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# **FAMILY ETHICS FOR AFRICA**

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# FAMILY ETHICS FOR AFRICA

A Z MAPITSE

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## INTRODUCTION

In one of Guy De Maupassant's short stories "The love of long ago", he has some commentary on the social ethics of the eighteenth century.

"It is love that is sacred" she said. "Listen child, to an old woman who has seen three generations and who has had a long, long experience of men and women. Marriage and love have nothing in common. We marry to found a family and we cannot dispense with marriage. If society is a chain, each family is a link in that chain. In order to weld those links we always seek for metals of the same kind. When we marry we must bring together suitable conditions; we must combine fortunes, unite similar races and aim at the common interest, which are riches and children. We marry only once, my child, because the world requires us to do so, but we may love twenty times in one lifetime because nature has made us able to do so. Marriage, you see, is a law, and love is an instinct which impels us sometimes along a straight and sometimes a crooked path. The world has made laws to combat our instincts - it was necessary to make them - but our instincts are always stronger, and we ought not to resist them too much because they come from God, while the laws only come from men. If we did not perfume life with love, as much love as possible, darling, as we put sugar into drugs for children, nobody would care to take it just as it is" (De Maupassant, 1947:217).

The grandmother in this extract, objects to the view (which her grand-daughter also shares) that marriage is sacred. She maintains that marriage will last for eternity since there is something like 'honour' involved in every marital relationship one enters into:

"In my time verses were written to teach men to love every woman. And we! - When we liked a gentleman, my child, we sent him a page. And when fresh caprice came into our hearts we were not slow in getting rid of the last lover - unless we kept both of them."

The charming "healthy logic" of the philosophers of gallantry of the eighteenth century can hardly solve the social problems of Africa. Ironically De Maupassant appreciates marriage as a link in the chain of society but does not blink at putting it at risk (this is true of his short stories in general).

Unfortunately something of this kind also happened to the mentality of the African community. In spite of the strong communalistic character, marriage is not respected as an essential social institution anymore. Contrary to what has been said in this short story, marriage and love have much in common. Marriage is perfected in a life-long partnership of mutual love and commitment. It is an intimate relationship of one person with the other. The same can be said of love. Love is an ideal attitude of people towards one another. It concerns people's lives and social structures in which they live their lives.

The main purpose of marriage is not to found a family. There are elderly people who have long passed the age of being able to procreate but who decide to marry and live as husband and wife. Clearly, there is something like

love enabling two people to live together as partners in everything, for the rest of their lives.

Families are pillars of our society because they prepare the young for important roles in society. Without them there can be no society. Societies are not structures by man but the result of God's ordinances.

Coming again to De Maupassant's views I should like to point out the following points:

- (a) that marriages are not founded on material possessions;
- (b) that marriages entered into for convenience always have problems in the end;
- (c) that marriage knows no racial barriers; and lastly
- (d) that the norms for marriage were laid down by the Lord.

The Scriptures warn us emphatically that what God has joined together no man should put asunder. It would however, be useless to attempt to force couples to live together even when it is quite clear that their marriage cannot be saved. Hence divorce is permitted under extreme situations and couples who have been finally separated are free to marry again.

Marriage is not primarily a legal agreement but an ethically qualified institution. It has a legal side of course. The law provides for the protection of the rights of those who enter into it and for the protection of the rights of possible children. Apart from this legal side, there is also a spiritual side, to which I



will refer at the end of this thesis. But in essence a marriage is a love-relationship between two people. This is the nucleus of it.

The ethical modality is not something that can be added to our lives, it is part of everyone of us. It is a gift but also a charge. The ethical as a normative modality challenges us from moment to moment to obey the relevant norms - norms for marriage for example like equity, communion, harmony.

The granddaughter in this short story by De Maupassant, seems to have a better view of marriage than her grandmother. To her marriage is sacred while her grandmother is of the opinion that a person is free to love consecutive lovers without any restraint. In addition the grandmother accepts that there is nothing wrong with a man or a woman who gets rid of a lover. In the old woman's view relations can be terminated unilaterally.

Instead of being of any help in Africa the advice contained in this story will lead African men and women further astray because it encourages men to 'love every women' and it encourages women to get rid of their husbands when fresh caprice comes into their hearts. People need to understand that marriage is instituted by God; that husband and wife become partners for the rest of their lives; that men cannot end their marriages unilaterally, that the fibre of our community life cannot be separated from the quality of our marriages and families.

There is a great need for solutions to the problems which face us in Africa as the Twentieth Century draws to a close.

Cases of sexually transmitted diseases and the number of children born with HIV are reaching alarming proportions. These children end up in children's homes as their parents will have nothing to do with them. The number of street children in our cities is rising at a fast rate and so is the number of children born out of wedlock who are often dumped in dustbins or left in the hospitals to swell the number of children who have to be cared for by the state or be given away for adoption. According to recent statistics, of black children born in South Africa in 1989/90, 69.8% were born out of wedlock (Cullinan, 1996:16-17).

Traditional marriages are widely accepted hence their rapid increase particularly among black Africans. In these unions, women who cannot conceive and give birth to children are expelled. African women are thus reduced to the status of 'machines' as it were, to manufacture babies.

As indicated earlier marriage and family are pillars of society. We therefore have to change those lifestyles which, in my opinion, are responsible for the social evils found on our continent. Should the pillars of society crumble therefore, our democracy will stagger. Marital love lays a strong foundation for a happy family life while parental love draws children closer to their parents. Contemporary workers such as sociologists, philosophers, ethicists and ministers of religion stress these points, but the idea can be traced to Aristotle. He stressed that:

The friendship of kinsmen itself, while it seems to be of many kinds, appears to depend in every case on parental friendship; for parents

love their children as being a part of themselves, and children their parents as having themselves originated from them (Aristotle, 1972:212-213).

By comparison, the 'friendship' and love children have for their fathers and the 'friendship' and love men have for God is stronger than any other.

The friendship of children to parents, and of men to gods, is a relation to them as to something good and superior; for they have conferred the greatest benefits, since they are the cause of their being and of their nourishment, and of their education from their birth; and this kind of friendship possesses pleasantness and utility also, more than that of strangers, inasmuch as their life is lived more in common (Aristotle, 1972:213).

The problem of men and women having more than one sexual partner is not peculiar to our age. It dates back to the age of Plato and is also referred to in the Scriptures. Plato was of the opinion that the practice of free love cannot be stopped by the intervention of the state:

... It may be that my present proposals are no more than the aspirations of a pious imagination, though I assure you any society would find their realization a supreme blessing. However, by God's help, we might not impossibly enforce one or other of two rules for sexual love. One would be that no freeborn citizen should dare to touch any but his own wedded wife, and that there should be no sowing of unhallowed and bastard seed with concubines,

and no sterile and unnatural intercourse with males. Failing this, we may suppress such relations with males utterly, and as for women, if a man should have to do with any - whether acquired by purchase or in any way whatsoever - save those who have entered the house with the sanction of heaven and holy matrimony, and his act become known to man or woman, we shall probably be pronounced to do well by enacting that he be deprived of the honours of a citizen, as one that proves himself an alien indeed. So, whether this be taken as one single statute, or should rather be called two, let it stand as our law in the matter of sex and the whole business of love, our rule of right and wrong in all relations inspired by those passions (Plato, 1973:1406).

Fear of God, desire of honorable distinction, and the development of the passion for a beauty which is spiritual, not physical. It may be that my present proposals are no more than the aspirations of a pious imagination, though I assure you any society would find their realization a supreme blessing. However, by God's help, we might not impossibly enforce one or other of two rules for sexual love. One would be that no freeborn citizen should dare to touch any but his own wedded wife, and that there should be no sowing of unhallowed and bastard seed with concubines, and no sterile and unnatural intercourse with males (Plato, 1973:841 c-e).

The concern with marriage and family is of course not restricted to antiquity. Concerned also about the

breaking up of marriages, the Roman Catholic Church mentions the following factors which are responsible for disharmony in marriages:

Every man experiences evil around him and within himself. This experience makes itself felt in the relationship between man and woman. Their union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. This disorder can manifest itself more or less acutely and can be more or less overcome according to the circumstances of culture, eras and individuals, but it does seem to have a universal character (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994:375).

God's plan for marriage is stated as follows:

The matrimonial covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptised persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament (The Catechism of The Catholic Church, 1994:394).

Social workers and sociologists have tried to find solutions to the problems without success. Marriage counsellors have also attempted to give pre-marital guidance, still so many marriages are short-lived.

Many disciplines fail to make an impact on man because they exclude God the author of nature. God created man with a purpose and a definite mission to accomplish. As manager of God's creation man has definite tasks to perform. His responsibility towards creation is always a normative responsibility. God's norms are guidelines, the directional pointers, the instructions for responsible cultural activity (Van der Walt 1997:58)

The Christian approach to our problems is in my opinion, the only approach which can provide solutions. Man's happiness, as I said, depends on obedience to God's ordinances.

The following are brief explanations of the contents of the different chapters of this thesis:

Chapter 2 is devoted to the Christian Anthropology and Social Philosophy. Themes that are addressed are: the notion of man as image bearer of God, man's stewardship of creation, normativity, responsibility, etc.

The structure of society is the next subject in this chapter. Different relationships (intercommunal and interpersonal) are examined here. The changes they bring about and the issue of authority are addressed.

This chapter ends with an analysis of the structure of marriage and family. Marriage is analysed as the Lord's institution for man and woman.

In Chapter 3 we examine family forms which are found in history, the extended family, the nuclear family and the single-parent families.

Apart from these there is a problem which is rearing its head all over the world, that of gay marriages which are however not yet universally accepted.

In Chapter 4 a comparison is made between the African communal experience and the individualistic Western approach. According to African culture, community is of the utmost importance while according to Western culture, to be an individual is to be human and to be human means to be an individual. This chapter ends with an examination of the reasons for the changes that are taking place in our societies in Africa.

In Chapter 5 we examine the nature of ethics. Here we learn that ethics has to concern itself with the morally qualified problems that are facing us in life. Separate paragraphs are devoted to the study of ubuntu and ujamaa, their contribution and how they affect various spheres of our lives.

Chapter 6 deals with various socializing agents like the television, the radio and the school and their impact on family life.

In Chapter 7 the part played by religion in social reconstruction is discussed fully. Religion provides unquestioned goals of life for its adherents. Without it there can be no culture. It is also the sustaining ground for the ethos of a community.

The method of research is the conventional one for the humanities - a bibliographical study. Philosophical, religious, social and anthropological sources were consulted.

Secondly - I have interviewed as many people as possible to gather more information relating to different cultures.

The ideological paradigm at the foundation of this thesis is the Christian view. By conviction the Roman Catholic Tradition influences my argument but I took note of what was written on ethics from the Reformational viewpoint.



## CHAPTER 2: META-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF MAN

#### 2.1 Anthropology

The questions which every human being asks himself especially at the time of personal crises are: What is it to be human? Who am I? Do I really matter? What is the meaning of my life? The answers to these questions are not always given in a scholarly manner because they come straight from the heart and are deeply rooted, as Strauss (1995:41) rightly points out. They are founded in the ultimate commitments of the human heart.

Various disciplines attempt, each in its own way, to find out who man is, therefore the question: What is it to be human? can be seen as not only a **religious** or **pre-theoretical** question, but also as a **scientific** question.

- (a) In a religious, pre-theoretical sense, the question focuses on the origin, nature and destiny of man, it is founded on an act of faith which derives from some or other revelation.
- (b) In a scientific sense as Smit (1997:1) points out, the question "What is man?" emphasizes the structural diversity and interdependence of transient human life in all its modalities, structures and relationships.

Before going on to deal with the different aspects (of man) it is appropriate to start with a definition of man. According to Van der Walt (1994:170):

Man is a very complex and dynamic configuration of a variety of functions, centrally directed in all his actions in terms of his religious commitment.

Strauss (1995:41) defines man as follows:

A human person is a God-created, timely, bodily whole, structurally integrated in a within-and-yet-beyond-time religious heart accepting or denying the responsibility of loving and serving God and humanity whole-heartedly.

As indicated earlier various disciplines attempt to answer the questions put above and also to study man's origin. Some define man 'as a highly developed animal' while others define him as a conglomerate of body and soul. The discipline which in my opinion has a relevant answer to the question: What is it to be human? is Philosophical Anthropology which may be defined as follows:

Philosophical Anthropology is the theory of the human person and humanity which attempts to uncover the origin, normative character and destiny of man, and which provides a structural analysis of the temporal embodied human person as a heart-centered whole (Smit 1997:3).

#### **REVELATION AND BEING HUMAN**

The ultimate questions concerning man, transcends empirical reality. The issues of the origin and destination of man for example, cannot be answered in terms of scientific results. They refer to convictions.

Without God's revelation it is not possible to understand what it means to be human. This revelation is to be found in God's creation which is brought into focus by the story of the Bible. The Bible does not provide us with an elaborated theoretical understanding of being human but it does however, uncover the ultimate meaning of being human which has to do with the relationship in which the human person stands to God. As Strauss (1995:43) points out:

A Biblical understanding of being human has to do with the reality of being human in the face of God.

From the above it is quite clear that an understanding of what it means to be human cannot be limited to the temporal bodily existence of ways of being a human person. It is necessary to gain religious understanding of the origin, meaning and destiny of the human person (Ouweneel, 1986:26-30; Smit, 1992:17-18) cited by Strauss (1995:43).

#### **MAN AS THE IMAGE OF GOD**

All humans bear God's image. Despite the sins we commit this image remains unaffected. In the Garden of Eden, Adam turned his back on God. His fall or rather man's fall from grace did not turn him into an animal or demon. Man does not lose the image of God with his fall from grace. He remains as Smit (1992:12) points out, a **human person**.

Even those who do not believe in God betray the image of God by their religious restlessness. Xhosas have a saying: "Unyawo aluna mpumlo". Do not treat a stranger disrespectfully as you may come face to face with him in

his hometown one day. In fact, respect for personhood plays a central role in ethics.

The fullness of the image of God is opened up when a person experiences a change of direction and becomes a child of God, that is, by beginning to live according to the ultimate religious call to love within a changing, renewing relationship of total dependence on God (Smit, 1992:11).

Definition of the image of God:

The image of God is the creaturely existence of the human person as child of God in dynamic religious dependence on God through obedience to the central religious call to love in Christ.

#### **Man's place in the universe**

God placed man above all creatures. Man did not gain this position through his own genius. Psalm 8:4-6 sums it all:

What is man that you think of him; ...  
You crowned him with glory and honour,  
You appointed him ruler over everything you made  
You placed him over all creation ...

God's creational ordinances determine the structure and behaviour of all things created by Him. Because of man's central position in reality all of creation is involved with humanity in one way or the other. Thus the relationship between God and creation is wholly mediated through humanity (Dooyeweerd, 1953:55, 175) cited by Strauss (1995:43).

### **Man as a responsible being**

Every human is free to make choices subject to specific norms (Ps 119:32,45). Every choice that is made is a decision either to obey or disobey God in a given situation in which we find ourselves. No choice is made outside the context of particular human relationships.

The fact that we are responsible/accountable/answerable indicates that we are indeed dependent on God. Man's action should be seen as a reaction to God's initiating, judging, sustaining and renewing action (Strauss, 1995:44).

Each human being shares this responsibility with the rest of humanity in all their societal relationships answerable to God. In the beginning man had a single all-embracing responsibility to act as steward over God's creation as David makes it clear in the above Psalm. With man's fall from grace this responsibility was interfered with but not abolished. Through Christ's intervention and redeeming work this responsibility is once again affirmed.

### **Being human means standing in relation to others**

Men and women form the corporate whole known as humanity. Therefore integrally interwoven with being human is being a fellow-creature to other human beings. People in various relationships are therefore not simply assembled individuals, but are in relationship part of an ultimate spiritual community (Strauss, 1995:45).

Olthuis (1975:3) shares this view. According to him at its roots humanity is cohumanity, that is, all men are associates. He rounds up his statement as follows:

To be anything less is to fail to be fully human.

Taylor (1994:34) has the following valuable contribution:

My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others.

What Taylor means here is that human identity is created dialogically in response to our relations including our actual dialogue with others. John Donne (cited by Bronowcki 1966:12) in *Devotions* expresses the same view as follows:

No man is an island, entire of itselfe, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the maine, ... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.

Christ mentions the word neighbour in his teaching. One's neighbour is not only someone who lives near one but is also someone with whom one shares various experiences in life. Christ could not think of a person who lives all by himself. This strongly supports the view that *"being human is being in relation to others"*.

#### **Man as one whole being**

Various views have been given about the unity of man. Democritus' view of man is that man is composed of parts - atoms.

According to Van Peursen and Luther man consists of spirit, soul, and body. The Bible uses various terms with which to describe being human. It applies such terms as soul, spirit, heart, body and innermost being. In the Biblical sense these terms are not intended to indicate that man consists of parts. Therefore, despite the variety of terms which the Bible applies it becomes clear from a study of what the Bible uncovers about being human, that the human person is a single whole.

The fact that we consider the human person as a single whole should not lead us into believing that it is wrong to speak of a duality. We speak of a duality for instance when we consider that a human being has a body and a heart. We speak of the **body** when we view man from outside and of the **soul** if we focus on the inward religious heart or personality centre. These are not two separate parts of the human person. Both refer to the single whole.

Man does not have a body, he is a body. The age-old belief that a human being consists of body, soul and spirit is not only misleading but is also unsupported by Biblical information. Strauss, (1995:46) makes the following contribution:

A person is a single bodily functioning unit founded in physical-chemical functions and directed by selfhood. Every constitutive factor of this configuration including its bloody-fleshly base, is human only because of the nature of the whole self structure.

But, of course, working in dualistic vein is typical of anthropological discourse. This is part of our Greek-Thomistic tradition in theology and philosophy. The

inherent danger is of course to degrade the body - and secular institutions.

### **Human beings are religious creatures**

Man is a religious being. As a religious being he has to surrender himself completely to God. He cannot, as Van der Walt (1995:171) says, retain his life for himself and also give some of it to God. Religion means surrender: totally and radically.

In the discussion of this aspect it is essential that we look at the human heart since it is the religious centre of human existence. Africans regard the heart as man's worst enemy:

Sera se seholo sa motho ke pelo (man's greatest enemy is his heart).

This is true of people who respect nothing, people whose main desire in life is to amass riches for themselves, selfish and greedy, people who have no sympathy at all for others. This, of course, is not true of people in general. In general it is therefore not right to regard man's heart as his worst enemy. The heart makes being human possible. All our personal choices come from the heart. "Guard your heart more than any treasure, for it is the source of all life" (Proverbs 4:23). Our personhood depends largely on the personal decisions we make: to do or not to do, to obey or not to obey, to follow Christ or not to follow him. These are choices which make us the type of people we are. Being human is also being subject to the law which God gives us to serve as guidelines for us within the covenant. By adhering to the law I become a true human image and co-worker of God and I consequently experience the fullness of life (cf



Smit, 1995:37). The cosmic law-order is centred in the central commandment of love.

In Dooyeweerd's view the heart is

the integral and radical unity of all the temporal functions and structures of reality, which ought to be directed in the human spirit toward the absolute origin, in the personal commitment of love and service of God and one's neighbour (Dooyeweerd 1953:174).

Berkouwer (1959:221) makes the following contribution:

The heart concerns man's total orientation, focus and concentration in and out of his heart, the depth-dimension, which guides and marks man's entire existence. The one who gives his heart to the Lord gives his whole life.

Indeed, if man's heart is focused on Christ he is fulfilling the law but if it is not he shall be carving his way to his own doom.

### **Man as a duality of sexes**

God created mankind male and female. The two sexes are different yet similar in their humanity, and they belong together. Therefore man cannot be defined without woman and woman cannot be defined without man. This indicates at once that man and woman are created as equal partners and as helpmates to each other everywhere and in everything, not just in marriage (Olthuis 1975:4).

The Bible acknowledges the sexual difference but nowhere does it mention that the one sex is superior to the other. Regrettably in various countries including Africa, women are regarded as inferior human beings and are treated like children. This mistaken view was also held by Aristotle who claimed that a woman is an imperfect man. The Scriptures deny this popular notion very strongly. God did not create woman as a second-class citizen. Numerous examples can be quoted to support this view. In African countries women run their homes independently while their husbands are away at the mines. Women now occupy leading positions in society, to mention a few: Prof. M. Ramphele, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, Dr. Frene Ginwala, speaker of parliament, Dr. Ivy Matsepe Cassaburi, premier of the Free State, ministers, judges, etc. Male chauvinism is therefore gradually becoming something of the past.

Male chauvinism was typical of Biblical times. It was and still is part of Western and African cultures. The New Bill of Rights deals with a universal phenomenon when it prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender. With the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme in South Africa, women can now be appointed to fill key positions in the public sector.

## **ETHOS**

On his earthly journey man has to take decisions and to respond to God's law. His attitude towards others and his outlook in life are displayed by the manner in which he reacts. The term ethos is thus related to the inner attitude, constant motivation and deeper foundations of man's concrete acts (Smit, 1992:30).

Briefly stated, ethos is the temporal religious expression of our concrete existence in response to God's law. The Christian creational faith does not know any reality other than the creational order supported by the permanent creational will of God. This concept is expressed in the mutually related distinction which Dooyeweerd makes between the law-side and the subject-side (Smit 1992:31).

On the law-side the ethos represents Christ's demand that in all our interpersonal relationships we should adhere to God's central commandment of love with all our heart.

On the subject-side the ethos represents the deepest and widest tendency/motivation in man's actions and behaviour. It is in this sphere that we make decisions and shape our intentions (Strauss 1995:51) stresses this point:

It is at the level of the ethos that our heart-commitment finds convincing expression in any of a range of worldviews, life attitudes, or mentalities, and it is at this level of being human that we are gripped by a civilizational foundational motive, and the Zeitgeist of a particular cultural period.

## **The question of mortal body, immortal soul**

According to the centuries old Christian view the soul is the highest, most important and above all the immortal part of man. But according to the Scripture, only God is immortal. Christ mentions the resurrection and the Judgment Day in his teachings. The resurrection which Christ refers to is not only of the body but of the entire man. According to Van der Walt, man's immortality is granted to him by God - and then also as complete man (not only to the soul) on the day of resurrection (Van der Walt, 1995:166).

In traditional Africa man was regarded as having two entirely different parts: body and soul.

The body is seen as the visible side of man which in its development goes through various stages ending up in death.

The spirit which lives in the body could leave it temporarily during dreams or permanently upon death. This immortality of the spirit is not seen as eternal immortality since, according to this view, immortality depends on how long the dead will be remembered by the living (Van der Walt, 1995:167).

The question of the resurrection and man's immortality were unheard of in traditional Africa. There is life after death according to traditional Africa, but this life is a continuation of earthly existence.

The Sadducees made the same mistake during the time of Christ thinking about heaven in terms of the earth and of eternity in terms of time. According to Christ: people do not marry in the next world, and heaven is not going

to be but a continuation or extension of this world (Matt 22:23-30).

## 2.2 Social philosophy

Various views have been put forward regarding the structure of society. One of the major trends in scientific sociology holds that society is composed of various elements which, according to the propounders of this view, fit together in different ways at different times. Since these elements do not fit in one particular manner we have different forms of societies as a result. In such a process social structures are supposed to be the outcome of historical factors or even chance.

Dooyeweerd did not find this argument convincing. He conducted his own investigation of the structural principles which have been established as normative structural laws for human society. From his investigation he was able to distinguish three types of societal relationships.

Following Dooyeweerd to a certain extent and trying to cope with translation problems in this regard, we could speak of institutional, organizational and associational communities. (I will attend to Dooyeweerd's view on marriage and family more extensively later on.)

**Institutional communities** unite people in a more or less permanent way, as members of the same social whole. Examples of these are: the state, the church, and the family. These should preferably be called institutional communities, because they were instituted by God. They have definite authority structures.

Secondly there are intercommunal and interpersonal social relationships which are organized to serve a certain purpose. (Kalsbeek, 1975:197). These could be called **organizational communities** and include hospitals, municipalities, schools, academic institutions, etc. They also have structures of authority like institutional communities.

A non-institutional community is one which a man can join or leave of his own free will. A person is free to join a political party of his own choice and he is equally free to leave it when he feels like it. A non-institutional community is therefore a voluntary organisation.

Thirdly Dooyeweerd distinguishes **associational communities** where the people involved are on equal footing like in friendship or in the case of a shopkeeper and his clients or a doctor and his patient.

If these relationships are good, society will benefit thereby, but if the relationships are not good, society will reap bitter fruits, since in families for instance, children could turn to the streets and become thugs and hijackers, giving peace-loving people no rest at all.

Without good intercommunal and interpersonal relationships there can be no community and without the community no intercommunal and interpersonal reactions can take place. Without these three, human society is therefore impossible.

It is necessary to follow Dooyeweerd in his distinction between **organised** and **natural** communities. Such organised communities as the church, the state and businesses appear at a particular point in history as a

result of human cultural formation or organisation (cf Kalsbeek, 1975:198). In contrast to these we have natural communities such as marriage and the nuclear family which are biotically founded. Unlike organised communities mentioned above natural communities occur at any period of history because they are not formed according to the historico-cultural process.

For the proper running of natural and organised communities **authority** and **subordination** are necessary. Parents in a family have to exercise authority and children have to obey. This authority has to be given in love. Supervisors in any work situation have to give orders and exercise authority and their subordinates in turn, have to obey.

Human society as Kalsbeek (1975:199) maintains displays a great variation in the mutual relationships. Because each person is involved in several communities or social structures, his status will be different in each. A young parish priest shows great respect for his elders and for all those who taught him during his school days. In church however his elders and all his teachers show great respect for him to the extent of addressing him as: "Ntate Moruti" in Sesotho and "Bawo Mfundisi" in Xhosa. Ntate and Bawo meaning "father". When the young parish priest and one of his former teachers meet as friends to discuss past incidents the authority structure is entirely absent. In associational relationships therefore the authority structure is not present. This is not true of institutional and organizational social structures.

The last social category is the distinction between **differentiated** and **undifferentiated** **societal** relationships. Family life in "primitive" culture and in

"modern" or "civilized" culture do differ. Authority of husband over wife and children is far more pronounced in the undifferentiated culture. In the undifferentiated culture freedom to choose your own marriage partner is seriously restricted. And in a broader context the clan allows little individual initiative to its members - like starting a shop for example.

### **2.2.1 Authority**

I indicated in the previous paragraph that authority and subordination are necessary for the proper running of natural and organised communities.

In this paragraph I wish to point out the different forms of authority found in various structures.

### **2.2.2 Marital authority**

Authority is an important element in the structure of marriage - authority of the husband over his wife. According to modern views the structure of authority is derived from civil legal order. Dooyeweerd opposes this view strongly. According to him whether the civil order recognises this structure or not the authority relationship is there and should not be eliminated. Its existence is based on the cosmic law-order of creation. According to this divine order the husband is the head of the wife. He has to lead his wife and not to dominate her. (Dooyeweerd 1957:325 cited by Kalsbeek 1975:214).

The husband's marital authority has to function under the guidance of marital love. Husbands should therefore consult their wives before making important decisions. If husband and wife fail to reach an agreement on certain



issues the final authority rests upon the man as head of the community.

In traditional African families and even in many modern African families husbands, for example, turn to their wives only when they have already made deals which they are now unable to pay!

This is the type of marital authority which is found in various African states since paternalism rules supreme. The authority of the father figure may not be doubted or questioned, as he is the authority in practically every field.

Kalsbeek (1975:215) warns rightly that:

This marital harmony is disturbed where the husband behaves like a despot or is henpecked. Similarly we could hardly call a marriage harmonious when a strong-willed wife takes over the leadership which the husband is unable to give.

It is regrettable that men should conduct business transactions without consulting their wives. In my opinion women have the same ability as men to carry out the affairs of the family.

On the issue of the equality of sexes Plato, quite rightly, states that men and women have the same natural capacity for guardianship. As far as women's capacity to hold administrative posts is concerned, I share Plato's view that:

There is therefore no administrative occupation which is particular to woman as woman or man as

man; natural capacities are similarly distributed in each sex, and it is natural for women to take part in all occupations as well as men (Plato:234).

But I do not share his opinion that in all occupations women will be the weaker partners.

Since, as indicated above, men and women have the same natural capacity for 'guardianship' I do not think it is fair to give the leadership role to men. In my view it would be to the advantage of families if this role could be shared by husband and wife with the husband retaining his position as head of the family.

### **2.2.3 Parental (family) authority**

In a family the relationship of authority and subordination is also essential. Parents do not have to relinquish their parental authority over their children as this could affect the structure of the family seriously. The exercise of authority varies with age. As children approach adulthood parents should increase the responsibilities of their children as much as possible. According to African custom as we will see in the next chapters, married young men remain under the control of their fathers as long as they are part of the extended family. They will only be free to run their own affairs when they move into their own huts - the custom that is known in Sesotho and Setswana as "ho tswa motse" - (moving out of the extended family).

The authority exercised by parents has a legal dimension. An example of this is the legal right to discipline and punish children.

Punishment in the family has to take place under the guidance of moral parental love and trust.

#### **2.2.4 State authority**

Paul in his letter to the Romans (13:4) has a good description of the relation of the authorities to their subjects. He mentions the use of the sword which the authorities carry:

But if you do wrong, be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain.

The sword symbolises the power of the police and defence force which will stem any form of resistance by the citizens against officials in the exercise of their duties. There are laws and ordinances which the citizens have to obey. Transgressors are, as in the days of Paul, punished by the state.

#### **2.2.5 The authority of the church**

The church council admonishes members of its congregation and shows them by example how they ought to live here on earth with God and with their fellow man. The authority structure of the church is therefore qualified by the faith of the community of believers (Kalsbeek, 1975:226). Church discipline should serve to enhance the faith of its members.

#### **2.3.1 Sovereignty and universality in the own sphere**

Human society may appear to be completely disorganized when one looks at it. On a visit to a large city such as Johannesburg, a man who has never been to a big city before may easily conclude that there can be no order in

such a city, not when thousands of people can be seen coming back from the city and almost a million can be seen roaming the streets of Soweto. To him this coming and going can only spell chaos.

Society is however, as Kalsbeek (1975:176) rightly puts it, highly structured. Some institutions did not just happen. There are laws of creation which, according to Dooyeweerd, govern their formation and functions. Each institution has a measure of sovereignty or independence in relation to all others. By **sovereignty in the own sphere** Dooyeweerd understands the unique, irreducible, creational character of an institution given by God.

In my opinion if God's creational order is obeyed these institutions will exist in perfect harmony since the sovereignty of any social sphere is, as Dooyeweerd rightly maintains, limited by the sovereignty of other spheres. No sphere can therefore encroach upon the sovereignty of the other spheres. In addition Dooyeweerd mentions that the sovereignty of other spheres is limited to the task or function to which it is called to perform. What is more important, the sovereignty each social sphere has is subservient to the sovereignty of God.

The other principle that Dooyeweerd emphasises is that of **universality in the own sphere**. By this phrase he refers to the fact that social structures are interrelated so that any of these will be reflected in the others. Family life and state life cannot be separated. The one can support or subvert the other.

### 2.3.2      **Radical types**

Dooyeweerd then refers to marriage and family life as "natural communities". This must be read in the context

of his radical type analysis of social structures where he distinguishes between the qualifying or leading modality and the foundational one. According to him natural institutions are founded in the biotic modality of life and are qualified by the modality of love.

Love acts as the family's constant guiding structural function determining its destination. Regrettably, a majority of African men are bound by their traditions, denying themselves thereby the companionship of their wives and children. In an example used by Kimathi (1994:42) a young man learns from his father that an African man must behave as unapproachable as his lordship the chief. If he intends commanding authority over his wife and children he has to stand aloof. This is indeed the case in most African families. To openly display love for his wife and children is therefore not possible in traditional culture.

Organized institutions on the other hand, according to Dooyeweerd, are founded on the historical modality, they are the product of human cultural formation. Unlike natural institutions, organized institutions did not come about by the divine order of creation.

In addition to the above distinctions Dooyeweerd further points out the following:

- Natural communities display a wide variety of forms - such as Christian marriages, patrilineal and matrilineal families, nuclear and extended families, to mention a few examples.

Historically founded communities by contrast depend upon and are bound to certain historical conditions.

- Historically founded communities do not cease to exist when a member dies. These organized communities are called 'organizations'. When a husband dies the marriage ceases to exist. Similarly when two parents die a family ceases to exist. Therefore a marriage community (which is a natural community) depends on the life span of husband or wife.
- Institutional communities by virtue of their normative structural principle are meant to embrace their members for their entire lives independent of their will. This is characteristic of natural communities, state and church institutions. Non-institutional organizations, by contrast, have arisen from free differentiated social relationships. They are based on the principle that their members can freely enter and depart. Members of a particular party are free to cross the floor and join another party whenever they feel like it.

All of these distinctions are relevant when we analyse the structure of marriage and family.

#### **2.4        The structure of marriage**

Marriage is defined in various ways. The dictionary definitions are in my opinion not satisfactory at all. In these definitions no mention of God is made. Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines marriage as follows:

The social institution under which a man and woman establish their decision to live as husband and wife by legal commitments, religious ceremonies, etc.

According to Maswanganyi (ND:3) marriage was instituted by God who even officiated in the marriage of our first parents Adam and Eve. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994:394) makes the following contribution:

The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws ... God himself is the author of marriage.

Despite the many variations it may have undergone in different cultures and social structures, marriage is all but a purely human institution.

Modern sociologists such as Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox do not share the view that marriage is of the Lord for men and women. They regard marriage as a human invention to be eliminated when we please (Olthuis 1975:22).

Inevitably sociological analysis of marriage are reductionistic. In the name of science any religious reference is excluded by definition.

As a divine institution called into existence by God in the beginning, human marriages therefore exist as an unfolding of God's word for marriage. In this vein Tenney (1963:511) defines marriage as follows:

Marriage is an intimate personal union to which a man or woman consents; consummated and continuously nourished by sexual intercourse and perfected in a life-long partnership of mutual love and commitment. It is also a social institution regulated by the word of God and by

the laws and customs which a society develops to safeguard its own continuity and welfare.

The mutual love and commitment makes it possible for husband and wife to become one flesh. Maswanganyi (ND:3) shares the same view. God designed marriage to be a life-long commitment between two members of the opposite sex with death as the only exit. Unlike Randolph House's definition, Tenney's definition gives us a complete picture of marriage, with God as regulator of our marriages.

There are two types of marriages in Africa: Christian marriages and customary marriages.

Christian marriage is defined in The Report of All-African Seminar on Christian Home and Family (1963, February 17) as follows:

Christian marriage is a union in which the "twain become one flesh" one living being, one entity, a new organism. It is a community of persons which is life-long in duration and fidelity: they are together "for better, for worse".

Tenney (1963:511) adds the following explanation:

Christian marriage is one in which husband and wife covenant together with God and publicly witness their commitment not only to each other but together to Him to the end that they shall in unity fulfil His purposes throughout life (1 Cor. 7:39; cf 11 Cor. 6:14).

In sharp contrast to the above in African or customary marriage a bond is established between a man and a woman



and also between the families to which they belong. In other words customary marriage is a covenant between two extended families; between two communities (Report of the All-African Seminar, 1963, February 17).

Customary marriage is preceded by payment of a bride price/lobola which is paid over by the family of the man to the family of the woman. In spite of this commercial aspect of the marriage contract, there is evidence that the love of the young people for each other often has an important part in the preliminaries of marriage.

Many young African couples who have been joined in marriage in the customary way have often approached their priests to have their marriages blessed even though, according to African custom and even by law, they are regarded as husbands and wives. Couples who are truly in love are not afraid to appear together in public. This step serves, in my opinion, as a good example of the love which the couples have for one another.

Unlike the family community which allows for certain changes in membership, the marriage community does not. When a widow or widower remarries, Dooyeweerd (cited by Kalsbeek 1975:211) rightly argues, he does not continue the first marriage but forms a new one.

According to African tradition a younger brother can marry his deceased brother's wife. This practice is known as Levirate marriage (or as the BaSotho have it "Ho Kenela") which served in many parts to beget children when the husband dies without offspring. Children born of this marriage are regarded as children of the first marriage. Moral love which Dooyeweerd mentions, is clearly not a prerequisite in the marriage of the younger

brother and his sister-in-law. The man in this case is used as a 'tool' to bear children.

### **Love and fidelity in marriage**

Love gives meaning and inward validity to marriage and guarantees its integrity. The type of love which Christ expects husband and wife to have for each other is other-person centred, giving and self-renouncing for the sake of one's beloved. This type of love is expressed through service, not exploitation. Such love dissolves differences and barriers, barriers created by one's self-centredness.

God created man out of love. He, in turn, calls man to love. As indicated before, man is created in the image of God who is Himself love, therefore this call by God is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (Catholic Catechism, 1994:394).

Marriage gains spiritual significance when each partner is enabled to transcend his own self-centredness and identify himself with the well-being and concerns of the other (Tenney, 1963:512). By staying aloof and by behaving like chiefs in their families, men allow these barriers to divide them from their life-partners and the attitude of "thine and mine" to develop. When this happens, it becomes increasingly difficult for both husband and wife to share each other's sorrows.

### **Sexual fulfilment**

Sex is a creation and gift of God and therefore it is holy. The same cannot be said of pre-marital sex and sex in trial marriages. Man and woman were created to

complement each other physically and to share in God's creative process.

Sexual intimacy affords husband and wife a medium for mutual disclosures, the senses becoming, as Tenney (1963:512) aptly puts it:

A channel of communication for all that lies too deep for utterance and yet must somehow be told in order to fulfil the total mutuality of marriage.

One cannot relate or communicate in this way with more than one person. This exclusive sexual relation between husband and wife points to the exclusive commitment of total responsibility for each other (Tenney, 1963:512).

According to Olthuis (1975:71-72), the marriage bond of troth has the unique character of being so intense that only two people can share in it to the full. This rules out polygamous bonds. Again the fact that face-to-face intimacy in physical intercourse is only possible between two people at the same time rules out polygamy also.

In many African countries marriage is a social arrangement to regulate physical intercourse. This is not so. Marriage is at heart an ethical relationship of troth, affecting the humanity of man at one of its deepest levels. Man chooses his life partner. This partner is his full partner in troth not simply his bed partner.

#### **The relation between husband and wife**

The relation between husband and wife is affected to a large extent by the manner in which they choose to run their affairs. Placing the husband in sole charge can

jeopardize the entire relationship by establishing a male-dominated marriage.

As I have already indicated women are regarded traditionally as less significant than men. Consequently they have less to contribute to the relationship. The situation becomes worse when the husband continues to grow through outside contacts while the wife languishes at home. After years of living separate lives, he may begin to see her as an embarrassment. Both, not only the husband, need outside contact with friends and colleagues. According to African tradition the duty of the wife is to prepare food and to look after her in-laws. She is not supposed to go out to meet friends. But the couple can seek and receive various kinds of satisfaction from other relationships without endangering their marriage. Even if she has to be on duty for 24 hours a day, the wife needs to meet other women.

### **Marriage without Christ**

Two questions have always been in man's mind throughout the ages:

- (a) Can we really say that a man outside of Christ loves his wife?
- (b) Is his love simply fake? A mere pretence?

In a bid to answer these questions, two traditions developed within the Christian church. More conservative Christians claimed that outside Christ we cannot really love each other, that love in non-Christian marriages is superficial and worse, mere pretence. The more liberal Christians having seen firm non-Christian marriages and ... Christian marriages, came to the conclusion that a

unique love of God had nothing to do with marriage, if it had any importance at all.

The correct view is that any couple that marries obeys the call to troth to some degree. Just as their Christian counterparts, non-Christians also live under God's structuring word for marriage. They can also pledge troth and honestly love each other. In this sense, they too give honour to Christ and bow before His Word in spite of themselves. Good marriages are found among Muslims, Hindus and Jews. The two views mentioned above must therefore be rejected.

### **The breakup of marriage**

Marriages are broken in as many ways as they can be built. Every couple can find countless ways to break their marriage. This can be done by having affairs, squandering money, establishing separate lives, cutting each other off and beginning to keep secrets. If the couple do not grow together in troth their relationship will not grow but will stagnate and become a boring affair.

The real cause of the problems which couples experience in their marriages is failure by both husband and wife to share their difficulties. Priests, ministers and marriage counsellors often have to listen to such complaints as: "My husband just will not talk to me. I am lonely and frustrated and I do not really know the man I married."

Sadly, this situation is typical of millions of marriages in Africa. One couple may think that there is still a two-way communication going on between them in their

marriage while the other feels frustrated and alone. Meredith (1997:23) sums up the situation as follows:

In reality the two spouses are merely co-existing under the same roof. They may not harm one another physically or verbally but the openness, warmth and total sharing of two lives that should be there, simply isn't.

When a marital relationship is reduced to two people merely co-existing in the same house then that marriage is missing the mark, failing to achieve its awesome potential (Meredith 1997:23).

In South Africa, when the higher liquor restrictions were relaxed, things began to take a different turn for Africans. Townships are now dotted with shebeens. Men and women frequent these shebeens to have a tot or two. As a result morals are lowered and the relations between husbands and wives who frequent these places, are strained leading ultimately to divorce. It is such considerations, I think, which led Olthuis (1986:x) to warn all those who are on the voyage of marriage, that:

today the shores are strewn with marital wreckage, and prognostications give each marriage about a fifty percent chance of survival. Today, more than ever, we need a map ... a description of the trouble spots and an itinerary of the stops along the way.

Something has to be done to encourage communication in marriages so as to curb the percentage of divorces which is continuing to rise.

## 2.5 Structure of the family according to Dooyeweerd

Various people have different views on what a family is or ought to be. In cultures which stress the nuclear family (husband, wife and children) marriage is the beginning of a family. As I have said Dooyeweerd holds that: No family can exist without marriage but marriage can exist without a family.

In its view of the family the Holy Scripture does not give us a theoretical analysis of its structure. According to Dooyeweerd (1957:269) the Holy Scripture:

presents the family as a typical normative bond of love, based upon the natural ties of blood between parents and their immediate offspring. This is a reflection of the bond of love between the Heavenly Father and His human children unbreakably bound to the tie between Christ and his church.

In his definition Dooyeweerd (1957:269) also brings out the ties of love and blood relationship between parents and children. He states that:

According to its inner structure of individuality, the natural immediate family is thus an institutional moral community of love between parents and their children under age, structurally based upon biotic ties of relationship.

Olthuis (1975:79) shares this view of the family:

The family ought to be a community of troth between parents and children based on the

biotic drive for motherhood and fatherhood and on the subsequent blood ties.

On the structure of the family Schrotenboer (1995:15) states that:

The two basic components of the family are the husband-wife bond (a bi-unity of love and fidelity) and the parent-children bond.

Kayongo Male Diane defines the nuclear family as follows:

A family at its simplest level included a husband and a wife and their offspring.

Gideon Strauss (1995:176) has this to say about the family:

The family is the intimate and secure context within which children find their own identity, covenantly inherit their ultimate commitment and convictions and begin to respond to the rich diversity of possibilities in creation. Childhood is an ultimate education marked in all its experiences by familial truth ... The reliable interdependence experienced as a child in the family, shapes our capacity for intimacy, and much of our broader capacity for interpersonal relationships.

In his description of a natural family Dooyeweerd mentions several issues pertaining to it which I intend dealing with in the next paragraphs. He also stresses quite rightly that we can only gain a better understanding of the inner nature of a natural family when we are guided by practical experience and a sound



knowledge of the biotic function since, as we are aware, the typical communal tie between parents and children is genetic, it is grounded in a blood relation of the most immediate character (Dooyeweerd 1957:266).

In their attempt to address the question of relationship between parents and children both Aristotle and Thomas explained it in functional terms as a part of the domestic community. This community was viewed by Aristotle as an economic unity which includes the relation between the husband, wife and slave(s) and by Thomas as the relationship between husband and wife while the relationship between parents and children was regarded as having been specifically planned to bring about the rational and moral perfection of the undeveloped human nature of the children resulting in their education to good citizens. According to Thomas, this natural education requires its supra natural completion by turning the children into good sons and daughters of the church as the institution of grace (Dooyeweerd 1957:267).

Clearly, the family and the relationship between parents and children cannot be described in such terms. The views expressed here are not concerned with the inner nature of the family bonds. They are rather directed at the purposes which this relationship can serve.

As indicated in 2.3 Dooyeweerd (1957:269) points out that though the family functions in all aspects it is qualified by the moral aspect. He sees the natural immediate family as a moral community of love between parents and their minor children. According to Dooyeweerd this type of family is based upon biotic ties of blood relationship.

An explanation of the word love will be given eventually. In this context I only wish to clarify that which I consider essential. The qualification of love as moral love is intended to put an end to any doubt which may arise since the word love is commonly used with reference to fleeting sensual affection between two persons of the opposite sex (Kalsbeek 1975:206).

According to the abstract idealistic view of morality, love between parents and children is not pure because it is founded on natural blood ties. In my opinion the propounders of this view make the same mistake that was made by Aristotle and Thomas of describing love in functional terms (procreation). Where real love between husband and wife and between parents and children exists qualities like involvement, taking care of, dealing with respect for another person, are noticeable. It also seems valid to say that it involves an attitude - an attitude of permanent and loyal affection. There is indeed no term that encapsulates an adequate definition of love (Smit 1985:4-8) but words like compassion, care, commitment, service and self-sacrifice do testify to its true character.

In sharp contrast to the view held by the propounders of the abstract idealistic view of morality Dooyeweerd (1957:270) argues quite rightly that:

the inner moral character of the bond of love between parents and their children is not affected by its typical foundation in the bonds of blood.

The typical biotic foundation however gives an intensity to the moral bond of love unmatched in any other moral relationship except in the one between husband and wife

in marriage. For example the bond of love between parents and children is much more intense than the bond of love between the parents and their friends. Unlike Aristotle and Thomas who explained the relationship between parents and children in functional terms, Dooyeweerd held that there is a close relationship between parents and children which is made possible by the moral bond of love. Such things as mutual duties and moral responsibility will flow from this.

He argues that:

If, according to its structural principle, the bond of love between parents and children in the family is of a typical moral character it cannot be reduced to an instinctive feeling of sympathy. Much rather it is a communal relation implying mutual duties and moral responsibility of a specific character.

Love does not emanate from duty and responsibility but vice versa. In any family for instance, parents have to provide shelter for their children. This is their duty and responsibility, something which they have to do to avoid blame. A father who has true love for his family will, besides obtaining shelter for the family, make sure that the house he has bought is suitable for the size of his family and that it is within walking distance from the bus stop or taxi rank and a number of other advantages.

### **The origin and nature of a family**

According to Dooyeweerd the nuclear family is part of the process of social differentiation. By mutual

interlacement communities exist together (Kalsbeek, 1975:205).

As Dooyeweerd rightly points out, the process of differentiation and integration went hand in hand. Thus we see the family as closely associated with the church to which it belongs, with the school which the children attend and with the state of which the family members are citizens.

In spite of these connections, however, the family retains its unique identity. This notion is contained in the following statement by Kalsbeek (1975:206):

But we are all aware that identity of the family as a natural community does not depend on these connections, no matter how intimate they are.

One could argue that individualism and communalism have no place in Dooyeweerd's philosophy. He supports neither of the two. From his argument we note that the family cannot be isolated because it is intimately connected with other communities, thus individual members of a family cannot grow and develop in isolation because they are part of the other institutions. But, even if they are associated with other institutions and people, each retains his identity, which simply means that their existence is not determined by the society in which they find themselves.

The unique feature of the family, according to Dooyeweerd, is that even though it functions in all aspects, it is qualified by the moral aspect. By this he means that moral love between parents and children ought to dominate the whole of family life. This love should

act as constant guiding structural function, determining the destination of each individual family.

The family, parents and children, has to be united by troth, a central norm or standard which has to be worked out in the family. As troth develops a family prospers, therefore each family must try in every possible way to develop, strengthen and conserve the bond of troth between its members. When this is achieved and maintained, only then can we speak of a real family. In a real family father, mother and child are devoted to one another and they help each other. In short, they pledge their love to one another.

As indicated in 1.1.3, despite the intimate bond of moral love, parents should not relinquish their moral authority and as with the other modalities, fairness and equity must colour the relations between parents and children (Kalsbeek, 1975:207-8).

Changes take place in the nuclear family. When both parents die, the family loses its identity. Blood ties remain intact between the children but according to Dooyeweerd, the family ceases to exist. Dooyeweerd holds that:

Even when these children live together, the family community is broken, also when all the children have grown up the family community ceases to exist whether or not the children have left the parental home.

This is a debatable point and I will return to it later on.

## **The internal unity of a family as a normative unity**

According to Dooyeweerd (1957:271) the guiding function of a family structure is normative. God's law as manifested in the structural principle of social relationships is holy and good, untainted by evil:

So then, the law itself is holy, and the commandment is holy, right and good.

Romans 7, v.12

By this Dooyeweerd means that the internal unity of a family is to a large extent defectively realised because of sin. That this is so can be seen from a close examination of families in contemporary society. In some of these we find cases of child-abuse and the abuse of women - two cases which strongly support the view that sin distorts family life into a caricature of what it was meant to be. Olthuis (1975:9) also takes up the point. According to him:

The break with God brought an immediate break in man's relation with himself, fellowmen and the rest of creation. When man's heartfelt communion with God and his neighbor broke, he set himself over against woman, woman reacted against man.

Olthuis (1975:9) sums up his argument in very strong terms:

With the Fall, intimacy became a curse instead of a blessing, openness meant vulnerability, dependence felt like defenselessness, and mutuality turned into hostility.

We can therefore justifiably conclude that families suffer when the guiding function of moral love is not positivised.

### **Authority and subordination in the family community**

Dooyeweerd holds that authority and subordination are indispensable in the structure of natural communities. However intimate the bond of moral love in the family may be the relationship of authority and subordination remains essential. This prompted him to issue the following warning:

Notwithstanding their intimacy the ties of love between parents and children do not lack the distinction between the authoritative position of the former and the subordinate position of the latter. On the contrary, if parents abandon their moral authority and factually behave as the older comrades of their children, the typical bond of love which qualifies the family relationship is violated (Dooyeweerd 1957:274).

It would indeed be detrimental to the family's future well-being if the parents would relinquish their authority over their children or even act as though they were their older friends. Since the family is a pillar of society, should it fall apart as a result of lack of proper control, society itself would suffer. Gangsterism, car-hijackings, armed robberies and wanton killing of farmers would rise unabated. All these are but few examples of what we in South Africa have to put up with as a result of lack of discipline and failure on the part of parents to exercise their authority well.

In sharp contrast to Dooyeweerd's view Kant held that true morality is incompatible with any relation of authority and subordination. In rejecting Kant's view Dooyeweerd (1957:273) concludes that:

If this were true, the immediate family relationship would in principle lack any moral character. For according to its inner structure, it does imply that very heteronomy which Kant considers to be opposed to real morality.

Considering that almost all types of communities imply a typical structure of authority, I share Dooyeweerd's opinion that Kantian ethics has no room for a moral community.

Having dealt with the question of authority and subordination, Dooyeweerd goes on to discuss the internal structural principle of the family which expresses itself in the aspects of social intercourse and language. The question of authority crops up here also. Instead of subordination on the part of the children we have here **respect**. Dooyeweerd (1957:285) expresses this relationship as follows:

The prevailing tone of the family intercourse should be consonant with the typical communal love between parents and children and brothers and sisters. And notwithstanding the close interweaving of the members of the family in their intercourse with each other, the authoritative structure of this relationship should find expression in the social respect shown by children for their parents.



Family conversations and discussions should, according to Dooyeweerd, always be conducted respectfully and lovingly. Children lose respect for their parents if they are treated by them as though they are their comrades or if the parents abandon their authority over them. In my opinion parents who spent most of their time visiting friends and only go back home to sleep are also in a way abandoning their authority and will in turn receive no respect from their children. Once the children are allowed to address their parents disrespectfully they will address everyone they come across in the same manner. All these associations are contained in the following paragraph:

Children should not speak to their parents in a disrespectful familiar way, but when the language used in a family has the exterior formality of the ordinary social intercourse with strangers, the family tone is somehow wrong (Dooyeweerd 1957:285).

**The expression of the structural principle in the cultural aspect of the family**

According to Dooyeweerd (1957:286) the family cannot be replaced by any other community in its function of moulding and educating children from infancy. Parents are the first people who are closest to the growing child.

The intimate family sphere is the only natural community able to give the first and foundational cultural moulding to the disposition and character of the infant. Both its biotical foundation and its typical moral qualification as a bond of love between parents

and children provide the formative power of parental education with a particular intimate character not found in any other communal sphere.

Olthuis (1975:80) also regards the intimate atmosphere of the family as the most suitable for the education of the growing child:

In the intimacy of the family, parents must lead, educate, steer, guide and nurture their children so that they come to see the norms that hold for life and so that they will be able to bear the responsibility of living according to the norms.

Being closest to their children at all times from their early years until they reach the stage of maturity, parents come to know exactly their children's habits. The knowledge enables them to find suitable ways in which they can prepare their children for future roles in life. Modern psychology and pedagogy may be of assistance to the family but should not replace it.

Parents remain the best teachers of their children. Any attempt to pass over this responsibility to institutions of learning would be the families' undoing. Mbiti (1969:225) sums up this point aptly as follows:

The education of children is increasingly being passed on from parents and the community to teachers and schools where it becomes more of book learning as an end in itself than an education which prepares the young for mature life and future careers.

Dooyeweerd (1957:287) rightly warns:

But it would be a dangerous overestimation of science if it should be supposed that the formative educational task of the parents had better be taken over by a skilled psychologist or pedagogue. The integral character of education in the family sphere is irreplaceable and in many respects decisive for the whole further life of the children. The children belong to their parents in a personal sense as long as they have not reached the stage of maturity necessary for them to be considered as responsible persons in human society.

#### **The end of the continuous identity of the family**

Dooyeweerd (1957:344) maintains that the parents remain advisers of adult children who have left their parental home for good. But over these children the authority of their parental office comes to an end, just as their children's duty to obey after they have reached the state of maturity. According to black culture parents do not lose authority. They have it for life. Parents are for instance

called whenever there are disputes. Whatever they lay down in the end is final and has to be accepted by the young couples.

In my opinion parents should remain advisers of all adult children not only of those who have left the parental home for good. Adult children should be encouraged to settle their own disputes. For those who are married I strongly recommend that they be advised to find solutions to their problems through sharing, that is by discussions

## CHAPTER 3: FAMILY LIFE

In this chapter I want to discuss family forms in Africa and the role of the family in society.

### 3.1 Social meaning of the family

#### 3.1.1 Plato's confusion

- that our men and women guardians should be forbidden by law to live together in separate households, and all the women should be common to all men; similarly, children should be held in common, and no parent should know its child, or child its parent (Plato 1963:237,457d).

In the **Republic** Plato makes propositions which are contrary to God's plan for marriage and family. For these institutions which were created by God Himself, he substitutes a system of eugenic breeding analogous to that used in breeding domestic animals. One big mistake which Plato makes is that of thinking that the state has a say in matters relating to the procreation of children. As it will become clearer later in this thesis, couples alone have a God-given responsibility of maintaining the human family on the earth. God gives the couples freedom by His command "increase and multiply" (Kimathi 1994:44).

According to Plato (1963:236,457), for the purpose of satisfying the sex instinct and of bringing about a good breed of citizens, the rulers will run mating festivals at which they will select mating partners. Without marriage, to my mind, there would be free mating which would reduce human beings created in the image of God to

a beastly level, therefore what Plato holds as good in his opinion, would be unacceptable in the eyes of God and also unacceptable to Christian communities all over the world.

Mating feasts which Plato recommends cannot replace marriage without which the basic social unit that is so essential in a stable society is not possible.

According to Plato's plan, state nurseries will be responsible for the upbringing and education of the children. These nurseries may be of help but they cannot replace the family as society's primary institution for raising children and for passing on and developing the values of society. Kimathi (1994:44) has this to say about parents as educators in the family:

The Christian couple creates a unit in which children are trained in worship, in work habits, in respect for man and reverence for God. The married partners give their offspring a model on which to build their life styles.

Solutions to problems of 'free love' morality which Plato proposes in **Nomoi** (841C) are in direct contradiction to the propositions he makes in the Republic. In the Republic citizens have to be rid of the distracting loyalties, affections and interests of the family system which according to Plato, prevent them from serving the community. In the Republic 'community' is more important than the 'individual'. In the Nomoi as indicated, Plato proposes the following as solutions to the problem of 'free love': fear of God, nurturing self-respect, and a passion for spiritual rather than physical beauty. 'Free love' has to be discouraged while in the Republic it is

encouraged. The individual is more important than the community in **Nomoi**.

### **3.1.2      Recapitulation      of      Dooyeweerd's      structural analysis of the family**

Dooyeweerd (1957:91) analyses social structures in terms of their qualifying and foundational aspects. He terms this type of analysis a radical typical analysis. By radical he understands the root of the structure. He also emphasizes the correlation between the two. In terms of the family he chooses for the ethical modality and the biotic modality.

#### **(a)      Qualifying aspect**

This aspect refers to the ethical attitude towards life which has to do with love. The word 'love' has lost both its meaning and its expressive force through overexposure. The bond of love between family members which Dooyeweerd describes, is based upon the natural ties of blood. This bond of love, according to Dooyeweerd, is founded in the biotic modality. As it will become clear from the descriptions in the next paragraphs, love cannot be restricted to intimate relationships and it has little to do with sentimental feelings of involvement. It is constant in nature.

Love is regarded by many as synonymous with emotion. There is a clear distinction between the two. Emotions are fickle while, as we have seen, love is enduring. Love should in fact be referred to as an attitude - an ideal attitude of respect for people's lives, their personhood, the social structures within which they live their lives and the God who ordains the norms for individual and social behaviour (Smit 1985:109).

**(b) The foundational aspect**

This aspect refers to the biotic structural aspect of the family. Dooyeweerd regards marriage and family as naturally founded societal forms. According to him both marriage and family are qualified by the ethical modality and founded on the biotic modality (Dooyeweerd 1957:91, 178ff). I share Smit's view that marriage is founded on the modality of psychic sensitivity. What happens concretely is that two people from the opposite sex are drawn to each other. Rather than to refer to the biotic difference between a male and female body, the psychic attraction between the sexes is the crucial issue. To take it even further we must emphasise that the whole personality is male or female therefore attraction is not merely biotic (Smit 1985:109-114).

**3.1.3 Family forms in Africa**

The family has a long history dating from pre-historic times. In its long history it took different forms, some of which are slowly dying out as a result of the influence of Christianity in different countries at different times.

The following forms are found in various countries:

Nuclear families

Extended families

Single parent families

Gay families

The nuclear family is the basic unit of every known family organization. It consists of a married couple and their immature offspring. This family form was not

common in South Africa and the rest of the African continent. The most common family form was the extended family.

### **Extended family**

This topic will be dealt with extensively in Chapter 4.

Extended families are still found in various parts of the world. This kind of family consists of the married couple and their children. It might include grandparents, brothers and sisters, perhaps an uncle and aunt. All these people, some related by blood and some by marriage, lived and worked together.

In the cities members of a kinship network continue to live together either as an extended family in a common household or, according to Unterhalter (1987:), in what may be called a quasi-extended family. Members of this type of family cannot share the common household because of living space. The kinship group continues as a major unit of association despite this limitation. Even if there are no relatives staying with the nuclear family, the wider kinship group continues to influence family life. Ceremonies connected with marriages and deaths are supervised by uncles who are often invited to settle the questions relating to 'amasiko' (customs).

According to African tradition ancestors are senior members of extended families and, as such, offer guidance and protection. When discipline disintegrates, or when moral norms are disregarded the living invariably turn to their ancestors for help. This point will be treated fully in chapter 7.



Among the Africans in the South-Eastern regions of Africa the domestic unit was traditionally the patriarchal extended family rather than the nuclear family while the very act of conversion led to a degree of withdrawal from extended families to which the converts belonged.

In agrarian societies the common form was the patriarchal family unit which was initially self-sufficient. It produced and consumed goods, carried out political and educational duties and it provided the much-needed protection. In these family units young people stayed with their parents until after marriage and left only after the birth of their first children. This is still the practice among black families in South Africa, both in the urban and the rural areas.

The matriarchal form is not popular in South Africa. This unit was popular in the North but is gradually dying out. In this case a man decides to leave the family in which he grew up to live with his wife in her parents' household.

### **Gay families**

A gay family is composed of two people of the same sex who literally live together as husband and wife. This type of association is not relevant for African life. It is a Western phenomenon. This form of association has not yet been legalized in South Africa.

#### **3.1.4 Educational task of the family/nurturing**

To a certain extent this topic was already touched on in chapter 2.

The child comes into the world within a family, a community that is founded on loving trust. It is in this community that the basic attitude to life is determined. In a family a child learns to express his feelings and if he experiences intimacy in the family he learns to do what is expected of him and to accept responsibility for his deeds.

There is no community that can take over the basic educational task of the family viz. an education in fidelity in intimate circle ... One who does not experience mutually and interdependence within the family, will have difficulty in mastering the art of responsible intimate relationships (Uys and Smit 1987:32).

Blankenhorn (1990(a):33) sees the family as an institution which renders valuable service in society:

The family is society's primary institution for raising children, caring for the elderly, and passing on and developing the values of society. It is usually the source of both our greatest loves and our greatest sorrows. It is the main mediating institution between the individual and the state - the basic social unit of our culture. For these reasons, most of us see the family as our central and most enduring commitment beyond the self.

Young boys learn from their fathers in the rural areas how to milk and how to plough the fields and they take up these duties when their fathers are away in the mines. In the cities young men learn from their fathers how to run business and how to drive while girls are taught by their mothers how to sew, knit and cook.

The majority of men of all races have to be taught to be fathers. It is an accepted fact that the supreme test of any civilization is whether it can socialize men by teaching them to be fathers, creating a culture in which men acknowledge their paternity and willingly nurture their offspring. One seldom comes across a mother who neglects her duty of educating her children. When both father and mother do not educate their children they will turn to those who can. These are very often the Police.

There is hope for the family. The middle class Africans are beginning to realize that their goal is to prepare their children to live responsible and useful lives. As a result many parents take their children to multiracial schools where there are few or no stayaways as compared to African schools where toyi-toyis and sit-ins are/were the order of the day.

### **3.1.5      The meaning of the family home**

According to Olthuis (1975:83), the family is a place of rest. It is a place of troth, security and peace where a child can come to himself and feel safe. Strauss (1995:176) makes the following contribution:

Children are inhibited from experiencing an appropriate sense of loving security when parental discipline is either authoritarian or permissive. Discipline which respects the dignity of the child, and then expects and nurtures a maturing towards responsibility, is the foundation of a secure sense of identity and adulthood. The authority of parents is limited by familial love and the personal dignity of the child, and should be exercised

in such a way that the child continues to be led out into the free exercise of promise and possibility.

Children feel wanted, safe and secure when they are accepted for what they are and when parents do not attempt to change them from what they are. A child will feel safe when he realizes that he is accepted even if he does poorly at school ... even if he does not want to be a farmer and his father has the best farm in the country (Olthuis, 1975:83).

African parents are conservative. With them the moral obligation to conform to traditions and conventions overrides any desire for change or non-conformity. (( cf Yusufu Turaki (1991:135) cited by Van der Walt (1995:9)). They will not move an inch from the practices of their forefathers. They bring up their children the way they themselves were brought up. Some parents still choose careers for their children - the practice they adopted from their forefathers (a practice which often has negative results). With the exception of the elite, African parents punish their children if they perform badly at school. In my opinion children will feel safe if they know that their parents will love them even if they do not meet their expectations but they will become emotionally insecure when they are overwhelmed with the obligation to fulfil their parents' wishes. Olthuis sums this up beautifully:

Once the child begins the uncertain task of trying to earn his parents' love, he loses the freedom and trust he needs to learn to know himself. He becomes anxious and uncertain of his own worth (Olthuis, 1975:84).

According to African tradition the children's upbringing is the responsibility of the mother, thus women are always blamed when their children perform badly. But who, in the family, is to blame when this happens? Is it not the father for neglecting his duty as a parent?

### **3.1.6 Social meaning of the family**

Migratory labour has had an enormous impact on family life in Africa. It has deprived children of their fathers and wives of their husbands in some cases over extended periods of time while in others, for good. Lately children are also being deprived of their mothers who, more and more, leave their homes to seek employment in towns or cities.

The fact that the survival of the family depends on its members being separated from one another runs counter to both Western, Christian and traditional African values. These migrant workers have no choice as there is no other way open for them to earn a living.

The family is the community in which from childhood one can learn moral values and begin to honour God. Ideally, the relationships within the family have to bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests arising above all from the members' respect for one another. The relationship between parents and children is summed up as follows in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994:516):

The family is a privileged community called to achieve a sharing of thought and a common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager co-operation as parents in the children's upbringing.

Shutte (1994:50) describes how interaction takes place in the family according to African view. He states that:

... the best model for human community as understood in African thought is the family. The family has no function outside itself. It is a means of growth for its members, and the interaction, the companionship and conversation between the growing and fully grown members is also an end itself.

He rounds off his comment on the family with a reference to the extended family for which African society is famous:

And the extended family is capable of extension to include anyone, not only those related by blood, kinship of marriage. In the last resort humanity itself is conceived of as a family, a family which one joins at birth but does not leave by dying. Because of this, no-one is a stranger. The world is our common home, the earth the property of all.

### **Child labour**

Galston (cited by Young 1995:538) quite erroneously considers the state to be the only organ capable of addressing problems in our society - problems such as child labour and sexual abuse.

The question of child labour has to be addressed by parents as well as the state. Protest marches are being organised all over the world in which state officials and

members of the public take part to voice their objection against this practice.

As indicated earlier on, parents send their children to beg in the streets. This is a form of child labour which like the other, exposes these children to unhealthy and hazardous conditions where they are vulnerable to sexual abuse, harassment and economic exploitation by other youth. It has to be discouraged.

The family plays an important role in society. It is the building block of a number of institutions. As Kimathi (1994:57) rightly states:

The church needs the family to teach and model Christianity. The Government needs homes in which children can be socialized for good citizenship. The family still remains the most effective social control. It is regarded as the best insurance against delinquency (Neumeyer 1961:158 cited by Kimathi 1994:58)

It is in the families where lasting attitudes, morals and values, which are so essential in a good, happy society are learnt. As indicated earlier on, the virtues of honesty, generosity and humility, hard work, loyalty and respect for personal worth are taught here (Kimathi 1994:58). Spykman in **The Hope for the Family** (1994:139) stresses the role of parents in preparing the children for their place in society:

The home is a kind of mini-society. The home must open one door after another in every direction looking out upon the larger realms of societal life beyond, and gradually leading the

younger set out into ever enlarging realms of involvement.

This can be achieved if through table talk and family prayers, our children come to a growing sense of the family's involvement in the life of the Christian community and society at large. Through these efforts children must see that the covenant is bigger than the home and that the Kingdom is as big as life itself.

Ironically De Maupassant uses the view that the family is the building block of society:

If society is a chain, each family is a link in that chain. In order to weld those links we always seek for metals of the same kind.

Building society is not an easy task. There are problems which have to be solved along the way and several broad issues which influence family life that need to be addressed. Problems associated with single parent families, child labour, education and migratory labour.

### **3.2 Family and education**

Next to the family, schools play an important role in the training of children with the view to preparing them for future roles in society.

Upon entering school, the child enters a new world as it were, one that has its own socializing programme.

Launched into school, Goodman and Marx rightly maintain that *the child is to some degree launched into society for better or for worse.*



At school children come into contact with teachers who, like parents, may become powerful role models. The school is responsible for transmitting to children the content of the dominant culture in history, its language, its fund of knowledge and its norms (Goodman and Marx 1978:138).

Kindergartens that are built, creches which now dot various townships in South Africa as well as the most modern pre-primary schools for children could be friends of the family but they can never be adequate substitutes for the family. Van der Walt (1995:425) also sounds a very strong warning. According to him a school will be a failure:

... if it can produce impressive statistics about students achievements, but does not give each student the opportunity to be fully equipped for service in the whole of his/her life.

Missionary schools up to 1954 played an important role in the development of the African children. Schools such as Lovedale and Healdtown in the Cape, Inkamana in Natal, Moroka Missionary Institute and Stofberg Gedenkskool in the Free State, produced men who left footprints in the history of the African people. There are many more.

After the depression in 1936 an increasing number of young people were sent by their parents to high schools and colleges. Many of those who completed their college education came back to relatively well-rewarding jobs. Values and expectations favouring higher education spread. There was no shortage of teachers as this was the only profession parents could afford to see their children through.

Bursaries were not easily obtainable. Parents who were eager to see their children educated would often have to sell their sheep, oxen and maize to pay fees and purchase prescribed books. The young people who could only go as far as Junior Certificate (Std 8) took up jobs in the mining industries as clerks (mabalane).

Missionary schools in those days functioned in a way that strengthened, encouraged and supported parents in their unique task. How I wish this idea of supporting parents could be turned into the **Teachers Pledge of Service**, then toyi-toyis and sit-ins by teachers would be reduced considerably.

3.2.1 Education brought about other changes, changes such as:

- (a) decline of parental authority;
- (b) changes in family roles; and
- (c) freedom to attend the school of one's choice.

### 3.2.2 **Decline of parental authority**

The decline of respect for authority is a universal phenomenon in our world. The lifestyle of the youth in particular, is determined by negative freedom - the freedom from and not by the far more challenging freedom to - that is normative freedom.

It is an established fact that one of the reasons for the decline in parental authority is the introduction of schools and churches, both of which offer alternative systems of values, as well as new sources of authority. Closely connected to this is the moral degradation associated with racial discrimination which reduced the

dignity and status of black parents and, also, the children's respect for their parents. These children normally blamed their parents for what they termed the "yes boss" attitude. In South Africa some parents who occupied key positions in the urban councils which were established by the apartheid regime, were branded 'sell-outs' during the students' uprisings in the late 1970's. These councillors were told to relinquish their posts by the students. Those who refused to comply to the demands made by the students had their houses burnt down while others were necklaced.

### **3.2.3 Changes in family roles**

Many of the changes which started during the colonial period have continued to this day to affect family roles to a large extent. Children have to be at school for longer periods and are often forced to work at their assignments at home. These have reduced the hours which the children have available for helping at home.

In the rural areas children have sufficient time after school hours and even during the holidays to help their parents. Girls are allowed little time to attend to their books at home because a girls school performance is not as highly valued as that of the boys.

In the latter part of the 20th century girls (particularly in the urban areas) are being given the same opportunity as boys, to further their studies. We now have female doctors, female advocates and female ministers of religion to mention a few positions which were filled by males only in the past.

Middle class men no longer leave all educational and other responsibilities to their wives, but rather take a more active part.

#### **3.2.4 Freedom to attend the school of one's choice**

The majority of South Africans have had little choice regarding their education up to 1990. Things have now changed. Black children are now admitted into white schools. The government has made a good effort to reduce the gap between black and white education. Upgrading of all education facilities and the integration of these would go a long way towards stabilising family life in this country.

### **3.3 Family and church**

I mentioned in chapter 2 that marriage is an ordinance of God. He ordained it for mutual fellowship and helpfulness between man and woman, for responsible parenthood, for the making of home and building a family.

Since families are the pillars of our society, something must be done to ensure that they live according to God's plan for families. In my view the organ which is best suited for this task is the church. This task cannot be taken over by the government and social agencies.

The church, as the body of Christ, has to approach family problems as sympathetic as Christ, its head, would have done. Thus it should recognise man's sinfulness and the imperfection of human society. Therefore while it teaches and shows Christians the norm for Christian marriage and family life, it should view in the spirit of Christ every occurrence in our lives, even such occurrences as divorce and polygamy; it should know that

the persons involved are in desperate need of redemption and that it is the pastoral responsibility of the church to offer them reconciliation with God through Christ. Regarding the occurrences of divorce and polygamy the **All African Seminar on the Christian Home and Family Life** (1963:9) rightly warns that:

Each case of divorce should be treated with sympathy and pastoral care: the polygamist should not be asked to put away his wives when converted, as that would be contrary to our commission as ambassadors of reconciliation. We have no right to amend God's law of grace. If a polygamist is really converted, to receive him into the church with his wives is to place him under perpetual penance.

For the church to achieve success, it is necessary constantly for it to preach, to reach and to admonish in the theological and practical things relating to the Christian home and family life. Among the things which the church have to teach are: preparation for marriage, responsible parenthood, the place of man and woman in God's purpose for society and the World (All Africa Seminar on Christian Home and Family Life, 1963:9).

It is a part of the church's mission to pass judgments even in matters related to politics whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of soul requires it (The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994:525). It is, I think, in pursuance of this call that a few churches are up in arms, as it were, against the sanctioning of the Abortion-on-demand Act. Meredith, p3, in **The World Ahead** (March/April 1998), has this to say about the role which Christians have to play in the fight against abortion:

... I am nonetheless appalled at the hedonism, the debauchery and the sheer **brutality** to which this current generation has been exposed! And I sense that our totally decadent adult society is slowly but surely losing any sense whatsoever of the true values and standards that some of us may have been taught in years past. How dare we sit back comfortably when we read that nearly 35 million unborn babies have been slaughtered over the past quarter century of our lives! Remember, this 'legalized murder' that we call abortion has occurred on our watch!

He ends up with a question directed to all of us:

How dare we call ourselves a Christian nation when our officials knowingly sanction this kind of mass murder! When they give validity and even certain blessing to sexual perverts!

In the same way in which we organise protest marches against child labour we will have to organise marches against this gross inhuman practice.

Finally, as Christian families we are called to transform human realities into salvation realities, to enable the good news of Jesus' salvation to become incarnate in the actual society in which we live. The need to respond to this call is, as Vic Missiaen maintains: the fundamental reason why the church must play an active role in the economic, political and social dimensions of development (Missiaen: April/May 1998:16).

### 3.4 Family and public morality

As I indicated in chapter 3.1 the family is the original cell of social life. The real importance of this institution for the life and well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family.

Having such an important role to play in society one would expect civil authority to consider it a grave duty to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality and to promote domestic prosperity (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994).

In spite of the political and educational advancement of our societies, people all over the continent, particularly those in South Africa, are frustrated because nothing positive is being done by their governments to end such problems as aids, abortion, prostitution and rape which are facing them. In Gauteng province alone over a thousand cases of rape are being reported every month. Because of a promiscuous lifestyle, aids has become a major threat. Of the black children born in South Africa during the years 1989 and 1990, as I have already indicated, 69.8% were illegitimate.

Detribalisation and apartheid laws among other causes, led to social patterns that are all but conducive to a healthy community. Instead of helping to check the spread of aids the government is making it possible (in spite of itself) for this deadly epidemic to spread by passing the abortion-on-demand bill. In terms of this law women can terminate pregnancy without the knowledge and concurrence of their husbands. Young girls are also

free to terminate their pregnancies without the consent of parents. In another breath the government encourages the use of contraceptives to combat aids!

It is indeed shocking that even among Christian communities very few people speak up against irresponsible sexual behaviour. Parents will be well-advised to impress upon their children the need to take precautionary measures to avoid unnecessary suffering. A different kind of sexual freedom should be taught to our children:

To us sexual freedom first of all should be ethical: An expression of love with respect for personhood, a comprehensive involvement with the other person, a commitment to care for and share with such a person. Secondly it should respect the God-ordained social structure to shield the relationship and provide the ideal atmosphere for begetting and raising children (Smit & Smit, 1995:15).

In our modern families both parents decide on the size of the family they wish to have. I therefore find it strange that women should be permitted to terminate their pregnancies without consulting their husbands. Kobus and Yvonne Smit end with a strong warning directed to all Christian families:

To keep silent on the present cult of eroticism is to aggravate the problem. Silence means consent.



## **Unemployment and the lowering of morals.**

Unemployment has led to the lowering of morals in some areas. Unemployed men sit around all day with nothing to do and start drinking early in the morning. In the afternoon when children come home from school, they are often left unattended because their parents are out working. They are offered food, drinks and sweets in exchange for sex and many who are desperately poor, accept the proposition from these "sugar daddies". Many were lured in this way and have never been seen again while a few were raped, butchered and buried in shallow graves.

The number of divorce cases is gradually rising among blacks. Something has to be done to stem this rising tide. In my view a solution which will be better than divorce to the problem of marital conflict would be to learn how to predict incompatibility before two people come to the marrying stage and use the information gained to reduce the number of marriages which are likely to end in divorce (Mercer 1958:261).

## **The social revolution and its effects on society**

We are living in the age in which social customs and moral values are gradually being replaced. The term 'social revolution' sums it all. By this is meant an absolute disregard for traditions. Good things from the past no longer have a place in our societies. Our youth have to learn by trial and error, as a result the number of illegitimate children and the number of children raised by unmarried mothers are rising at an alarming rate.

In any community some sense is left that social customs embody more wisdom than could emerge in a single generation. The decencies and hesitations that once surrounded sex, are not arbitrary injunctions of a departed ruling class but the wisdom of generations. Our own duties cannot be understood only in terms of our own experience. Without religion, law and morality lose their authority. Religion is not so much revealed in the search of doctrines but in the self-imposed daily duties of people. What happened since the sexual revolution is that we inhibit our basic convictions because the liberal press relentlessly scoffs at ordinary prohibitions and decencies while advocating "alternatives". Liberal sarcasm can kill a lot of what is good in society, especially when it comes from academic circles and government commissions (cf Scruton, 1996:A8).

Ministers of religion, church councils and families themselves have to join hands to teach the youth proper Christian values. Children should be taught self-restraint, self-discipline and responsibility, words which are now despised in our culture. I subscribe to the view held by Kobus and Yvonne Smit (1998:5) that:

We got rid of a lot of taboos, but we have created new ones: never moralise about sex. We back it up with rights: the right to free sexual expression and the right to privacy. Reality tells us that sex mostly happens in private, but its consequences affects a family, a community, a people, the public!

We will have to act fast, to teach our children these values for the sake of living with integrity. As Lombaard (1997) rightly maintains:

We cannot be uncommitted bystanders. Simply being human already commits us to the fate of others.

We cannot speak of public morality. Not when the government is passing laws which sanction abortion and free sex. Not when women are given the right to decide (without the knowledge of their husbands) whether they want to have children or not.

### **3.5 Family planning/contraception**

There are no hard and fast rules which limit parents to a fixed number of children they should have. Previously, before the sixties, family planning was no issue at all, there was nothing you could do about the laws of nature. Now many parents are in a position to decide on the issue after careful consideration of the difficulties encountered by parents who have large families or the disadvantages of small families.

Contraception, which was at first not accepted by the majority of the African people, has made dramatic progress both in techniques and public acceptance even among Africans. As Uys and Smit point out, contraception has the advantage of improving the relationship between husband and wife and also between parents and children because more time, money and opportunities are available (Uys and Smit 1987:16).

Children today require much personal and individual attention to prepare themselves to cope with our complex society. Few parents can really cope adequately when there are six or more children in the family. In African families it is not unusual to find a couple having up to

twelve children. As a result these parents find it difficult to nurture and educate their children.

Contraception should, however, be seen as a tool to fight a greater social evil. The modern sexually permissive society would, as Uys rightly states, have a bigger number of unwelcome children and single-parent families if it had not been for contraception. Uys and Smit warn that:

... Contraception is not there for the sake of unbridled sexual intercourse beyond marriage limits (Uys and Smit 1987:18).

### **3.6 Abortion/termination of pregnancy**

Termination of pregnancy can be defined as the separation and expulsion by medical or surgical means of the contents of the uterus of a pregnant woman (Termination of Pregnancy Act, No. 92 of 1996).

In terms of the abovementioned act, Act 1996 (2.2) to perform a termination of pregnancy only the consent of the pregnant woman, unless she is incapable of giving consent. In 7(1) the clause is explained further:

Notwithstanding any law or the common law, no consent other than that of the pregnant woman, unless she is incapable of giving consent, shall be required for the termination of pregnancy.

Many criticisms have been raised against this act. According to Christian ethics fatherhood and motherhood are seen as offices that are being entrusted to them by God. This implies that two people, not only the mother,

are entrusted with a life for which they accepted responsibility (Uys and Smit, 1987:23). H. Thielicke (1979:231) cited by Uys and Smit (1987:23) holds that both parents are, according to God's creational ordinance for marriage and the nuclear family, responsible for the granted gift.

Vilakazi in the City Press, 1997 April 6 condemns abortion in very strong terms:

A woman's or girl's right to do as she pleases with "her" body overrides all precepts that undergird the fabric of family, church, tribe and broader societal morality ... The Abortion on Demand Bill hurts the dignity and kernel of the African people - when a girl, a woman or a wife will leave the house and go across the street to procure an abortion, just as she would get any item of her desire in a store.

He also finds the fact that women can procure abortion without the knowledge of their husbands disturbing:

The more affluent fly out on a day off to Durban to "get themselves fixed" and return home to serve family supper without even a word to the husband that will share her bed that night. He is one of the ones who by the new decree should "mind his own business"

Lombaard (1997:(i)) finds it quite disturbing that:

... people who are generally against racism, against the exploitation of children, against sexism, against death penalty, somehow seem to be in favour of abortion. People who are

generally for freedom of speech, for freedom of the mass media and arts, for the protection of the individual against the state and the prejudices of broader society, people who are for social responsibility regarding the underprivileged, are also - paradoxically - for abortion on demand.

There seems to be a contradiction in values, to hold liberal democratic views and at the same time be pro-abortion.

### 3.7 Adoption

According to the White Paper for Social Welfare: August 1995, adoption is a child protection and prevention service and an effective means of procuring permanent homes for children whose biological parents are unable to care for them.

Adoption also comes as a blessing for couples who cannot obtain a family through the normal way of reproduction. Olthuis (1975:76) has this to say regarding adoption:

This possibility too is a real blessing of the Lord. Parents can have children even if they cannot bear them and parents can control conception even if they can have children.

In Africa children are so cherished that hardly anyone is ready to give up his or her child for adoption. Africans believe that God provides for each child born, thus the idea of giving up a child for adoption is never thought of, not even by parents who are extremely poor. Single mothers would rather keep their children because Africans have a high respect for motherhood. This is even the

case with young girls of school-going age who have had a fall. They would rather leave their children with their parents while they pursue their studies than give them up for adoption.

Instead of adoption, Africans practice a form of fostering which is slightly different from the type of fostering that we know by which couples take someone else's child into their family for a certain period only.

According to African custom illegitimate children and the children whose parents are unable to provide for them are fostered by their childless aunts and uncles. Fostering was and still is a common feature of African family life. All foster children know their real parents, but are happy to spend much of their life away from their biological parents.

Adoption is gradually being accepted by Africans with the only difference that while whites adopt children of unknown parents blacks adopt children of their own relatives.

Whatever forms adoption and fostering take, the adoptive as well as fostering parents do a lot of good towards reducing the suffering of homeless children.

### **3.8 Single parent families**

The high rate of births out of wedlock has created significant distortions in family patterns. In Nairobi of the 60 000 street children 80% have one living parent. According to the Star April 1, 1998, it is mainly single mothers who send their children to beg in the streets as a source of added income.

Grandmothers who have had their shares in bringing up their own children are forced to look after their grandchildren, a task they can no longer perform well. In roughly 65% of these cases the mothers are nowhere to be found while the fathers cannot be traced to maintain their children. As a result grandparents spend large amounts of their pension grants on their grandchildren's needs.

As a solution to this problem Galston (cited by Young 1995:538) insists that public policy should take action to discourage their existence. In my opinion this problem can be solved by reviving the tradition of marriage to make it easier for blacks to get married. At present one finds a large number of young men who wish to get married but are deterred by the amounts they are expected to pay in lobola.

Sexual ethics should also be propagated instead of running AIDS campaigns.

### **3.9 Divorce**

Divorce has generated much criticism throughout the ages, with the strongest criticism coming from the Catholic Church which denies its members, to this day, the right to divorce. Galston cited by Young (1995:538) also opposes divorce in very strong terms. According to him divorce has bad social consequences. He calls on the state to implement policies which would encourage marriage and discourage divorce and single motherhood. One of the policy recommendations he makes for regulating family life is that divorce should be made more difficult to obtain to enable parents to raise their children into good citizens.



Such a step would obviously be unfair to couples whose marriages are on the rocks. Moreover encouraging parents to stay together when they do not want to may cause more harm in children than allowing them to divorce in as simple and peaceful a manner as possible (Young 1995:538).

### **3.10 Street children**

Freedom, democracy and peace in Africa have done little to improve the lot of young people who, if anything, are as badly off as were children during World War II. Being a child today means coping with an adult world in unchildlike ways. Violence, war, abandonment and broken families are reshaping the future of the children.

These children are on the street for various other reasons. They are the orphans, the mentally, physically and sexually abused who have run away or the children of homeless people. Sometimes they are the breadwinners for their families, supporting brothers and sisters and parents who are unable to make a living.

Many children in our cities and towns are no longer staying with their parents. If the question were to be asked: Where have the children gone? the answer would undoubtedly be: They have gone to live on the streets. Winnie Graham in World Wide (1997:1) sums up the plight of these children as follows:

While fortunate youngsters know the security of a loving home, good health and a good education, there are literally millions of children, some just a few years old, who live by their wits. Some were abandoned, some the products of violence and war. All too many

have been physically, mentally and sexually abused.

The collapse of the extended family in Africa is one other cause of this problem. Africans have traditionally operated as extended rather than nuclear families. Lack of accommodation has caused the breakup of families with some members having to relocate in places far away from others. The patterns of the support system on which the families depended for many essential functions, including childminding and housekeeping, have been disrupted thereby.

Street children are treated differently in every country. Some are ignored, some are murdered, some are sold into prostitution and slavery (Laura Clarke, World Wide 1997:13).

Southern Africa has not escaped the trauma of street children. The first youngsters appeared on the streets of Johannesburg many years ago. Today there is hardly a town in the country from Pietersburg to Potchefstroom, from Vryburg to Ventersdorp without these forlorn waifs. According to Graham (1997:1)

They converge on towns, living a hand to mouth existence begging and sometimes doing petty jobs. All too often adults who care little about their well-being exploit their vulnerability.

Their fate is shared by children in the war ravaged countries bordering on South Africa and countries further north from Angola to Zaire, Rwanda and Kenya. Churches and welfare organizations do what they can by building

shelters and teaching skills but this is only a partial answer. Children need families.

These homeless children make their own way in a world they did not create and their numbers are outpacing all church and government efforts to stem the tide. These neglected and ignored children are the shame of our big cities. They are grave reminders of our lost family and community values and failed government and social policies (Laura Clarke 1997:13).

The only hope for the next generation rests with us. Only by making a concerted effort to stop the violence - on the battlefield and in the homes and returning to traditional family values, can we hope to provide the boys and girls of tomorrow with real security. It is a monumental task but one which the church, the parents and the state must tackle and set a lead for all to follow (Winnie Graham 1997:1).

These children do not have a voice to cry for them. We are their voice. We have to articulate their needs. As Christians we should not be part of those who are living in luxury while others are facing death.

A last remark:

The results of the aids crisis are beginning to dawn on us. It has implications for the problem of street children as well. The more the orphans, the more likely the children will land on the streets. A comprehensive moral solution is imperative.

### 3.11 Family authority and discipline

Parents are invested with authority over their children according to the ordination of God. Their authority is however not the same as state authority, or church authority.

Authority in the family determines both how children should behave towards their parents as well as how parents should behave towards their children. The apostle states this double relationship as follows: "Children obey your parents - and you parents provoke not your children to wrath" (Schrotenboer, 1995:15).

Their authority is an authority of love and their discipline should bear the qualification of love and fidelity for if it does not have these two factors, it is no discipline.

Authority and punishment are intended to help develop a child's own sense of responsibility and to help inculcate in him/her virtues such as love of God and the fellowman, fidelity, reliability, humility, respect for other people, justice and many others. Scripture warns parents to discipline their children. This warning is stated emphatically in Prov. 19:18:

Discipline your son while there is hope, do not set your heart on his destruction.

Dooyeweerd (1957:276) shares this opinion. Parents have to guide their children every step of the way. He makes the following contribution in this regard:

In keeping with the inner structural law of the family in its narrowed sense, parental discipline has an exclusively pedagogical character bound to the special guidance of parental love. The exercise of this disciplinary competence ought to be accommodated to the stage of development of the children.

Dooyeweerd (1957:274) warns parents not to abandon their moral authority and the children to obey their parents. If parents behave (as many do in the squatter settlements) as the older comrades of their children, the typical parental bond of love which qualifies the family relationship is violated. He further warns that:

A relationship which scorns obedience and authority, and implies equality of the individuals... lacks the tender tone which the divine order gives to love between parents and children. Respect for the divine office of parents plays an essential role in the latter, it can never be disregarded with impunity (Dooyeweerd 1957:274).

Uys and Smit (1987:33) share this view:

Each parent that flinches from discipline and thus believes in the myth of boundless freedom, uninhibited creativity or permissiveness (anti-authoritarian education) makes a caricature of his office and commits an injustice towards his child.

One could perhaps add that the parent commits an injustice towards society as well, since a child who gets

what he wants from his parents in all situations, will also expect to have it in all relationships outside the family.

Van der Walt (1994:419) also shares this view. To the question of **no authority** he adds **little authority**. Little or no authority, he maintains, can lead to confusion, uncertainty and lack of discipline in a child. That this is so, can be supported by a study of African children who are left in their grandmothers' care. They lack proper training and are often thoroughly spoilt. Parents dare not scold the children in front of their grandparents for fear of being told that: "you were naughtier than that but we did not scold you that way", by the overprotective grandmother.

In African families particularly, among the Basotho and Tswanas, children who are named after their grandparents or uncles may not be punished or called by their names since if you do so, you would be regarded as having no respect for the grandparent or uncle after whom the child is named. These children are either referred to as "Ntate, Rara (father) Malome (uncle) depending on the relationship of the person after whom the child is named.

Some parents exercise too much authority. According to Van der Walt (1994:419) too much authority can lead to fearful anxiety on the one hand or rebellion on the other.

According to African tradition girls are supposed to be home before sunset or face the wrath of their parents for coming home late. Many have taken their lives rather than face their parents' wrath. African boys choose to roam about the streets at night after being scolded by their parents rather than go back home. Those who stay

become rebellious and tend to resent all forms of correction.

Strauss has the following good advice to parents in his thesis **The Ethics of Public Welfare** (1995:176):

Discipline which respects the dignity of the child and therefore expects and nurtures a maturing towards responsibility, is the foundation of a secure sense of identity and adulthood.

Guidance without rules is not complete. However guidance in the home is not just rule upon rule, ordinance upon ordinance (Olthuis 1975:86).

Van der Walt (1994:419) also warns that:

Growth in personal responsibility in a child is also curtailed when parents simply give commands.

Many rules which we find in African tradition are rules which were laid down long ago. The rule that a newly wed woman 'Makoti' should wear dresses which go as far down as her ankles, and the rule that she should sit behind the door for some months after her wedding, were brought down from time immemorial and should really be discontinued. Van der Walt (1994:419) gives sound advice on this issue:

Family rules should therefore not rest merely on tradition or contingency, but the parents have to be convinced that they act in the way in which God wants them to fulfil their

responsibility towards their families - even if not in a perfect fashion.

### 3.12 Children's adventures and parental support

In African families infants are allowed to do anything during their crawling stages but this permissiveness changes in early childhood. Durojaiye makes the following observation in **A Christian Religious Education Course for School Certificate** (Book II):

The permissiveness, always noticeable in African homes whereby an infant child can do anything during sucking and crawling periods, suddenly changes in many homes to an excessive restrictiveness in early childhood. The fast talking inquisitively questioning child is now reprimanded for interrupting conversations or for being too talkative. Noises of all kinds are now frowned upon (1975:55).

It is not unusual to hear Christian parents reprimanding their children in such strong terms as:

This child has no respect, he always interrupts his father in his conversation. Keep quiet!

Durojaiye warns rightly that these activities which are growth stimulants are repressed thereby. This may lead to a personality that has no capacity to accept or initiate new ideas in a rapidly changing world.

In many cases, I think, children who are described as 'lazy' and unwilling to work are children whose parents expressed no desire for them to try new things. Liberal Westerners subscribe to the view that: 'experience is the



best teacher'. Their children are given opportunities to learn.

According to Western tradition dating is acceptable. Young men invite their girlfriends to their homes to have lunch together. Through dating these young people have a chance of knowing each other fully: each others likes and dislikes. When they ultimately get married they stand a good chance of staying happily together.

African parents do not allow their daughters to go out with young men for fear that they may become pregnant. To do this, however is to deny them freedom to act as responsible individuals.

## CHAPTER 4

### TRADITIONAL FAMILY LIFE AND FACTORS THAT LED TO ITS DISINTEGRATION

In this chapter I shall discuss the part played by parents and the extended family in the upbringing of children. I shall also discuss the conditions that bring about changes in social patterns.

#### 4.1 Family life in Africa

In Africa families tend to follow traditional patterns. In many homes duties which are supposed to be performed by both parents become the responsibility of women.

Kayongo-Male Diane (1984:27) is also of the opinion that very few husbands are dedicated to their families:

Few husbands help much with the children's homework and they may seldom feel pressure from having too many demanding roles. Some may in fact, feel that their only role is to provide money for the family's maintenance.

In tribal courts men are often heard arguing that they buy sufficient groceries for their families. One thing which these men fail to understand is that their families need their company and not the material things which they are provided with. Instead of being close to their parents, children who live in such families do not easily communicate with them and as there is no one with whom they can share their problems, they turn to the street where they will be taught how to spend their lives.

Children are not the only ones who experience this problem of communicating with others. In traditional society on the whole communication between husband and wife is unknown. Small wonder instead of sharing her husband's problems, a woman will come with such suggestions as:

Try a Disprin Ntate (father) it will help ease your tension!

Which is unfortunately no solution at all. All because she is never consulted in her husband's affairs. Olthuis (1975:104) sums up the question of sharing as follows:

The family is a we-situation in which parents and children develop and grow into full persons through open-end sharing.

Maswanganyi (The miracle of marriage), (ND:13) rounds off his argument on a 'home' as a place where children's dreams:

can be crippled, frustrated and shattered, be their dreams spiritual, intellectual, physical, professional, material or marital.

Many children ended up as drop-outs at school or even twilight children because they were not prepared by their parents to reach their dreams while others went astray because they were brought up by over-authoritative fathers. Children should be disciplined not terrorized. Discipline was translated out as follows by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians:

Fathers do not exasperate your children instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 5:4).

Any man, by turning the place where he lives into a happy home, will improve relations between parents and children and between one family and the next. I firmly believe that happy homes produce happy children, happy children create a happy community, a happy community makes a happy world. A home will still remain a happy place for the mother and her children even if the father spends time visiting friends if these visits take place under the norm of troth. Similarly father and children will still derive happiness from their home even if the mother has to attend "manyano" (women's guild) if this takes place under the norm of troth. These activities and others such as balancing the budget, attending worship services, skating and just plain living, are, as Olthuis mentions, necessary and should take place under the norm of troth (Olthuis, 1975:80).

As the family grows the need for both husband and wife to raise their children jointly increases. Often the wife has to stay home to look after them.

Many mothers have no one to talk to during the day. This creates a strong need for them to relate their problems to their husbands when they come back home in the evenings. Unfortunately many husbands, partly because they wish to avoid what they perceive to be a boring rehash of household frustrations, and partly because of the customary habit of letting women do everything in the house, drop headlong onto their couches with the evening newspapers or would rather go out visiting till late to spend time with friends to avoid various domestic duties in which they are not really interested.

The whole idea of husbands helping their wives in household chores and in educating their children is un-African. However, a few are beginning to see the need to do so. This is one clear lesson which African children as parents of tomorrow, will have to learn. By accepting this lesson and by putting it into practice, future African families will be happy families indeed.

On the question of child-rearing practices, Durojaiye maintains that these have to be changed. He states that African parents rarely play with their children. Adults, especially fathers, think that children are too junior, they do not understand, so why play with them? Those children will not know how to talk with adults or appreciate what the adult world is like. He correctly maintains that:

If the father plays with a child, the child sees how his father passes a ball and imitates him (Durojaiye:Book II:2).

### **The extended family**

This topic was discussed in Chapter 3. In this chapter I want to point out why the extended family was so essential in traditional African families and why it is still essential in the modern period.

This type of family differs from the nuclear family in that it consists of several nuclear families united by parent-child relationship and living together either in the same house or in a compound.

The agrarian family consisted not only of the father, mother and children, but ranged wider to include

grandfathers, aunts, uncles, etc. No distinction was drawn between household and extended family.

Another type of joint family common in Africa is the patrilineal extended family which is formed by a custom whereby sons remain in their father's family group bringing their wives to live with them so that their children belong to the group.

The patrilineal extended family is still found in various parts of South Africa. In the Transkei and in large parts of KwaZulu Natal - particularly in the rural areas - married sons stay with their parents until the birth of their first children. Thereafter they move to their own separate houses to avoid clashes with the rest of the family members.

The extended family functions strongly in the urban areas also. In his studies on the cities of Brazzaville, Dakar, Lagos, Leopoldville and Stanleyville Aldous (1962) concluded that the extended family still functioned strongly in the urban areas in terms of the co-residence of two or more nuclear families, joint activities by the extended family, assistance exchanged among individual relatives and friendship networks of kin members (cited by Diane, 1984:35).

**Peter Marris** (1966) in **The Family and Social Changes in an African City** has a different opinion. According to him when nuclear families were relocated away from their extended family members, the frequency of visiting decreased and mutual aid declined. According to him therefore, distance was one of the major factors which altered family relationships by reducing opportunities for visiting and interaction. He further argues that the ties between members of the extended families can not be

strengthened since, with relatives coming to town expecting to live freely off working relatives, problems will always be created. Such relatives may never find work but may cause serious financial problems in the family before they are told to leave (cited by Kayongo-Male Diane, 1984:34).

This is not the case in Africa. Families living in the urban areas are happy to have someone staying in their homes to look after their properties while they are away at work. Oscar Lewis says that the extended family becomes stronger despite the pressures to which it is so often exposed. The same can be said of families in africa. In Africa, the extended family often financially assist migrants in towns, in order to help the migrant to obtain work quickly. Like Oscar Lewis, Aldous maintains, rightly, that:

"Even with numerous strains on the extended family, it would be very wrong to argue that the urban environment has significantly reduced the relevance of the extended family" (quoted by Diane, 1984:35).

4.1 This communal feature of the African traditional way of life is still found in the extended family system of today which is characterised by mutual help and interdependence. Hence the traditional African makes no clear distinction between "brother, half-brother, sister, half-sister". They have no such terms in their languages. Any member of the extended family who has the fortune of being a little better off economically than others come to their aid. Today all over Africa children of poor parents are being helped by relations to acquire education. Many Africans generally help train children of relations before their own children grow up, and

sometimes even along with their own children. In this way the whole extended family shares in the fortune (or the misfortune at times) of its members. The Tswanas have a fitting idiom which brings this out vividly:

'Bana ba motho ba arolelane hloho ya tsie' (relatives are always willing to share any item of food be this as big as a locust's head).

Apart from migrants, younger relatives are often sent to towns to help care for children and housework while the mother works or to look after a grandparent (Quoted by Diane, 1984:35).

Addressing all people in terms derived from relations in the nuclear family says something of ubuntu in the extended family, clan and community: mtwana wam, ma, mme, tate, sisi, buti. And then: ntate moholo. The popular way of saying to a single person 'lekae' in the plural form suggests not only warm relationship between the people but also a sense of belonging and familyhood.

Indeed the extended family is still relevant in our townships in South Africa. Grandparents still play an important role in the upbringing of their illegitimate grandchildren. Boys who intend marrying will not break the news to their fathers. According to African custom the task is performed by uncles and where there are none by grandparents. A young man who breaks this practice by approaching his father personally is regarded as having no manners and as showing no respect for his father. It is also not unusual for parents to encourage their sons to marry especially when they are about 30 years of age.

The part played by extended families in the following spheres cannot be overemphasized:



**(a) Economic sphere**

People need food, shelter and medical care. Every society has its own way of meeting these basic needs. Thus agricultural societies have extended families because more hands are needed to do the many kinds of work that farming entails.

In the townships where there is no such need family members usually join hands whenever there is need. For instance they will readily join hands to assist one member who is in need of financial assistance. Generally speaking, if one member works he is expected to look after the entire family.

**(b) Educational sphere**

The role played by aunts, uncles, etc. in the upbringing of children is summed up by Goodman (1978:340):

Many of the world's children are fed, changed and taught to tell right from wrong not only by their parents but also by a large network of aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins - the extended family of which their parents are only a small part.

This also serves to indicate that the child belongs as much to the rest of the family as to the parents.

**(c) Social sphere**

In the urban area children are sent on errands by their uncles and aunts and other family members while in the rural areas (Ezilalini) they help their uncles, and their

grandfathers in the fields. Their parents will raise no objections since, as indicated above, children belong as much to the rest of the family as to the parents.

Family members need one another. Our aunts, brothers and sisters give us support during weddings and funerals along with other relatives. Many of us are the products of the good work done by relatives other than our parents. Your relatives guard your house when you are away on holiday. Your parents look after your children when you are away working in the mines. It is also possible that we are rising in life and holding key positions because a kind elder brother or sister educated us. With Africans it is clear, children need their aunts, brothers and sisters and they in turn need the children. Family relationships are therefore strengthened rather than weakened.

One could justifiably conclude that nuclear families which maintain strong extended kin relationships are more upwardly mobile than nuclear families that are isolated from extended family relationships.

All the things that have been mentioned here are indeed good things inherent in our African culture which should not be discarded during our assimilation of Western culture.

I therefore share the sentiments of some elderly African statesmen that this traditional African 'familyhood' be extended beyond the confines of the extended family and made to embrace the whole of each African nation, the whole continent of Africa and to all nations of the world. By so doing, selfishness which leads to all sorts of corruption will definitely have no place in our society.

There are indeed a lot of good things from the past and a lot of good things from the Western culture from which we could build a truly African approach to life.

#### **4.2 Communal experience versus individualistic Western approach**

According to the Western way of thought man is born an individual. He is unique and is an independent entity. The Africans regard man as a communal being, in other words, man becomes man through a gradual process of integration into society. To the African therefore, the community comes first, then the individual.

Mbiti puts this aptly as follows:

"I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am (quoted by Van der Walt, 1994:211).

The same idea is stated as follows:

"I am because we are, I share in the community therefore I exist."

The following Sotho proverb also brings out the same notion clearly:

Motho ke motho ka batho (Man is only man through his fellowmen). This is a prominent idea in the Bible as well. In the Garden of Eden Adam attains fulfilment only in his relationship with Eve and vice versa. I am also of the opinion that man only comes to full humanity in and through other people.

Van der Walt (1994:396) sums this up as follows:

Human existence therefore reveals a relational structure. In its very being it is community-directed. If the apartheid ideology or any other view therefore maintains that some people cannot or should not in principle enter into a relationship with others, or that they do not qualify to participate in society, it is a fundamental transgression of the essential communal directness of human existence and also of the Will of God.

To the Westerner it is first the individual then the community or social relationship. Makgoba has made a valuable contribution in his article **In Search of The Ideal Democratic Model for South Africa** (Sunday Times, October 27 1996). He argues that various democracies have in common a number of problems the most threatening of which are issues of a reduction of human values, materialism, an "overemphasis on the individual above community and a profound crisis of authority".

This view can be expressed as follows:

We are because I am. The community exists because it is constituted by individuals.

As a result of their outlook on life, it is not unusual in Western societies to hear one man saying that he does not know who his neighbour is. Even at church one may share a seat with one and the same person for three consecutive Sundays and still make no effort to know who the person is. One could therefore conclude that the West often has mere collections of individuals as against true communities.

In African communities anyone who does not know who his neighbour is would be regarded as very selfish. In African communities neighbours share their problems and are ready to assist one another in every possible way. The virtue of sharing and compassion are regarded very highly in Africa. The individual has a social commitment to share with others what he has. Stinginess (amagogotya) is anti-social and thus one of the greatest imaginable sins. One seldom hears the traditional African saying that "this is my land" "my cattle". Usually they will say that "this is our land" "our cattle".

To the Westerner the OUR is an addition while this is an essential and innate component for the African. Menkiti (1979:167) makes the following observation:

Unlike Western societies which are organized on the basis of rights, for the traditional African the concepts 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 (Cited by Van der Walt, 1994:211).

In the rural areas, for instance, women organize teams for the purpose of removing weeds from their mealiefields. While in the urban areas men and women form organizations known as Masingcwabane (burial organizations) since to the African death is a loss not only for the family but for the community as a whole.

For Europeans material things have become more important than people. Westerners will, for instance, do

everything possible to ensure that their cars are not stolen or that their houses are not broken into. They fit them with alarm systems or security devices. Regrettably, their aging parents do not receive such attention. They are placed in old-age institutions, something which is unheard of in traditional Africa.

The African respects people especially older people. Children stay with their old parents and they look after them. Grandchildren lead their grandparents to clinics or even to Municipal centres to receive their pensions.

Kaunda is also of the opinion that people are far more important than material things. It also annoys him that Westerners shift their elderly to the sidelines in old-age institutions. He condemns this practice in very strong terms. According to him:

It is a sin to deprive old people of especially their grandchildren. 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 (Quoted by Van der Walt, 1994:213).

Unlike Westerners who fear age probably because one will, supposedly, then be worthless, Africans view age as an asset. When expressing a special word of thank you for a kind deed Basothos express it as follows: "U hole u Kgokgobe" (May you live to a ripe old age).

Kaunda (1966:20-32) expresses the difference between the Western way of thinking and the African way of thinking as follows:

Socially, 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 (Kaunda, 1966:23 cited by Van der Walt, 1994:213).

This of course is a very relative statement making a mockery of all individual initiative and playing down individual merit. It is a sure way of stagnating African culture.

Changes are taking place. The elite are turning their backs on their needy relatives. Kimathi expresses this as follows:

For the Western educated African elite relatives are a total nuisance. You drive home and seven persons want to have a ride in the back of your saloon car (Kimathi, 1994:92).

It is gratifying to know that the Bible condemns "those who do not take care of their relatives, especially members of his family, he has denied the faith and is worse than the unbeliever" (Timothy, 5:8).

Regrettably middle class Africans, not only the Western educated elite, are beginning to regard material things as much more important than people. According to Mbiti

(1974:51-52), the situation is aggravated by the fact that the elite have:

Very high affinity for Western, European and American value systems and standards which define personal goals and achievement norms. To this extent, they are alienated from their parental culture, and often use double standards and experience extreme cognitive dissonance (Cited by Kimathi, 1994:8).

Both individualism and communalism offer no satisfactory answer to the question: "Who am I?" as each asks what is within the human person that gives identity to that person as Van der Walt (1997:64) rightly puts it:

They each look for something within the human world that gives meaning to human existence.

Both must be rejected because they fail to give us a true picture of man. Van der Walt (1997:65) states further that:

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 humanness, but neither defines the human person.

The Scripture encourages us to have a proper view of the individuality and communality of the person. As Fowler (1995:33) puts it:



The human person is never just an individual; personhood always involves communal relations and obligations. Social relations are not subordinate to individual interest. On the contrary; the Gospel calls us to recognize the need to subordinate our individual interests in love to the interests of others (Phillipians 2:4).

#### **4.3 Changing social patterns**

There are six main reasons for the changes that are taking place in our society today:

1. Absence of men from home.
2. Contact between societies.
3. Relations between parents and children.
4. Sexual life.
5. Ceremonies connected with various transition phases.
6. Efforts of Christianity.

##### **4.3.1 Absence of men from home**

There is an increasing number of female-headed households in various parts of Africa. As men take up jobs in the cities and also in the mines, women are left to till the land and to care for the children as well as aged parents and other relatives in the rural areas. In Africa as a whole, rural households are headed by women since the male heads are often away in town or in the mines. In some cases eldest sons take over the role of their fathers in running the affairs of the family.

Some women who cannot tolerate the instability of marriage choose to engage in careers consequently becoming self-supporting heads of their households.

#### **4.3.2 Contact between societies**

##### **Population movement**

In sharp contrast to the conditions in the 1980's when movement to urban areas was restricted by influx control resulting in the channeling of large numbers of Africans into settlements and the homelands; urbanization during the 1990's have been rapid. Urbanization during the 1980's was rapid. The proportion of the black population living in areas notably in areas are Durban, parts of Bophuthatswana and Kwa Ndebele close to Pretoria, and Botshabelo, close to Bloemfontein, rose from 42% in 1980 to 50% in 1990. Movement was an unplanned shock (Ramphela 1991:23).

##### **Urban areas**

Black local authorities which have been in place since 1980 with inadequate sources of revenue have been unable to provide adequate infrastructure and services. There were other problems besides these. According to Ramphela (1991:91) some 40% of the metropolitan black population, outside of 'homelands', earns incomes below the poverty line of R700 per month [2] and that 25-40% of the potential economically active black population is formally unemployed [3]. Consequently vast numbers of people are engaged in a desperate daily struggle to meet basic needs.

The housing backlog is estimated as well over one million units, and more than seven million people live in

informal housing: free-standing or backyard shacks, outbuildings and garages.

These poor living conditions, poverty and unemployment led to the lowering of morals which in turn gave rise to housebreaking and theft.

With the abolition of influx control people are now free to move from one place to another to look for work taking with them a few members of their families. Changes are bound to take place in the lives of the newcomers. The good manners taught in the rural areas are lost as children and their parents come under the influence of newly-acquired friends in the townships. As time goes on the language spoken by the newcomers is affected. It is no longer pure but becomes a mixture of either Xhosa, Sotho or Shangaan, depending on the languages spoken by the people in the areas in which the newcomers settle. This is how "Fanakalo" originated in Johannesburg. With the lowering of morals, gangs and gang warfare originated in our big cities in Africa.

#### **4.3.3 Relations between parents and children**

There is a marked change in the relations between parents and children. As a result of periodical migration of men to seek work in the towns, and mothers working elsewhere, children are freed from parental authority. Other socializing agencies such as the school and the church fail to provide training to match the training which the children received under tribal conditions. Young boys and girls who under the old forms of control could not meet in public, can now be seen at the corner of the streets hugging and kissing in front of elderly people.

Unemployment in Africa is resulting in rising crime rate and the breakdown of family lives. Parents become sometimes abusive and unreasonably strict. Children react differently to adults under such conditions. Many leave home to look for work. Some become street children (Pick 'n Pay, 1997:13).

Children who support their parents end up running the affairs of their families. Pick 'n Pay has the following contribution:

Children who are earning money when their parents are not, tend to have more 'power' over their parents and families. The parents find it difficult sometimes even impossible, to discipline such children. Given the fact that the child has taken over providing the finances for the survival of the family, they also end up taking over the decision-making role from the parents (Pick 'n Pay, 1997:13).

Children want to be free to do as they please. Schapera sees this as follows:

There has consequently been a development of youthful independence and irresponsibility which the old forms of authority are no longer able to control and which the new influences seem unable to check. The young people no longer look to their parents for guidance in everything, but are tending more and more to do as they please (Schapera, 1936:381).

#### 4.3.4 Sexual life

Unterhalter attributes the change in sexual life to the change in the structure of the African family. According to him, the traditional African family was patriarchal, partrileneal and patrilocal. The pattern he states, is no longer the same in the urban areas owing to the breakdown of marriage. (I would add here owing largely to the lowering of morals through social contacts and to some degree television). Young African women in the cities bear children out of wedlock. It is estimated that as many as half of the children born in the townships are illegitimate (Unterhalter, 1987:138)

Schapera (1962:382) attributes this change to the marked relaxation of the old sexual morality. According to him, premarital sex relations are so widely practised as to have become almost customary and so frequent have premarital births become that the old attitude towards illegitimacy has considerably toned down.

This lowering of morals has led to the rising number of AIDS cases in Africa and the rest of the world.

In a survey that was conducted in America it is reported that very few people change their behaviour to protect themselves against HIV infection. Only 30 % of the respondents in this survey say that they have changed their behaviour because of the danger of AIDS (Michael, 1995:207-217) cited by Smit & Smit (1995:4). The situation is far worse in the South African community. The ignorance on the issue is unbelievable or unpardonable. People tend to respond to their sexual instinct like animals - hormones dictate their behaviour, not norms.

#### **4.3.5 Ceremonies connected with various transition phases**

In a number of countries in Africa, traditional ceremonies connected with various stages of a person's life were observed for example: Marriage ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, passing over ceremonies by boys after their circumcision.

According to African tradition one ceremony was not enough to create an African marriage. Therefore in terms of traditional African marriage the formalization of marriage was based on a series of interrelated ceremonies or steps rather than a single ceremony.

In some quarters in Lesotho women were not allowed to be at the graveside during burial ceremonies. They were permitted to witness the proceedings at a distance of 50 metres from the grave.

Typical black ceremonies were conducted in the past to mark the passing over of boys to the stage of 'young men' (abakwetha).

#### **4.3.6 Effects of Christianity**

Christianity brought about various changes. For example Christians have not only adopted the new rites of baptism and confirmation, but they also celebrated births, marriages and deaths according to the rituals of their churches. Marriage ceremonies now take an hour only. The passing over of boys have been replaced by 'coming-of-age' parties which are celebrated when young men and young girls turn twenty one years. The moral protection of group solidarity got lost along the line.

## CHAPTER 5

### ETHICS - A HISTORICAL AND META-ETHICAL SURVEY

In this chapter I am going to discuss the views held by Greek philosophers and the 19<sup>th</sup> century ethicists who erroneously maintained that ethics is the science of the good and the bad. In my opinion the duty of ethics is to describe relevant ethical norms for a specific situation and it has nothing to do with the good and the bad.

#### 5.1 A brief look at history

Ethics is as old as philosophy itself. One can therefore justifiably conclude that there is almost no philosopher who did not give this subject his attention. This is true of such famous thinkers as Plato, Aristotle, Moore, Hume and Kant.

Ethics can be defined as the science of the ethical modality. Contrary to general belief ethics is not the science of the good and the bad. Ethics does not study normativity in general but only ethical normativity. Ethics has the duty to describe the relevant ethical norms for a specific field of inquiry.

Some define ethics simply as: the philosophy of good human conduct. Dewey (1922) has a more comprehensive view. He, for example, defines ethics as follows:

Ethics is not normative or merely descriptive but always prospective, studying the total range of individual and social behaviour in the quest for ways of living that lead to more enriching, satisfying and freeing relationships

of persons to others and to the world about them.

Cited by Handy (1986:493)

Because no systematic analysis of what ethics is about can do without a survey of the history of moral philosophy (and vice versa), I first want to analyse some monumental meta-ethical systems in the history of philosophy.

## Plato

With the collapse of traditional society in Athens, values which, for many ages were accepted and taken for granted, were questioned during Plato's lifetime. This led to intellectual and moral confusion. Prompted by these conditions Plato looked for clear and firm definitions of pleasure and knowledge and their relationship to the 'good'. Like Socrates, Plato taught that knowledge was virtue, ignorance was vice. Virtue could be learnt, like any new insight. In the **Philebos** Plato changed his attitude by teaching that insight was not sufficient to move the will, that virtue was a matter of inborn uprightness (Smit, 1997:28).

According to Plato the ultimate object of the universe was **the good**. All things, including man, were part of that. In the sphere of ideas, **the idea of the good and the beautiful** was central. Plato held that man with his immortal soul was part of the realm of ideas. He wanted to possess the highest good by elevating himself above the sensual world.

Plato maintained that the world can be of great help to man in his attempt to reach his goal, but it also can thwart all his attempts thereby reducing all his chances



of success. Reason has, however, something good to offer - in relation to the world of ideas. Man needs ideas to grow both spiritually and intellectually.

Smit (1997:28) summarizes Plato's view on the two roles played by the world as follows:

If man became too attached to the world, it drew him away from his destiny. But the world, because it shared in the realm of ideas, also represented something good.

By climbing to the world of ideas, the world will be good as far as that particular man who does so, is concerned. Close relationship between man and the world has to be maintained so that, driven by the true Eros, he would search for the higher world. This is in harmony with the thoughts Plato had about the world. Stumpf (1977:80) states that Plato's first thought about the world is that though it is full of change and imperfection it nevertheless exhibits order and purpose.

### **Aristotle**

Aristotle's ethics is also the ethics of the 'good'. Unlike Plato, he argues that 'good' is not the name of a single quality. Different kinds of things are called good for different reasons. According to him: An axe is a good one if it cuts efficiently, eyes are good if they see well. If we want to decide the good life for man we will have to ask what functions are proper of a man. A good man, according to Aristotle is one who performs given functions excellently (Urmson, 1975:34).

Aristotle regarded ethics as a branch of political science since it studies good for human beings as social

creatures. This led him to search untiringly for the ethical by studying man's deeds.

Every act has a definite purpose and is directed towards the attainment of a specific goal. This notion is brought out clearly in Nicomachean Ethics 1094(a) 1-3:

Every act and every inquiry, every action and choice, seems to aim at some good whence the good has rightly been defined as that at which all things aim.

For Aristotle, the realization of **form** was equal to the realization of 'good'. His ethics was therefore teleological in the sense that morality for him existed in man performing certain deeds not because he regards them as right but because he sees them as something that brought him closer to what is good for man.

Aristotle maintained that all things by nature seek their own good and that man's final good is **happiness** - eudaimonia - or well-being. Well-being or happiness are activities in accordance with virtue. Aristotle regards theoretical ability as the highest virtue in man. If one exercises this ability one is assured of happiness. Happiness is defined by him as the life of activity in accordance with moral virtues.

In his view **virtue** is a state from which deeds should flow forth. People teach themselves to act correctly by practicing and in the end they become virtuous as a result of the ability to repeat good deeds.

Everyone has, according to Aristotle, a natural capacity for virtue which could be developed by forming the right habits. Through education and habituation we come to

understand our actions as right and we are able to make choices. Each time man chooses correctly by means of his insight to follow the middle course, it becomes easier for him to distinguish what is good the next time he has to do so.

## **Marx**

Marx's ethics is also the ethics of the good. According to him truth and goodness are associated with the struggle for freedom. Both Marx and Hegel maintain that human freedom is not individual, but the activity of a self-realising whole, that truth and goodness can be known only from within the struggle. It follows that in Marx's view ethics or morality has a clearly defined subordinate role to play in the promotion of social revolution and the construction of a socialist society. Marx's approach gave rise to communist ethics.

Communist ethics is not independent, but is subordinate to the revolutionary struggle. It rejects with condemnation the capitalist and feudal social orders as based on exploitation and justifies all steps to bring about their destruction and replacement by a socialist society. West (1967:62) describes morality as follows:

Morality is discipline and inner commitment in this struggle. Good and right actions are those which promote this end. Otherwise stated ethics and morality belong to the superstructure not to the basis of society.

To sum up: Communist ethics depend for their content on the progress the working classes have made towards socialism.

Marx's fame rests on the effort he made to discover and formulate the laws that govern the behaviour of men in society and on the creation of a movement which would change the lives of men in conformity to these laws (Urmson, 1975:176). In many respects his social criticism is still valid. His economic ideology was a complete failure though.

### **Pragmatism**

Pragmatists hold that the mind has a very important role in people's lives. It is the tool of the organism to guide action. The function of the mind is to redirect activities by an anticipation of their consequences (Handy, 1986:493).

Pragmatism does not concern itself with principles or values. The question which it seeks to answer in any situation is "Does it work?" Pierce cited by Handy (1986:492) makes the following contribution which supports the notion that pragmatism does not concern itself with principles or values:

Different beliefs are to be distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise. To develop a thought's meaning, then we need only to determine what conduct it is fitted to produce; to attain clearness in our thoughts of an object, we need to consider what practical effects the object may involve.

A good example of this approach (excluding Christian and Humanist principles) is the way abortion is handled worldwide. One can at least say that it does something(!) about the problem of deaths related to backstreet abortions.

## Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism also contains the question of the good. According to this doctrine acts are to be judged in the light of their consequences. An act is good for instance, if it promotes happiness. What is characteristic of utilitarianism is promoting happiness for the biggest number of people. No single decision will ever make all people happy. It is therefore realistic to maximise happiness as far as possible.

Both, Mill and Bentham applied scientific methods into the discussions of moral questions. The fundamental principles of Mill's ethics are:

- (a) That pleasure alone is good or desirable in itself. He states this principle as follows:

Happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being desirable as means to that end.

Cited by Urmson 1976:194

According to Mill there is a close link between being good and being desired. To desire a thing, according to Mill, is to think of it as pleasant and to hold that it brings or would bring pleasure.

- (b) That actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote the happiness of all concerned, wrong as they tend to promote unhappiness; and happiness means pleasure and the absence of pain.

Bentham also holds that there is a close relation between being good and being desired. According to him what moves a man to action is always a desire to secure his own pleasure or to avoid his own pain.

### **Situation ethics**

Unlike casuistry, a kind of ethics that tries to apply a standard for every possible situation, Situation ethics stresses the fact that the relevant norm arises from the situation and that no universally valid law for a specific situation is possible. According to Joseph Fletcher there is room for only one universally valid law, the law of love. This enables him to justify adultery in the name of love. (For example a woman working in the secret service for the sake of patriotism.)

Fletcher (1966:30) maintains that:

Christian situation ethics has only one norm or principle or law (...) that is binding and unexceptionable always good and right regardless of the circumstances. That is 'love' - the agapé of the summary commandment to love God and the neighbor. Everything else without exception, all laws and rules and principles and ideals and norms are only contingent, only valid if they happen to serve love in any situation.

### **Existentialism: Sartre**

According to Sartre, existence precedes essence, that is, people first of all exist, confront themselves, emerge in the world and define themselves afterwards. Unlike the pragmatists who hold that ethics provides standards of

conduct, Sartre's is an ethics of strict accountability based upon responsibility. People are what they make of themselves. Each one makes his own choice, takes his own decisions without any authoritative guide. He finally stresses that when people choose, they choose not only for themselves but for all people. But, in essence, existentialist ethics is basically individualist and relativist.

## **5.2 My personal view of the scope of ethics**

As indicated earlier, ethics has the duty to describe the relevant ethical norm for a specific situation. This is achieved by analyzing human problems from an **ethical** perspective something which the Greek philosophers and the 19th century ethicists never adopted in their search for truth.

As the twentieth century draws to an end man is faced with many problems which need immediate attention. Problems such as AIDS and abortion. In my opinion, ethics, along with the other sciences, should concern itself with these problems. The psychologist will, for instance, concentrate on psychological effects of abortion and AIDS, while the social worker will analyze the effect of abortion and AIDS on society. The Government will be concerned with regulating abortion by law. But moral philosophy chooses for an ethical perspective. This is its unique contribution.

### **Nucleus of meaning**

In the following paragraphs I wish to discuss the views held by various authors on the question of the nucleus of meaning of the ethical

Since the deepest religious fullness of meaning of the ethical can only be approached as an idea, not as a concept, our starting point will be the intuitive insight into the nucleus of the ethical as a modality of creation.

How can nuclei of meaning be defined? According to Dooyeweerd nuclei of meaning cannot be defined. Dooyeweerd (1955:129, cf 478, 480) has this to say:

It is the very nature of the modal nucleus that it cannot be defined, because every circumscription of its meaning must appeal to this central moment of the aspect-structure concerned. The modal meaning-kernel itself can be grasped only in an immediate intuition and never apart from its structural context of analogies.

By intuition is understood a certain basic ability of the human normative personality structure which makes an immediately probing insight possible. Intuition as an essence-probing ability cannot be isolated theoretically because of its continuous temporal character. Intuition differs from one person to another, it is completely fallible, like every expression of the human heart it is religiously determined (Smit 1985:15).

Various attempts have been made within the cadre of the Christian reformed thought to pin down the nucleus of meaning of the ethical. Two views have been put forward on this issue: One which centres around the formulation of 'troth' (fidelity) and the other which centres around 'love'.



Taljaard, Vollenhoven and Popma find the essence of the ethical in "troth in marriage and friendship" (Taljaard 1956:323ff: Vollenhoven 1967<sup>2</sup>: Popma 1956:17). Olthuis (1968<sup>2</sup>:199) shares this view, but he maintains that 'troth' suffices because the formulation in marriage and friendship is too concrete to serve as an indication of the ethical aspect. He says:

Provisionally, partly because of terminological considerations, partly because love is often reduced to a feeling and partly because love is generally confined to marriage and the family, it seems to this writer preferable to describe the kernel moment as troth or 'fidelity'.

There are philosophers who emphasise the love-moment. In their views three things come to the fore: the central position of the human personality, the relationship, in which the ethical comes to the fore and the need to express both the normative and the antinormative moments in the formulation of the nucleus of meaning (Smit 1985:16).

Stoker, one of these philosophers, initially referred to the nucleus of meaning as "**persoonlikheidsliefde**" but later replaced it with "**persoonsliefde**" because the human being as such is a person. Since "**persoonlikheidsliefde**" only pertains to the ethically good Stoker decided on "**persoonsbehartiging**" influenced by P.G.W. du Plessis' thesis. He explains that (translated freely):

"Persoonsbehartiging" is the ethical as such, that is, the ethical in principle of which the ethically good and the ethically bad form a part, the ethical from which man can never free

himself, which he cannot escape (Stoker 1967:249  
Footnote 35:251).

Stoker explains further that the ethical is revealed to us as the relationship of 'heart to heart', where one person takes care of another from the centre of his heart.

Degenaar (1976:38) makes the following contribution on the issue of morality (translated freely):

Morality is the characteristic of man that he respects himself as a person and the moment that he does so, the personality character of all human beings is implied. Morality means to discover my own personal character and that of others.

In his discussion of the typifications of love in temporal relationships, person love and fidelity in marriage, Du Plessis emphasizes that (translated):

We are careful not to pass off an ethical norm as an ethical principle. It would then appear that 'love' in 'temporal relationships', 'persoonlikheidsliefde' and 'fidelity in love and friendship' are rather norms which contain elements of the anti-ethical. Opposite love one finds hate and opposite fidelity one finds infidelity. It is therefore more probable that 'love' and 'fidelity' are figures which are positivised in specific-ethical norms. The ethical life too is richly variegated (Du Plessis 1965:199).

Strauss responded as follows to the question of the validity of the nucleus meaning:

If the meaning nucleus is structurally valid no action can escape the still applicable structure merely because it is antinormative. Therefore un-ethical actions are still not a-ethical ... the viewpoint that nuclei of meaning appeal to universally valid structures which conform to scientific laws right from the start provides for the idea that "both the ethical good and the un-ethical can only exist in terms of the structure of the ethical aspect (Strauss 1969:81, cited by Smit 1985:17).

Illogical argumentation can only take place within the logical modality of meaning. The invalidity of an argument only applies in terms of the law of the logical, in fact the ethical only has meaning as a creaturely way of being under the law which was fulfilled by Christ. Even the apostate meaning is related (negatively) to Christ (Smit 1985:17).

Regarding Stoker's argument it is clear that "persoonsbeartiging" is explained satisfactorily but at the same time it loses its grasp on the ethical. Like the question concerning 'oughtness', the issue of care or "beartiging" is undifferentiated. A person can care for his neighbour in any conceivable normatively qualified manner. The same applies with regard to personality respect (which in fact can be totally loveless) (Smit 1985:17).

In **A new critique of theoretical thought I** Dooyeweerd (1953:48/9) provides a provisional delimitation of the moral aspect:

That moral aspect of temporal reality ... is characterized as that of temporal relationships of love as differentiated more precisely by the typical structures of temporal society as conjugal love, love of parents and children, love of country, social love of one's fellow-man and so on.

In **A new critique of theoretical thought II** Dooyeweerd (1955:152) in his modality theory emphasizes the sovereignty of the ethical in its own sphere:

Every serious attempt at an analysis of the modal meaning - structure of the moral relation leads us back to love as its irreducible kernel. There can be no single really moral 'virtue' which in the last analysis is not a manifestation of this modal nucleus of the ethical law-sphere.

In this formulation mention is still made of "love in temporal relationships", but it clearly pinpoints the nucleus of meaning (meaning kernel) as love. Dooyeweerd also emphasized very strongly the difference between modal love and the central religious love demanded by the commandment. Modal love is merely a single temporal split of meaning of God's religious law for the cosmos.

In his Biblically justifiable view of the ethical J.A. Heyns proceeds from the central love commandment which exposes the vertical and horizontal dimensions in the actions of human beings. On the basis of the demand of love of one's neighbour Heyns draws the conclusion that the personhood of human beings must be awarded a central position.

Man occupies a unique place in the cosmos. All actions which affect this exceptional position of man in the cosmos are ethical actions, i.e. those actions which affect his status, function, vocation, distinction (Heyns in Potgieter 1979:1).

Heyns is justified in deducing from the central law of love that the human person as sole ethical subject occupies a central place. But Heyns concludes that:

All actions which therefore affect the person of a human being in one way or another, whether directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly in positive or negative sense, are ethical actions. The question as to good or evil with regard to the person of a human being - that is the ethical question (Heyns in Potgieter 1979:2, cf 3, 8, 12: freely translated).

The cosmological foundation of his essays however precludes such a conclusion. Heyns relativises his remark himself by declaring that the ethical is but a single aspect of human existence. He mentions that not all human acts are ethical acts. Heyns is also aware of the particularity and universality of the ethical (Smit 1985:18).

His choice in the end is "persoonsbehandeling", that is, treating another as a person.

Heyns and Stoker hold a unique view regarding love towards the non-human world. Overcropping, cruelty to animals and damage to the milieu are ethically bad, not because such acts imply a lack of love for nature, but rather a lack of love for the self as a person. Only via

the medium of the human person do acts become ethical or unethical.

To repeat: the objection which can be raised against this argument is that the ethical can certainly not be restricted to subject-subject relationships but subject-object relationships can also be of ethical nature.

Smit (1985:19) makes the following comments in relation to the above principles to which I fully subscribe:

- "Persoonsbehandeling" like "persoonsbehartiging", includes all normative actions and cannot be ethical solely on the basis of the central love commandment. Fairness towards one's neighbour is certainly also person treatment (juridically positive.)
- In his expansion Heyns argues in very much the same vein as Stoker in his cosmology and anthropology. If one takes the ethical as modality of the normative person of man into account, it excludes the view of the ethical as exclusively personal treatment. Even the principle of universality in own sphere, cannot justify personal treatment as principle of the ethical.
- From a cosmological perspective "persoonsliefde" (personal love) is too narrow to serve as norm for the ethical. It excludes love for the land, landscape and animals. Scripture also contains statements regarding the treatment of animals. That only the human person can be an ethical subject and that only he can distinguish object functions in natural and cultural objects is certain. But in my opinion any attempt to deny the objective love appeal of objects smacks of personalism. This does

not in the least detract from the anthropo-centrism of the cosmos.

- The distinction between religious and modal love could probably have obviated the misunderstanding between us and Heyns. Religious love of the neighbour means a universal, positive personal treatment (or "persoonbehartiging"). Modal-ethically love as creational principle finds its essential characteristic in love -especially of the person but also of the object.

It would be possible to work out an excellent ethics as a special science on the basis of the nuclear meaning of love. And precisely with regard to ethics scripture offers so many perspectives which must be taken into account - more than in the case of any other discipline. It is rich in examples of moral personal management (Persoonsbehartiging), of troth (fidelity) in love, of loving service, of love in temporal relationships determined and enriched by eternal relationships.

Ethics should also concern itself with the quality and scope of love. It concerns love in marriage, family and friendship and love which qualifies professions like nursing, medical practice and social work (Uys and Smit, 1987:10). In analyzing the task of ethics we have to distinguish between principles, norms and values. Principles are God-given possibilities, norms and values are subjective human actions. Man applies norms for his behaviour following the possibilities of creational principles. Uys and Smit (1987:10) define norms and values as follows:

- (a) Norms are human standards to judge behaviour and to assess the quality of social structures to see if

they obey the specific principles or laws applying to them.

- (b) Values are those ideals to which man aspires like happiness, health, freedom, culture, etc. and which can only be attained indirectly by obeying norms.

In Christian moral philosophy we try not to use a term like **values** because it is used within the humanist paradigm. We prefer to use **creational ordinances** (or principles) in the extension of which we positivise norms.

Two things are of special importance for an understanding of Christian ethics, namely:

- (a) that Christian ethics confirms the norms of love in every situation;
- (b) that according to Christian ethics no situation is norm-neutral.

Thus to discuss abortion ethically means to evaluate the situation and to see how love is shown or not shown in the situation. In case of abortion love is manifested by the concern Christians show towards the mother and the baby she carries.

Christian ethics has to provide for compromise as well. A broken reality (because of the fall) often confront people with a choice between two evils where a choice for the lesser evil is the only option. This can, for example, be illustrated by referring to the issue of abortion:



The Christian does not glory in suffering. It is senseless for a mother to carry a baby with a serious genetic deviation ... for nine months, just to see it die a few days or weeks later. This suffering can be prevented by a timely abortion. Abortion is thus permitted to prevent senseless suffering for the parent and the baby (Uys and Smit 1987:25).

## UBUNTU

So far I have referred only to Western philosophical interpretations of ethics. This leaves us with an incomplete picture. Ethics must be contextualised and our context is Africa. I therefore want to treat ubuntu as a typically African ethics and try to determine its relevance for my topic: a family ethics for Africa.

Many views have been expressed on ubuntu and many articles have been written but none has so far applied ubuntu to the areas of marriage and family.

How can the concept Ubuntu be defined? Mbigi and Maree (1995:1) define the concept Ubuntu as follows:

Ubuntu is a metaphor that describes the significance of group solidarity on survival issues, that is so central to the survival of African communities, who as a result of the poverty and deprivation have to survive through brotherly group care and not individual self-reliance. ...It is a concept of brotherhood and collective unity for survival among the poor in every society.

Boon (1996:31) defines ubuntu as:

The heritage of philosophy that comes to us through our traditional African roots. Ubuntu is: morality, humanness, compassion, care, understanding and empathy. It is one of sharing and hospitality, of honesty and humanity.

### **5.3 The positive contribution of ubuntu**

Life is a relationship and ubuntu describes all of this life: the life as it is lived by an individual, the life which is spent in the nuclear family, in the extended family, in the clan, the nation and in the life lived with the divine.

Ubuntu is the sum of the rules and attitudes given by the ancestors to humans. The common family unit in Africa is an extended family which, as we have seen, includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. Despite the changes which are bound to come about due to the shifting of responsibilities from the family to various socializing agents, the extended family still functions strongly in the urban environment in terms of co-residence of two or more nuclear families. The spirit of Ubuntu prevails in this unit. Extended families offer financial assistance to migrants in towns. Aunts, brothers and sisters survive through this spirit of brotherhood and collective unity.

Shutte (1994:157) has this to say about the extended family and the spirit of ubuntu:

The traditional African idea of extended family as something that includes far more than parents and children is perhaps the most common and most

powerful institutional protection of the value of ubuntu.

Ubuntu is an inclusive way of looking at life. Everyone, and even concrete inanimate things are seen as belonging together. There is indeed a blessing involved in being kind to the lame, the crippled and the mentally ill. In ubuntu there is no need for orphanages since orphans are cared for by other families. There is also no need for old age homes since grandmothers and grandfathers are highly valued in the home. The entire community and nature are bonded together by a sense of belonging and a sense of love and being cared for. In short ubuntu encourages a caring outlook.

Ubuntu is not practised in a cold and abstract way. On a day-to-day basis ubuntu means both lending and giving to ensure that nobody goes hungry when somebody has food. When any individual experiences any kind of material or emotional difficulty, the community responds with material and emotional support. It takes the form of providing advice, friendship, companionship as well as emotional support. Neighbours feel free to enter each other's homes to clean the house and see to the needs of children when a mother is sick (Waring 1986:14, cited by Metembo (1997:18)).

Mbongwe (1989:166-167) cited by Metembo (1997:19) provides the following examples of the practical manifestation of ubuntu amongst Zulus:

- People help one another and show sympathy.
- A person with many cattle would share a few cattle with the one who has none so that the latter can enjoy milk from cows under his care.

- A visitor whether known or unknown is well received, is given water to wash his feet, food to eat and a place to sleep.
- A neighbour would care for his neighbour's cattle so that they would not destroy the latter's crop - this spirit of caring is extended to include all properties or belongings of one's neighbour.
- according to Zulu custom an adult person intervenes positively when he/she is convinced a neighbour's child is doing the wrong thing.
- To care for the aged is considered as an act of humaneness according to Zulu customs.
- When somebody realizes that a neighbour is experiencing difficulties, assistance will be given especially when that person is in a position to give such assistance.
- When a person is hurt he will be nursed and arrangement will be made speedily to see a doctor or reach a hospital.
- Care is taken of the poor, deprived, the disabled and the widowed.
- Clothing and gifts are distributed to the needy.

(Cited by Metembo 1997:19)

Ubuntu can also be called a participatory humanism. Each person is seen as being experienced through his relationship with others and theirs with him. This, in

turn, recognizes and establishes their own humanity. An African saying is: Umuntu Ngumuntu ngabantu (Zulu), Motho ke motho ka batho (Sesotho) which means: people are made people through other people or: we find our identity in community. As Mary Joseph (a Franciscan nun) in a private interview rightly stressed in our discussion:

People experience their own worth and the worth of others by participating in the community. Participation binds people together and brings life.

Taking part in community activities ensures one's physical and spiritual survival. Apart from this, one's physical safety and well-being is assured. Being included in a group is the source of man's mental well-being. People engage in consoling conversations for instance, which are the cement of any society. In various gatherings people tell stories about the past and give advice on the present. Everyone comes away from these gatherings restored and renewed.

Ubuntu does not exist therefore, unless there is interaction between people in a community. Boon (1996:32) has this to say about ubuntu:

It manifests itself through the actions of people, through truly good things that people unthinkingly do for each other and for the community. One's humanity can therefore only be defined through interaction with others.

According to Mbiti **compassion** and **care** are elements of ubuntu. As indicated above, Boon and other thinkers believe that ubuntu can be defined through compassionate

interaction with others. One looks in vain for these elements in many African homes. An African man, as we have said, shows no compassion for his wife who, according to Drum Magazine, is expected to be a mother, lover, cook, waitress, cleaner, nurse, and scores of other things too! All these she has to do when she arrives home from work (Drum, 31 October 1996:24).

I have also referred to the fact that children are denied the company of their fathers. Lacking compassion and love for his family, can African men be said to have ubuntu? These considerations led Ndale to write in the African paper **Post** of 2 May 1965 that:

Men are still bogged down in the tribal notion that taking little Enoch out for a walk is none of their business. The idea of sharing everything in marriage and children ... our African husbands just don't accept ... maybe if our husbands would move up a notch into modern age and could be persuaded to take more interest in their children, less of these would leave home for delinquency; maybe if they paid their wives a little more attention, there'd be fewer lovers let in through the back door when they're away.

Ubuntu sums up all the different aspects which make up a person and it touches on the true self. Ubuntu helps us to grow into simple, tolerant, kind and forgiving people. Ubuntu makes us loving, open-minded people who will not willingly hurt others.

Many writers use the word to describe a way of life and make no mention of the personhood of each individual. Articles, and at least one book that has already been

published, are written on ubuntu in the context of management. Here black empowerment and participatory management are the key issues. The representation of what business is about is often one-sided.

Ubuntu is introduced as a challenge to self-centred individualism and a challenge to a community that has lost its compassion. This response is absolutely justified, but generalisations do not lead to solutions.

African communities are held together by communal spirit which encompasses elements such as supportiveness, co-operation and solidarity. Khoza (1994:5) sums this up as follows:

It is the basis of a social contract that stems from, but transcends the narrow confines of the nuclear family to the extended kinship network - the community.

Mbigi is also of the opinion that communities are held together by communal spirit. In his address to business men in Port Elizabeth on ubuntu, he emphasized the collective solidarity principle entrenched in the concept of ubuntu. This, together with other ubuntu characteristics such as unconditional love, openness and co-operation, he says has the potential to lay a good foundation for the South African nation (Mbigi 1995:15, cited by Metembo 1997:20).

Ubuntu also stresses co-operation and sharing instead of dominance. In traditional African society materially well-off persons and even people in authority, commanded little or no respect if they had no ubuntu (Metembo 1997:20).

## Examples of Ubuntu in action

In the townships in South Africa where housebreaking and theft are common, "street vigilantes" are formed by residents to curb such deeds. These committees also assist members financially in times of need. As a result the crime rate is reduced considerably in these areas.

In the rural areas women have to fend for their children while their husbands are away at the mines. They have to plough the fields. This, they can accomplish with the help of their neighbours. In this way team-work (Letsema) is done.

In whatever community they may be, be it urban or rural, Africans know one another closely. They share what they have with one another in times of difficulties. Writing about the Kenyan elite Mbiti states this point economically:

The parents of the Kenyan elite are rural peasants who regard their elite children (living in the cities) as interpreters of the Western culture. Although the elite are in enviable social and economic positions, the same elite have brothers, sisters and cousins in much less privileged positions. The privileged elite 'repatriate' a lot of their money to their rural homes so as to relieve their parents and relatives of some of their financial burdens (cited by Kimathi (1994:10)).

The solidarity of the group which ubuntu advocates, is also shown in mass action. Mass action has the value of registering collective anger. Brewer (1990:430) makes



the following observation in **Critical Choices for South Africa**:

Black opposition to apartheid is expressed in the rich indigenous poetry emerging from literary groups in the townships, in sport, religion, street daubing, in dance and song, worker activism, schools and consumer boycotts. It occurs in the urban townships and increasingly in formerly conservative rural areas.

In 1948 when the government proposed legislation that would deprive Africans of their already limited parliamentary representation, the English-speaking churches reacted in an effort to prevent the legislation from becoming law. The churches acted against the injustice. The assembly of the Baptist Union condemned any tampering with the accepted constitutional understanding of the franchise rights of non-Europeans. In 1986 the pastoral letter of the South African Catholic Bishop's Conference expressed "Christian hope in the current crisis" in solidarity with blacks and condemned injustice and the current conflict (A History of Christianity in South Africa, Volume I, 270).

Collective action, as Brewer rightly points out, should be judged by whether it raises political consciousness or solidarity and lead to organisational forms of opposition. The student uprising of 1976 in Soweto and in the rest of our country, and the Black Consciousness Movement which gave rise to SASO - a student organisation under Steve Biko - made a stronger impact on the Government than any of the uprisings or movements before them. Belarmino Mamjate, a post-graduate Theology student at the Rand Afrikaans University said Biko's

philosophy of Black consciousness had been a decisive factor in the fight against apartheid (City Press, 15 September 1996, 17).

Recently Catholic Schools raised a strong objection against subsidy cuts made by Mary Metcalfe. This is how they made their voice heard:

We are committed to the same goals and principles (as the ANC) but we're being pushed into a situation where we must show solidarity with other schools and march.

The goals and principles which schools such as the Sacred Heart in Gauteng had in common with the ANC was that it was "put at the service of the returning exile community that was not prepared to send their kids to dysfunctional DET schools".

Ubuntu among South African blacks led to a social revolution in the country:

The political activity of the 1976-86 period has been effective in expanding the constituency for change, in incorporating formerly politically conservative sections, especially in the rural areas, in encouraging people to make political sacrifices, and in facilitating the expansion of immediate concerns into a more generalized challenge to apartheid (Brewer 1990:430).

The spirit of collective unity played a significant role in the social, political and economic transformation of the South African society. The trade and mass democratic movements ensured the end of apartheid through mass

action and strikes that crippled the former minority regime and forced them to the negotiation table. Through the emancipating spirit of ubuntu, national liberation and majority rule could be achieved (Mbigi and Maree 1995:8).

There would have been no affirmative action without ubuntu. Affirmative action policies are designed to afford disadvantaged groups access to jobs and resources corresponding to their percentage of the total population.

The result of consistent ubuntu was that various restrictions disappeared. Segregation in sport and the restriction of the use of Springbok colours are no more enforced. Restaurants, hotels, cinemas, theaters, suburban trains, beaches, parks and libraries have been desegregated. Universities are now open. Such racial labels as black, white, coloured are no longer used to include or exclude people.

Despite all these good efforts problems are still there:

There are endless problems in schools and universities associated with non-payment of fees by black students. Problems caused by racial tensions particularly during strike-actions in universities. There are also endless problems in factories, mines and the public sector in the name of solidarity but for wrong causes.

There are problems in families as well where one finds one member of a household working with the rest doing nothing productively in any way.

Ubuntu, in various cases, protects the lazy person. It stifles individual initiative and creates jealousy when one member excels, or owns more.

African ubuntu is at times inclined to be exclusive. This was evident in Lesotho where Asian and Indian people are ever so often expelled or banned.

### **Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)**

The spirit of ubuntu has made the introduction of the RDP programmes possible. It is through the spirit of caring that the basic needs of the people are being addressed. Maree and Mbigi (1995:16) make an appeal to organisations to help to restore, in the spirit of compassion and care, the dignity of previously underprivileged people which had been emaciated by the indignity of apartheid.

RDP is intended to meet the basic needs of the people. Such needs as health care and housing. There is free treatment for expectant women and for children up to the age of six.

Ubuntu has a unifying character in our nation. It is inclusive not only on state level, but also as far as political parties are concerned..

In the **political** sphere for the first time in 1994 South Africans of all races went to the polls to cast their votes. Government has now changed hands and for the first time power is in the hands of the majority with Mr. Mandela as the first head of the democratically elected government of the Republic of South Africa.

Political parties which one would have thought will remain exclusively black or white accommodate people of

all races. The ANC has Blacks, Whites, Indians and Coloureds, all serving in the newly-elected government, while the opposition parties such as the Nationalist Party and the Democratic Party also have all races in their ranks.

In this sphere ubuntu has definitely promoted the spirit of goodwill and fellowship among the different races of our country.

### **Sport**

In sport South Africans of all races are now united in their support of our teams. In the past blacks used to support visiting teams and had nothing to do with our local teams. There is much hope for improvement in relationships between the racial groups. One can mention here the rugbyfyng of the country which we experienced during the World Cup Series when Shosholozza exercised a coup over the collective national anthems. Like President Mandela we now speak of "our boys", "our heroes" from the Olympic Games and so on.

### **Ujamaa as a synonymous interpretation of ubuntu**

Ujamaa, like ubuntu, has to do with caring, forgiving, sharing and sympathising with all those in need. As it will become clear, Nyerere and his government saw to it that this spirit was spread throughout his country.

In his book "Ujamaa" Nyerere makes a few references to socialism from which emerges an individual conception of the idea of ujamaa. It is not surprising therefore that the socialism in which he believed owes little to Marxism or to European democratic socialism. There are however parallels between his theories of socialism and the

theories of other socialists but in each case these are merely parallels and not derivatives.

The socialism which Nyerere advocates is an attitude of mind. Thus, because of his disposition, a socialist could be defined as one who cares for his fellow countrymen while a socialist society could be defined as a society imbued with the same spirit of ujamaa, or 'familyhood'. The term 'familyhood' is of central importance if one considers the foundational role of the extended family in Africa.

Nyerere presented his views as distinctive of the traditional way of life which was gradually being replaced by capitalism. He dismisses capitalists and millionaires as users and exploiters of the abilities and enterprise of other people. He questions the fact that one man, however hardworking or clever he may be, can acquire as great a 'reward' as a thousand of his fellows can acquire between them. For this reason he condemns acquisitiveness aimed at gaining power in very strong terms:

Acquisitiveness for the purpose of gaining power and prestige is unsocialistic. In an acquisitive society wealth tends to corrupt those who possess it. It tends to breed in them a desire to live more comfortably than their fellows, to dress better, and in every way to outdo them. They begin to feel they must climb as far above their neighbours as they can. The visible contrast between their own comfort and the comparative discomfort of the rest of society becomes almost essential to the enjoyment of their wealth, and this sets

off the spiral of personal competition which is then anti-social (Nyerere 1971:3).

This prompted Nyerere to make an earnest appeal to the nation to carry on with the good practices of the past. Referring to one of the achievements made in his day he says:

One of the most socialistic achievements of our society was the sense of security it gave to its members and the universal hospitality on which they could rely. But it is too often forgotten, nowadays ... (Nyerere 1971:5).

This is the strongest characteristic of the societies in Africa. The spirit of ubuntu in Southern Africa gives the same sense of security to the people - the security that comes of belonging to a widely extended family.

In traditional African societies no one was left out. Africans regard all men as their brethren, as members of their ever extending family. Nyerere sums up the inclusive attitude of Africans as follows:

We, in Africa, have no need of being 'converted' to socialism than we have of being 'taught' democracy. Both are rooted in our own past - in the traditional society which produced us. Modern African socialism can draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of 'society' as an extension of the basic family unit ... For no true African socialist can look at a line drawn on a map and say "The people on this side of the line are my brothers, but those who happen to live on the other side of it can have no claim on one',

every individual on this continent is his brother (Nyerere 1971:12).

The spirit of ujamaa, of 'familyhood' permeates through the spheres of the economy, labour and politics.

In connection with the economy Nyerere says that three things are essential for the production of wealth a) land, b) necessary materials for production, and c) willingness to work.

In Africa land was recognised as belonging to the community. Each one in the community had a right to the use of the land but could not claim it as his own. The foreigners introduced the concept of land as a marketable commodity.

He condemns capitalism for exploiting others by using land. The true socialist, according to Nyerere, will not exploit his fellow. The right to private property which we acknowledge has no place in his philosophy.

In the past people were individuals within a community. They took care of the community and the community took care of them. In short traditional Africans were dominated by the spirit of caring.

The spirit of ujamaa in labour prevents exploitation. Everybody must work and live on his own labour. On this issue, Nyerere (1971:34) states that:

In our country work should be something to be proud of, and laziness, drunkenness and idleness should be things to be ashamed of ...



For a people to be able to distribute the national wealth fairly, it is necessary that everybody works to the maximum of his ability. He does not realise that equal opportunities do not mean equal outcomes, that it is unfair not to reward the person who worked harder and is more innovative. The ideological foundation of this brand of African socialism is the idea of an all-powerful and omnipresent state who owns all and distributes - making people state - dependent and robbing them of their initiative which is why Nyerere's country is still where it is - demanding welfare from Western countries and having problems with the World Bank for not showing responsibility and progress.

It is inspiring when he says:

But most of all, we have to re-activate the philosophy of co-operation in production and sharing which was an essential part of traditional African security (Nyerere 1971:103).

At the stage of the hey day of anti-colonialism Nyerere would get away with naive ideas but a modern world is far more demanding.

With the exception of children and the infirm every member of society has to contribute his fair share of effort towards the production of wealth so as to counter capitalism and loitering. The problem of course is the distribution of wealth by the state. Corruption is rife in all African countries - South Africa included.

People who work together not only come to know one another but they also share one another's problems. According to Nyerere, individuals in such a society do

not have to worry about future financial problems. Society itself will look after him; or his widow or his orphan. This is exactly what traditional African society succeeded in doing. Looking at Africa and its maladies, we don't have much hope that ujamaa will save the pieces though.

The purpose of trade unions was to ensure that the workers receive a fair share of profits of their labour (Nyerere 1971:19).

Some individuals for instance possess certain qualifications and skills, which, for certain good reasons, command a higher rate of salary than others. In this particular instance Nyerere explains:

The true socialist will demand only that return for his skilled work which he knows to be a fair one in proportion to the wealth or poverty of the whole society to which he belongs.

A true socialist will not attempt to blackmail the community by demanding a salary equal to that paid in some far away society. Such a demand would, according to Nyerere, be anti-socialistic. Since biblical times, the proverb "The worker earns his keep" had good currency. Unfortunately there was a fall of man and therefore greed entered the scene - leading to that kind of capitalism which believes that only too much is enough.

### **The spirit of ujamaa and education**

Racial distinctions within education in Tanganyika have been abolished. Complete integration of the separate racial systems have been introduced and discrimination on the grounds of religion was also brought to an end.

The spirit of ujamaa has thus prompted officials in education to show respect for human dignity. The education which was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial society was done away with. The education provided by the government of Tanzania is designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country.

According to Nyerere the education which Tanzania should provide for the students of the country must serve the purpose of Tanzania. It must encourage the growth of the socialist values Tanzanians are aspiring to. In the words of Nyerere (1971:74):

It must encourage the development of a proud, independent and free citizenry which relies upon itself for its own development, and which knows the advantages and the problems of co-operation. It must ensure that the educated know themselves to be an integral part of the nation and recognize the responsibility to give greater service the greater the opportunity they have had.

### **The spirit of ujamaa and political aspirations of the people**

To be successful an ujamaa village must be governed by the members themselves. In a village people are able to discuss their problems together and make decisions together for which they all feel equally responsible. They must jointly make such decisions as: where to plant, what to plant, how to share returns and what to invest in future development.

The communities have to obey the laws of the land, they cannot be exempt from other national responsibilities. But Nyerere (1971:182) states emphatically that:

The decisions about the way they run their farm and their village - the amount of private farming and ownership they allow, etc. - must be made by them, not by others.

### **Ujamaa and the question of equality**

According to Nyerere (1971:38) the basis of socialism is the unity of mankind and is common destiny. The basis of Nyerere's socialism is therefore human equality. Acceptance of this principle is absolutely fundamental to socialism.

For socialism the basic purpose is the well-being of the people and the basic assumption is an acceptance of human equality. For socialism there must be a belief that every individual man and woman whatever colour, shape, race, creed, religion or sex is an equal member of society with equal rights in societies and equal duties to it (Nyerere 1971:78).

It is also clear from the above that the purpose of socialism is the service of man.

Despite this belief however women are still discriminated against in Tanzania just as they were in traditional African society.

The moral intention of Nyerere is above board but no community in Africa will remain communalistic in the long

run. Two fundamental ideologies of modern civilization are sweeping over Africa, influencing every person and community: individualism (with its egoism and moral relativism) and capitalism (with its exploitative greed). More than any other ideology these two determine the duality of marriage and family life. Traditions are overturned. New life patterns are developed. An African renaissance therefore will have to be realistic to have any impact on society.

How can we reconcile our theoretical analysis of the ethical modality with the practical moral philosophy of ubuntu/ujamaa? I think that the abstract way in which the nuclear meaning of the ethical was formulated ("love") guarantees its heuristic value. In fact, all the characteristics of ubuntu/ujamaa can be related to love. What must be clear is that culture has an influence on the positivization of ethical norms - the difference between the primacy of the nuclear family vs. the promiancy of the extended family being an illustration of this.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOCIAL ENGINEERING AND THE FAMILY IN AFRICA

I wish to dwell in this chapter on the issue of social inequality which, in my opinion, rendered the creation of human communities impossible, and which also made life unbearable for a large number of people in South Africa and the rest of the continent.

A study of the Bill of Rights convinced me that previously the majority of the people in South Africa had no say in the running of the affairs of their country, and were denied a host of other rights which the minority group in the country enjoyed. Among the rights which they were denied were the following: (1) the right to equal treatment, (2) the right to have one's dignity respected, (3) political rights, (4) the right to have access to housing, (5) the right to health care, food, water and social security, and (6) the right to basic education.

1. According to the Bill of Rights: Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. South African blacks were regarded as foreigners. Thus they could not share equal rights with the minority group. The clause which states that "the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, social orientation, age, language and birth' were completely overlooked in the case of blacks.

2. The right to have one's dignity respected. All human beings own an inalienable dignity, ultimately

founded in the reflection of the image of God. Blacks in this country were subjected to grossly inhuman treatment under the apartheid regime. Pass laws restricted their movement and made it impossible to stay with members of their families living in other towns for more than three days.

3. Blacks were denied the right to vote. They had no say in the affairs of the country.

4. As stated earlier blacks were regarded as foreigners hence they could not own properties in South Africa. As 'contract workers' they had to go back to their homelands when their contracts expired. Blacks were in this way denied the right to have access to adequate housing.

5. In large parts of the country there were no clinics, as a result infant mortality rate was high.

6. The use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was unacceptable to blacks and so was the school curriculum. These led to student uprisings of 1976.

As I see it, the most urgent task facing the people of this nation is the restoration of human dignity. This can be done by addressing destitution and child mortality, joblessness and discrimination against women. The restoration of a life with dignity for all is a task for our communities of faith, our families, our schools and business, but in our historical context it is in particular a task for the state (Strauss 1995:157).

The struggle by blacks against the apartheid regime in South Africa was aimed at bringing about a change in social conditions by extending democracy beyond its narrow racial base to all citizens. It was also a

struggle against structural economic exploitation which denied blacks the opportunity to adequately carry out their family responsibilities.

Without a stake in the economy of the land and without financial resources, many African men from the rural areas throughout Africa are forced to take up contracts in the mining industries ranging from six months to twelve months leaving their families behind. Some men return home when their contracts expire while others never do. These are known in Xhosa as 'amatshipha'. Wilson and Ramphele (1989:106) describe these conditions as follows:

Lack of income is all the more serious because of the large dependency burdens placed on the limited numbers of money-earners. In many cases migration on the part of the breadwinner, whilst the rest of the family remains in the rural homeland environment, is the only answer to boosting household income. What is crucial from the nutritional point of view is that family cohesion and organisation is often impaired as the family unit is broken up in the effort to solicit more income. A casual relationship appears to exist between family disorganisation and increased incidence of malnutrition in the household. Invariably it is the young and aged who are most seriously affected by malnutrition ... The break-up of family unit also spawns other social maladies including the breakdown of family discipline and promiscuity among young adults which invariably leads to illegitimate pregnancies: the resulting illegitimate, and often unwanted,



children are the ones who become the malnourished in a community.

### **Poor nutrition, hunger, sickness and death**

According to Wilson and Ramphele (1989:100-101, 106-112, 174-177) South Africa is one of the few countries in the world which exports food in considerable quantities while there is widespread hunger and malnutrition particularly among children. Diseases associated with malnutrition are the major cause of death among these children. Thousands die of malnutrition while millions grow up stunted for lack of sufficient calories. Commenting on these conditions and on a number of social imbalances, Wilson and Ramphele (1989:4) have this to say:

Tens of thousands of men are spending their entire working years as lonely 'labour units' in single-sex hostels whilst their wives and children live generally in great poverty in the overcrowded reserves. This structural violence assaults the majority of people living in South Africa as harshly as any physical confrontation.

The government is presently running a feeding scheme in black schools as a measure to combat undernourishment. Ithuba and Zama-Zama are contributing large sums of money towards charity. The real solution would be the creation of jobs to accommodate the large number of people who are presently unemployed.

Who among the poor are vulnerable?

Wilson and Ramphele (1989:172) think that:

people residing in the rural areas in South Africa are especially vulnerable because of the interrelatedness of forces that lock them in a cycle of poverty.

The plight of these people can be traced to the following factors:

1. The wealth of this country which has been accumulated at the expense of rural areas in terms of both human and other resources.
2. The discrimination which favours urban areas in the allocation of resources, be they health, education, social and recreation facilities or manpower. Unless these resources are made equally available to all people be they in the urban or rural areas, the standard of living particularly in the rural areas will never be improved.

#### **Categories of people vulnerable to poverty in Southern Africa**

There are four major groups which are vulnerable to poverty: children, women, elderly persons, and adults who are handicapped.

Regarding the black children of our society, the first thing that strikes us is the mortality rate of those below the age of 12 years. This is very high. With intelligent intervention this rate can be reduced substantially and rapidly. The major factor in high infant mortality rate Wilson and Ramphele (1989:174) maintain, is the practice of feeding children powdered milk (often in insufficient quantities using contaminated water) rather than breast-feeding. Breast-feeding should

be recommended. According to the 1986-study of the nutritional status of children in selected areas of Namibia found that most babies were breast-fed up to six months. Despite poverty they were usually better fed and suffered less malnutrition as compared to those who were older.

Among women four groups are likely to experience grave difficulties. These are widows, divorcees, the wives of migrants and other single-mothers. Widowhood, for a middle-aged woman who depended much on a regular remittance from her husband comes as a severe blow. The story of a Transkei widow (46:16) quoted by Wilson and Ramphela (1989:170) is a good example of the plight of these women. She relates her plight as follows:

I am now experiencing difficulties in supporting my two children. I haven't got a field although I have a kraal ... I only depend on my mother's pension money which she gets from the government. We share the money because she has her own house and I am staying at my house. If I could get work, the first thing that I would try would be to look for a field even before building a decent house. Livestock would then follow later. All that would only be achieved when I was working. No I am in complete darkness. I do not know what can help me.

Widows are further crippled by the combination of the migrant system, traditional laws and the sexism of both black and white society. When a husband dies at the mines for instance, her money comes through the magistrate office and it can only be distributed to her by one of her in-laws.

According to traditional law to wind up the estate of the husband, there has to be a male relative who becomes in this case the effective custodian. Wilson and Ramphela (1989:178) sum up the situation as follows:

... Many widows are impoverished in that process - all in the name of tradition. Moreover if a widow refuses to be the second wife of her husband's brother he can refuse to pass on the assets due to her; thus she is held captive sexually.

Children of the poor widow are bound to suffer while these wranglings go on.

### **The plight of divorcees**

Divorcees and deserted women like widows experience a lot of difficulties and they may also find themselves destitute since our society is structured in such a way that women are forced to depend on their husbands financially. Until recently the right to a house or permission to be in the urban area could be forfeited by or withdrawn from a woman who became divorced from her husband. In a way men could do as they pleased with their wives who were at their mercy.

Rural women were legally prohibited from seeking work in the cities. Thus they depended entirely on the little money that was sent to them by their husbands.

### **Female-headed families**

The South African economy like economies of many other countries, is biased in that it places well-paying jobs

in the hands of men. This is why the degree of poverty is noticably higher among female-headed households than in homes headed by men. Logically in one case there are two people working whilst in the other there is only one hence the difference in the degree of poverty. In South Africa women are denied the opportunity of moving freely in the market place to select jobs that appeal to them. This, coupled with educational disadvantages, weigh heavily upon them placing additional burdens which men do not have to carry.

Up until the nineties women could not obtain jobs easily because male employers considered them to be less reliable than men since they may need leave when their children are ill. Women are discriminated against in all aspects of life. Wilson and Ramphele (1989:179) make the following observation:

In the home as girls being brought up and educated, in the allocation of resources at school and institutions of higher learning, at work, and in society in general, African rural women are at the bottom of the economic pyramid in this country because of the added problem of paucity of resources and more rigid sexist practices in these areas.

### **Work, joblessness and poverty**

For most people work is the primary source of income. In South Africa poverty could be ascribed to the fact that the wages earned by employees are far too low to cover

the basic needs for themselves and their dependants (Wilson and Ramphele 1989:54-62, 84-85, 93).

In 1980 out of a total population of 28.8 million persons roughly 9.6 million were economically active. Each of the three major sectors: agriculture (including the then homelands), services (including government) and manufacturing (including construction) employed approximately 2 million people with commerce and mining each employing 10 %. On average white employees earned far more than black employees in 1980 as can be seen from the following table:

	African	Coloured	Asian	White
Ariculture (regular farm worker)	38	63	157	529
Mining and quarrying	172	318	439	1040
Central government	204	276	547	629
Manufacturing	224	261	302	956

(Measured in rands cf Wilson and Ramphele 1989:54)

The above comparison is striking when one considers that the minimum monthly wage was R180. There was a noticeable increase in real earnings for black South Africans in the above-mentioned sectors between 1970 and 1985. But in 1985 only one million black South Africans earned more than the supplementary living level.

Black domestic workers suffered a decline of 10 % in real earnings from 1973-1980.

### **Remittances**

In the rural areas particularly in the former homelands as a result of the scarcity of jobs and low wages paid by employers other sources of income assumed greater importance. Remittance sent home by migrants working away from home play a vital role under these circumstances.

Through localised research (Wilson and Ramhpele 1989:62-65) it is abundantly clear that for households in most parts of the then Bantustans access to regular cash income is the single most important determinant of their well-being. According to this research it was found that rural households depend on remittance for as much as 71 % of their income and on pensions for as much as 19 % and the rest from local wages or home production. Rural household expenditure on food alone can be as much as 55 % of net farming income (Wilson and Ramphele 1989:62, Strauss 1995:141).

### **Pensions**

But pensions are much more important. According to Wilson and Ramphele (1989:63) in the Transkei for households whose annual income in 1982 was R500 or less, pensions constituted one fifth of income. In die Ciskei in three settlement camps the primary source of income for half the household was pension. Wilson and Ramphele (1989:63) maintain that:

The importance of pensions can be seen for example, in the fact that the average male

contribution to the households quadruples from R265 to R960 per annum as men reach the pensionable age of 65.

Old age pension became payable to white people in 1928 and disability grants in 1946. Blacks started receiving pension in 1943. The amount received in 1981 was R162; it now stands (in 1998) at R476 per month. It is from this amount that grandchildren left in the care of their grandparents by their unmarried mothers are maintained. It is this amount which has to cover rentals and medical expenses.

### **Housing**

For the sake of family life something has to be done to improve social conditions in South Africa where poverty is sustained and reproduced by the infrastructure deliberately shaped during the apartheid era. Housing shortage and recreational facilities need immediate attention. According to Wilson and Ramphele (1989:125) on the Witwatersrand there was an estimated housing shortage by mid 1970 of 90 000 houses. In Soweto alone the estimated shortage in 1982 was 35 000 houses. One survey estimates that there must be nearly 20 people for each house. Where people are 'crammed' in one room like this they lose respect for each other. Wilson and Ramphele (1989:125) sum up this unpleasant conditions as follows:

The absence of privacy for married couples, the need for space for children to play, the impossibility of having visitors, are all part of the pain, quite explicitly felt by those enduring a dimension of poverty that is to be found across the length and breadth of the



country. The extent of overcrowding is overwhelming particularly in the urban areas.

### **Recreational facilities**

Human beings need time and amenities for recreation and relaxation in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle. For blacks in metropolitan areas and in the platteland such facilities are practically non-existent. As a result alcoholism is becoming rife because alcohol consumption offers the only form of relaxation for the young and old. As David Dewar cited by Wilson and Ramphele (1989:133) rightly explain:

Children grow up in environments which are totally unscaled in terms of the human activities which they must accomodate. Each area, in terms of its feel and the opportunities it offers, is the same as the others. They are simply uni-functional sleeping areas with little or no sense of place. There is nowhere to escape the privations of the overcrowded private dwellings, save the scaleless streets or windswept 'open spaces' which are, in reality, simply unsightly and dangerous dumping grounds for rubbish.

The need for proper housing and urban infrastructure is acute (Wilson and Ramphele 1989:134).

### **State responsibility**

The government has to be responsible for the maintainance of individual rights. Apart from this, it has to balance public rights, responsibilities, needs and just claims of

interpersonal relationships. To fail to carry out these duties would be to fail to establish a just public order serving the wellbeing of all the citizens of the country. Most important, the government should combat the oppression and exploitation of one group by another.

It is the responsibility of every citizen to see to it that none of the inhabitants is forced to beg for food just because he is unemployed.

As Christians and responsible citizens:

We shall not be satisfied with the structure of society until it offers all human beings an existence worthy of man. Until then, the structure must remain the object of our criticism. But one should not seek salvation in monetary help from the state. That is always offensive to human feelings and also weakens our national strength. The help that the state must give is better legislation ... [But] if no help is forthcoming from elsewhere the state must help. We may let no one starve from hunger as long as bread is moulding in so many cupboards. And when the state intervenes it must do so quickly and sufficiently (Kuyper 1991:94) cited by Strauss (1995:100).

### **The economy and ethics**

The economic life that I would recommend is the one that is directed along the way of prudence and thrift. One which provides the goods and services needed by the people in our stewardship of God's earth. This type of economy is rooted in respect for human dignity and

environmental integrity. Strauss (1995:101) sums up economic practice as follows:

Economic practice conscious of its proper foundation in formative power and destiny in stewardly prudence and thrift is textured by environmental care, meaningful work, economic inclusion of the powerless, and the rejection of greed.

Goudzwaard, cited by Strauss (1995:101) makes the following contribution:

At its starting point stewardship economics included rather than excluded people. It replenishes rather than extracts. It internalises and takes responsibility for its effects rather than expelling them to other sectors of society.

Doors should, therefore, be opened to people of all races to participate in farming and various other industries. Shares and trading licences should be made available to all who can afford it.

By closing doors to some sections of the population and by thwarting their efforts to rise citizens from these sections will obviously be hostile to society and its norms. This will lead to frustration which will be expressed in withdrawal, excessive use of alcohol or drugs or even in violence and all forms of abuse. When this happens society itself will be to blame.

## **Educational sphere**

In the mid-fifties schools were divided along ethnic lines. There were consequently separate schools for Sothos, Tswanas, Zulus, Xhosas and Vendas. Universities were also divided in this manner.

In the lower primary schools the medium of instruction was the mother tongue while in the high schools and universities the medium of instruction was English. These separate facilities should be done away with since they foster racial tensions. Children should be free to attend schools and universities of their own choice. Forcing a child to go to a school he or she does not like would be just as bad as forcing a horse to the river - it will not drink.

## **Welfare and health services and family life**

Public welfare in South Africa emphasises social security and social services to the aged, the disabled or handicapped, children and their families and the unemployed.

Non-contributing pension to the aged continues to be the largest part of public welfare in South Africa. The disabled are occasionally provided with direct services such as sheltered workshops or residential services in urban areas. These services are not common among blacks in the Free State.

Social security for families take the form of maintenance grants to poor single-parent families, maternity benefits through unemployment insurance and survivor's pensions under the Workmen's Compensation Act.

As far as health services is concerned, there is a marked improvement in that doors are now open in what was formerly whites-only hospitals. Coloureds and blacks are now admitted to these hospitals.

The problem which still has to be addressed is that of housing. A large number of blacks still live in squatter settlements where there is no running water and proper sanitation.

### **Migrant workers**

Before 1990 wives of migrant workers could not join their husbands in the cities due to lack of accommodation. This often led to the breakup of a number of marriages, with husbands and wives (as it very often happened) being drawn into extra-marital relationships.

In the rest of the world - Western Europe being an example - people who started as migrants workers eventually brought their families to live in the cities with them. Wives of migrant workers should also be allowed to join their husbands. In my opinion this will help to reduce the number of divorces and illegitimate children.

In this chapter I wanted to give an indication of the social problems we have to address in our country. The impact on family life is quite radical and the need for social engineering obvious. Family ethics is not only about relationships within the family - it is influenced by myriad social factors.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

Religion plays a dominant role in Africa. The people of our continent are deeply religious. Religion affords them the power to persevere in the face of hardship. But religion has a fundamental role in society by teaching people social norms. We should therefore implement religion in our effort to solve social problems.

When we examine the role of religion in social reconstruction, it is necessary to ask several questions. The following two questions will, in my opinion, suffice for the purpose of this study:

- (a) What forces does it release or contain?
- (b) What is it functional to?

Before we can attempt to answer any of these questions it is fitting that we first give a definition of religion.

Durkheim defines religion as follows:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things that is to say, things set apart, and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.

Cited by Mercer (1957:268)

Dooyeweerd (1953:57) defines religion as:

the innate impulse of human selfhood to direct itself toward the true or toward a pretended absolute Origin of all temporal diversity of meaning, which it finds focussed concentrically in itself.

Not all thinkers share the views contained in these definitions. There are a few schools of thought which regard religion as incapable of effecting social changes. According to these schools the only role which religion can play is to help maintain the *status quo*. One school of thought which is associated with Karl Marx maintains that religion is an instrument of social contract and that on its own religion has no formative power.

There are two other schools of thought which should also be mentioned. According to the one, religion is decaying and will soon disappear from the scene. Wilson (1971:11) maintains that:

A number of Anthropologists ... have thought that science would replace religion, that as technical control increases religion would be edged out altogether.

The other school maintains that religion is not disappearing but is becoming private and individual in that people limit it more to their private lives. According to this view religion is a facet of personal life therefore it cannot give meaning to life anymore.

Dooyeweerd and many others hold a different view. According to this group of thinkers, religion plays an important role in social reconstruction. Dooyeweerd (1953:57) maintains that religion is the driving force in man's life. He stresses that:

As the absolutely central sphere of human existence, religion transcends all modal aspects of temporal reality, the aspect of faith included.

Smit (1996(a):59) makes the following contribution in support of the view that without religion there can be no culture:

In the Egyptian culture the deepest driving force for cultural development was the religion of Re (or Ra) and the cult of the Pharaohs. Those who eliminate religion from their theorizing cannot hope to gain an understanding of Egyptian art. Greek culture is founded on nature-religion and the Olympic cult. The Odyssey becomes meaningless without the Olympian gods ... Without Christian religion, there would have been no West European culture. Even the culture of the communist bloc cannot be understood in isolation of Christian religion.

The role/functions of religions can be divided into personal and social functions.

The Bible has also been responsible for bringing about social changes in Africa. One of the unique teachings of the Bible, especially the New Testament, is the worth and dignity of the individual in the sight of God. According to African tradition the individual counted in so far as he was part and parcel of the group, outside of which he lost his real worth. As discussed in the paragraph on "ubuntu" no individual could therefore follow his natural



bent beyond the group. Sithole (1959:53) sums this up as follows:

All new schemes, new adventures, new thoughts, and new outlooks on life were subject to the approval or disapproval of the group ... The individual, socially, spiritually, and mentally, moved in shackles and this was certainly not conducive to progress. Individual initiative was crippled.

The African individual is gradually being delivered from these fetters. As the shackles which crippled individual initiative are being removed the individual is being invested with a new status. Hence today we find individuals venturing beyond the confines of the group and, as it would be expected, the group now looks upon the new individual as its real saviour. Sithole (1959:53) concludes rightly that:

The Bible is redeeming the African individual from the power of superstition, ... crushing tradition, witchcraft, and other forces that do not make for progress.

### **Personal functions**

Religion provides unquestioned goals of life for its adherents, and thereby provides, as Mercer (1957:275) aptly puts it:

the material out of which people may build the sense of purpose and security which results in what may be called inner personal peace.

Apart from this, religion provides an available measure by which the individual can judge his personal goals and actions. Mercer (1957:275) sums this up as follows:

By adjusting his behaviour carefully to the requirements of his religion or by somehow rationalizing that he has done so, the individual can "know" that he is right, and, therefore, acquire a sense of the security which comes from such knowledge.

Man has a conscience, thus he is called upon to make choices and judgements continually, guided as Mercer rightly states by the requirements of his religion.

All education can be regarded as focused on the sharpening of the individual conscience. In fact education primarily involves inculcating norms in individuals.

### **Social functions**

According to Mercer, religion may be functional to whole societies, to communities or to such social groups as church congregations. It reinforces the social cohesion of its believers.

By providing people with an unlimited source of beliefs about rewards and punishments for proper and improper behaviour, religion has a powerful and important social control function. One example will suffice. The Church of England opposed the courtship of Princess Margaret by Captain Townsend. Its influence can still be noticed in what happens around Prince Charles' affairs.

Contrary to what the different schools hold, in Africa religion plays an important role in men's lives since even after the adoption of Western dualism the daily lives of Africans is still permeated by their religion. The whole nature of family life was influenced by traditional religion long before the coming of foreign religion. There was a common belief that biological life is transmitted by God through the elders and ancestors. God and ancestors laid down laws and taboos to ensure the prosperity of society. In the family the responsibility of seeing to it that these laws are obeyed, rests with the father while in society, the responsibility rests with the clan-leader, chief or king. Each of these key figures was under a serious obligation to see that the right order established by God and the ancestors is carefully maintained and each was held accountable for any disorder (Bujo, 1992:22) A chief who no longer contributed to the welfare of his subjects was removed from his office since:

In offending against the laws and customs and experiences of the tribe he is despising the ancestors and even God himself and consequently suffocating the life of his people (Bujo, 1992:22).

Father Tlhagale (1998:30) brings out quite vividly, the role played by ancestors in the lives and religion of their descendants in his article "Ancestors, guardians of the community". He stresses that:

While ancestors are not put before their descendants as models of virtue, they do play a pivotal role in the maintenance of moral fabric of the kinship group. There is a price to be paid for the guidance, protection and

beneficence that come from the ancestors. They in turn expect the living to uphold the moral norms of the community, conduct their affairs with integrity, observe taboos and respect the customs of the clan. An infringement of the laws and code of conduct is believed to be an open invitation to misfortune in the form of (personal) illness, poverty or any other form of personal or family disorders ... Both the living and the dead ancestors are caught up in a network of obligations and responsibility. Ancestors are generally the senior members of the lineage. This entitles them to respect and authority. When discipline disintegrates or when the moral norms are disregarded, the living invariably turn to the ancestors for help. It is in this sense that the ancestors still play a significant role in the lives of their descendants.

So I have to repeat: in Africa, religion is deeply rooted. Like Van der Walt and Bujo, I do not subscribe to the view that religion is 'decaying' and that it will soon 'disappear' from the scene. For instance, many Africans who are Westernised still cling to the culture of their ancestors. Van der Walt (1997:8) mentions, rightly, that:

Few Black Africans will still wear traditional clothes to-day - 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.

On the different aspects of a culture, Van der Walt (1997:9) brings out the role of religion vividly:

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.

There is a strong belief, especially among the Basotho that ancestors - Badimo (i.e. those who live with God) act as their mediators, hence the saying:

Hlabela Badimo e tshweu o tla thabisa Modimo  
(If you slaughter a white goat for the ancestors, you please God).

Changes have taken place. According to Mbiti:

Whenever Africans today show an interest in the future, they owe it to Christianity and to Western education ... modern developments have altered the old categories: political and social change and especially the introduction of Western type of education and the experience of political independence have inevitably widened the modern African's vision (Cited by Bujo (1992:28)).

The role of missionaries in evangelizing and educating the African people cannot be over-emphasized.

Prior to the coming of the Christian church, Africa was "grossly cursed" with illiteracy, and she still is, but

to a lesser degree. But since the coming of missionaries great strides have been made in the field of literacy.

It is estimated that 10-12 percent of the African population can now read and write with varying degrees of proficiency. African literacy is definitely on the increase ... There is everywhere in Africa an unprecedented hunger for education and literature. Even the uneducated African parents try to make sure that their children get the opportunity they themselves never had (Sithole, 1959:52).

The abovementioned examples prove beyond doubt that religion has an important role to play in social reconstruction. The church was involved in social reconstruction through the ages. Even during the apartheid era there were church leaders who strongly opposed the Nationalist Government with its policy of apartheid.

Contrary to Karl Marx's view that religion is an instrument of social control with no formative power, and also, contrary to the view that the only role the church can play, is to help maintain the *status quo*, one can also quote the daily influence of churches in terms of norms. The influence of the Roman Catholic Church on the world community in its pronouncements on the value of life (its view on abortion, euthanasia, war, medical research, etc.) has a far-reaching influence. But all churches, Sunday after Sunday, preach about the ethical, juridical and social norms that should apply in people's daily lives. A very good example of this influence is the Zionist Church's work ethic.

Religion continues to have a strong hold on the African people. A study of the reaction of these people to Christ's Sermon on the Mount will illustrate this point best. Christ states among others, the following:

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice ...

Mandela could draw on the sense of justice of all blacks strengthened by their biblical faith. Black people were carried through ages of injustice by their faith.

The peace makers try to break down the barriers which divide people, they set out to make others happy, removing things which make others anxious, frustrated, bitter. Chapman in *Christian Living Today, Book II* makes the following contribution:

The person who works for reconciliation, acts among men as God does (Chapman 1975:15).

Nelson Mandela, the President of the Republic of South Africa, is trying by all means to bring about reconciliation between the perpetrators of atrocious crimes and their victims or their families despite the suffering he experienced for twenty seven years on Robben Island. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up for this purpose. Charlotte Bauer states in the Sunday Times that:

The terrible silence, thrown like a blanket over apartheid's atrocities, is over. The brittle bubble of the 'honeymoon' period is over. Unspeakable acts are being spoken about, evil is being exorcised, and it is not a comfortable

experience for any South African (Charlotte Bauer, 1996, Sunday Times, 22/9/1996).

As the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* proceeds, one gets the impression that those whose loved ones were brutally murdered, are willing to forgive the perpetrators of the crimes.

People being able to forgive because God taught them to forgive (Matt. 6:14-15).

Many people in various countries are heeding Christ's call to serve. Some have given up their high positions to be able to serve God by caring and improving the lot of the poor. A good example is the famous Albert Schweitzer. Princess Diana used her position to work for charity and chose to be the "Queen of people's hearts". Mother Teresa who, for more than 50 years, gave up her life for the poor will, like Princess Diana, be remembered for many years to come. Instead of 'dying' religion will continue to appeal to many people throughout the ages.

#### **Religion and worldview. Apostasy and stagnation of culture**

In his argument to prove that religion does indeed play an active role in man's life Dooyeweerd shows how light emanating from some form of belief, guides man to proper understanding of things. Religion guarantees some perspective on one's life. The light which guides a man whose heart is open to God differs from the light which guides a man who is alienated from God because their faith or belief is not the same.



According to Dooyeweerd the man whose heart is open to God is guided by the light of word-revelation while a man who is alienated from God is guided or might allow himself to be guided by his reason.

Proper knowledge of God, Dooyeweerd (1955:307) further explains, is not gained through the 'theologia naturalis' of speculative philosophy but it is knowledge which is exclusively guided by faith in the Word of God. Through this word alone the eyes of the mind are opened to the universal revelation of God in created nature. Dooyeweerd (1955:307) explains this process as follows:

In the Word-revelation God addresses the human race in its religious root, and man has only to listen faithfully. As this Word-revelation was originally a revelation to a community, and not to individuals, its addressee was not each individual believer apart, but mankind in community with its first head Adam ... Only in faithfully listening to the Divine Word is the true meaning of God's revelation in created nature revealed to man.

In the case of a man who is alienated from God the function of faith is drawn away from the Divine Word. According to Dooyeweerd (1955:308) by turning away from God man sets himself on the path of doom:

God's revelation in the whole of created nature and primarily in the heart of man, became man's doom when he fell away from the Divine word-Revelation. Where the heart closed itself and turned away from God, the function of pistis was closed to the light of God's word. As a result faith began to manifest its transcendal

direction in an apostate way, in the search for an absolute firm ground in the creation itself. The inevitable consequences were the idolatrous absolutizing of meaning.

What Dooyeweerd is trying to put across here is that a person who has turned away from God knows the certainty of faith but in his case faith has no contact whatsoever with Word-Revelation. Instead the certainty of his faith is primarily linked to revelation in nature. According to Dooyeweerd, in the two examples quoted above, the light which both consider the proper guide in their lives, is a matter of belief. He thus concludes quite rightly, that there can be no genuine faith no matter how far away from truth it may have fallen, which is not related to divine revelation for even apostate faith is not purely arbitrary but subject to normative principles of natural revelation (Dooyeweerd 1995:308).

Primitive people in exercising their faith, defy forces of nature and clothe them in all kinds of fantasies. They are also led by some form of belief. They believe that the forces of nature regulate the whole biopsychic foundation of their closed society, including life and death, fertility and barrenness. Through ritual acts they hope to ward off these deified forces of nature (Kalsbeek 1975:134). Dooyeweerd (1955:316) maintains that:

Here too the Divine Revelation in the created nature primarily touches the heart of man's existence. Being completely closed to the Word-Revelation, this heart guides the function of faith in its restrictive 'apostasy'.

According to him faith may be a closed state. This is the case in totemism where members of a clan identify themselves with totem animals, such as kangeroos, elephants, etc.

At such a depth of apostasy from divine revelation, the effects are far-reaching. Because the faith aspect is still restricted it cannot fulfil the guiding functions necessary for the opening of the preceding aspects. Consequently for a people whose faith still has a closed structure the cultural dimension and the remaining normative aspects of society cannot be opened. Such a society will remain static and undifferentiated (Kalsbeek 1975:134, Dooyeweerd 1955:317).

In Africa with all its problems massacres are becoming an everyday experience. Numerous cases are being reported in Rwanda, Angola, the Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Burundi and South Africa to name a few countries. With the mounting lawlessness throughout the continent, we in Africa need to find an urgent solution to save our continent from bleeding to death. We need to open our hearts and allow ourselves to be guided by the light of the Word-Revelation in all we do. If we close our hearts and allow ourselves to be guided by the gods of our own creation, there will be no end to the maladies of Africa.

Our ubuntu or ujamaa must find a deeper foundation in the revelation of God as ministered by His Holy Spirit. Only on this basis can we really reconstruct family life in Africa according to God's creational ordinance.

## CONCLUSION

Having analysed the material relating to family life, I now want to extract the relevant views needed to construct an ethics for family life in Africa.

In the opening chapter I pointed out serious problems which threaten to destroy the structures of marriage and family and I also pointed out various courses of these problems. Many African families lead unhappy lives. Mutual love which lays a strong foundation for a happy family life and parental friendship which draws children closer to their parents are not found in these families.

Through lack of mutual love marriages end up on the rocks while children who through neglect are denied the opportunity to communicate their difficulties and their frustrations with their parents, end up in the street. Apart from these factors, relationships are also threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy and conflicts.

Marriages and families can become happy institutions if parents and children can heed God's norms which serve as guidelines or directional pointers. To me the Christian approach to our problems remains therefore, the only approach which can provide solutions.

Attending to the issue of the Christian view of man in chapter 2 I dealt with the structures and foundations of marriage and family in detail. On the issue of the family I pointed out that it is founded by blood ties and is qualified by love. The points mentioned below were treated fully:

The ultimate meaning of being human can only be uncovered by God's revelation and His Word. This has to do with the relationship in which the human person stands to God and to his fellow human beings.

Man is free to make choices. The choices that are made are decisions to obey or disobey God. No choices are made outside the context of particular human relationships.

God created man and woman as equals. Male chauvinism has to be countered in all cultures. Man and woman form a corporate whole known as humanity. We never live our lives as isolated individuals. As social beings we form part of many social structures. We take part in community life via these life spheres.

To maintain good human relationships in any community be it institutional, organizational or associational, the structural principles which have been established as normative structural laws for human society have to be observed, and to ensure proper running of all communities, authority and subordination are necessary.

Problems which we experience in our relationships can be solved by heading God's ordinances which serve as guidelines for responsible cultural activity.

Marriage succeeds when each partner is able to identify himself with the well-being and concerns of the other. The structural law of marriage depends on the correlation between loving troth and sexual satisfaction.

In the case of the family the creational law has to do with the loving troth between parents and children founded in blood ties. It is a normative relationship

where decisions to concretise loving troth determines the quality of being together. Both marriage and family are very intimate relationships depending heavily on mutual trust and love. Family life is always founded in conjugal love. Family life can only be normal if this is the case. In a family, parents should enthusiastically work together to provide nurturing, guidance, discipline and instruction for their children. The decline of moral as well as educational standards in the country are often caused by the hands-off attitude of the parents.

In chapter 3 I dealt with the social meaning of family. To construct the ethics of family life for Africa it is necessary to mention the manner in which traditional African families were run and the part played by the different socializing agents in the daily lives of the people. Here I want to mention the changes that should be made to improve their lives:

Children should be given the opportunity to learn to express their feelings and to experience intimacy in their families. This is the way to learn to do what is expected of them. Apart from this, children should be allowed also to learn by their mistakes, i.e. guided not forced in an authoritarian way.

All factors that threaten family life should be addressed. Here I am thinking of poverty, unemployment and migratory labour. Migratory labour deprives children of the company of their fathers and the wives that of their husbands. The pain and suffering the children and their mothers experience can be alleviated by local job creation.

But housing also impacts on family life. Small homes and lack of environmental space leaves little room for the

traditional lifestyle in an extended family. The patterns of the support system on which the families depended for such functions as childminding and housekeeping have been disrupted by this problem. The state and the private sector should join hands to make houses available for those in need. This will help to stem the rising tide of street children, aids, prostitution and sex abuse in general..

Of course, the church has a special role in family life. Apart from teaching Christians the norms for marriage and family life the church has to attend to such occurrences as divorce and polygamy in the spirit of Christ, by treating every case sympathetically.

In chapter 4 mention is made of the rising black middle-class with the concomitant replacement of the extended families by nuclear families particularly in the urban areas. With the introduction of nuclear families childminding has become a problem. In traditional societies children were looked after also by grandparents and aunts.

As far as children of school-age in the nuclear family is concerned, parents are now able to detect their children's weaknesses and are therefore able to give the necessary guidance in time. In the nuclear set-up parents can now enjoy the much-needed privacy. But the training which the extended family provided in the past is seemingly lost forever.

A closer look at the benefits and failures of the nuclear and extended family highlights the following: In some respects families in Africa follow traditional patterns to their own detriment. Fathers hardly spend time with their families. As a result proper communication and

sharing, two essential elements in human relationships, are lacking. Parents have to spend time with their children and play with them to enable them to appreciate what the adult world is like.

The extended family system has proved to be a better system than the nuclear family system in various ways:

In the extended family system, family members assist one another in times of need. The extended family shares in the fortune (or the misfortune) of its members. Thus children of poor parents are helped by relations to acquire education.

In the extended family system education is offered by not only parents. Children are looked after by grandparents, aunts and uncles - none turn to the street for help. There were no street children in traditional societies as a result, and orphanages were not necessary in these societies.

Discipline was never neglected in the absence of father and mother. Others simply took over as a matter of course.

Becoming an orphan or being adopted has a totally different dimension in the extended family. A child does not feel rejected if brought up by other members of the family.

On the other hand churches and schools should provide training courses to match or surpass the training which the children received under tribal control.

In general I must also point out the need of censoring television programmes which are responsible for the



lowering of morals and the undermining of marital and family values.

In the quest for restoring family life the enormous problems of AIDS, abortion, divorce, etc. should be addressed comprehensively. Not only societal structures but also the sciences should attend to these. Ethics has a very special contribution.

In chapter 5 I dealt with a short history of ethics with the view to showing the importance of morality in our lives. I also dealt with the question of ubuntu as well as that of ujamaa. Both take the extended family as point of departure. Ubuntu or ujamaa are both essential in our construction of a family ethics for Africa.

Ubuntu and ujamaa are both about caring, sharing and forgiving - all of which are absolutely essential in the building up of healthy families and a healthy society.

Umuntu Ngumuntu ngabantu: people are made people through other people. To seek to live by oneself, i.e. alone, is to deny one's 'personhood' and personal growth. Participation in the community binds people together and offers a richly textured life.

Just as they play an active part in such organisations as trade unions, African men should play an active part in the affairs of their families. Love and fellow-feeling should not be displayed in relationships outside the homes only but should be displayed in the family circles also. This is real ubuntu/ujamaa or 'familyhood'.

Participation in the community should be encouraged because it binds people together and brings life.

The traditional African 'familyhood' should be extended beyond the confines of the extended family to embrace the entire African nation, and all nations of the world. When this is achieved all sorts of human misery can be prevented.

One thing must be emphasised: the nuclear family can never shift its primary responsibility to the extended family and the flagrant abuse of the system by irresponsible children who dump children on family members must be opposed vehemently.

Chapter 6 dealt with social engineering and the family in Africa. Here I mentioned the changes that occurred and which still have to be made to ensure the upliftment of the African people: their standard of living and their moral standard in general.

Changes will have to be made in all spheres of life throughout the continent of Africa to bring about peace and stability, without which proper running of our societies cannot be achieved.

Social conditions will have to be improved by extending democracy beyond the narrow racial base to all citizens. Capitalism and apartheid should be replaced by real democracy which will promote mutual trust and co-operation. Discrimination and reverse discrimination must be outrooted.

Every citizen should be given the opportunity to adequately carry out his family responsibility. In the case of migrant workers this can be achieved by allowing married men to settle with their families in towns and cities.

Resources should be made equally available to all people in the rural as well as urban areas so as to improve the standard of living and therefore of the family life of all citizens.

To stem the rising tide of alcoholism recreational facilities should be created. Families are being broken by excessive use of alcohol.

The state should ensure that the structure of society offers all human beings an existence worthy of man.

In the economic sphere doors should be opened to people of all races to enable them to participate in various industries. Shares and trade licences should be made available to all citizens who are interested. This will help to raise the standard of living of all families thus enabling them to bring up their children well.

Racial discrimination in schools should be abolished as this has led to racial conflicts and unnecessary bloodshed.

Women should not be denied the opportunity to seek work of their choice. Traditional laws barring them from doing so should be abolished.

The government has to maintain the individual rights of all its citizens and should combat the oppression and exploitation of one group by another. As Christians any structure that is being neglected or denied the chance to grow must remain the object of our criticism.

In chapter 7 I discussed fully the role of Christianity in Africa: the part played by missionaries in education

and health and the part played by the church in the lives of the people in general.

Christians and believers all over the world are called to transform human realities into salvation realities to enable the Good News of Jesus's salvation to become incarnated in the societies in which they live and to turn economics and politics into salvation economics and politics.

The need to respond to this call is one of the reasons why the church continues to play an active role in the economic, political and social dimensions of development. Religion influences people in various ways:

It provides the material out of which all those whose hearts are open to God's Word may build a sense of purpose and security.

It provides people with unlimited sources of beliefs about rewards and punishments for proper and improper behaviour. Thus religion has a powerful and important control function by instilling a sense of right and wrong.

By adjusting their behaviour to the requirements of their religion, individuals are enabled to know whether they are right and through this knowledge to acquire a sense of peace and security.

In the trouble-torn continent of Africa - a continent in which large numbers of officers in key positions are blinded by an insatiable desire for power and wealth - there is a strong and urgent need for all leaders and followers alike to open their hearts to receive God's Word and to allow Christ's indwelling spirit to guide

them in everything they do. There is no other solution to the problems which is facing the peoples of Africa.

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