

Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu:

The *ubuntu* philosophy and the anti-apartheid rhetoric
of Desmond Tutu

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by

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A thesis presented for the B.A. degree

with Honors in

The Department of English

University of Michigan

Spring 2007

Dedicated to those who, in their wisdom, dream.

Acknowledgements

This finished project has been over one year in the making. In the months since its inception, dozens of people have left their mark—consciously or otherwise—on my ideas and writing. I thank my family for encouraging my development as a unique, independent-minded human being from my earliest years. I thank Alisse Portnoy, my thesis advisor, for her patience and insight throughout the entire process—your help has proven invaluable. I thank Joshua Miller and Scottie Parrish, my thesis instructors, for their humor, wisdom, and uncanny ability to strike courage in the hearts of anxious, sleep-deprived students. I thank Dennis Brutus who, with unbelievable energy and an unwavering commitment to humanistic ideals, first sparked my interest in this subject. I thank my friends, and particularly my three wonderful roommates, for tolerating the chaos and disorganization that have billowed around me like a cloud these past few months. I thank Jarod for his loving and unconditional support in this and every other endeavor—you have been more of an inspiration to me than you will ever know. And to every other person who has been involved in the process of my research and writing: I deeply appreciate every contribution you have provided, and though you are not named individually, I will never forget your role in the shaping of my life and work.

Abstract

The story of South Africa's decades-long struggle against the apartheid system is a complex interplay among all elements of society: politicians and religious leaders, tradition and modernity, the secular and the spiritual. This paper examines one of the most prominent figures of the opposition, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and his rhetorical conjunction of Christian theology with *ubuntu* philosophy. Tutu embodied the essence of the "politically religious" leader, utilizing the precepts of both Christian theology and pre-colonial African philosophy.

Africa's foundational philosophical traditions were at the heart of Tutu's anti-apartheid rhetoric. The central tenet of the so-called *ubuntu* philosophy, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, literally translates to "a person is a person through persons." The philosophy is inherently humanistic and pacifistic, a worldview based on the belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of all human beings. Throughout his numerous speeches and sermons vilifying the apartheid regime, Desmond Tutu merged the profound universal truths he found in the *ubuntu* philosophy with his deeply-ingrained convictions of Christian spirituality. The result of this mediation, I argue, is a unique rhetoric of resistance in fundamental opposition both to the secular National Party government and to the reactive church leaders implicitly supporting the apartheid system. In addition, I propose that the *ubuntu* philosophy itself followed a path of exploitation, re-evaluation, and resurrection as the post-colonial South African nation moved from the apartheid system into a more democratic, racially equitable society.

The trajectory of this paper follows parallel lines of development—the most important historical events that contributed to the rise, peak, and decline of the apartheid system; and, concurrently, the growing philosophical importance of *ubuntu* in the context of apartheid legislation and within Desmond Tutu's rhetoric of opposition and reconciliation. In the first chapter, I examine the philosophical underpinnings of the apartheid system. I argue that two of the key bodies of apartheid legislation—namely, the Pass Laws and the Homeland Acts—are actually reflective the *ubuntu* conceptions of community and humanity, though these ideas are exploited (however unconsciously) by the apartheid government.

In the second chapter, I move into a discussion of Desmond Tutu's anti-apartheid rhetoric, primarily from two speeches given in the mid-1980s. Part I examines the dichotomous development of the South African Christian church along political lines. In Part II, I argue that the *ubuntu* philosophy was intrinsically important to Desmond Tutu's conception of humanity and community—Christian theology alone does not encompass his complex understanding of morality and justice. In the third chapter, I examine two rhetorical pieces by Desmond Tutu in the years following the official conclusion of the apartheid regime. I argue that the *ubuntu* philosophy has remained crucially important within the post-apartheid rhetoric, though its conceptualization has expanded into the international arena as a viable model for community and human relationships.

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Short Titles

AH: Omond, Roger. *The Apartheid Handbook*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1985.

UB: Shutte, Augustine. *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa*.

Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001.

POL: Thompson, Leonard. *South African Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

RP: Tutu, Desmond. *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

WDT: Tutu, Desmond. *The Words of Desmond Tutu*. Selected by Naomi Tutu. New York: Newmarket Press, 1989.

Introduction

“Once a Zambian and a South African were talking. The Zambian boasted about their Minister of Naval Affairs. The South African asked, 'But you have no navy, no access to the sea. How then can you have a Minister of Naval Affairs?' The Zambian retorted: 'Well, in South Africa you have a Minister of Justice, don't you' (Tutu, *Words* 41)?

Of all the controversial political and social ideologies of the twentieth century, one of the most widely discussed—and remembered—was that of the apartheid system of South Africa. The overt racism, ubiquitous discrimination, and overt violence inherent in the apartheid system placed it in the seat of contention the world over. Moreover, the courageous and unrelenting voices of the resistance—notably, Nelson Mandela and the Archbishop Desmond Tutu—launched the issue into the international arena. The apartheid system evolved throughout the twentieth century from a domestically contentious situation into the epitomizing case of the dangers of injustice and intolerance; throughout the entire process—and continuing into the present time—South Africa became a favorite topic of researchers, activists, journalists, artists, politicians, and writers of all kinds. A prime reason contributing to the apartheid system's continued presence in the international legal, intellectual, and creative spheres lies, arguably, in its enduring capability to spur thought-provoking, timely, and universally relevant questions about the human condition. How should society be arranged in order to prevent such a system from taking root? What is the most effective form of government?

How should human beings interact with each other, and how important are distinctions of race, class, etc.?

Though these questions are infinitely fascinating and worthy of philosophical inquiry, I have embarked on this project with quite different motives. The questions I ask are inquiries into the philosophical life of South Africa even before such a nation existed. My early research uncovered the exceedingly interesting and complex philosophy of *ubuntu*, the pervading ideology of the pre-colonial village society throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Even more remarkable than the intricacies of the philosophy itself is the continued influence it holds within the society of South Africa. Consciously or otherwise, for example, the apartheid government's language in a great deal of the system's legislation—namely, the Pass Laws and the Homelands Act—is informed by the *ubuntu* conceptions of community and individuality. Moreover, the traditional philosophy speaks in the background of a large portion of anti-apartheid discourse. Sometimes overtly, often subtly, the *ubuntu* philosophy is wound inexorably throughout South African rhetoric.

One of the best examples of this phenomenon, and the focus of much of this project, is the rhetoric of Desmond Tutu. Born in 1931 in northern South Africa, Tutu became a schoolteacher, an Anglican parish priest, the Bishop of Lesotho, the Secretary-General of the South African Council of Churches, and the first black bishop of Johannesburg before ascending to the position of Archbishop in 1986. Unabashedly faithful to his Christian beliefs, Tutu nevertheless tempered his anti-apartheid religious theology with the language and ideology of *ubuntu*. His

speeches and sermons have been admired all over the world, and he has often been deemed the icon of reconciliatory politics—indeed, the virtual embodiment of the *ubuntu* ethic. This project will delve into the language of Tutu's rhetoric, from his Nobel Prize acceptance speech of 1984 to his foreword in the Truth and Reconciliation Final Report, composed several years before the turn of the century.

I argue that the *ubuntu* philosophy, far from an archaic holdover of pre-colonial society, was first exploited by the apartheid government itself. From this corruption and through the rhetoric of Desmond Tutu, the ideology re-emerged and was interwoven with Christian theology into a language of opposition. Finally, after the officially legislated end of apartheid, the importance of the *ubuntu* philosophy did not diminish—in fact, the perceived ramifications of the ideology were expanded into more generalized discussions of international relations and social theory. In the post-apartheid context, I argue, Desmond Tutu became an icon of the resurrection of *ubuntu*—not solely the spokesman or figurehead of the ideology, but an example (albeit a well-known one) of the potential applications of *ubuntu* to modern society.

Chapter 1

“One’s full potential of being-human”:

The interwoven ideologies of *ubuntu* and apartheid

I. *Ubuntu*: An African tradition

“*Ubuntu* is the essence of being a person. It means that we are people through other people. We cannot be fully human alone. We are made for interdependence, we are made for family. When you have *ubuntu*, you embrace others” (Tutu, *Peace* par. 17). So attempts Desmond Tutu to articulate a deep-seated conviction of the human condition, a certainty of the fundamental interconnectedness of all human beings. Written in the early years of the twenty-first century, these words speak to the Archbishop’s decades-long legacy of relating traditional African thought to modern political and social concerns—most notably, in his widely publicized campaign against the South African apartheid system. Tutu draws on the traditional language and value system of sub-Saharan Africa, often known simply by its key philosophical construct, *ubuntu*. While it is admittedly impossible to express fully an entire region’s worldview within one schematic, the peoples of southern Africa do share remarkably similar ideas regarding humanity, community, and individuality. It is partially from within this traditional framework that Tutu interprets the injustices perpetrated in the name of apartheid—and his own role in challenging his country’s legal structure.

What, then, are the central tenets of the *ubuntu* philosophy, and why is it so crucial to understanding modern South African society? A significant difficulty in discussing the nature of *ubuntu* lies in its somewhat ambiguous, even mysterious, roots within African culture. The philosophy developed in a “pre-literate, pre-scientific, pre-industrial” era, and as such, lacks any comprehensive code or foundational leader (UB 9). It was the prevailing ideology in the village society of pre-colonized Africa, more accurately conceived as a collection of insights about humanity than a set of rules for conduct or social order. Despite the challenge this blurred history presents to the modern scholar, much of *ubuntu*’s complexity can be unraveled from the widely propagated Zulu phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, most commonly translated as “persons depend on persons to be persons.”¹ The Sotho aphorism *motho ke motho ka batho* expresses a similar sentiment. Furthermore, the Shona language of Zimbabwe contains an analogous concept, *unhu*, with the corresponding phrase *munhu munhu nevanhu*. Virtually every language of sub-Saharan Africa—including Xhosa, Swazi, Ndebele, and Bhaca, among others—expresses the idea of *ubuntu* and a belief in the universality of the truths it represents (Ngubane 64). Despite the pervasiveness of the concepts encompassed within the *ubuntu* philosophy, however, only in recent decades have scholars and philosophers demonstrated a concerted effort to analyze the philosophy and its implications within the social and political milieu of South Africa. Examined in the context of the apartheid system, the *ubuntu* philosophy is

strikingly politicized and remarkably applicable to both the foundations and ramifications of the system.

Augustine Shutte, a prominent South African philosopher of the twentieth century, addresses many aspects of the African philosophical tradition in his *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a Modern South Africa* and *Philosophy for Africa*. The basic questions he seeks to answer are crucial to the concerns of human rights and social harmony that interest social activists like Desmond Tutu: how does interdependence function within society, particularly in the development of personhood and the maintenance of the community body? Even more fundamentally, what is the nature of personhood itself? That is, what does it mean to *be* a human being? These questions become even more significant in the context of the highly stratified, segregated, and prejudiced system of apartheid in South Africa. Indeed, the viability of the entire governmental structure rests on the answers; in this political and social environment, the systemic categorization of race, the hierarchical structure of society, and the relationships among disparate groups of human beings were ever at the forefront of the nation's consciousness.

Aside from any specific political situation, the idea of interdependence is an integral concept in the African understanding of the individual's place within society. The central ideological concept, *ubuntu*, encompasses the African sense of the proper ordering of individual and community, as well as the ideal relationship between the "parts of the whole." The Zulu phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*—persons depend on persons to be persons—indicates that an individual exists only

insofar as he or she holds a place as a member of a community. According to Shutte, “personhood comes as a gift from other persons...each person is a focus of shifting forces, changing as they change, existing only as part of the different relationships that bind us to others” (UB 12). In making a claim to personhood, a human cannot depend solely on one’s own actions, thoughts, or philosophy; rather, one is dependent on those in the community, other human beings, for a true selfhood. Without relationships with other human beings, an individual can never achieve full humanity.

According to the *ubuntu* philosophy, personhood evolves throughout the course of a lifetime, and every new encounter with another human being contributes ever more to one’s own development as a human. At birth, one is only “potentially a person.” One’s lifetime is conceived as a “continual becoming more of a person” as more and more relationships are established and developed (UB 12). Consider, by illustration, the myriad of interpersonal dynamics that occur within the life of one person. A man’s relationship with his mother, for instance, occupies a separate part of his life and involves different emotions and patterns of behavior than his relationship with his wife. One part of his self, then, develops from his interactions with his mother, while another—very separate and unique—part of his self arises from his relationship with his wife. Moreover, the relationship with his mother has been ongoing since birth, while that with his wife may have been initiated relatively recently. The man has, therefore, a distinct part of his self that corresponds with his maternal relationship, and a quite separate part corresponding to his marital

relationship. This example is drastically simplified, however, as the typical human being develops from countless social interactions formed over the course of many years. Essentially, each self is actually the amalgamation of the various relationships that develop between the individual and others throughout life. Each relationship does not independently constitute a separate “self,” but nevertheless, each is indispensable in constituting an individual’s overall humanity, or uniquely defined “selfhood.”

One implication of this philosophy is that the sense of self cannot arise from any characteristic or trait inherent *within* the individual. In other words, “persons are not defined by this or that natural property or set of properties but by the relationship between them and others” (Shutte, *Philosophy* 46). Under the African conception of humanity, then, a person’s unique personality or attributes must continually be set in relation to others’ in order for either to claim full humanity. Another African philosopher, Ifeanyi Menkiti, draws a distinction between seemingly individualized human traits and actual selfhood: though a single person may possess unique attributes that seem to suggest autonomy and individual subjectivity—rationality, will, memory, and so on—these are merely “isolated, static qualities” and do not in themselves define personhood (175). A newborn infant is not a full person in the way that an elderly man or woman is; for the same reason, an independently-minded, aloof, and solitary individual cannot make the same claims to personhood as can a more extroverted and socialized individual. Thus the stakes of human relationships extend much deeper than purely emotional or social

support; the presence of others is crucially important throughout life because, quite simply, one's humanity depends on it.

At first glance, the community-oriented nature of the African *ubuntu* philosophy seems to bear a close resemblance to the more communal systems of the West – namely, Communism and Socialism. However, crucial differences exist in the systems' conceptions of personhood itself, and, by extension, society as a whole. The Western philosophies typically regard the self as *internal* to the person, holding the life essence, mental powers, and fundamentally “human” elements of the individual.² While the African tradition holds that a person develops continually throughout life, and only as the multitude and depth of personal relationships grows, these Western worldviews conceive the individual as an autonomous being, one that can thrive and grow even in relative social isolation. In fact, the social growth of an individual in this Western context—that is, the ability to interact with others in a way that facilitates friendly relations and mutual goodwill—is but one aspect of a human being's development throughout life. In the absence of a defined need for interdependence, Western philosophy grants the individual a freer reign over the course of his or her life, without the dire results implied by the *ubuntu* philosophy's utter dependence on others for existence as a “whole” human being.

This idea of the interdependence of human beings raises interesting issues when considering the nature of personhood itself. As the previous discussion suggests, one implication of the pervading African philosophy is the conception of the self as residing separate or “outside” the person. Because the self only develops

in relation to others, it is inherently *external* to the physicality of the individual. As Shutte explains, “in African thought [the self] is seen as ‘outside,’ subsisting in relationship to what is other, the natural and social environment” (Shutte, *Philosophy* 47). This premise of the “external self” also helps to explain why two different human beings, though physically the same age, may actually show a disparity in the degree to which they have become “human.” The functioning, dynamic, and developing self – that is, the self as a social entity in relation to everyone else – is not merely the “self” implied by a physical body. The true “self,” the self capable of growth and maturation, is only defined in the context of one’s community.

Another crucial difference between Western collectivist ideologies and the African *ubuntu* philosophy lies in the differing perceptions of community itself. A distinction exists in the nature of the community established within the *ubuntu* understanding and that which springs from the more individualistic societies of the West. Ifeanyi Menkiti differentiates the two worldviews by describing African collectivism in terms of incorporating “an organic dimension in the relationship between the component individuals,” creating a “collectivity in the truest sense.” Western collectivist systems, however, are simply characterized by the “aggregated sum of individuals” (Menkiti 178). In other words, African society necessitates constant interactions and interdependencies among each of the individuals contained within the whole. Each member is responsible for the development and growth of every other member. Shutte asserts that the best model for

understanding the African community according to the *ubuntu* philosophy is “by visualizing it as a *single person*. Each individual is then related to the community, not as a part to the whole, but as a person is related to themselves ... Each individual sees every other individual member as *another self*” (UB 27). The society thus exists, not as a collection of distinct units organized according to the needs of productivity and efficiency, but as an ever-changing and evolving body—an irreducible whole.

The idea of selfhood embodied in *ubuntu* thus gives rise to a greater sense of community and interconnectedness than is found in many Western, individual-oriented philosophies. According to the German historian Christoph Marx, the “heterogeneity” of Western individualism is “understood to be the antithesis of the intimacy and harmony that constitutes ‘the community’ in the African village” (Marx 53). Because individuals sharing in the African worldview require an extended social environment in which and by which to develop their own selfhood, one’s community takes on a crucial significance. In recent years, the term “African socialism” has been used to describe the unique systems of government founded in several African nations with this philosophy in mind. According to Léopold Senghor, the first president of Senegal and a staunch supporter of African socialism, this particular brand of collectivism is distinguished by its “theory of the tendency of all peoples to communicate, to merge and eventually to become a universal community. This is what [is understood] by African socialism...‘the civilization of the universal’” (*Socialism* 18). The ideal African community, founded

on the principles of *ubuntu*, provides the means for individuals to develop their own personhood while simultaneously looking ahead to a time of universal harmony and coexistence within the entire “organism” of humanity.

A sense of dynamism and vitality is also inherent within the *ubuntu* philosophy of sub-Saharan Africa. The worldview is decidedly vision-driven and focused on the continual growth and development of each constituent part of the organic community. *Ubuntu* teaches that a human being does not simply exist; it must *become*. Furthermore, constant interaction and mutuality define the relationship between individuals and society as a whole. Shutte references several philosophers who point to the innumerable interactions and acts of cooperation between a society’s people as the necessary conditions for the continued existence of the whole. Vincent Mulago, an African theologian writing in the mid-twentieth century, asserts that mutual participation “is the pivot of relationships between members of the same community, the link which binds together individuals and groups, the ultimate meaning not only of the unity which is personal to each man (person) but of that unity in multiplicity, that totality” (Mulago 140). Speaking from much the same position, Senghor distinguishes the *ubuntu* philosophy from European collectivism in that it is “based both on the community and on the person and ... because [the traditional African society] was founded on dialogue and reciprocity, the group had priority over the individual without crushing him, but allowing him to blossom as a person” (*Humanism* 5).

Senghor's statement points to an important facet of the human-society relationship under the *ubuntu* philosophy: the power of a community to directly refine, nurture, and cultivate each individual within it. As the community—that is, the “greater self”—improves, so must the individuals within it, as microcosms of the whole. Society “enables the person to grow in his knowledge...to teach and enable him to discover more satisfying dimensions of being human...[to realize] the promise of being human and the glory of being a self-defining value” (Ngubane 80). The ideal relationship between the individual and the community, though complex and nuanced, is unmistakably beneficial for every person's journey to a higher stage of development—the “promise” of which Ngubane writes. The interdependence of humans, the crux of the *ubuntu* philosophy, ensures that each person is a healthier, more satisfied, and more complete unit within the overall framework of society.

Within Senghor's statement, however, lurks a more cynical interpretation of the relationship between individual humans and their society. The *ubuntu* philosophy certainly recognizes the potential for “self-definition,” for human beings to develop individual strengths, interests, and characteristics in a continual symbiosis with all other humans. As Senghor admits, however, the group—society—still maintains priority over the individual. Within a philosophy that understands individuality only in the context of relationships and interactions with others, can an autonomous, independent person even exist? Can we even speak of the “self” as a concept external to the community? The implicit subordination of the individual to society within the *ubuntu* philosophy, while useful in discouraging

selfishness and promoting a feeling of unity and harmony among human beings, nevertheless introduces the potential for undermining the integrity and humanity of individuals for the sake of the “greater good.” If the person—existing only insofar as the community exists—is not an end in herself, she may find her very *selfhood* in a tenuous position.

Beyond mere philosophical musings, the implications of the *ubuntu* worldview have very real consequences when applied to the development of the apartheid system in South Africa. Examined through the lens of *ubuntu* tradition and the philosophy’s pervasive influence throughout African society, the apartheid ideology becomes ever more complex and intriguing.

II. The politicization of philosophy

Some philosophers—even Shutte himself, albeit obliquely—have suggested that the *ubuntu* philosophy had all but disappeared from the people’s consciousness by the twentieth century. I argue, however, that the traditional African philosophy was never completely crushed by the onset of colonization and the influx of European ideas. Instead, the notions imbedded within the traditional society, particularly the conceptions of individuality and the relationship between people and community, informed the development and implementation of a great deal of apartheid legislation. Though the National government made no claim to upholding the philosophical legacy of pre-colonial African society, its policies nevertheless reflected a recognition of the *ubuntu* worldview. The Pass Laws are a prime example of such exploitation, though other pieces of legislation—like the

Homelands Act—also utilized traditional ideas within the racially oppressive system. It is within this philosophical framework that the later anti-apartheid rhetoric of Desmond Tutu must be examined.

The roots of the apartheid system in South Africa extend to the early years of European colonization. Though “apartheid” as a legal construct did not officially exist until the mid-twentieth century, a hierarchical classification of races—each with its corresponding rights and privileges, or lack thereof—was recognized for centuries. The first phase of white settlement in South Africa commenced in 1652 in the western Cape, where immigrants from Germany, France, and the Netherlands established what would eventually become the Afrikaner nation.³ Meanwhile, some bands of Khoikhoi—the nomadic sheep herders indigenous to southern Africa—were pushed northward by the European settlers, while others chose to remain in the increasingly colonized areas as shepherds and cattle-herders to the white farmers (POL 24). The San peoples—hunters by tradition, and commonly referred to as the ‘Bushmen’ by white settlers—were nearly all killed trying to resist the European “encroachment”; those who survived were conquered by the nineteenth century. The Dutch East India Company, the ruling power in the western Cape until 1795, also imported thousands of slaves from tropical Africa, Malagasy, and Southeast Asia. These slaves, gradually intermixing with whites, Khoikhoi, and other groups, formed the basis of the present-day Coloured (or mixed) racial group in South Africa (Elphick 52).

The second phase of white settlement took place between 1795 and 1910. The European immigrants during this period hailed primarily from Britain, especially after the discovery of diamonds in Griqualand West and gold in Witwatersrand in 1867 and 1886, respectively (POL 25). Until this point, many of the Bantu peoples of southern Africa—the indigenous farming peoples, ancestors to the present-day African ethnic population—had been able to resist most infringements on their home territories. Gradually, however, a series of armed clashes with both Afrikaner and British forces began to strangle the natives' hold on the land. By the twentieth century, the Bantu peoples had been pushed into the areas comprising modern-day Lesotho, Botswana, and half of Swaziland, as well as the areas that were to become "African reserves" in South Africa. These territories were grossly inadequate for providing even subsistence, and many Africans were compelled to seek employment on white-owned farms; they were returned to their "home" areas when they were no longer needed (Thompson, *Mythology* 26). Thus the region comprising present-day South Africa was characteristically mixed-race from the beginnings of European immigration, and the close contact between disparate ethnic groups inevitably contributed to tensions and outright hostility (POL 28).

Indeed, this trend toward racial segregation—pursued in policy in both religious and secular life since the earliest years of colonization in South Africa—was escalating by the 1940s. In 1948, the National Party was elected to power with the "mandate to ensure white supremacy in perpetuity" (RP 4), and it

systematically passed dozens of laws that would form the basis of the apartheid system. The government called for the classification of every individual by race—White, African, Indian, or Coloured—and officially criminalized all interracial sex and marriage, enforced the separation of public facilities, legislated the segregation of urban workplaces, and banned multiracial trade unions (RP 4). Of the various legislation passed in support of ethnically-based discrimination, arguably no group of laws was more notorious or oppressive than the Pass Laws. This body of legislation, enacted mainly in the late 1940s through the early 1960s, effectively grouped every South African individual into a distinct racial or ethnic category. Beginning with the National Party's rise to power, the Pass Laws mandated the exclusion of all non-whites from designated "white areas," except those carrying proper identification, or "passes." Defined by the government-appointed Fagan Commission of 1948, a pass was carried only by members of a particular race, restricted the bearer's freedom of movement, and was to be carried on the individual at all times, thus obligating him or her to produce it on demand to police or government officials (AH 107). Failure to carry a pass often resulted in heavy fines and jail sentences. Continuing through the early 1980s, roughly 250,000 people were arrested every year in violation of the Pass Laws (RP 4). Quite predictably, the racial groups targeted by the Pass Laws were the African and Coloured populations—the vast majority of the South African populace.

Given the mixed identities and diverse histories of South Africa's people, upon what basis were the racial categorizations founded? The answer lies in an

interesting mixture of eugenics, Afrikaner nationalism, and traditional African conceptions of individuality. Since the commencement of European colonization, the non-white populations in the areas around the Cape had been categorized in part based on their biological features. In this respect, the racial differentiation was quite similar to other categorization prevalent throughout much of Europe in the post-Enlightenment period. Africans—sometimes referred to as Blacks, Bantus, or Natives—and Coloured (mixed) individuals were often identified on the basis of fingernail color, forehead size, or hair texture (AH 22).⁴ The stereotypically non-European features of the indigenous peoples, as well as the descendants of slaves and those of mixed backgrounds, sentenced many to a lifetime of exclusion and systematized oppression.

The legalized classification of races extended beyond these superficially visible traits, however, into a system unique to the nation of South Africa. Beginning with the Population Registration Act of 1950 and extending into an amendment in 1952, the apartheid government revised the means by which persons were classified. These laws established the policy of considering both appearance *and* acceptance when classifying an individual's race (AH 22). Put simply, not only one's physical traits, but also the opinions and beliefs of the surrounding community must be consulted when making the decision. If the two criteria ever conflicted, the generally accepted race of the person—that is, the identity of the individual *as decided by the community*, regardless of the person's personal beliefs about his or her own identity—was considered foremost (AH 22). Implicit in this

notion was the belief “that only identification with one’s own ethnic community was authentic” (Giliomee 381). These policies applied to both white and non-white classifications, particularly in cases wherein the racial identities of the parents were unknown or unclear. According to the Act, for example, a white person is one who is “generally accepted as a white person and is not in appearance obviously not a white person” (AH 22). Though the wording of the laws allowed the South African courts a high degree of flexibility in determining the “general acceptance” of an individual, more important is the idea of *community acceptance* itself as a viable means of establishing race.

Indeed, one of the principle conceptions of the traditional *ubuntu* philosophy is that of community—in particular, the role of the community in shaping the essence and humanity of every individual within it. A single human being within this philosophical system is, admittedly, inherently subordinate to the greater community. However, several modern philosophers have argued convincingly that a certain level of individual autonomy exists within the *ubuntu* worldview. How this individuality is developed and expressed can differ among various people, but the root cause of this individualism is invariably the community. Through others, an individual grows in his or her self-knowledge and self actualization; in the process of becoming more connected with the surrounding world, he or she quite literally increases his or her own humanity.⁵

The idea of an individual gaining more autonomy and growing in self-realization only as he or she is influenced more and more by the surrounding

community is, needless to say, quite paradoxical on first examination. The fluid relationship between the person and society—that is, between the part and the whole body—is complex and interdependent. As Shutte conceives, perhaps the “unified dichotomy” can best be understood by studying the idea of the “mutual gaze,” exemplified in the work of John Heron during the 1960s and 1970s. Heron speculated on the differences between the eyes and their gaze. When looking at another individual, one is able to stare directly into one or both eyes; the impression this action makes, however, is quite different when one shifts attention to the other’s actual *gaze*, which may be experienced without staring directly at the eyes themselves. In the other’s gaze, one finds both “her presence as a person and the fact that she is looking at you ... You see a person. And at the same time *you become conscious of yourself as the one who is looked at* [emphasis mine]” (Shutte, *Philosophy* 78). This idea of the mutuality of gazing illustrates the fundamental principle of relationships within the *ubuntu* philosophy: an individual becomes self-conscious only in the presence of others, through interactions that simultaneously recognize the individuality of the other person. One sees oneself in the other’s eyes; in looking at another person, one is essentially seeing oneself reflected back. This self-realization is a primary key in the process of becoming human, and without the context of other human beings—that is, the community—such development is impossible.

Jordan Ngubane, a twentieth-century Zulu novelist and scholar, offers a slightly different yet similar interpretation of the self-realization of individuals

through community within the *ubuntu* philosophy. For Ngubane, the process of developing self-consciousness cannot occur naturally through the daily interactions between people, but must be pursued consciously with the goal of sharpening mental acuity and increasing one's knowledge. An individual has the potential to be a self-sustaining unit, though only through a life of discipline and recognition of one's dependence on others. In traditional African society,

his ignorance was the only factor that limited his adequacy. To overcome the weakness, he had to regard his neighbor's mind as an open book of discovered knowledge; to recognize his neighbor as the reverse side of an entity to which he (the person) was the obverse ... To cope with the demands of these freely imposed disciplines was the glory of being a self-defining value. (79)

Thus the individual does not merely learn *from* other people, but *through* them as well. Every human being is a member of a larger body, the "entity," and only by recognizing the inherent connections between oneself and the community can one develop a sense of self and a personal conviction as a "self-defining value." At this fundamental level, Shutte and Ngubane agree: without the community, a person can never fulfill the full potential of personhood. Only through others can one fully understand one's identity.

The system of racial classification in South Africa, executed and legislated formally via the Pass Laws, was much indebted to this conception of community preceding individual identity. In many instances throughout the decades of apartheid rule, individuals were re-categorized according to the beliefs of those in

their communities, whose judgment was deemed more legitimate than any individual's. In one such case in 1981, a woman was convicted for living in a "white" area. Though the woman was previously thought to be white, the magistrate argued that she was Coloured, pointing to her "flat nose, wavy hair, pale skin, and high cheekbones." The Supreme Court overturned the conviction, however, after it became clear that the woman was 'generally accepted' as white (AH 22). Of course, 'general acceptance' and appearance often went hand-in-hand, but when in doubt, the government usually opted to accept the precedent set by the individual's community.

Thus the relationships between human beings affected the existence of the individual under the apartheid system in very real and lasting ways. Racial and ethnic classification determined nearly every aspect of life throughout most of the twentieth century in South Africa—from the quality of education and healthcare, to job access and housing location. In granting the community the right to identify its members, at least in theory, the government effectively transferred much responsibility to society; its culpability was, by extension, shared by every individual within the whole. Though the apartheid government certainly passed the oppressive legislation separating the races into inferior and superior categories, lumping the majority of the population into a small portion of the available land area, and systematically suppressing the use of native languages within the educational system, the actual categorization of the population was seemingly outside its direct control. Though the intentionality of the apartheid government in

exploiting the *ubuntu* philosophy is certainly up for questioning, the language of the legislation—namely, the subordinate and contingent relationship established between the individual and society—indicates an internalization of the traditional African worldview.

How could such a philosophical tradition as *ubuntu*, with widespread connotations of harmony, cooperation, and societal tranquility, be used as the rhetorical foundation of such a divisive political system? The answer lies in the concept of race itself, both in the *ubuntu* philosophy and in the Euro-centric, Afrikaner worldview. Biological differences in race were simply not an important part of the *ubuntu* code in pre-colonial African society, nor are such traits salient within a modern conception of the philosophy. In its pre-colonial conception, *ubuntu* even represents “a form of friendship that transcends differences of origin and culture” (UB 186). The invocation of “community” refers not only to those people most similar in appearance and background to oneself, but all of humanity. While this worldview was obviously idealized and difficult to implement within a society marked by such diversity, the idea was still present in the consciousness of Africans, regardless of whether they followed the principles in practice (Ngubane 141).

To this ingrained consciousness—the awareness of *ubuntu* as the ideal model for society and the individual’s reliance on the community for development and self-realization—was melded Afrikaner nationalism and fear. Many twentieth century writers have commented on the extent to which a particular “mythology of

nationhood" contributed to the development of the apartheid system as a means of cultural self-preservation. Indeed, by 1960, Whites comprised less than one-fifth of the total population, with Africans standing at nearly 70% (POL 35). Numerical inferiority, coupled with a sense of "mystery" surrounding the native populations, who had lived largely separated from the White population since the eighteenth century, produced in the ruling class a widespread distrust and insecurity about the tenuousness of their position. In addition, many Whites were taught a mythologized history of their origins in South Africa and they believed that the Dutch were in fact some of the first inhabitants of the Cape (Thompson, *Mythology* 29).⁶ Other histories focused on the "civilizing" effects of the Europeans, without whom, it was surmised, the continent of Africa would have forever remained "barbaric and ungodly." Accepting this premise, many European colonists embraced the argument for the dominance of Whites in civic life (du Toit 626). From geographic division and power inequities inevitably sprung the notion of racial superiority. According to Leonard Thompson, writing in the 1980s, "to legitimate the policy of *apartheid* (separateness) or "separate development," the mythology presents the African inhabitants as a totally distinct subspecies of humanity...deemed to comprise ten distinct 'nations'" (Thompson, *Mythology* 29). Once the native Africans were no longer considered to be the same type of people as the Whites, then, the nationalist ideology was able to take a firm foothold in the Afrikaners' consciousness.

Instead of overtly translating a sense of racial superiority directly into a body of legislation, however, the apartheid government—the National Party—worded the Pass Laws so that that the Africans *themselves* were the main source of justifying an individual's racial categorization. The individuality of a single human being, including his or her self-perceptions of race or ethnic origin, was to be determined primarily by his or her community. In the 1930s Nicholas Diederichs, a South African professor of philosophy and soon to become the State President, characterized the human identity in language remarkably similar to that of the *ubuntu* philosophers:

The individual or human being as such is an abstraction that does not exist in reality. Outside of the community ... the human being is not really human. Because he is a social being by nature he is and becomes human only within human community ... But more than that. The human being is not just a social being; he is also a national being ... and without the elevating, ennobling, and enriching influence of this most comprehensive community, which we call the nation, the human being can never develop the full potential of his being-human. (qtd. in Marx 57)

Diederichs later became well-known for his staunchly pro-apartheid stances as a member of the National Party government (Manning 141). His reliance on both African philosophy and the rhetoric of nationalism was nothing new within the academic and political realm of South Africa, and it is this exploitation of

traditional principles—however unconscious—which lends a decidedly unique flavor to the South African situation.

Besides the system of racial classification via the “general acceptance” of the community and the resulting Pass Laws, another body of legislation exemplifies the National Party’s ideology of racial distinction and its connection to traditional *ubuntu* philosophy: the Homeland Acts, beginning with the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959. This Act prohibited Africans from electing four representatives (all Whites) into the Senate, a right that had remained the Natives’ last meaningful opportunity for civic involvement. Most importantly, the Homelands legislation provided for the “full political development [of Africans] including the option of sovereign independence based in their traditional territories” (AH 97). Each African was thereafter classified as a member of a “national unit,” and his or her political rights existed only within that unit. In most cases, as in the system of racial classification itself, an individual’s community and family determined which of the ten homelands (altogether comprising roughly 13% of the available land area) to which he or she belonged. Though the official government of South Africa considered the homelands legally and economically separate entities, none could support its people with the available land resources. This system of inherent inequalities further entrenched the power disparities between the African and White areas—the homelands relied heavily on the state of South Africa to balance their budgets and provide food for their people (AH 99).

The homelands were intended to reinstate the divisions thought to exist among traditional African ethnic groups, granting each one a private section of land and the independence to self-govern. Following the line of *ubuntu* relational categorization, and mirroring the language of the Pass Laws, the Homelands Act subsumed the individual's will—indeed, his or her own identity—under the will of a particular community. Under an amendment to the Act in 1974, an African could be classified as a member of a particular homeland for any one of many criteria: if related to any member of the population living there, if identified with the population of the homeland, or if associated with it “by virtue of their cultural or racial background” (AH 102). The individual's entire social identity was thus taken into account, and determining one's place without this context proved to be quite difficult.

The Homelands Act thus mirrored the earlier system of racial classification and its implementation within the Pass Laws—the *ubuntu* philosophical tradition was enmeshed within the nationalist ideology of the Afrikaner state, creating a means of division rather than an expression of communalism and interdependence. By artificially creating boundaries between supposedly disparate ethnic groups, the Afrikaner government—whose conceptions of individuality and categorization were revealed in the apartheid legislation—effectively narrowed the traditional conception of “community.” As Shutte points out, the development of political community is “a natural and essential expression of human nature. It is not something artificial. It is a conscious and deliberate creation, but that is because

human beings are conscious and deliberate beings" (UB 181). The apartheid system applied this mandate even further, however, offering "autonomy"—at least on paper—to pursue the moral, spiritual, and economic goals of one's own community. The widely propagated belief was that, in doing so, each individual within the community would glean personal benefit; the more opportunities an individual received to connect and build relationships within his or her own "community," the more developed a person he or she would become, and the more productive to society (Manning 143).

The rhetoric of this "separate development" strategy was spattered all over the media, political literature, and written statements of the National Party. Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, a former prime minister and the recognized "architect" of separate development, asserted that the Nationals "seek a solution which will ensure the survival and *full development*—political and economic—to each of the racial groups ... Then they can co-operate as a Commonwealth ... by means of *political independence coupled with economic interdependence* [emphasis mine]" (qtd. in POL 6). Charles Manning, recounting the report of the Tomlinson Commission on separate development, argued that the separate territories (or homelands) would give each African ethnic group "the fullest opportunity for self-expression and development" (Manning 136). Another political leader, J.S.F. Botha, advocated separate development on the basis that the system would allow each "nation" to be "independent in the fullest sense" (Mbali 8). These benefits would then extend,

theoretically, to every individual within the system, negating the need for the previous apartheid legislation (AH 103).

Thus the Homelands Act essentially phased the traditional African notion of community, the *ubuntu* understanding of human interdependence and growth through personal relationships, into a justification for separating the “races” geographically. Given the assertion of different subsets of humanity, the need for areas in which to practice this humanity—and thereby act in the best interests of every individual—follows closely behind. The National Party rigorously pursued the apartheid agenda—including the Pass Laws and the Homeland Act—while thus maintaining some pretense of cultural awareness and understanding. Although Afrikaner nationalist rhetoric wound throughout the apartheid legislation, the traditional *ubuntu* conceptions of community and individuality underpinned much of the system. Although implemented quite differently under the National Party than in the village societies of pre-colonial southern African, the *ubuntu* philosophy implicitly continued to inform the political language and ideology of the apartheid system.

Chapter 2

“A veritable miracle unfolding”:

Desmond Tutu’s rhetorical challenge

I. Apartheid and the South African church

The emergence of Desmond Tutu as a pivotal figure in the anti-apartheid struggle occurred gradually and—so it seemed—quite naturally with his rising status in the religious realm. Indeed, Tutu’s moral and political convictions were unquestionably and inexorably connected to his identity as a church leader. Despite overtly religious overtones, however, Tutu’s rhetoric vilified the apartheid system on both a Scriptural and a more traditional philosophical basis. His revolutionary sermons and speeches responded to the exploitation of the *ubuntu* philosophy by re-framing the human predicament around a duality of Christianity and African traditionalism. In challenging the apartheid system through years of rhetorical activism, Desmond Tutu undertook the ambitious task of restructuring and reevaluating the assumptions about communities, social order, and human distinctions on which the system was built. Beyond the immediate goal of expunging decades-old legislation from the South African Constitution, Tutu challenged the dichotomous and exclusionary models of society that had enabled apartheid to exist in the first place.

A key element of this rhetoric of transition involved the idea of community – the complex network of relationships by which individuals are coagulated into

groups, societies, and, on a broader scale, the entire body of humanity. In both secular and religious contexts, Tutu grappled with many questions that struck at the very roots of the racially oppressive system of apartheid. What is the place of the individual within the community? How are various communities constituted—that is, what connects people to each other in the formation of one (seemingly) cohesive whole? For Tutu, the mediation of Christian faith with the traditional African philosophy of *ubuntu* was crucial in developing a model of human relationships within communities that could provide a viable alternative to apartheid itself.

Indeed, Tutu's emphasis on religious principles was largely due to the polarization of the Church from the earliest beginnings of colonization on the Cape. By the mid-twentieth century and the legal establishment of the apartheid system, the nation's Christian community was divided into two distinct camps: the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which was to become an outspoken critic of the apartheid government and of which Desmond Tutu was a part, and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), a body representing the interests of the Afrikaner minority, on the other. The relationship between the SACC and DRC were strained at best, and often openly hostile. Though the SACC was not officially founded until the 1960s, its predecessors existed in tense opposition to the DRC's racial exclusivity and often overtly nationalist agenda (Mbali 193).

The prominence of the Dutch Reformed Church can be traced back to the earliest years of settlement on the Cape, when groups of well-intentioned European

Christian missionaries— under the supervision of the Dutch East India Company— sought to bring order, knowledge, discipline, and “civilized” spiritual faith to the indigenous people of colonized South Africa. Most of these missionaries followed on the heels of the white settlers as they moved east and north, establishing farms and trading networks (du Toit 618). The Dutch East India Company—in addition to calling for a permanent trading station—suggested “that some of the natives can be Christianized with the result...[that] many souls could be brought to the Reformed religion and God” (du Toit 618). From the seventeenth century onward, missionaries worked in the Khoikhoi communities and among the slaves arriving continuously from other parts of Africa and the Far East. By the end of the 19th century, the DRC had the “practical monopoly of religious practice in the Colony” (Patterson 25).

The roots of the South African Council of Churches, the organization fated to challenge the racist policies of the DRC in the mid-20th century, also stretch back to the earliest years of the Cape colony. Though various missionary societies and church organizations were founded under the overarching General Missionary Conference during this period, seldom were the native people themselves very active players in the church leadership. Even while the Conference attempted to support the natives’ rights against the steady rise of racially oppressive legislation, each session “was not a meeting *with* black South Africans. It was a meeting of white missionaries *about* black South Africans” (Spong, *Jubilee: Conference* par. 2). By the early 1900s, the church had developed along distinct color lines (du Toit

619). Separate buildings were erected for white and black congregations, ostensibly for the purpose of allowing black communities to worship in their own languages. While white ministers were permitted to assume leadership positions within black congregations, however, black ministers were legally prohibited from serving within white congregations (du Toit 620). A conference of the Free State branch of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1908 advised that black churches should be formed under the auspices of the established white church, but “as a daughter ... which could develop under the fostering love of the mother church” (Smith, qtd. in du Toit 621). As South African politics developed along color lines, then, the Church pursued a parallel line of racial policy.

The establishment of the Union of South Africa on May 31, 1910 ushered in several pieces of legislation that, though not as extreme in their social consequences as those of the future apartheid government, nevertheless succeeded in further entrenching a system of racial hierarchy and segregation within the nation. Notably, the constitution of the new Union included a color bar expressly prohibiting non-Whites from participation in the parliament (POL 81). In addition, the Land Act of 1913 placed physical boundaries around already well-defined areas of racial segregation, granting the lion’s share of the South African lands to the small but powerful White segment of the population, then comprising only 21% of the population of South Africa (POL 35). In addition, most churches discouraged interracial sex and marriage, a policy tacitly supported by the government, though not legally enacted until the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the

Immorality Amendment Act of 1957 (AH 26).⁷ Though the General Missionary Conference recognized the oppression of the indigenous people—indeed, the very people they purported to serve—it accomplished very little in substantively challenging the generally racist tide of South African policy.

By the 1930s, enough frustration had built up within the ranks of native South Africans to spur a significant effort at re-working the dominant Church structure. In 1936, the Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) was founded as the successor to the General Missionary Conference, with the aim of incorporating all of its South African membership into a non-hierarchical community of fellowship and cooperation (Spong, *Jubilee: Interest* par. 4). Until this time, many within the Dutch Reformed Church used Matthew 28, verses 19-20, as the basis for racial differentiation in church membership (Mbali 191): “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (*New International Version*). Under one interpretation of these verses, in which Christ instructs his disciples to go and teach “all nations,” the practice of grouping people into ethnic units was established (du Toit 622). The CCSA, in attempting to circumvent any potential discord regarding the particulars of Christian doctrine, forbade any examination of “ecclesiastical faith and order which represent denominational differences” (Spong, *Jubilee: Interest* par. 3). Such loftily idealistic aims, however, were never quite achieved within the highly politicized face of religion in South

Africa. And although the CCSA was initially founded as a challenge to apathetic and reactionary policies, its goal of encompassing the beliefs and practices of ethnicities within the South African nation resulted in a decidedly watered-down effort to encourage more indigenous people to participate (Spong, *Jubilee: Council* par. 1-3). In trying to avoid offending any particular group or political ideology, the council effectively stifled the voices fervently opposing the trend toward the separation of South Africa along racial lines.

By the 1960s, the situation in South Africa was marked with increasingly violent racial clashes and confrontations between police and civilian dissidents. Academic freedom had been effectively stifled, segregationist laws were in place across all levels of the educational system, most of the black inhabitants of the nation were crowded into dirty, hastily-constructed township settlements on the outskirts of cities, and several widely-publicized incidents of race-based hate crimes had brought the injustice to the forefront of the national consciousness (RP 3-5). Though not every member church of the CCSA was outspokenly critical of the apartheid regime, the growing unrest within South Africa—and specifically the ranks of the Christian church—prompted a meeting in 1968 between several national religious organizations. This gathering, the so-called Church and Society Conference, facilitated discussions between the CCSA and the Christian Institute, whose mixed-race membership had become well known for its open condemnation of the apartheid regime. From this Conference arose an entirely new South African institution, the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which was to play a

visible—albeit highly controversial—role in the politics of the nation throughout the following decades.

Indeed, there was little doubt in anyone's mind regarding the political agenda of the newly-formed South African Council of Churches. The General Secretary of the organization, Bishop William Burnett, publicly blamed the existence of apartheid on the lack of cohesion with the national church community. In his *Message to the People of South Africa*, Burnett asserted, "if we are going to be effective in the body of Christ, we are not going to get anywhere unless we unite. If the Church had come to South Africa united, then apartheid could not have happened. It was a result of the disunity of the Churches" (qtd. in Spong, *Unity* par. 6). Thus the leaders of the SACC sought to construct a parallel between the spiritual fragmentation within the nation's religious institutions and the political and social splintering that occurred simultaneously in the sphere of the secular. In this respect, the system of apartheid was layered with religious and moral inflections well beyond the social implications of a racially-stratified society. It was in this context that Desmond Tutu was named Secretary-General of the SACC in 1978, a position from which he could both advocate for unity among the highly diversified churches of South Africa *and* speak for reconciliation in the political realm. If this duality of purpose made for a more profound influence in the history of South Africa, however, it also created a highly diversified base of opposition against Tutu's rhetorical activism.

Naturally, the officials within the apartheid government—notably Prime Minister John Vorster and his successor, P.W. Botha—were rhetorically and politically at odds with Tutu throughout the period of anti-apartheid resistance. However, equally virulent attacks befell the Bishop from within the Church community itself, and in several interesting cases, this opposition to Tutu explicitly overlapped with debates in the political realm. In particular, the Prime Minister of South Africa during the “heyday” of apartheid legislation, P.W. Botha, also held the position of Moderator within the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Synod. The predominantly White DRC had distanced itself from previous attempts at unity with other churches by both the Christian Council of South Africa and the South African Council of Churches. This self-isolation was mainly due to its members’ overwhelming support of the apartheid regime (du Toit 623). Without a doubt, members of the DRC were in favor of apartheid for many of the same reasons that Tutu and his followers were opposed to it; Biblical evidence was used extensively by both camps, and Botha himself, in a speech in late 1968, announced that “on Scriptural grounds [the DRC] would not budge one inch from its position [on apartheid]” (Verkuyl par. 32). As years passed and the stakes in the apartheid struggle grew higher, Tutu became one of the most outspoken critics of the government system under which he, as an African, had been subject since birth.

II. A language of opposition

Though Desmond Tutu produced an overwhelmingly extensive compilation of sermons, speeches, and writings, several pieces are particularly crucial in

understanding his unique philosophy, the co-mingling of Christian theology and the *ubuntu* worldview. The first speech to which I refer, Desmond Tutu's 1984 Nobel Prize lecture, occurred at a pivotal moment in South African history. A new constitution of 1983, passed by the South African Parliament under pressure from the international community to temper the oppressive legislation of apartheid, introduced little more than minor differences in local administration within the homelands. Desmond Tutu became involved in the United Democratic Front (UDF), an organization founded in response to the disgruntled frustrations of Africans—a position Tutu could hold for only one year, after which (as the newly appointed Bishop of Johannesburg) he distanced himself from overt party partisanship (RP 85). After the new constitution was implemented in September 1984, a wave of violence swept across the nation, the bloodiest since the Soweto uprising over race-based education reforms. The biggest political strike in South Africa's history occurred on November 5 and 6, and soldiers from the South African Defense Forces were deployed into the African townships in an effort to restore and maintain order. At the same time, Desmond Tutu became an international figure of reconciliation and the anti-apartheid movement. He was awarded the Nobel Prize by the Norwegian Nobel Committee in 1984 and delivered this lecture in December (RP 86).

Beyond several vignettes illustrating the personal suffering of many Africans under the apartheid system, the Nobel speech does not detail the Africans' and Coloureds' complaints about specific apartheid legislation. Instead, Tutu—fully

aware of the international audience to whom he is addressing the speech—seeks to present his own conception of humanity and the interconnectedness of all human beings. His ideology is flavored with the ideals of Christian theology and the legacy of *ubuntu* in its assertion of the interdependence of all people for the development of their own humanity. For Tutu, the apartheid ideology undermined the fundamental sacredness of all human beings: it has “ensured that God’s children, just because they are black, should be treated as if they are things and not as of infinite value as being created in the image of God” (RP 88). With the implementation of Christianity, Tutu complicates the decidedly spiritual dimension of Africans’ conceptions of themselves within society. Created in the resemblance of God, and imbued with a sacredness inherent in that creation story, individuals have a basis of connection through which to build relationships and self-realization.

By the time of the Nobel speech, Tutu’s assertion in the fundamental sacredness of the individual was nothing particularly novel. In a previous sermon, Tutu argued, “apartheid, injustice, oppression, and exploitation are not only wrong; they are positively blasphemous, because they treat the children of God as if they were less than his” (WDT 37). The apartheid ideology not only segregated and oppressed individuals who were, at least in the eyes of God, sacred; it also tore at the seams that bind together all humanity in this common “deification”: “God, when you worship him, turns you around to be concerned for your neighbor. He does not tolerate a relationship with himself that excludes your neighbor” (WDT 84).

Though Tutu does not expressly invoke the *ubuntu* philosophy of dependency and

connectedness, this interpretation of the Biblical story of human creation and the ideal relationships between individuals is directly analogous to the traditional African philosophy.

The system of racial categorization and the Pass Laws, through which the community itself has designated responsibilities in classifying individuals, is one target of Tutu's criticism of the splintering, divisive effects of the apartheid system. Tutu describes some of the sweeping injustices of the racial categorization system—embodied in the Population Registration Acts—in his Nobel lecture:

[T]his is too high a price to pay for racial purity, for it is doubtful whether any end, however desirable, can justify such a means ... Such an evil system, totally indefensible by normally acceptable methods, relies on a whole phalanx of draconian laws ... which is almost peculiar to South Africa ... All this is too costly in terms of human lives. (RP 89-90)

The identity an individual receives and develops through his or her own community was, through such legislation, corrupted and exploited into the basis for racial oppression by the powerful National Party government. As another example, the Homelands Act enforced geographical separation of the races on the basis of imagined ethnic historical groups: According to Tutu, Blacks are expected to “exercise their political ambitions in unviable, poverty-stricken, arid bantustan homelands, ghettos of misery, inexhaustible reservoirs of cheap black labor, bantustans into which South Africa is being balkanized ... and [they are] being turned into aliens in the land of their birth” (RP 87-8). While advocated by the

apartheid administration as a viable means through which to build the autonomy and self-governance of the native Africans, the Homelands were, in truth, a means by which to separate the races of the country into isolated sectors. The economic and social interdependence emphasized in African traditionalism and in Tutu's rhetoric simply did not exist during the years of apartheid; instead, a system of economic *dependence*—with African areas fully dependent on the White areas for food, employment, and basic services—ensured a subordinate class under the Afrikaner authority (Omond 99-100).

One of the most critical portions of Tutu's Nobel Prize lecture is his description of the ideal community of Christian believers, which—couched in a specific religious discourse—represents the fulfillment of humanity's potential as interdependent beings cast in the image of God. Desmond Tutu's understanding of the qualities inherent in the Christian community develops around the idea of *koinonia*. Appearing more than twenty times throughout the New Testament of the Bible, *koinonia* is usually translated to “fellowship,” “community,” or “communion,” and always in the context of the Christian Church. Though often used in reference to the early Christian Church, *koinonia* also embodies the more general scope of Christian fellowship and communion with God or other believers. Tutu references this term in his Nobel speech when describing the proper and ideal relationship of Christian believers to one another and, on a grander scale, every human being to each other, as spiritual beings:

When will we learn that human beings are of infinite value because they have

been created in the image of God, that it is blasphemy to treat them as if they were less than this, and to do so ultimately recoils on those who do this? In dehumanizing others, they are themselves dehumanized....They need to know each other to become truly free, to become human. We can be human only in fellowship, in community, in *koinoinia*. (RP 94)

Though Tutu primarily conceptualized his ideology of interdependence and interconnectivity within the framework of Christian theology, his ideas concerning the mutual benefits of cooperation and the need for harmony were by no means restricted to the community of the Church—or, for that matter, the Christian concept of *koinonia*. Even when Tutu discusses the body of humanity as one cohesive whole beyond the Church community, with every human being a valuable and constituent part, he does so from a fundamental belief in the deeply spiritual place of humans within the cosmos.

The evocation of *koinonia* in this context suggests an even broader meaning of the word than previously used – a community bound together by a common need for humanity, self-actualization, and mutual concern. Thus “an expression of Christian fellowship, of *koinonia* in the Lord...is the mutuality of giving and receiving as of a loving family” (RP 57). This community transcends physical limitations, founded instead on an ontological commitment to a shared faith. As Tutu argues, “God created us for fellowship ... so that we should form the human family, existing together because we were made for one another. We are not made for exclusive self-sufficiency but for interdependence, and we break that law of our

being at our peril" (RP 93). Relationships are thus created through an individual's identification with others on a fundamentally spiritual level, beyond the realm of the traditional political or social organization. Furthermore, though the individuals within a larger community – that of South Africa and, by extension, the entire body of humanity – may not necessarily agree with the tenets of Christianity, the same interdependence certainly exists.

Likewise, in Tutu's view, the community itself is at stake in the relationships of individuals within the system. The foundation of this notion lies in the traditional *ubuntu* philosophy. Because human beings need each other to become "fully human," depriving a person of anything he or she needs – material or otherwise – essentially undermines the relationship necessary to the development of one's own humanity. Tutu sees a decidedly spiritual aspect of such dehumanization. Because the system of human relationships is based on interdependence and the mutuality of development between human beings, Tutu argues that the ruling class suffers just as much under apartheid as those over whom they rule, the Africans and the Coloured populations. He gives several examples of this phenomenon in his Nobel speech, including the chronic shortage of skilled manpower due to the regime's systematic under-education of non-Whites and the "wanton wastefulness" of human resources, and the numerous suicides of Whites who, faced with accusations of interracial relationships under the Immorality Act, would rather die than live with the public humiliation (RP 88-9). In an even more dire prediction, Tutu asserts his conviction that South Africa has

condemned itself to destruction through the injustice and oppression of its apartheid ideology:

Unless we work assiduously so that all of God's children, our brothers and sisters, members of our one human family, enjoy the basic human rights, the right to a fulfilled life, the right of movement, the freedom to be fully human within a humanity measured by nothing less than the humanity of Jesus Christ himself, then we are on the road inexorably to self-destruction, we are not far from global suicide. (RP 93)

In de-humanizing one segment of the population, all are dehumanized. In segregating one portion of human beings from every other portion, every person loses the opportunity to grow in novel ways and develop a strong sense of humanity and community. While the *ubuntu* philosophy does not expressly equate the suffering of one individual with the suffering of all, the implications of a system based on interdependence are clear enough: the stakes of oppression are as great as every individual's need for self-fulfillment and maturation.

Desmond Tutu gave a second speech crucial to an understanding of his anti-apartheid ideology two years later, in 1986. Previously the first black South African to be Dean of Johannesburg, then the first to be Bishop, he was now the first in such a high leadership position within the church. On 7 September, Tutu was enthroned at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town amidst growing pressures against the apartheid regime. The government had rescinded several pieces of legislation—including those prohibiting interracial sex and marriage—but was

dragging its feet on issues of greater significance. In addition, the National Party was increasing its suppression of resistance activities. A State of Emergency had been imposed in June, and media censorship was tightened. According to the South African Institute of Race Relations, almost 1,300 people died throughout the course of 1986 (RP 114).

It was in this context of violence and frustration that Desmond Tutu was appointed as Archbishop, and his stirring speech was intended to forge solidarity among disparate elements of South African society. Though his language and tone suggest a largely Christian audience, the politicization of Tutu's role at this point imbued his words with significance across all segments of the population. Like his Nobel Prize speech of two years earlier, Tutu's ascendancy speech invoked the concept of *koinonia* as the ideal community, particularly (though not solely) within the body of Christian believers:

The world saw a veritable miracle unfolding before its very eyes as all sorts and conditions of women and men, rich and poor, slave and free, Jew and Gentile – all these came to belong in one fellowship, one *koinonia*, one communion. They did not regard each other just as equals ... An equal you can acknowledge once and then forever thereafter ignore. No, they regarded one another not just as equals but as sisters and brothers, members of one family, God's family... You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them... When one part suffered the whole suffered with it, and when one part prospered then the whole prospered with it. There was a

mutuality in the relationship in which all gave and all received. (RP 118-20)

Amidst all other differences, those identifying themselves as members of the Christian community are thus joined together both by shared faith and by responsibility to each other. The existence of these relationships—indeed, the existence of the community itself—is conceived as the product of God’s will and creative energy. Tutu’s invocation of the family image within *koinonia* suggests that these relationships are not to be taken for granted: their very nature demands action, purpose, and constant attention to the lives of those around an individual. The community is organic, not static, and must constantly adapt to the needs of its constituent parts.

The health of the community, then, depends on the health of all of its members; equality in spiritual and physical well-being should be the goal for the preservation of the individual as well as the continued life and vitality of the broader community. As Tutu asserts later in his speech of 1986, the destiny of one human being is inseparable from that of another:

If we could but recognize our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up with one another’s, that we can be free only together, that we can survive only together, that we can be human only together, then a glorious South Africa would come into being. (RP 121)

Interestingly, Tutu here weaves together the language of politics and economics with that of theology and spirituality. He presents an analysis of humanity much at odds with the values of individualism and self-sufficiency that are found in

typical Western philosophies. In his “Genesis 3” sermon, Tutu further elucidates the human need for support, asserting “no real human being...can be absolutely self-sufficient. Such a person would be subhuman. We belong therefore in a network of delicate human relationships of interdependence...We do need other people and they help to form us in a profound way” (Battle 42, 45).

Indeed, this call for the necessity of human relationships echoes the African worldview expressed in *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*; that is, “a person is a person through persons.” Personhood is defined as the product of a multitude of relationships developed over time. An individual depends on the community in order to achieve real “human” status; without this social context, a human being could never actually be considered as such. Moreover, the process of becoming human does not take place within a set of well-defined parameters. Rather, it is essentially organic, developed and enriched over a lifetime of experiences, relationships, and social interactions. According to Augustine Shutte, the essence is this: “The human self is not something that first exists on its own and then enters into relationship with its surroundings. It only exists in relationship to its surroundings; these relationships are what it is” (UB 23).

Tutu extends and complicates this conception of human interdependence in his 1986 speech, however, by examining both the relationship of the individual to the community *and* the relationship between individual people within society. One danger of *ubuntu* is its susceptibility to a dichotomous and hierarchical interpretation of the world – indeed, the very thought patterns that allowed for the

institutionalization of apartheid (Libin 119). In the *ubuntu* philosophy, the individual is often seen as subordinate to the community in the aggregate. The community makes the existence of the individual possible, and therefore – it can be surmised – the needs of the community are more vital and necessary than the needs of one component part. Tutu rejects this diminishment of the individual by extending the focus beyond the “human being versus community” model: “I pray that our Lord would open our eyes so that we would see the real, the true identity of each one of us, that this is not a so-called Coloured or White, or Black or Indian, but a brother, a sister” (RP 120). He looks at the community as a series of transactions, compromises, and needs, and as characterized by the color-blindness of a family.

While a human being relies on the community for personhood and self-fulfillment, the relationship is not one of subordination and authority, but rather a complex system of dependence on both individual and organizational levels. Michael Battle, a fellow bishop and friend of Tutu’s, has argued that “for [him], being properly related in Ubuntu theology does not denigrate individuality” (*Community* 177). The individual’s existence is directly linked to the community, but the converse is no less true. While the traditional *ubuntu* philosophy focuses primarily on the emotional and spiritual (though not necessarily Christian) development of the individual, Tutu extended the idea into the physical realm of worldly existence and the micro-scale person-to-person interactions within the broader community. Tutu’s depiction of the “loving family,” albeit an idealized view

of the Christian community, is nevertheless his vision of harmonious and balanced relationships within the Church.

The significance of Tutu's framing of community using traditionally Christian terminology should not be overlooked in the context of his opposition, not only of the National Party, but to the various pro-apartheid, Calvinist factions represented under the Dutch Reformed Church. Christians from both sides of the political fence were following Tutu's words and actions closely, and the Archbishop did not hesitate to point out the hypocrisy and "blasphemies" within the DRC in his 1986 speech:

If you say you love God whom you have not seen and hate the brother whom you have, the Bible does not use delicate language; it does not say you are guilty of a terminological inexactitude. It says bluntly you are a liar...If we take the incarnation seriously we must be concerned about where people live, how they live, whether they have justice, whether they are uprooted and dumped as rubbish in resettlement camps, whether they are detained without trial, whether they receive an inferior education, whether they have a say in the decisions that affect their lives most deeply...As a church, we must demonstrate that Christ has indeed broken down the inner wall of partition.

(RP 117, 119)

Indeed, one of Tutu's primary criticisms of the Dutch Reformed Church was its invocation of Biblical scriptures in supporting a system of racial inequality, segregation, and oppression. The DRC often used Genesis 1:28 as the basis for belief in the origin of ethnic diversity: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be

fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (*New International Version*). In addition, Acts 17:26 (“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”) and Deuteronomy 32:8 (“When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.”) were commonly cited in support of the Homeland Acts and separate development, as well as various arguments for segregated public facilities, workplaces, and residential areas (Mbali 191).

Tutu challenged these suppositions by referencing the “incarnation,” the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its call for fellowship and communion with all humans. Indeed, Tutu often noted, Jesus spent more time socializing with the downtrodden, the outcast, and the poor segments of society than with kings or nobles. He knew poverty and could relate to the masses who desperately needed his help: “Jesus Christ ... although rich, for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might become rich” (RP 120). Christ indeed represented a revolutionary in his own right, breaking down the “partitions” that were artificially constructed by human beings. Tutu’s 1986 speech includes the declaration of religion and spirituality as the primary motive for his involvement in political life: “God [has] intervened in political, in judicial matters because for this God, our God, no one is a nonentity... Friends, we do not do this because of our politics, but because of our

religion...[F]or us, the spiritual is utterly crucial" (RP 117). The Archbishop was driven by a deep spiritual conviction in the necessity for community, harmony, and fellowship among all human beings.

Desmond Tutu concludes his ascendancy speech with a call for the re-connection of Africans to their traditional roots in the *ubuntu* philosophy. Far from destroyed under the several hundred years of colonial rule, the ideology was still very much in the consciousness of native Africans—and, as we have seen, was intricately enmeshed within the ideology of the apartheid system itself, particularly in the language of racial categorization and the homelands. In his speech, Tutu calls for a re-examination of the *ubuntu* principles, rejecting the division of humans along ethnic lines and advocating an alternative community of humanity, sans discrimination:

We Africans speak of a concept difficult to render in English. We speak of *ubuntu* or *botho*...It has to do with what it means to be truly human, it refers to gentleness, to compassion, to hospitality, to openness to others, to vulnerability, to be available for others and to know that you are bound up with them in the bundle of life, for a person is only a person through other persons. And so we search for this ultimate attribute and reject ethnicity and other such qualities as irrelevancies. (RP 125)

Tutu calls on the spirit of *ubuntu* in criticizing the unjust system of apartheid, intertwining the philosophy with a Biblical theology of liberation through community. Taken in conjunction, these ideologies comprised a unique rhetoric of

continuity between cultural tradition and modern spirituality, both in direct opposition to the demeaning, fractious, and dehumanizing system of apartheid.

Chapter 3

“We shall be free only together”:

Desmond Tutu and the post-apartheid transition

I. The end of an era

Within several years of Desmond Tutu's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize, the South African apartheid government was facing ever more virulent opposition. The United Democratic Front—to which Tutu belonged for a brief interval in the mid-1980s—was heavily restricted as a result of the government's growing insecurity and fear. Nevertheless, the group was able to organize a broad leadership coalition under the title of the Mass Democratic Movement (Allen 267). Beginning in 1989, the MDM launched a campaign in defiance of the Parliamentary elections scheduled for September—which were, as in the past, open only to members of the White community. Nine national church leaders pronounced their support for the campaign, and within days the city of Cape Town became a battleground between the authorities and the steadily growing body of anti-apartheid supporters, including hundreds of church members (Ernst 15).

Desmond Tutu, though not officially a member of the United Democratic Front since his appointment as Archbishop in 1986, nevertheless supported the activists in their struggles. In one interview for a Nationalist newsletter, Tutu pronounced that the “Kingdom [of God] expresses itself in concrete ways, in the political, social, and economic dispensations, and there are certain standards in that

Kingdom of how people are meant to live together...The Defiance campaign, the disobedience to unjust laws and obedience to God, have very many biblical parallels" (RP 170). Religion, particularly Christianity, had been irrevocably politicized in the context of racial violence and discriminatory policies. The churches of Cape Town, following the same mentality as Tutu, immediately adopted measures to protect the activists and facilitate their activities: hiding illegal marchers before arrests could be made, conducting church services in place of prohibited meetings, and even intervening between police and protesters (RP 169).

The Defiance Campaign lasted six weeks, reaching its climax during the week leading up to September 6, Election Day. On August 30, roughly 170 women, including the Archbishop's wife Leah Tutu, were arrested as they attempted to march from the Metropolitan Methodist Church to the British Embassy, bearing a letter to Margaret Thatcher as a "wife and mother" (Allen 306). A meeting of leaders from various churches, trade unions, and the United Democratic Front convened at Bishops court—Desmond Tutu's office—the following day; they unanimously declared two days of nationwide protest for September 5 and 6. On Saturday, September 2, the Mass Democratic Movement—the leadership coalition of the UDF—organized a series of marches to the center of Cape Town. The results were violent, with dozens arrested, injured, and humiliated after being whipped and beaten by the National police forces that were called in to quell the protests (Ernst 17).

On September 4, only two days before the election, the dissident Afrikaner church leader Beyers Naudé was scheduled to preach at a Methodist Church in Cape Town. The police banned the service, fearing another outbreak of protest, and pulled an armored vehicle against the church doors, trapping people inside. When Tutu, Naudé, and several other church leaders protested the blockading, they were arrested and held in prison for ninety minutes. Only after their release were they able to free the people still trapped inside the church (RP 185). By Election Day, the frustrations of the protesters and the violence of the police officers had peaked—more than twenty people were killed in the townships surrounding Cape Town, and over two million workers stayed home in protest.

By this point, the downfall of the apartheid government seemed inevitable. Desmond Tutu organized discussions with diplomats from twelve countries—including Britain, the United States, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Australia, and Canada—and even met with delegates from the Dutch Reformed Church in an effort to facilitate a cooperative action against the recent violence (RP 186). President de Klerk, who had replaced P.W. Botha as party leader and head of government, began to show signs of willingness to compromise (Waldmeir 52). Within weeks of the Cape Town protests, de Klerk relaxed the government's ban on public protest, agreed to the Archbishop's request for joint meetings with other church leaders, and released the "Rivonia trialists," political prisoners who had been incarcerated since 1963. These promising changes in policy prompted Desmond Tutu's exultant exclamation: "today is the day in which we the people

have scored a great victory for justice and for peace ... [W]e invite you, Mr. de Klerk ... come and see what this country is going to become ... This country is a rainbow country! This country is Technicolor. You can come and see the new South Africa” (RP 187).

On February 2, 1990, de Klerk opened a new session of Parliament with the announcement of sweeping reforms throughout the country. Several predominantly black political organizations, including the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC), and the South African Communist Party were unbanned (Allen 328). In addition, de Klerk announced the upcoming release of Nelson Mandela, recognized by many as the most promising candidate for South Africa’s first black President. Mandela had been in prison for 27 years, a symbol of the oppressive and unjust apartheid regime (RP 191). Desmond Tutu and other public figures thus began the rhetorical transition into a post-apartheid situation, with its own set of injustices, frustrations, and challenges. Yet even the changing political and social situation did not alter Tutu’s interweaving of the fundamental ideology of Christianity and the ethics of *ubuntu*, particularly their complementary conceptions of community and the interdependence of all human beings—regardless of race.

II. *Ubuntu*: Beyond apartheid

The difficult road to racial equality and social harmony, for which Desmond Tutu and many others fought vigorously over many years, did not end with the official downfall of the National Party’s hegemony in 1990. The legacy of apartheid

pervaded every aspect of South African society and was especially felt in the months immediately following the deregulations. More than 1,000 political prisoners were released over the course of the year, and laws were passed granting indemnity from persecution for political crimes. Yet violent clashes developed between supporters of the African National Congress under Nelson Mandela and the Inkatha Freedom Party under Mangosutha Buthelezi (RP 227). Unlike so many previous struggles in the nation of South Africa, this violence was black-on-black, spurred by disagreements about the proper method of handling the African population and the national identity (or lack thereof) of the various African “ethnic groups.” Though Mandela and Mangosutha met in January 1991 and subsequently issued a joint appeal for the end of violence between their parties, the strife continued (Allen 325). On March 27, Archbishop Desmond Tutu addressed a crowd gathered at St. George’s Cathedral—one of the churches involved in the Defiance Campaign led by the United Democratic Front and the Mass Democratic Movement—regarding the escalating crisis. Tutu’s call to end violence and revert to basic principles is similar to previous speeches and sermons before the end of apartheid, but his words also evince a new sense of urgency—even desperation.

Tutu’s sermon to the crowd gathered within the cathedral makes almost no reference to God, though of course the setting suggested a continuing relationship between spirituality, the established church, and the political situation. At the end of the sermon, however, Tutu closes with a “straightforward prayer,” a simple list of requests for the future of South Africa: “God bless Africa, guard her children, guide

her rulers, and give her peace” (RP 230). The Christian element of Tutu’s rhetoric had certainly not dissipated in the aftermath of apartheid, but the Archbishop appeared to understand the necessity of downplaying any ideology that might be construed as too abstract or idealistic for the current state of affairs. The violence had escalated to a degree that warranted the identification of the problem and possible solutions, and perhaps even Tutu himself doubted that a call for harmony as “people made in God’s image” would accomplish much in addressing the underlying issues of community dissolution. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of Tutu included enough of the theological language—particularly since the sermon ended with a call to God—to ensure that this ideology, too, would not be altogether forgotten or ignored in the ensuing struggles (RP 226).

Tutu’s main focus in this sermon is violence—namely, its roots, as well as possible explanations for its prevalence in the post-apartheid context. Tutu was not blinded by the newly legislated freedom; he understood that the transition to a democratic system would be difficult and long. Yet he did not agree with those who would write off the inter-community violence of the native Africans as an inevitability of the time period. Admittedly, declares Tutu,

during periods of transition there is the violence due to the instability of transition, as we have seen in parts of Eastern Europe. Yes, South Africa has never really had a culture of tolerance...Some of the violence is due to sociopolitical and economic deprivation...It is true also that we are reaping the horrible harvests of apartheid through the migratory labor system and its

ghastly single-sex hostels...It is true that the police and the security forces have on the whole behaved disgracefully, being accused on all sides of a lack of professionalism as a peacekeeping force...Yes, all that is true. But it is not all the truth. (RP 228-9)

In listing the various frustrations and legacies of the apartheid system, Tutu is acknowledging his connection with the plight of all Africans. He was no leader perched in an ivory tower of ignorant bliss; after years of struggle against the apartheid government and other religious leaders, Tutu understood the intricacies of society's injustices. Yet the circumstances alone were not enough to explain—or to justify—the rising violence between blacks, between one oppressed person and another.

What, then, did Tutu pinpoint as the cause of the crises within this speech? Not surprisingly, the answer lies in the community—the complex network of interdependence between all human beings. As ever, Desmond Tutu's ideology after the end of apartheid is informed by his education, not only in Christian theology, but in the pre-colonial, distinctly African *ubuntu* philosophy within which, in part, the African consciousness is conditioned: "Something had gone desperately wrong in the black community. We can't go on forever blaming apartheid...[U]ltimately, man, we are human beings and we have proved it in the resilience we have shown in the struggle for justice. We did not allow ourselves to be demoralized, dehumanized. What has gone wrong, that we seemed to have lost our reverence for life?" (RP 229)

A crucial transition is occurring in these lines. What had been before an oppressive,

culpable system of injustice and illogic is no longer in place, and can no longer take all the blame for the dehumanization of individuals within it. With the end the apartheid, with the resurrection of racial equality, comes the personal responsibility for all of one's actions and an even greater challenge of upholding the principle for which so many fought and died.

Considering Tutu's belief in the humanization of *ubuntu*, the development of human beings through their relationship and interactions with other human beings, the assertion of dehumanization occurring *within* the African community—rather than resulting from the artificial separations imposed by the apartheid government—takes on new significance. One of the harshest criticisms of apartheid made by Desmond Tutu in his pre-1990 rhetoric was its inherently “de-humanizing” effects. Through the lens of *ubuntu*, the reasons for this loss of humanity are readily apparent. A human being in isolation, explains Shutte, is not “human” in the truest sense; in fact, humanity is not a necessary attribute of an organic being, and one could actually “fail” at it if one lacks a social identity (*Philosophy* 112). Sometimes the individual does not make this choice, however, but rather an entire group within society is culpable. In separating the Africans into distinct areas by their “historic communities,” the nation's dominant class and Party effectively sentenced all of its members—indeed, even themselves—to a degree of dehumanization. All members of society are affected because, according to the *ubuntu* philosophy, humanity itself is a great community; viable race and ethnic distinctions simply do not exist (UB 62).

Interestingly, Tutu comments in his 1991 speech that under the apartheid system, the African people were still able to retain at least some degree of their humanity by virtue of their tenacity and liveliness, their perseverance in the face of oppression, and their shared values and commitments to each other. This spirit of cooperation and hope, Tutu is arguing, enabled the black community to retain its moral commitment and courage throughout the struggle—building relationships, forging connections, and increasing in the vitality of *being*. With the liberation and the subsequent splintering of the movement toward different goals, paradoxically, some areas saw the shattering of the same community ties that had allowed them to preserve and develop their humanity under the apartheid years:

It seems to me that we in the black community have lost our sense of *ubuntu*—our humaneness, caring, hospitality, our sense of connectedness, our sense that my humanity is bound up in your humanity. We are losing our self-respect, demonstrated, it seems to me, most graphically by the horrible extent of dumping and littering in our townships. Of course we live in squalor and in slum ghettos. But we are not rubbish. Why do we seem to say that is what we are when you see how we treat our already poor environment? (RP 229-30)

The loss of the *ubuntu* ethical foundation carried very real implications in the lives of the African population, decreasing their standard of living and often destabilizing what little security and safety they felt. The African population, in dissolving its own internal connections and lacking any particularly deep relationships with the

White community as its former “oppressors,” essentially began to shrivel in self-image down to the sub-human status it legally occupied under the National Party. Tutu is thus arguing that the physical condition of the land, the only real “possession” of many black South Africans, speaks volumes about the community’s self-perception and respect for each other. For the *ubuntu* philosophy teaches that what is mine is yours; what benefits the group will eventually benefit each component part; every other individual is really a reflection of myself, and my own actions will directly affect every other human in my community.

What Tutu is recognizing in the post-apartheid situation might be called a “crisis of *ubuntu*”—the awareness of the tradition and the sense of its loss in the violence and disruption of families and entire communities. The violence may have been predictable and symptomatic of such a radical transitional period, but the stakes of the situation were nevertheless critical and warranted immediate attention. The *ubuntu* philosophy had been exploited, however unconsciously, by the Afrikaner governing elite in its instatement of apartheid legislation, but members of mainstream African society still somewhat understood its ideals and its significance within their community structure and their relationships with each other. By the 1990s, Tutu contends, even this underlying consciousness was threatened: “something has gone desperately wrong in the black community” (RP 227). Political autonomy may have been a great advancement for the majority of South Africans, but the people must not forget the interconnectedness of all human beings—any semblance of moral and ethical society relies on the cohesion of the

community, the pursuit of human relationships, and the recognition that one's humanity is inextricably bound up in everyone else's.

This formulation of the *ubuntu* ethic as a reunifying ideology of reconciliation is, I propose, the most significant development in Desmond Tutu's post-apartheid rhetoric. The *ubuntu* philosophy—never completely lost with colonialism, and indeed intrinsically utilized within the rhetoric of the apartheid legislation—was blended with the language of theology throughout the decades of apartheid. Throughout the early post-apartheid era and initially within the rhetoric of the iconic Desmond Tutu, the *ubuntu* philosophy underwent another re-evaluation and resurrection, emerging as the moral and ethical ideal of human relationships in the modern world. Indeed, the Interim Constitution of South Africa reads, "There is a need for understanding but not for revenge, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimization" (Gillies par. 22). The *ubuntu* ideology was thus expressly written into the founding documents of the "new" South Africa.

A second key piece of Desmond Tutu's post-apartheid rhetoric is affiliated with perhaps the most significant transition in the last decade of the twentieth century in South Africa: the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Commission was founded by an act of the new South African parliament on May 17, 1995, and signed into law by Nelson Mandela on July 19. It was founded with the memory of *ubuntu* within the Interim Constitution still fresh in the minds of the populace. The mandated time for the Commission's activities

was two years,⁸ and its goals were fourfold: first, to develop a picture of human rights violations committed under the apartheid government; second, to “restore dignity” to the victims by allowing them to tell their stories publicly; third, to consider amnesty “if acts had been carried out for political reasons”; and fourth, to make recommendation on reparations for victims (Gillies par. 14). Desmond Tutu was chosen to chair the commission, and as such, the philosophy of *ubuntu* thus permeated much of the Commission’s proceedings.

In the foreword to the TRC Report, Tutu describes the process by which the sense of community among South Africans was resurrected, enabling reparations for the victims—a “traumatized and wounded people” (*Report* par. 1)—as the Commission deemed necessary. Tutu writes that the people of South Africa, no matter what their racial category, have an “obligation and responsibility” (par. 2) to the victims of apartheid. The *ubuntu* philosophy declares that all human beings are members of the same community, that all are responsible for the wellbeing of every other human—if the goal of the TRC was a reestablishment of the *ubuntu* ethic within the African consciousness, it would only achieve success if participation and engagement were widespread and universal. The many years under apartheid rule had splintered the identities of Africans, both black and white, dehumanizing each individual and causing a generalized “sickness of spirit” (par. 6) within the population. Only with full accountability and truthfulness, as well as the recognition of the interdependence of every person, could the society hope to regain its humanity.

A theme throughout Tutu's foreword is that of the "wounded healers," a phrase intended to embody the essence of interdependence within the framework of the TRC. Though most of those on the Commission and participating in the hearings—especially the victims' testimonials—were themselves affected in some capacity by the injustice of the apartheid system, the TRC under Tutu's leadership demanded an astonishing willingness to forgive and reconcile these past hurts. In forgiveness, proclaimed Tutu, healing occurs. Tutu also addressed the apprehension of so many white South Africans regarding the Commission's work: "Apart from the hurt that it causes to those who suffered, the denial by so many white South Africans even that they benefited from apartheid is a crippling, self-inflicted blow to their capacity to enjoy and appropriate the fruits of change" (*Report* par. 5). Thus the process of reconciliation was a national endeavor, and any obstruction to the process—even an unwillingness to share one's own story—was a denial of the power of *ubuntu* to reunite the splintered and disparate elements of society, and a restriction on one's own development as a human being.

As in the sermon at the cathedral immediately following the end of apartheid, Tutu ends his foreword with an invocation of God. The South African experience, believes Tutu, is both unique to the nation and universal: "God has blessed us richly so that we might be a blessing to others. Quite improbably, we as South Africans have become a beacon of hope to others locked in deadly conflict that peace, that a just resolution, is possible. If it could happen in South Africa, then it could certainly happen anywhere else. Such is the exquisite divine sense of humour" (*Report* par.

7). The *ubuntu* philosophy underlies the history of the nation from pre-colonization to the present, but the philosophy itself speaks to a universality of human experience—to others engaged in “deadly conflict” or merely the everyday struggles of existence.

Thus Desmond Tutu, the longtime anti-apartheid advocate, religious leader, and political activist, is a living representation of the transformative nature of the *ubuntu* philosophy. While both Christianity and *ubuntu* are indispensable elements of Tutu’s own rhetorical corpus, the latter occupies a uniquely distinct position in the South African experience. The philosophy emphasizes interconnectedness—the development of one’s humanity through the interpersonal relationships with other human beings—as well as the community’s crucial role in the process of an individual’s self-realization. These characteristics imbue the *ubuntu* ideology with a significance far beyond the national borders of South Africa. Though partially underpinning the apartheid ideology itself, *ubuntu* was resurrected in the rhetoric of Desmond Tutu—and thus in the consciousness of South Africans—as a key factor in the establishment of a color-blind and harmonious society. And outside South Africa, the legacy and philosophy of *ubuntu*, that “beacon of hope,” conveys the need for community, for each other, within any viable future state: “we shall be free only together ... We shall survive only together ... We can be human only together” (Tutu, *Words* 76).

Epilogue

As with any sustained investigation on a compelling subject, this project has left me with many more questions than I had at the onset. Unlike the rhetorical studies of so many historical figures, the work of Desmond Tutu and the ideals of his struggle continue to be revisited, debated, and examined. Perhaps the most visible outcome of the anti-apartheid movement and the resurrection of the *ubuntu* philosophy—the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—will prove to be particularly fertile ground for future investigation. Beyond any tangible changes or reparations resulting from the Commission's work, the ideological goals and outcomes of the project will make for fascinating study.

Ostensibly, the Commission was created to pave the way for a physical and moral “reawakening” across all of South Africa’s color lines—and indeed, it has inspired much commentary from nations all around the world. Writers like Chuck Gillies and Lyn Graybill have written extensively on the purported goals of the Commission and its success—or lack thereof—in fulfilling these aims. One of the most intriguing criticisms offered by Gillies is essentially the following: though the Commission was created to “give back” the humanity of the victims by permitting them a space in the public arena and an audience of the perpetrators, the Commission acts against its own interests in grouping together the “witnesses” and the “perpetrators” in the first place. In doing so, the Commission maintains the same groupings as had existed under the system itself; the victims continue to re-live their horrors, and the perpetrators might publicly confess their crimes yet

privately exult in their emancipation (44). Much more research and interviewing must be completed before such a criticism will hold much weight, but the idea is nevertheless quite compelling for further study.

If the Commission were unsuccessful in resurrecting the humanity of the South African populace—dehumanized, Black and White alike, by the segregation of the apartheid system and the exploitation of the *ubuntu* ethic—where would this leave us? What are the implications of such a threat to the viability of the TRC, or truth commissions more generally? Furthermore, the relationship of the media to the TRC proceedings promises an extensive range of future research opportunities. Is the media propagating a watered-down, superficially conceived notion of the intricate, complex *ubuntu* ethic? If so, what effect might this conceptualization of *ubuntu* have on the potentially widespread application of the philosophy throughout the international sector? The answers to these questions and many more—unasked as of yet—await discovery and rigorous examination. The stakes are high and, as Desmond Tutu would argue, crucially important in maintaining the very essence of our humanity.

Notes

¹ This phrase has been translated into English in several different ways. Other possible interpretations include “humanity towards others,” “I am because we are,” or “a person becomes human through other persons.” I present the most commonly accepted definition here, though the other translations are useful in constructing a more complex and nuanced sense of the ideology.

² Psychoanalytic theory has been remarkably influential in shaping the modern Western perceptions of selfhood and personal development. Jacques Lacan categorizes the first months of a child’s existence as the “mirror stage,” in which he or she is not yet affected by the responsibility (or even necessity) of inter-personal relationships: “[T]he *I* is precipitated in the primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (*The Mirror Stage* 2). Thus the self precedes any interpersonal relationships, existing as an autonomous entity and in stark contrast to the *ubuntu* definition of personhood.

³ While the Afrikaner ethnic category often receives a negative connotation as the “oppressor” within the apartheid system, the more historically neutral interpretation refers merely to the descendants of the white seventeenth- and eighteenth- century immigrants to the Cape. In this text, the latter meaning is intended.

⁴ A common practice in biological racial identification, particularly in determining between Whites and light-skinned Coloured people, was referred to simply as the

"comb test." A comb was pulled through an individual's hair; if the comb were caught in tight curls, the person would likely be classified as Coloured. In one notable case in 1983, hospital staff near Pretoria, South Africa discovered an abandoned baby. After the police laboratory examined a *single* strand of her hair, she was pronounced Coloured (AH 23).

⁵ Augustine Shutte breaks down the development of humans into three separate, yet not altogether distinct stages. The first ends with the capacity to make decisions and reasoned judgments with "self-consciousness"; the second comprises "cognitive, volitional, and emotional" development; and the third, which is ongoing throughout one's natural life, is an urge toward self-expression (*Philosophy* 77).

Though this concept would make for fascinating exploration, in this paper I will limit myself to the broader underlying notion of individuality through community.

⁶ For more information on the falsified notions of history on which Afrikaner nationalism was largely based, see Charles A. Manning's *In Defense of Apartheid*. (*American Quarterly Review*. 43.1 (1964): 135-49.)

⁷ From the beginnings of South African colonization and to the chagrin of white nationalists, many European settlers interbred with the black and Colored populations. As the Dutch established separate, segregated churches, "[t]he 'white blood' which had strayed into black channels was regarded as thereby contaminated and must be rejected and considered as lost. The colour-line was to be drawn once and for all, and thereafter the blood was to be kept pure. There was to be one

marriage law for whites and another for non-whites, and no provision for inter-marriage" (Patterson 620).

⁸ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission began its hearings on December 15, 1995, and was not officially dissolved until 2001.

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