Reason, faith and practice in our common home, South Africa

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"No one can be clever and ecstatic at the same time" Sir A Quiller-Couch

1. Introduction

Three elements of the overall theme, *Reason, Faith,* and the idea of *Our Common Home* are found in different cultural constructions or formations in the South African context. These formations have often combined or interacted with destructive results, and have at other times formed constructive, life-giving combinations.

Firstly, a few examples will be given of specific cultural formations and combinations of these themes. That will be followed by reflection on how we can arrive at constructive, life-giving combinations of these formations, with a practical example from the African context of what could be done. There are more factors that could be included in the mix that are not considered here.

2. The view of reason and "our common home" in the *Verligte Beweging* among Afrikaners

In the 1970's and the 1980's there was a movement in the Afrikaner-establishment that was called the *Verligte Beweging,* the Enlightened Movement, that reminds one of the Aufklärung in Europe. The leading figure of this movement was Willem de Klerk, a theologian and journalist and the brother of FW de Klerk, the leader of the National Party (NP). FW de Klerk was the person who, as president of the white minority government, officially declared that the policy of apartheid would be replaced by a full democracy, in a historic speech on 2 February 1990.
In a book about his brother FW that was published in 1991, Willem de Klerk stated that the basic concept of the Enlightened Movement was *togetherness* (gesamentlikheid), based on *reason as the natural law of the human soul*. He quoted the historian Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly* (1984): "Rejection of reason is the prime characteristic of folly…. When desire disagrees with the judgement of reason, there is a disease of the soul. And when the soul is opposed to knowledge or opinion or reason, which are her natural laws, that I call folly…." (De Klerk, 1991 pp. 130, 144-145).
Togetherness was seen as the opposite pole of separateness (apartheid), which was not rejected out of hand, sometimes for strategic reasons and sometimes, it seems, as a matter of

principle. The idea was to find a balance between togetherness with other cultural groups and maintaining an own identity. Willem de Klerk described how this movement convinced the Afrikaner in general, and FW himself, to move their policy from the one pole (separateness) closer to the other (togetherness), and to leave apartheid behind. In his conclusion he talked of FW's *conversion* to the idea of togetherness based on reason (1991, pp. 145-146). This thought construction became dominant in Afrikaner circles at the time, and when it combined with the drive for reconciliation of leaders like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, a peaceful transition to democracy in a deeply divided country became possible, which led to a lot of optimism. This was a noteworthy contribution!

Twenty-five years later this optimism is under a lot of pressure, but it is still alive. The question is if it was, and is, sufficient to put all one's confidence in reason as answer to all the movements of the human spirit in this turbulent country.

In his book Willem De Klerk presented his expectation of the way in which the five years after 1990 would evolve. On pp. 174-200 he presented an overview of the *seven* forces that would determine this period. He mentioned the difficulties that were to be expected: *four* situations that put pressure on negotiations (p 178) and *three* fault lines in the South African situation (p. 179). The powers that opposed reason were duly noted, counted and allocated their place in the bigger reasonable picture painted by Willem de Klerk. He looked all the difficulties and unreasonable ideologies in the eye and assured his readers that these forces could be contained by the processes of reason: by education, persuasion, negotiation, compromise. He was full of confidence that all would work out: economic realities would force all groups to find solutions (p. 187). With leaders like FW, he stated, it was quite possible. He even ventured that it was not far-fetched that FW could become president again in the next 10 years (p. 199).

It seems that the *Verligte Beweging* underestimated and consequently neglected the extent to which reason itself can be understood or constructed in different ways. What is reasonable to one is often unreasonable to another. And where Willem regarded reason and the economy as the binding forces that would keep all together, the African National congress (ANC) as ruling party expects minority groups to bow to the majority. The idea that the ecology is our and our children's common home hardly features.

On 27 April 1994 a government of national unity (GNU) was elected in a fully democratic national election. FW de Klerk became a member of the cabinet of president Nelson Mandela. Two years later and five years after his brother Willem de Klerk's book, he and the other National Party members withdrew from the GNU, complaining that the ANC refused to share power or to search for consensus in critical matters (Giliomee, 2004, p. 619). De Klerk's successor as leader of the once mighty National Party, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, became a member of their former arch enemy, the ANC, in 2004. The rest of the party followed about a year later. Van Schalkwyk was rewarded with a cabinet post and after serving as a minister for 10 years, keeping a very low profile, he resigned from parliament when president Zuma left him out of his cabinet (Makinana, 2014).

And recently Dave Steward (2016), Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the FW de Klerk Foundation, wrote an article *Slegs "goeie" blankes (Only "good" whites)* about a ruling of the Constitutional court on street names in Pretoria. Steward warned that the ruling implied that all the cultural, economic, and other contributions of the whites in the history of this

country are now in principle disregarded. He complained that the only legacy of whites in general that is recognised is oppression; individual whites who supported the struggle against oppression are the only "good" whites who may, in this case, have streets named after them.

It is noteworthy that Willem de Klerk, a *pastoral* theologian, worked with a rather simplistic anthropology that puts its ultimate confidence in reason. The anthropology of Christian theology, at its best, works with a very sophisticated and realistic anthropology that would have served him better. As example of the role that such a theology can play in the political arena one can refer to the contribution of Karl Barth after the Second World War in Europe. Barth did not reduce the complexities of life to neat rational categories. He did not work with a simplified anthropology. He always spoke as a theologian, and his theology and his view of political activity as a "free, direct approach to human beings and their welfare" is said to have contributed in Europe "toward breaking down ideological politics in favour of a more pragmatic and practical approach to problems of state" (Herberg, 1960, pp. 64-65, quoting Charles West).

Secondly, it is noteworthy that De Klerk, as *Christian* theologian, accepted Tuchman's view that *self-interest* should be the basis of reason: "…if the mind is open enough to perceive that a given policy is harming rather than serving self-interest…and wise enough to reverse it, that is a summit in the art of government" (De Klerk, 1991, p. 145, quoting Tuchman). Self-interest is a powerful force than can be directed towards positive goals, but unchecked and blatant self-interest, as is found in many sectors of society in the present-day South Africa, has destructive consequences such as rampant corruption, a growing gap between rich and poor and ecological devastation.

In April 2013 the prominent anti-apartheid activist Peter Hain, who later became a member of Parliament in Britain, wrote in a short article *My South Africa, riven by self-interest: "…* ANC leaders now seemed to be preoccupied with corruptly enriching themselves at the taxpayers' expense, not sticking true to Mandela's values. 'They are looting the country,' ANC members told me time and again as I travelled around this amazing and beautiful country". There is wide agreement with this view of many ANC members. By 2017 the term state capture had become dominant in the public discourse on the role of the ANC.

The people of the *Verligte Beweging* did very little to present an alternative to self-interest. The same can be said of many Christians, even if the Christian faith proclaims service to others and the search for the common good, more than self-interest, as a basic motif to direct practice (cf Benedict XVI, 2009). The theologian Leslie Newbigin (1989, p. 229) says what is required of the church is to become a servant church, 'a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighbourhood'.

What is needed is a life-giving combination of factors which achieve synergy through creative tension. It is important that reason and a measure of self-interest are part of this combination, but they are not sufficient on their own. The *Verligte Beweging* can serve as example of that. It was helpful to bring an end to apartheid but it was not sufficient to find a way after apartheid.

 One reason for the failure of the *Verligte Beweging* is that it did not recognise that "reason" is not a given entity, it functions within a larger cultural framework or construct. To illustrate this point, a few cultural formations of reason are considered below.

3. Views of reason of some African writers in the 20th century

In this section attention is given to some African views of reason over almost a century, followed in the next section by a discussion of the tradition of resistance to Western concepts of reason.

In 1936 H I E Dhlomo (1936, p 232) wrote:

"Action! Rhythm! Emotion! Gesture! Imitation! Desires … The origin of African drama was a combination of religious or magical ritual, rhythmic dances and the song. These ceremonies were based on what anthropologists call Sympathetic Magic… The dances were rhythmic and expressive; the songs emotional and devotional…."

In another article, Dhlomo (1939, p. 89) rejected rhyme as a "suitable outward form" for the "emotional content" of African poetry. He quoted Sir A Quiller-Couch who said "No one can be clever and ecstatic at the same time". Taking Hebrew poetry and Shakespeare's later works as examples, Dhlomo propagated the use of rhythm as the form best suited to the African genius. This comparison seems to point at a unifying transcultural formation in which people from different cultural backgrounds can feel at home, although one must remark that Hebrew poetry and Shakespeare's later works were, if anything, clever and/or inspired rather than ecstatic.

Dorsinville (1976, p. 70) stated that the famous poet from Senegal, Leopold Senghor "himself says that meaning is less dependent on discourse, analysis, linear thought than on breath, rhythm, sensibility".

The following statement by Ibe Nwoga (1976, p. 26) may also find some correlation with certain Western schools of thought, such as phenomenology, which will be discussed below:

> "My understanding of the issue is related to a distinction between modes of knowing – that whereas traditional western man has evolved a more detached, analytical mode of understanding of his world, environment and aspects of human functioning, traditional African man retained a more holistic, instinctive mode of understanding**….** I try various expressions to describe this mode – spiritual absorption, instinctive perception of whole meaning, sensitive interaction – but these are words that have their meaning in the language of a cultural mode of perception which is particular and rationalistic. The total of these expressions, however, comes close to what I mean, for which the word **rapport** may be used… (if) the African should be found to have a predominating tendency towards this type of knowledge, then it should be recognised, not indeed as exclusive, but as characteristic".

Other statements suggest that the cultural gaps may be deeper, that correlation may not be found so easily. In 1964 the well-known South African literary scholar Ezekiel Mphahlele (1964, p. 221) wrote: "It is significant that there is much more creative writing than scholarly prose by Negroes in Africa. Perhaps it is because a poem or short story or a novel is so close to individual experience, and therefore more natural modes of expression than argumentative prose; and further, because intellectual systems and the arguments involved are not natural to Africa."

And the philosopher K C Anyanwu (1984, pp. 87-93) wrote:

"The unity of the self and the world, mind and matter, is something magical because it defies any rational understanding. We can only say that the self and the world interpenetrate each other in such a way that we do not know where the self begins and ends for the world to begin .... the West seeks rational causality in all things. What happens if nature is alive, if spirit permeates the whole universe, if consciousness cannot grasp the factors of causality? Effects would then be interpreted as magical and so also the method.... Magic raises up the question of causality .... the whole truth about cause is magical, that is, it belongs to the non-material world."

The word "harmony" is often used to describe the African worldview. The Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor comments as follows on Chinua Achebe's book *Things fall apart* (first published 1958): "To Achebe, the African world before the arrival of Europe was a well-integrated one, with dignity and honour". In spite of contradictions and struggles "the search goes on inexorably for that fundamental harmony on which their cosmic destiny rests". It is this "pristine integrity" which has been "traumatically shattered... (by) the tragic encounter between Africa and Europe..." The first "seeds of havoc" are planted with the coming of the Christians: "Order and coherence are followed by that slow, imperceptible and disguised process of decay" (Awoonor, 1976, pp. 252-254).

African Traditional Culture is still alive and powerful. In August 2016, two church ministers submitted their doctoral theses in Theology with me: rev Simon Munyai of the VhaVenda in South Africa, and rev Peter Nyuyki from the 'Nso in Cameroon. Independently from each other, both state that the missionary era has passed, that the missionaries from the West did not understand their particular culture and religion, and that the African church now has the task to develop a meaningful relationship between their traditional cultures and the Christian faith. Both use the word *harmony* to describe their African worldviews: Munyai (2016, p. 70) states that healing is regarded by the VhaVenda of South Africa as an act of reconciliation by God, who brings order, stability and harmony to the whole universe. Nyuyki (2016, p. 177) states that in the worldview of the Nso' people, the self and the phenomenological world are inseparable because the Nso' people experience life in harmony with nature. The universe, for the Nso' people, is not static, inanimate or dead. "The worldview of a people and their ways of worship tell us how they see and conceive the cosmos and interpret the things and events around them. That of the Nso' people like most of Africa is imbedded in music and dancing, fellowship, corporate living, their traditional religion and socio-economic and political organisations."

This relation to reality is threatened by Western forms of reason and Western education, which leads to resistance.

4. Resistance to Western forms of reason

In 2015 and 2016 there have been major incidents of burning down of schools in the Vuwani district, a rural area in the province of Limpopo, and buildings on the Mafikeng campus of the University of North-West and at the University of Johannesburg. At the time of writing this article, news reports are still coming in on more campus violence, specifically the burning down of buildings and vehicles.

In a news report, "'Let the schools burn, let them burn!' - Vuwani resident" Lizeka Tandwa (2016) quoted a police officer who said that 20 school were burned and four damaged in this rural area. This happened when protests broke out about plans that the area would fall under a new municipality. Damage was estimated at more than R500 million (Whittles 2016).

In comparison, a house of 200 m² with a decent garden in an upper-middle class suburb can be bought for under R2 million.

In Vuwani, local *politics* triggered a spontaneous mass action by the communities who then turned against the *education* facilities of their children. On several university campuses there were also incidents where buildings were burned down, sometimes in mass protests about different complaints (North West University Mafikeng campus) and sometimes in secret at night (University of Johannesburg). Minister Blade Nzimande (2016) detailed the cost of student protests to university campus properties around SA, saying the total between October 2015 and June 2016 stood at R459.8m.

The question that many ask is: Why do people burn down schools and university buildings?

One factor could be that resistance to Western forms of reason has a long history in South Africa.

In the 1920s the church leader Isaiah Shembe broke away from the missionary churches in search of an own identity. One of his reasons was the suppression of oral traditions by the epistemological and cognitive authority of the Western tradition of print (Brown 1998, 124).

The mass actions that started in Soweto in 1976 led to the introduction of a fully democratic constitution for South Africa in the early 1990's. These uprisings were, especially in the early years, inspired by Black Consciousness with its slogan: *Black is beautiful!* The leading figure in this movement was Steve Biko, who was beaten to death my security forces in 1977 at the age of 31. Biko was not opposed to education and reason. He was also not anti-white. "Steve Biko did more than any other political leader to form a political movement whose primary aim was to challenge the intellectual foundations of European modernity while engaging with that modernity itself through the weapons it had itself furnished" (Mangcu 2012: 34, 39). He took his arguments to some of the most exalted academic forums in the country (Mangcu 2012: 178).

This objection to Western rationalism can be compared to responses to high levels of rationality in human history such as the Romantic movement in the West (Mangcu 2012: 273-2750).

However, by 1974 Biko was losing his grip on the movement as it became more radical and activist (Mangcu 2012: 192, 193). The movement raised the political consciousness of students and on 16 June 1976 demonstrations by school children led to violent responses by the police and the burning down of schools and other government property by the students. This was followed all over the country by frequent incidences of the burning down of schools and university buildings, and other buildings, which still flare up from time to time. It is often interpreted as expressions of political frustration, but there was also resistance against "Western values" such as individualism, a resistance that was repeatedly expressed, inter alia, in popular slogans such as "Pass one, pass all!" at universities.

Toyi-toyi, which is rhythmic dancing and singing by groups of advancing protesters, is the most prominent traditional cultural form during mass protest demonstrations. It has played a major role since the time of the struggle against apartheid, and it is still prominent in mass

protests by communities, trade unions, students and others. Toyi-toyi is described as "the war dance of black South Africans"; a resident said it can be seen as South Africa's 12th official language, "since it's nearly as old as the country itself and everyone knows it, including the government." It is very effective to give the protesters courage and to intimidate the authorities. "Toyi-toyi is a powerful and infectious statement, by which the oppressed may voice their grievances to the government" (Nevitt, 2016).

Toyi-toyi does not make a rational statement. It is rather ecstatic than rational. Sometimes it is combined with the processes of reason that were described by Willem de Klerk: by education, persuasion, negotiation, compromise, written submissions. In some circles, however, political protest that was expressed in a literate form was regarded with suspicion because the literate form itself was seen as foreign to African identity. Traditional oral forms at times involved "a return to the ancestral source", cyclical construction, parallelism and repetition (Brown, 1998, pp182-185). The oral form expresses another relationship to the world than the relationship that is expressed in literate forms. Brown quotes the literary scholar, Michael Chapman, who wrote in 1984:

> "Underlying such an approach is the vision of an African anthropomorphic universe wherein all relationships – from God to the ancestral spirits, through man to the animals and plants – are mutually co-existent. It is a universe which evinces beauty-in-harmony; it is (to quote Senghor) 'a dictionary, a web of metaphors, a vast network of signs' and is characterized by the depth and intensity of affective life. Thus artistic technique, in its attempts to express rhythmic essence, is at the same time felt to be an ethical principle; the poet, by chanting his poem, gives audible substance to those life forces which, according to African ontology, are deemed to emanate from God and are Being – for Being is Force, Life is Energy. As far as the poet is concerned, therefore, the ideal (again to quote Senghor) is 'total art', in which a world of static appearances gives way to one of dynamic realities; 'imitation is superseded by participation, the master-word of Negritude" (Brown, 1998, pp. 193-194).

This search for participation, (rapport – Nwoga, fundamental harmony – Awoonor) rather than control of nature through reason, which is pivotal in the modern West's belief in progress, was one of the inherent motives in the struggle against apartheid: it was more than political protest, it was also a search for an African identity. Toyi-toyi can be interpreted as one such an oral form that expresses a rhythmic essence and an ethical principle that are rooted in African ontology.

A more recent development on university campuses is the movement for the decolonisation of the university system. It includes the burning and vandalising of "colonial" art works, libraries and buildings, but there are also academic debates about the diversification of epistemology, bringing marginalised groups, experiences, knowledges and worldviews emanating from Africa and the Global South to the centre of the curriculum, challenging the hegemony of Western ideas and paradigms and foregrounding local and indigenous conceptions and narratives. At the University of Pretoria a copy of a book, *Decolonising the University. The emerging quest for non-Eurocentric paradigms*, was circulated electronically

in 2016. In the Forword with the heading *'Our universities are the purveyors of an imperialist worldview* SM Mohamed Idris writes:

> "Our universities are the purveyors of the imperialist worldview and ideology. They play the role of perpetuating Western hegemony through their education models that are so destructive to our culture, language, way of life, knowledge systems and dignity.
> To achieve true liberation and recover our authentic selves, we need to purge the West that is within us.
> ….Even at our universities, to bring about such a change would be seen as a radical exercise. So steeped in our psyche is the Western hold that to think in any other way is unimaginable for fear that we end up in poverty and backwardness - as if there were no other civilisation before the coming of the colonialists".

The reference to "our culture, language, way of life, knowledge systems and dignity" and a civilisation that is not Western indicates that the drive for decolonisation cannot be understood fully by using Western insights, for example that it is merely a search for power or that it is frustration with the struggle to get funding to study at existing universities. It may be such things, but it is more.

It is interesting that Idris names Al Jazeera as example of what should be done; it shows that his view of reason may be quite compatible with at least some Western schools of thought.

There are also political motives for attacks on Western education. In Martin Meredith's book *The state of Africa* (2006) there is a chapter, *The coming of tyrants*, in which he describes the two decades after political independence. It was an unstable period, marked by a high number of coups. The educated were often the target of violence by political leaders. In Zanzibar, Abeid Karume came to power through a coup; he was distrustful of intellectuals and executed some of his advisors (p. 223). In Uganda, Idi Amin "…took sadistic pleasure in humiliating officials, usually men with wide education and experience, for whom he held an instinctive distrust" (p. 237). In Equatorial Guinea, Francisco Nguema took power. "Given unlimited powers to arrest, torture, rape and murder, Nguema's security forces wreaked vengeance on the country's educated classes…" (p 240). In Ethiopia, under Mengistu Mariam, "…armed gangs hunted down students, teachers and intellectuals deemed to be 'counter-revolutionaries'" (p. 246).

In May 2000 a newspaper reported: "Mugabe thugs target black professionals" (Makhanya and Malala, 2000, p. 1). "Teachers, nurses and other professionals have been subjected to sustained abuse by supporters of President Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF party, raising fears of a repeat of the '80s 'Gukurahundi' (wipe out everything) campaign. Then, teachers and other professionals were among the first targets in a campaign of terror in which 20 000 people were murdered, many of them by being buried alive".

I could not find evidence that this level of violence against educated people or academics has been prominent in Africa in recent years. There are, however, political leaders who do show anti-intellectualism. Recently, the political columnist Prince Mashele (2016) wrote in the influential newspaper Sowetan: "African leaders don't like the idea of an educated populace, for clever people are difficult to govern. Mandela and Mbeki were themselves corrupted by

Western education. (Admission: this columnist is also corrupted by such education.)….Zuma remains African. His mentality is in line with Boko Haram. He is suspicious of educated people, what he calls "clever blacks". Remember that Boko Haram means "Against Western Education".

Linking the South African President's remarks about "clever blacks" to Boko Haram is ominous, but Zuma's remarks as such can also be compared to the remarks of, for example, some leaders of the Republican Party in the United States, cf the article by an experienced person in American politics, Max Boot (2016): "*How the 'Stupid Party' Created Donald Trump*". According to Boot, Republicans have often distanced themselves in their rhetoric from intellectuals, in order to attract a certain section of voters: "Rather than run away from the anti-intellectual label, Republicans embraced it for their own political purposes." Boot quotes a certain William F. Buckley Jr. who said, "I should sooner live in a society governed by the first 2,000 names in the Boston telephone directory than in a society governed by the 2,000 faculty members of Harvard University".

To conclude: in Africa, resistance to Western forms of reason is expressed in different ways, from engaging Western intellectuals in their own terms to violence against intellectuals, from the destruction of educational facilities to the academic debates in African philosophy and the recent movement for the decolonisation of universities. It also has different motives in different cases, such as the need to express "African ontology", the need to "recover our authentic selves" and the desire to maintain political power. It can be radical and destructive but it can also be moderate and constructive.

5. Movements in the West that challenge the hegemony of reason

The modern age, where reason and science are central, is traced back to Descartes' "I think, therefor I am".

Descartes set the human soul apart from the body and the world itself, a dualism that has plagued Western thinking over the centuries. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a younger contemporary of Descartes, presented another form of dualism, the dualism of *methods*: he made a distinction between *esprit de géométrie,* the method of natural science, and *esprit de finesse,* the sensitive disposition of the heart ("gevoelige instelling…van het hart"), which is more than the difference between reason and emotion. *Hart* means for Pascal: feeling, sensing, intuitive knowledge (Van den Berg, 1973, pp. 11 – 19).

There is a tradition in the West, especially in the English world, to see only natural science as science. There is an equally long tradition of resistance to this notion. In the 19th century a brand of psychology was developed that used only the methodology of the natural sciences. This tendency was resisted by people like Percy B Shelley, whose *In defense of poetry* was published in 1840. He made a distinction between *reason*, that builds up the whole out of the parts, and *imagination,* that understands the meaning of the parts from the whole. This view stands in the tradition of Pascal who spoke of the truth of the head and the truth of the heart. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911) made the same distinction: psychology can understand something like sorrow after the death of a child by using the methods of natural science to describe aspects such as the ensuing emotions and physical processes, or it could understand the sorrow by using the methods of the *Geisteswissenshaften,* giving attention to the relations

in which the child existed and what its death means in the whole context in which it was living. Both methods are valid in a discipline such as Psychology. The insight that Psychology must not only attend to the individual as isolated object, but as a person in relation to others, led to the understanding of the importance of culture and the cultural formations of human identity (Van den Berg, 1973, pp. 40-44, 79).

This approach is expressed in Phenomenology. Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) was also in this tradition: for him, being in direct relation with the Other is the basis of all truth (Peperzak, 2007, pp. 97-99).

The question is how compatible the moderate and constructive forms of resistance to Western forms of reason in Africa are with movements in the West that also challenge the hegemony of reason.

6. Convergence between African and Western concepts of reason?

The interaction between Western and African ways of thinking that has been going on for centuries has brought about different possibilities.

The first question is whether the Western tradition that claims a place for Pascal's *esprit de finesse,* the sensitive disposition of the heart as a way of knowledge, and perhaps even some debates in quantum physics about causality and about the impact of the observer on what is observed can be related to some of the ideas of African writers. Can Levinas' view that knowledge is found in direct relation with the Other be compared to Nwoga's "rapport" for example? Such questions are not debated here, attention is rather given to what happens in practice. It can be noted, however, that Nwoga's warning that the African way of understanding cannot be described by "words that have their meaning in the language of a cultural mode of perception which is particular and rationalistic" may also apply here.

One possibility of what may happen is that mutual influence may bring the traditions closer to each other. Half a decade ago, the well-known writer Es'kia Mphahlele (1964, p. 231) wrote: "We seem to forget that our neo-African culture, by its very nature, is going to absorb much more of European techniques – a process that should not worry us, really: our writing can only be valid if it interprets contemporary society in a mode of expression that hits on the intellectual, emotional and physical planes of meaning".

Many African and Western people can agree with Prigogine (1984, pp. 34-5) that modern science has been remarkably successful in unlocking the secrets of nature and in utilizing the potentialities of nature through a strong emphasis on the superiority of reason. But this emphasis has had a reverse side: scientists tended to dismiss all the non-rational, yet vital elements of human life and reality, such as the destiny of humanity, human freedom and spontaneity.

A very important opportunity - and need - for the different ways of thinking to interact and find synergy is presented to us by the practical problems of everyday life. The Nova Institute has been engaging in trans-disciplinary research where researchers from different disciplines and people who are in the actual situation put their heads together to search for meaningful solutions to concrete problems that the people in the particular situation is struggling with. Klein (2001) describes this approach well: "The core idea of trans-disciplinarity is different academic disciplines working jointly with practitioners to solve a real-world problem".

Real-world problems in South African communities are huge and complex, and they are almost always trans-cultural in nature. The problems emerge when elements from different cultures interact, a continuous process where these elements meet and mix, seek each other out, attract and/or repel each other, combine and clash, merge and break up. There is chaos but also patterns that emerge.

It becomes a problem when the combinations that form are destructive. In order to understand what is going on and to develop life-giving combinations, a combination of insights from al the cultures that are involved is needed, from within different scientific disciplines, as well as the insights from the people in the situation, who know the practical situation from the inside. Western ways of thinking and African ways of thinking all contribute to get a grasp of the complexities of every day processes and practices in households and communities, such as practices to produce and prepare food and to care for vulnerable children.

The desired result of the trans-disciplinary process is that a life-giving domestic practice emerges or is designed that is functionally integrated into the given context. Nova sees a domestic practice as a set pattern in which different household members play different roles, making use of artefacts and products, to satisfy a fundamental need. A technical solution or artefact will only be taken up and used in daily life if it has become part of a domestic practice. It is not the technical solution on its own that is needed, it is the practice as a whole that must be developed.

In the African context, African Traditional Religion and the Christian faith form different combinations that play a pivotal role in many people's decisions about everyday practices, for better or for worse. One of the factors that hamper the potential contribution of the Christian faith is the gap between faith and practice in Christian circles.

7. The gap between faith and practice in Christian circles

In his book *De eeuw van mijn vader* Geert Mak (2009, pp. 105, 106) relates some events in Reformed circles in the Netherlands around the year 1920. The focus was on the implications of the natural sciences for the Christian faith, but, says Mak: "Here and there people whispered the name of a Swiss theologian, a certain Karl Barth, who taught that theology and every-day life should be integrated with each other" (My translation. The original reads: "Hier en daar fluisterde men de naam van een Zwitserde theoloog, een zekere Karl Barth, die leerde dat theologie en het leven van alledag in elkaars verlengde lagen"). Whispered? Is it not most obvious that theology and life, that faith and practice should be integrated with each other?

Something similar happened in Evangelical circles. According to Black (2016: 59, 60, 62) the church connected evangelism and social responsibility for most of its history. However, that changed for the evangelical church between the years 1865-1930. In this period the evangelicals' interest in social concerns had, for all practical purposes, been obliterated and the social conscience of an important part of American Evangelicalism atrophied and ceased to function.

The Reformed tradition in the Netherlands and American Evangelicalism are both later fruits of the Reformation. In 1938 Karl Barth wrote an essay *Rechfertigung und Recht* (Justification and justice; translated as Church and State). Barth said that the Reformers did not set out

what the "inner and vital connection is between the service of God in Christian living … in the worship of the Church as such, and another form of service, which may be described as a 'political' service of God …" (1960, pp. 101–102). The 'political' service of God refers to the affairs of human justice and every-day life. If there is no inner connection between the 'political' service of God and the service of God in the worship of the church, it would be possible to build a highly spiritual message and a very spiritual church with a message that 'has ceased to seek or find any entrance into the sphere of these problems of human justice'. On the other hand one can build a very effective society which has lost contact with the vital values and direction that we as humans cannot provide for ourselves.

In his book *Metabletica van de Materie* JH van den Berg (1969, p. 206 ff) provides a gripping description of the earlier antecedents of this gap in the spirituality of the West, where the church started to define faith as turning away from the world into one's inner experience, such as mysticism and the ascetic movement around the year 1 000 A.D.

Africa has not gone through this process of the secularisation of every-day life. But still, the privatised, inner spirituality that was imported by the missionaries may explain the widespread dilemma that the church is growing strongly in Africa, but with little impact on the urgent questions of the continent, such as poverty, violence and corruption. It is well illustrated by the experience of Brian McLaren in 2004 when he attended a gathering of 55 young Christians, mostly from Rwanda and Burundi, after the violence in which more than a million people died. One of the people at the conference said that he had attended church all his life, and he had only heard the message of future personal salvation from hell – no mention was ever made of the hatred and distrust between tribes, of the poverty, suffering, corruption, injustice, the violence and killing that caused the country to fall apart – *even in the weeks when the killings were going on* (McLaren, 2007, p. 19).

The former president of the Republic of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, started the movement for an African Renaissance because, in his opinion, the traditional values of black people have been destroyed by modernization, and Christianity did not fill that space because it was a "Sunday religion". (Gevisser, 2007, p. 324). There is more truth to this observation than one would have wished.

In order to play a life-giving role in the African context, the church will have to find a meaningful way to overcome such a separation of faith and practice wherever it occurs.

8. A way forward

To say that all religions are paths up the same mountain is, in fact, crypto-exclusivist, because it implies that there is only one truth that you posit or assume, even if there are different paths to that one truth. If one recognises the integrity of religious ways in themselves, it becomes clear that they may not be after the same kind of final fulfilment. *Nirvana* is the religious end of Buddhism, for Hinduism it is complete absorption into the One. (We can add: Traditional African Religion sees the continuation of life in your offspring and in the cyclical journey between the living and the ancestors, also called the living-dead: if you have children, you become an ancestor when you die. And a child that is born comes from the ancestors.) Only Christianity presents *salvation,* that can be described as "a perfect communion of human beings with God, each other and God's creation, and this can only be reached through faith in

Jesus Christ and following him as disciple" (Bevans and Schroeder, 2009, pp. 380, 381, following S. Mark Heim).

The Christian message of salvation has been expressed in numerous religious formations. Not all would describe the message of salvation as is done in the previous paragraph. In South Africa, there is a wide range of spiritualities: there are thousands of African Initiated Churches who operate in the thought-patterns and symbolic horizon of Traditional African Religion and culture, spanning from those who are highly syncretistic to those who see the traditional religion as demonic; there are the churches that stand in the tradition of the different Western churches, and there are Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The influence of the prosperity gospel is widely felt across the spectrum.

All of these are expressed in different practices and have a different impact on every-day life.

It seems important that, in the trans-disciplinary search for domestic practices that would improve people's quality of life, African Traditional Religion and the Christian faith in particular should also be involved, in different ways and for different reasons: for people in the situation to express their views; to understand what is happening in practice from a phenomenological point of view; and from a general ethical point of view, to improve the quality of life of the people involved. The specific mission of the Christians involved can be described as an obligation to promote the flowing of life, and to try to understand and communicate, within the specific context, the meaning of the statement of Jesus in John 10:10, in a context long ago where death and life were also in grim opposition: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

9. A practical example of a life-giving practice

Globally as well as in Southern Africa the level of domestic wood use has become unsustainable. It is estimated that two to three billion people around the world still make use of traditional cooking methods that require biomass for fuel.

In the Lowveld of South Africa, adjacent to the Kruger National Park, a not-for profit company, Nova, set out in 2010 to embark with about 20 residents of Molati, a rural village in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, to design a stove that can be built and maintained with the materials, skills and finances available to these residents.

First of all, notice was taken of a large number of stoves that are produced and sold worldwide. Six stoves that were representative of the most important available models were purchased and a group of about twenty residents of Molati used and evaluated the stoves.

None of the stoves complied with the requirements of the residents. In the process of evaluating different designs the group started to think of the possibility that they can build a stove for themselves according to their own requirements, using materials that are locally available (e.g. cow dung, clay, salt, water, etc.) and skills that people normally use to build their own homes. This means that the residents "saw" the idea of an improved stove as a possibility for themselves and began to design ways in which this idea could work in their context.

Technical expertise from outside the community and the insight in the local context from within the community were combined to design a stove together.

Initially, five different prototypes of the locally built stove were designed and implemented in households where they were evaluated, compared, redesigned and iterated until a final prototype emerged. When most of the group had used this prototype for almost a year, this model was identified as the one to take to scale. That was the first milepost: the technical solution had been taken up into a domestic practice of at least one representative household – in this case nearly twenty!

The next phase was to find ways to take the stove to enough households in a given community to make a significant contribution to the impact of wood use on the local environment, and to generate carbon credits in order to get finance to take the stove to many communities. The process is still underway. So far, the stove has been taken to more than 5000 households, not by selling stoves as products, but by community projects where people were assisted to build their own stoves and use them and maintain them themselves.

The whole process was driven and managed out of the local congregation.

Different elements from outside and from inside the community were combined with each other through a process where a certain type of reason and faith played a role. The result was that a certain domestic practice was designed that is being used by a number of households.

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