

he *Liberating*  
**MESSAGE**



**A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW FOR AFRICA**

**BJ van der Walt**

# **THE LIBERATING MESSAGE**

**A Christian worldview  
for  
Africa**



**B.J. VAN DER WALT**



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for  
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*In grateful memory of my parents who showed me that love is the secret of life:*

- *My Father (1909-1989) who loved the African soil as only a farmer could.*
- *My Mother (1916-1991) who taught me to love my fellow Africans*

*In grateful acknowledgement for the Christian education I received at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, on occasion of its 125th anniversary (1869-1994)*



# CONTENTS

	<b>Preface - Dr. Y. Turaki</b>	iv
1.	<b>Voices calling from Africa</b>	1
2.	<b>The crisis in the transformation of Africa and the urgent need for a Christian worldview</b>	5
2.1	Introduction: Western Christianity and European colonialism	5
2.2	The pre-colonial phase (until about 1880)	6
2.3	The colonial phase (from about 1880 to about 1960)	10
2.4	The post-colonial phase (from about 1960 onwards)	25
2.5.	New hope for a bleeding continent	34
2.6	Conclusion	37
3.	<b>The nature, structure and functions of a worldview</b>	39
3.1	Introduction: word and definition	39
3.2	The nature of a worldview	40
3.3	The structure of a worldview	43
3.4	The functions of a worldview	53
4.	<b>God's revelation: the foundation of a Christian worldview</b>	56
4.1	Introduction: fundamental questions	56
4.2	Twelve theses about God's revelation	57
4.3	Recapitulation: light in the darkness	80
4.4	How to read the Bible	82
4.5	The revelational foundation of a Christian worldview	89
5.	<b>A radical Christian worldview compared with dualist Christian worldviews</b>	90
5.1	Introduction: two questions	90
5.2	Biblical perspectives for a Christian worldview	90
5.3	Traditional African views of history and time	93
5.4	The kingdom of God as the meaning of history	94
5.5	Four Christian worldviews	99
5.6	Dualist Christian worldviews: a description and critique	109
5.7	The origins of a radical Christian worldview	118
6.	<b>The basic outlines of a Christian philosophy</b>	123
6.1	Introduction: the relationship between religion, worldview, philosophy and science	123
6.2	Six basic distinctions in a Christian philosophy	126
6.3	The distinction between God and His creation	130
6.4	The distinction between God's laws and the creatures subjected to them	134



6.5	The distinction between the aspects or modalities of earthly reality	142
7.	<b>On being human according to a Christian worldview</b>	153
7.1	Introduction: the quest for self-identity	153
7.2	Man as a gift and a duty	156
7.3	Man as a duality of sexes	157
7.4	Man as a holistic being	163
7.5	Man as a multi-dimensional being	170
7.6	Man as a religious being	171
7.7	Man as the image of God	172
7.8	Man as a sinner	175
7.9	Man as fellow man	180
7.10	Man as creator of culture	185
7.11	Conclusion: on the way to a new Africa	193
8.	<b>Cultural plurality in Africa</b>	196
8.1	Introduction: a few examples of cultural differences	196
8.2	A provisional comparison between traditional African culture and Western culture	197
8.3	African communalism	209
8.4	Possible reasons for the strong communal consciousness among African people	216
8.5	The encounter and cooperation between African culture and Western culture in South Africa	220
9.	<b>Conflicting views on human identity and society in Africa</b>	232
9.1	Introduction: the background	232
9.2	A brief comparison between Western liberalist and socialist anthropologies and views of society	233
9.3	African socialism with special emphasis on Zambian humanist socialism	237
9.4	Human identity and community according to individualism, communalism and according to the Bible	247
10.	<b>A Christian view of society in dialogue with the individualist and communalist views</b>	259
10.1	Introduction: three Biblical perspectives	259
10.2	The general characteristics of individualism, communalism and a Christian view of society	265
10.3	Some critical remarks about individualism and communalism	278
10.4	Structural and confessional pluralism	280
10.5	Office, authority, power and responsibility	282
10.6	A summary in thirteen theses	291

<b>11.</b>	<b>Societal change and renewal according to three models</b>	<b>295</b>
11.1	Introduction: looking for a model	295
11.2	The dualist-pietist model for social renewal	303
11.3	The revolutionary model for social change	311
11.4	The reformational model for social renewal	318
11.5	Christian organisations and institutions as a strategy for social change and renewal	325
<b>12.</b>	<b>Christian worldview versus ideology</b>	<b>336</b>
12.1	Introduction: an acid test	337
12.2	Idolatry in the Bible	340
12.3	Anatomy of an ideology	356
12.4	Secularism: mother of ideologies	367
12.5	Apartheid: a many-headed monster	375
<b>13.</b>	<b>Six important societal relationships in a Christian perspective</b>	<b>400</b>
13.1	Friendship: a neglected need	400
13.2	Leave, cleave unto and be one: the threefold mystery of marriage	407
13.3	A new vision for broken family life in Africa	413
13.4	The school as a societal relationship	423
13.5	A critical look at the modern business enterprise	427
13.6	"Not of the world but in the world": the calling of the church in the world	444
<b>14.</b>	<b>Government and citizen in a Christian perspective</b>	<b>465</b>
14.1	Introduction: religion and politics in Africa	465
14.2	Christ and politics	469
14.3	Romans 13:1-7 about government and citizens	484
14.4	The right of protest, resistance and disobedience against a bad government	494
14.5	Towards genuine democracy for Africa	508
<b>15.</b>	<b>Christian higher education for Africa</b>	<b>526</b>
15.1	Introduction: the characteristics of education	527
15.2	The character of scientific knowledge in comparison with pre-scientific knowledge	535
15.3	Christian higher education in Africa today	541
15.4	Christian scholarship in confrontation with Christian dualism, secular neutralism and secular pluralism	564
15.5	Theology and Philosophy	580
15.6	A credo for an institution for Christian higher education	592
	<b>Postscript</b>	<b>597</b>
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>604</b>

## PREFACE

Professor B.J. van der Walt, the author of this book has become a very good friend of mine in a matter of just a few years after our first meeting. As I got to know more about him, I discovered that we have many things in common. Our deep and engaging discussions, sharing and exchange of ideas over the years have brought us closer together theologically and philosophically. During these meetings of minds, I observed that Professor van der Walt was deeply concerned about one very important issue which is plaguing Christianity in Africa. It is the crisis of a Christian worldview in Africa. This crisis is deeply rooted in the social dynamics, processes and transformations of African societies by various agents of change, such as Christianity and Colonialism.

The crisis of values and worldviews in Africa affects Christianity deeply. This crisis requires that a comprehensive Christian worldview be developed and formulated for Africa, hence the primary reason for writing this book. The author preoccupied himself with the construction of a comprehensive Christian worldview based upon his good knowledge of theology, social philosophy and history, and the Scriptures.

Without going deeply into his background and deep roots in the Reformed theology and philosophy, the author has succeeded in establishing theology, social philosophy and history and the Scriptures as foundations to our understanding and development of a Christian worldview. The pitfalls of a Western dualistic theology, secular philosophy and ideologies are adequately defined and critiqued. Similarly, on the other hand, the pitfalls of African communalism and social philosophy are also defined and critiqued. The Holy Scriptures and Reformational theology and philosophy form the basis of the critique of both the Western and African legacies.

I took time out to read this fascinating book over many weeks. The exercise was very rewarding and fulfilling. For many years, I have developed a deep interest in studying and understanding a Christian worldview. The author has succeeded in convincing me that this book has a substantial contribution to make in this area.

The transformation of Africa by the colonial powers and missionaries' activities has generated and accelerated many socio-political, cultural and religious changes and crises for Africans. The more I as a Christian look at these crises on the African scene, the more I think of the relevance of a comprehensive Christian worldview for Africa. African Christians need a compass to guide them through the crises of values and worldviews which are plaguing Africans today. In this state of confusion, there is a need to have a well-defined and well-developed Christian worldview to give guidance to Christians.

In order to achieve this noble goal and desire, the author uses his wealth of experience and skills in theology, social philosophy and history, social sciences and the Holy Scriptures to develop and formulate a Christian worldview. He does this by moving from the Western perspective to the African context. This contextual journey is not an easy one and may appear complicated to ordinary Africans. Even if this contextual movement is not well-understood or well-developed, there is much that contemporary Africans can learn about the crisis of Christianity in Africa.

This book serves as an introduction towards understanding the Christian worldview within the African context. It is theologically sound and systematic in its development.

Anyone who is interested in the study of social values and worldviews in Africa will find it very valuable. I recommend this book highly to theologians, philosophers and social scientists.

Dr. Yusufu Turaki  
General Secretary  
Evangelical Churches of West Africa  
Jos, Nigeria



## Chapter 1

# VOICES CALLING FROM AFRICA

Africa is crying out for help. It is a cry coming from Christians from all walks of life who are struggling to find answers to problems they are confronted with in their daily lives. These brothers and sisters, like some Christians in other parts of the world, are asking: how can the Christian life be meaningful within my particular socio-cultural-political context?

The following ten excerpts from letters written by people of different ages and sexes from all over Africa will indicate just how relevant the problem is that we wish to reflect on in this book.

\* *A final-year student at the University of Oxford, England*

My father (who is illiterate) is still a full-blooded traditional African. I smile into my beard about his primitive superstitions. My mother belongs to the Shona Independent Church of Zimbabwe. If you ask me, this 'church' is more pagan than Christian. Friends at Scripture Union have guided me towards Christ. I have now been an active member of the Methodist Church for two years.

Why do I still doubt who I am? Am I still a true African if I do not believe in traditional culture and religion any longer? Have I perhaps become a black Westerner - or a Westernized black man? Is my identity determined by my Christian faith? Or am I perhaps not any of these three ...?

\* *A young minister from South Africa*

I am convinced that the task of the Christian is not merely to evangelise, to show compassion to the sick, the poor and the unemployed and to exhort people to lead a clean moral life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ surely also has something to say about economics, labour and politics. From this I deduce that we need not say goodbye to the world if we wish to serve Him. I would like to serve the Lord *in* the world and also as their minister offer guidance to my congregation in the field of politics.

If I do dare, however, to say something about the political calling of the Christian from the pulpit, I am accused of practising politics from the side of either the rightist or the more enlightened people. Do help me not to fall into the trap of spiritualist pietism, so that I only preach to my congregation about their eternal salvation, while my people are hating one another for political reasons, assaulting and killing one another. What should I do?

\* *A female journalist from Malawi*

Is the kingdom of the Lord as limited as the church? Do we have to enclose ourselves within the walls of the church? May we, apart from the Bible, read only elementary catechism books, sentimental evangelising pamphlets and feeble ecclesiastical newsletters? Do we as Christians have nothing to say about urbanisation, corruption, one-party rule, social injustice, unemployment, art, education and many other problems? I would like to write about these things for my newspaper, but it seems as if Christians are hesitant of talking about these things. Is there nobody who is willing to speak up? Or do people simply not know that there are Christian alternatives - and what they look like?

\* *A high-school student from Zaire*

The Lord Jesus has commanded us to love Him not only with our hearts but also with our minds. I would like to do this - because the Lord has blessed me with a good brain. (I usually get the highest marks in the class.) In my Biology handbook, however, I read nothing about the Lord. Is He then not also the Creator and the Upholder of life? Will I be able to serve Him as a biologist one day, or would it be better for me to become a minister?

\* *A Christian political leader from Windhoek, Namibia*

I am a member of the SWAPO government of the newly independent Namibia. I realize more and more every day that I do not really have enough insight into my work. For example: What are the duties and the responsibilities of subjects? And what exactly are the calling, rights and limits of government? I have enquired all over to obtain a Christian book which will make clear to me what the Bible has to say about this,

but I was not able to find *one*. Please do help me to find such a book - I am willing to pay for it.

\* *A female lecturer at a teachers' training college, Francistown, Botswana*

I teach at a secular state institution. There are many para-church organisations spreading the Gospel among the students on campus. I have the feeling, however, that the students need *something more*, something like a Christian intellectual framework, vision or perspective on life. The students seem to me to be directionless - how would they one day be able to help schoolchildren to keep to the right (Christian) way? I do not really know what the solution is. I do hope that you understand my problem and that you will be able to give me the right advice.

\* *An economist from the University of Nigeria (Nsukka)*

I know that the socialist economy has collapsed in Africa and also in the East Bloc countries in Europe. But is materialist capitalism really the only alternative? Can a Christian find a third way? Do you know how many of my students have asked me: "What should we choose - capitalism or socialism?" Could you help me with titles of good reading matter which I can study in order to be able to answer them?

\* *An American development agent from the Ivory Coast*

I have no idea where to turn any longer. *What* is development? *How* does one develop? *Why* does one do these things - are people not happier left alone to live as their forefathers did? Why is the process so slow in taking off in spite of all the dollars which we have already invested in it? Is neo-colonialism to blame? Is it merely a result of Africa's climate? Or is there a basic cultural-religious cause? What I mean is this: Would Africa not perhaps begin to modernise when people have changed their worldview? Do you think that the Christian lifeworld contains elements which can unlock the African culture?



\* *A student in Religious Studies, Accra, Ghana*

Is Christ truly the only Way? Our traditional faith, after all, also knew a Creator God. Does Islam not also contain moments of truth? My lecturer says that these three religions are only different paths up the same mountain - at the top of the mountain (eternal life) they all converge. What do you say? Is the Christian faith unique? How could I be sure about this?

\* *A lecturer at an agricultural college in Kenya*

I am worried about the ecological deterioration of our environment. The over-grazing and soil erosion are becoming worse. Trees are cut down for firewood - but nobody plants anything to replace the trees. Would I be able to find guidelines in the Bible to motivate people towards conservation? (Most people around here are Christians.) I do know that the Lord gave the command in Genesis that we have to be stewards of his creation in every sense of the word. I am, however, not merely looking for scattered Bible texts, but am looking for a broad perspective with which I can inspire my students. By the way, do you not think that it is about time that our churches should become more relevant and also preach about the sins against our precious environment, rather than only inveighing all the time against smoking, drinking and whoring?

\* \* \*

The basic need emerging from these ten cases is for an integral, encompassing and powerful Christian worldview, a Christian perspective on all the facets of man's life. Without such a vision Africa will perish. Because without it we will not be able to offer really sound responses to these voices calling out from Africa, or to all the hundreds of others who have not been mentioned.

However, before we can develop what we regard as a *solution* for Africa (in the form of a radical Christian worldview), we should have a clear idea of the *problem*: What exactly has happened to this continent that has resulted in the fact that many African Christians are uncertain, without direction and even have "divided souls"? Therefore, in our next chapter, we shall investigate the crises in the transformation of Africa during the past hundred years under the influence of (Western) Christianity and (European) colonial administration.

## Chapter 2

# THE CRISIS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF AFRICA AND THE URGENT NEED FOR A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

What could the reason(s) be for the desperate cries from the different people representing the whole of Africa that came to us in the previous chapter? They are clearly experiencing a loss of religious unity in their lives, a clash of values, a tension between different worldviews.

Has this always been the case in Africa? The answer is a decisive "No". What then has happened? And when did it happen?

To be able to deal with this very important question, we will have to spend some time on the history of Africa - especially the history of approximately the last hundred years.

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION: WESTERN CHRISTIANITY AND EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

During the last century Africa has been subjected to the influence of especially two powers which changed the face of our continent in a dramatic way: Western Christianity and European colonialism. When distinguishing between these two factors in the following exposition, it should be remembered, however, that they can never be fully separated. This is already evident from the fact that it was a *Western or European* type of Christianity transplanted on African soil. The type of education Africans received during the colonial period is a good example. Education grafted them into the whole Western system. They had to read, write and think in Western categories of thought. At the same time education served as a gateway through which the Christian faith was brought to them. The Christian missionaries were also members of the colonialising nations and acted - whether they were aware of it or not - in favour of colonial rule.

To obtain a clear picture of the radical transformation of Africa in the course of merely one century, this period will be divided into three phases: a pre-colonial phase (until about 1880), the colonial phase

(from about 1880 to plus-minus 1960) and the post-colonial phase (from about 1960 to the present). It is important to at least mention something about the pre-colonial phase because it is the traditional African to whom Christianity and colonialism were transmitted, who became the recipient. With regard to the colonial phase it will be necessary to investigate who transmitted what, how it was done and what the effects were on the people of Africa. Our discussion of the post-colonial phase will concentrate on the African's reaction to Christianity and colonialism.

## 2.2 THE PRE-COLONIAL PHASE (UNTIL ABOUT 1880)

It is important to note that the African context exhibits a great variety of peoples and cultures. Because it is impossible, and for the present study, unnecessary to examine in detail these variations, attention will be focussed on a few general traits of pre-colonial African culture. And this will be done here only very briefly because they will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. (See for instance chapter 8 where traditional African culture is compared with Western culture.)

Before we mention the characteristics of African culture, and try to understand what happened during the subsequent phases (colonial and post-colonial) we should firstly explain culture in more general terms.

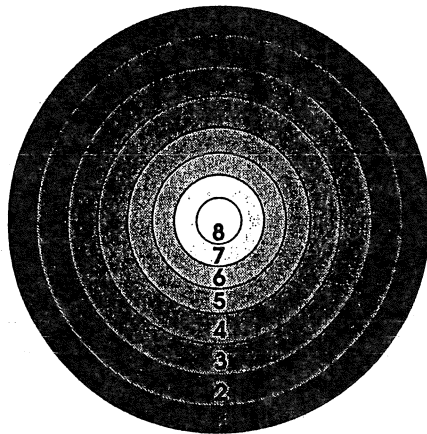
Man was made *from* the dust of the earth, as the word *Adam* clearly indicates. At the same time he was appointed *over* the earth. Because God created man thus, he cannot but change his natural environment. God has placed him in a beautiful "house", but he himself has to make a "home" of it. The Creator has put enormous potential into creation, but man has to actualize it.

Human culture is therefore something different from a spider which spins a web, a bird which builds a nest or an animal which instinctively feeds and protects its young. Insects, birds and animals do the same thing generation after generation. Man is creative; from that which exists he can create something new, something different.

The following elementary definition summarises what culture is: Culture is the ways in which human beings shape their natural and human environment.

The result of human cultural activity is a complex whole. If we use the image of an onion which we start peeling, we find at least the following eight layers: (1) habits; (2) behaviour; (3) customs; (4) material and spiritual creations, like buildings, language and works of art; (5) institutions, such as marriage and the state with its laws; (6) values and norms; (7) a specific worldview, and (8) finally the religious convictions of a specific group of people.

The following diagram explains these eight layers:



You will note that the outside cultural layers are visible. The deeper we move to the centre, the less visible do the facets of a culture become. It is therefore easier to describe a specific custom than it is to describe the worldview of someone or of a group.

A subsequent characteristic of culture is that the outside layers also change more easily than the core. Very few Africans, following acculturation with the West, will still wear traditional African clothes. Many of those who wear Western clothes, however, may still have more or less the same worldview as their traditional ancestors. Westernisation has not touched their essential being!

This tenacity of a worldview has a link with another trait of culture which we have not mentioned yet. This is that the inner, deeper, cultural layers determine and direct the outward layers. For instance: Your marital and family life and the norms which you support cannot be understood without an understanding of your worldview.

Your worldview in turn is influenced in a decisive manner by even more fundamental religious convictions or your ultimate commitment. View of self, view of the world and vision of life are most fundamentally determined by the one you give your heart to - it is directed by your view of God. (This does not imply that circumstances cannot have an influence on one's religious convictions. One cannot simply say: a change in the hearts of people will automatically change the socio-economic structures. This is not the full truth - just as the opposite statement will also not be true.)

This analysis applies to each culture. What then is so unique about traditional African culture?

In traditional African culture the deepest, innermost core which determines all the other cultural layers, is the belief in a spirit world. This spirit world can be divided into two categories, namely the non-human spirits and the human spirits or the spirits of the ancestors. Non-human spirits are arranged in hierarchical order according to type and importance, depending on their power and the role they play in nature: the Creator on top of the hierarchy is followed by the deities, object-embodied spirits and other miscellaneous spirits comprising both good or harmless spirits as well as bad or evil spirits.

The spirit world keeps everything in balance and permeates the entire world or nature. The law of the spirit dominates the African worldview in which man stands between the different spirits and nature. The African concept of the world, society and the human being is defined, moulded and conditioned by his faith - the reality of the spirit world and the application of the law of the spirit as a means of explaining social phenomena and all kinds of mysteries.

Traditional Africans did not separate the sacred from the profane. All the authorities confirm that the well-known Western division between religious and worldly, sacred and secular and supernatural and natural simply does not occur. Before this Western dualism had been transferred to African soil, their religion permeated *the whole* of their daily lives. The religious awareness of the Africans was as much part of their daily life as eating, drinking, sowing, harvesting, warring and procreating. Their lives as such were religion!

Dr. Yusufu Turaki (1991:135) summarises the most prominent characteristics of the traditional African worldview in the following seven points:

1. Social and spiritual phenomena can be explained by the law of the spirit.
2. The world/nature is held in balance by the spiritual laws and therefore should not be tampered with.
3. The moral and spiritual obligation of man is to live in harmony with and in obedience to spiritual forces in the human and the non-human world.
4. The orientation is toward the glorious, perfect, primordial state of the past and less to the unknown, uncertain future.
5. The world of the ancestors is always better, closer to the perfect origin and therefore has more potency than the present or the future. Thus, anything passed down from the ancestors, such as culture, religion, technology, education, values, social institutions, etc., must be maintained, preserved, protected and eventually passed on to the next generations.
6. The moral obligation to conform to traditions and conventions overrides any desire for change or non-conformity.
7. The conception is that the best in life lies in the past, the world of ancestors and the origin.

As mentioned already, we will in the following chapters have the opportunity to present an extensive exposition and analysis of traditional African culture. The aim of the brief exposition here has merely been to indicate that the traditional, pre-colonial African was not a person without culture concentrated in a definite religion and worldview. This is what - believe it or not - many Western colonialists thought. No, their traditional worldview was holistic, all-embracing, it integrated their whole life and gave it clear direction. They did not experience any "identity crisis".

This, however, is what has happened in the process of "Christianisation" and "modernisation" during the colonial period. The introduction of Christianity, as well as of a Western education and Western political and economic institutions have exerted a profound influence upon African cultural values and structures.

### **2.3 THE COLONIAL PHASE (FROM ABOUT 1880 TO ABOUT 1960)**

For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that contact between Africa and the rest of the world did not commence round about 1880. For more than four centuries (1450-1880) Arabs and Europeans have explored and exploited the continent. Africa was not only robbed of valuables like ivory and gold, but also of millions of its people. It is estimated that a minimum of 10 million slaves ended up in the Americas, the Atlantic islands and in Europe. An average of 20% were, however, killed during the capturing operations or died between the time of capture and embarkation or during the voyage. The resultant figure could be many times the numbers which landed alive outside of Africa. Some writers estimate the total at about 100 million! (Cf. Rodney 1972:104.) We will, however, focus our attention on the period lasting from about the end of the previous century up to the liberation and independence of most of the African countries during the sixties of the twentieth century.

During this phase when Africa was divided into separate colonies by the large Western powers, the traditional way of life came under increasing pressure. For the sake of "modernisation", Western worldviews and values, which were often in direct conflict with the traditional African values, were forced onto the continent's inhabitants.

The colonizers did not hide their Western sense of superiority. The African worldview was considered childish and therefore had to be corrected and brought to the same level as that of the West. Europe and the USA regarded Africa as the symbol of barbarism and non-civilization. They regarded the worldview of the African as primitive, pre-logical and without intelligence.

The strategy which the Western powers and missionaries therefore applied, was the negation of indigenous African culture and its

replacement by the so-called superior Western culture. Let us first have a brief look at colonial administration and then discuss in more detail the role of Christian missions.

### 2.3.1 The role of colonial administration

The above-mentioned strategy of negation and replacement of African culture in some cases resulted in facets of traditional culture being ignored or even wiped out, but in most cases traditional African culture was modified or transformed by the Western influence, sometimes resulting in totally new cultural phenomena and institutions.

Examples of social structures imported more or less wholesale from Europe are (apart from the church, which will be discussed under the next point of Christian missions) schools, universities and Western forms of government (with *inter alia* elected leaders and bureaucracies). These migrated social institutions were regarded as an "improvement" by the Western rulers, but for the local people they were a "mixed blessing".

Because of Western colonial rule pre-colonial institutions were transformed also. An example here could be the influence of the Western idea of a nuclear family (the family consisting only of father, mother and children) on the traditional African idea of a much more extended family life.

But apart from *importations* and *modifications* the encounter between traditional African culture and Western colonial administration also resulted in totally new *creations* - institutions and phenomena which previously neither existed in Africa nor in the West. Examples, for instance, are urbanization and ideologies like African socialism.

Cormack (1983:xx) uses the following ideal-type characterisation of the traditional rural community in contrast with the modern urban society in Africa. This model is useful for purposes of comparison and for determining the extent of change. However, as is the case with every abstract model, few empirical cases will correspond exactly to the abstractions.



**Traditional/rural**

Small  
 Homogeneous  
 Collective  
 Sacred  
 Unspecialised  
 Organised  
 Personal  
 Kinship  
 Stable  
 Religious  
 Self-sufficient  
 Tradition  
 Local  
 Simplicity  
 Isolation  
 Co-operation  
 Status ascribed  
 Subsistence economy  
 Non-literate  
 Uncritical  
 Non-legislative  
 Non-experimental  
 Non-intellectual

**Modern/urban**

Large  
 Heterogeneous  
 Individual  
 Secular  
 Specialised  
 Disorganised  
 Impersonal  
 Non-kinship  
 Unstable  
 Scientific  
 Dependent  
 Change  
 Cosmopolitan  
 Complexity  
 Contact  
 Competition  
 Status achieved  
 Cash economy  
 Literate  
 Critical  
 Legislative  
 Experimental  
 Intellectual

**2.3.2 The role of Christian missions**

There were three major phases in Christian contact with Africa. The first one was between the first and sixth century, mainly confined to North Africa, which was finally overrun by Islam in the seventh century. The second was the Portuguese missions between the fifteenth and eighteenth century, but its influence was limited to the coastline of Africa, the Congo, Angola, Mozambique and East Africa. The third phase brings us to the modern European missions that came to Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is the work of Christian missionaries during this period that are of special importance to us.

Before we start criticising the work of Christian missions in Africa, let me state categorically that this critique in no way whatsoever suggests

that the Christianity brought to Africa was useless. In spite of certain failures, Christianity has made immense contributions to our continent. The thousands of schools and hospitals established by the missions are proof enough.

In the first place we will have to look at the *way* in which Christianity was introduced into Africa and secondly at the *type* of Christianity that has been transplanted to our continent. We do hope that it will become clear that it was not only Western colonial rule which disturbed the earlier, pre-colonial culture and worldview of the peoples of Africa. The gun was accompanied by the cross! The *way* in which the Christian faith was presented and the dualist *type* of Christianity resulted in a real crisis for Africa.

### **2.3.2.1 The way in which Christianity was introduced**

Christianity - or any other religion - never exists in a cultural vacuum. One experiences one's religion *in* and not *outside* one's own culture. This should be kept in mind especially in transcultural communication of the Gospel.

Transcultural communication of the Gospel is not something new. It already occurred during the time of the New Testament when John and Paul brought the Gospel from its Hebrew origins into the world of Greek thought, used Greek words but filled them with a new meaning. The message in its new form filled the Greek cultural and religious concepts with a biblical substance and so "revolutionised" them.

In our case the messenger was a Western missionary. Therefore the Gospel transmitted by the missionaries was coloured by Western culture and worldview, it was brought to Africa in Western "clothes". Someone has used the example of the Gospel flower in the flower pot. The flower pot symbolises the cultural values of the missionary. The flower, that is the Gospel, should not stay in the Western pot and be confused with "real Christianity", but should as soon as possible be transplanted in African soil.

The recipients were traditional Africans, who grew up in a totally different cultural environment. Their perception and interpretation of the Gospel was therefore determined by their own worldview. Every

form of Christianity is contextualised - whether one is aware of the fact or not. Each individual Christian experiences and expresses his/her faith in a specific cultural context.

The problem was, however, that neither the missionaries nor the recipients of their message were aware, or at least aware enough, of the difference between the Gospel and its cultural "clothes". The result was that the missionaries viewed the cultural form in which they presented the Gospel as a real part of the Gospel. And the Africans thought that they should accept Western cultural forms to enable them to be genuine Christians!

The situation was aggravated by the fact that the Western missionaries - like the colonial rulers - regarded not only Christianity, but also their culture as superior to that of the indigenous people of Africa. We have already mentioned their attitude of negation and replacement.

As Christians today we are much more critical towards Western culture. We do now realize that no culture should serve as a criterion for the Christian. No culture is *per se* good or bad. By the grace of God every culture contains good elements. But because of human sinfulness it also contains less acceptable or totally unacceptable elements that are against God's Word.

In spite of the fact that Western culture was strongly influenced by Christian faith for nearly two thousand years it has, especially during the past three hundred years, become increasingly secularized. Unbiblical ideologies like individualism, materialism, scientism and technicism (an overestimation of the value of scientific and technological development) have overshadowed and finally eliminated the Christian faith. The Western missionaries did not realize how deeply the Gospel they brought to Africa was contaminated by secular Western culture. They definitely had no ground to regard their culture as superior, the criterion according to which African culture could be measured.

Let us have a brief look at the methods a missionary usually applied in spreading the Gospel. He would build a house for himself and his family - not in the local village but at some distance.

Then he would learn the language, make a few disciples who can assist him and, when he has enough converts, build a church and also a school. (For Africans there was not much difference between the two because at both you were taught new things.) In some cases the missionary station would also get involved in health care, agriculture, provision of water, roads etc. In all these ways the traditional people were pulled out of their traditional village milieu and culture. The missionary did not enter the African context, but he invited them out of their context to the Western one!

Apart from Christianity ignoring their own cultural environment, the Africans also got the impression that Christianity was something *separate* from ordinary life. (This idea was strengthened by the dualist type of Christianity which will soon be discussed.)

The ways of worshipping were also totally foreign to the indigenous people: the music and the songs - also sung in London, Paris, Rome - as well as the sermons and prayers. Add this to the translation of the Bible in the vernacular languages. In all these ways of communication the worldview plays a very prominent role. The same applies to the content or doctrine communicated. What was transmitted about God, creation, sin, salvation etc. was done in Western thought patterns.

Could we blame many black Christians who concluded that, in order to be a good Christian, one had to become a white man and thus leave behind one's own customs, clothes, language and values? For many Africans the above-mentioned Western ecclesiastical forms became sacrosanct. For example: to be a genuine Christian one has to stand in front of a group and be able to deliver a monologue called a sermon!

Due to the same confusion (between the cultural forms and the Biblical norms) others, who realized that their cultural heritage was endangered, rejected Christianity as a religion of the white man.

What happened in most cases, however, was that the outer, more visible layers of traditional African culture were exchanged in favour of the outer layers (habits, behaviour, customs, institutions and values) of Western culture. The inner core of traditional culture (its worldview and religious convictions), however, remained more or less intact. As we have already indicated above, these outer and more visible cultural

layers tend to change easier and faster. We have, however, also indicated that culture as a whole (from its inner religious and worldviewish core to its outer layers) constitutes a unity. It cannot be a mixture containing foreign elements. If one therefore has a traditional African core (religion and worldview) and the rest (values, material and spiritual creations, customs etc.) is largely Westernised, tension is inevitable. An identity crisis will be the result: Am I (still) an African, (already) a Westerner or (only) a Christian or perhaps all of them in one?

To summarise: the crisis of African Christianity is basically a worldview crisis. And what is the basic reason for this? The reason is that most Western missionaries - and also some Africans who embraced Christianity - did not take the worldview and the religion of the African people seriously, because they regarded it as ridiculous, primitive superstition. If they took it seriously, they reasoned, it would weaken the Gospel. But it is precisely because they did not take it seriously that the impact of Christianity on the African was weakened!

Because the Gospel was not brought as a new, total, encompassing worldview, which had to take the place of an equally encompassing traditional worldview, the deepest core of African culture remained untouched. Christian faith only influenced and changed the outer layers of African culture such as, for example, customs and behaviour. For this reason it often led to superficial Christianity - totally at variance with the nature of the Christian faith, which is a total, all-embracing religion, influencing the whole of life from a reborn heart - in the same way that a heart pumps life-giving blood to every part of the body.

The average African convert did not experience the Gospel as adequate for his whole life, and especially not when it came to the most complex issues of life. For that reason we discover all over Africa today that Christians, in times of existential need and crisis, as in danger, illness and death, revert to their traditional faith and view of life. The Gospel has no real impact in those areas where it really matters!

This results in many Christians in Africa living in two worlds: the older or traditional one, and the new or Christian one. They try to straddle both positions. This can only lead to frustration and

uncertainty, especially for the African, who has traditionally functioned within a holistic, integral religion and worldview.

Because a worldview determines personal identity, a crisis in one's worldview also implies an identity crisis. One has difficulty to find oneself! One does not know where to look for solutions for one's problems, be they of a physical, psychological, ethical, social or of whatever nature.

One could use illness as an example: Should one pay a visit to the medical doctor or the witchdoctor?

Saayman and Kriel (1992:31-53) contrast the traditional African and Western views of sickness, health and healing. The reality in Africa today is the simultaneous existence of two medical systems: the traditional African and the Western biomedical system.

In the traditional African view, healing is a thoroughly religious phenomenon. People usually want to know the *cause* of illness - the exact *diagnosis* of the disease is not so important. The cause could be failure to communicate with the ancestors or the patient neglecting or even maltreating them.

Secondly, according to the African view, a person can only be healthy if he belongs to a healthy community. The social dimension is very important. A person gets ill when the social balance and harmony is disturbed. This may happen because of wrong behaviour, e.g. committing adultery or because of witchcraft.

When a member of a community falls ill, the medicine man or woman will determine why (the cause) and also prescribe the correct treatment which could be prayers, sacrifices and/or traditional medicine. Because the main aim of the treatment is reconciliation with God, the ancestors and the community, the whole clan usually participates - healing cannot take place if the individual is separated from his community.

Western medicine, by contrast, views man as a biological organism or even a "machine" with different parts. The emphasis is not on the spiritual cause as is the case in Africa, but on the bodily or physical facts, the diagnosis of the specific part which is malfunctioning. The

task of the doctor is to repair the individual "machine" by way of chemical or surgical intervention. (The religious aspect is ignored.) The treatment can also take place outside the community in an impersonal but functional clinic or hospital. (The social aspect of healing is not acknowledged.)

Let me tell a fable which so beautifully illustrates the identity crisis of the African. The king of the birds sent his tax collector to collect taxes from the birds. The fruit bat maintained that he would not pay because he was not a bird - I mean, have you ever seen a bird which brought his babies into the world live and suckled them? Shortly afterwards the king of the animals sent his representative to remind the animals of their tax duties. When he came to the fruit bat, he was told that the bats would not pay - after all, the bats could fly, and thus were not mammals. When the king of the animals held a feast for the animals, the bat was not invited. The same happened when the king of the birds held a feast. The poor bat - neither animal nor bird - was accepted nowhere. In this way many Africans today live in two worlds: the traditional and the Christian world (in Western guise). Without a worldview in which he feels totally at home, he experiences an identity crisis. His worldview is not in accordance with reality any longer. This results in a deep-seated existential uprooting. (In the following chapter more attention will be paid to what such a crisis of worldview really involves.)

Not only was the *way* Christianity was introduced to Africa detrimental; the *type* of Christianity imported to this continent also aggravated the situation.

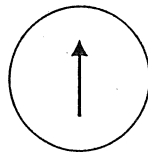
### **2.3.2.2 The type of Christianity introduced to Africa**

We will have to discuss this vital issue in more detail. A survey of the road which Western Christianity has trodden is important, because to a great degree African Christianity has - unfortunately! - followed Europe on foot. For the sake of clarity we shall simplify a bit and divide the spiritual history of the West in three phases: the Biblical, the dualist and the secular.

\* *The original Biblical vision: everything is spiritual-religious*

The Biblical message is that the whole of life is religion. The religious direction of the heart of man (positive in obedience to God, or negative in disobedience away from God, directed toward a series of idols) determines his *whole* life, *everything* that he does or says. The *whole* of life (not only prayer, reading the Bible and going to church) is religion, service of God, or, obversely, idolatry. The Gospel is not only something spiritual (for Sundays only), but it is a *full*, complete Gospel. It touches the fields of labour, commerce, political and social relations - everything that man does. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has power to change and renew the whole of life. *Biblical spirituality encompasses the whole of life.*

Allow me to represent this Biblical vision as a circle with no divisions in it, to indicate that man's whole life is undivided, integral, total and radical service to God. In this circle we place an arrow facing upwards in order to indicate that this spirituality is determined by the true God of Scripture and is directed towards Him. The diagram thus looks like this:



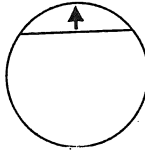
\* *Dualist Christianity: the limitation of the spiritual-religious*

The true Biblical vision of life was only briefly - if at all - given shape by Christians. Already early in the history of Western Christendom, religion came to be seen as an addendum, a plus factor, additional to the ordinary secular concerns of life. It was not the whole of life that was spiritual or religious, but only the "upper part". This upper part of man's existence was called the sacred or holy part, over against the lower or secular part, which would then include such things as science, economics, politics, commerce, labour, social life, etc. The all-embracing word for the lower sphere was "nature", as against the higher "supernatural" part, the sphere of grace.

In this case we can once again draw a circle, but a horizontal line should be drawn through it in order to represent the higher and lower



parts of the two-spheres doctrine. In the upper part there is an arrow pointing upwards and in the lower part there is no arrow, in order to symbolize the fact that this is a so-called neutral sphere or terrain.



The vision of man and his task in the world is no longer radical, total and integral. Man's religious life (which should be all-encompassing) is now limited to things such as praying, reading the Bible, going to church and doing theology - the so-called spiritual things - and perhaps also leading a good moral life. Religion, instead of being all-encompassing service to God, becomes a private issue that no longer has an influence on the social, political and economic spheres. It is clear, however, that this vision on spiritual matters is something totally different from the Biblical perspective, which sees the whole of life as spiritual, that is, determined and directed by God or an idol.

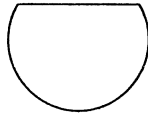
The two-spheres doctrine is not simply slightly wrong. It is totally unbiblical. This is clear *inter alia* from the fact that the Bible nowhere makes a distinction between nature and grace. The correct Biblical distinction is between grace and sin. The awful fact is that this incorrect view has been held by Christians for almost 2 000 years, and is still widely accepted. This means that we have a half-hearted, impotent Christendom, because the influence of the Gospel is reduced to a small part of life, for instance to Sundays, that is, to one-seventh of the week!

It was exactly this kind of pietist, world-negating Christianity that missionaries mostly brought to Africa.

The process of secularisation - of which we can see the bitter fruits so clearly in our own times - therefore started early in the history of Christianity. It is not the "world" which is guilty of this in the first place. Christianity itself sowed the seeds. Modern secularism is simply the harvest which has been yielded by the infected seeds.

\* *Modern secularism - rejection of the spiritual-religious*

We can represent secularism diagrammatically, this time by the remaining lower section of the circle. Secularism entirely rejects the upper (spiritual) section. It refuses to have anything to do with religion. Life has to be divorced from the church. And because God and religion were limited to the upper or spiritual section (church life), man's life is also stripped of God. Man now has to live as though God does not exist. The supernatural has fallen away. All that remains is the natural, the visible life, here and now. The diagram thus looks like this:



While in the two-spheres doctrine there was still a little influence from the spiritual-religious sphere on the secular sphere, the world has now become wholly and totally secular, and has nothing more to do with service either to God or to idols.

We should not, however, deceive ourselves into thinking that the "secular" sphere is wholly neutral. Many Christians have capitulated to secularism (as they previously had to the two-spheres doctrine) by accepting the idea that there are things and areas in life which have (or should have) nothing to do with their religion.

Man, however, cannot live "neutrally" or secularly. The truth is that man will, having scrapped one God (formerly placed in the supernatural sphere), simply replace Him with another god. Should the true God be rejected, His place would be taken by idols, because man is an inherently religious being who cannot live if he does not live for something or somebody. Today we are able to see how a large variety of neo-pagan cults and superstitions have sprung up on the dunghheap of secularism.

How did these worldviews influence African Christianity? Africa has followed Europe on foot. We find today that Africa holds both the dualist and the secular views.

\* *Dualist African Christianity*

In following most Western churches, life in Africa is divided into "spiritual" and "secular" spheres. There is a wide range of opinions concerning the relationship between these spheres, how they influence each other and which should enjoy preference. The more conservative Evangelicals of Africa allocate priority to the spiritual, the church and redemption. The "vertical" (the relationship to God) is the most important for them and all stress is therefore placed on evangelisation (the gaining of souls for Christ).

The Ecumenicals in Africa (the more liberal Christians), tend to think more "horizontally". Good relations between people at the natural level are more important and they therefore strive for a more humanitarian society.

The Evangelicals believe that new (reborn) people will gradually, through their individual testimony, change society with all its societal structures, such as state, industry and education. They are very naïve, however, because they do not see the depth and breadth of human lostness. The tragic fact is that reborn Christians, even where they are the majority in a society, do not necessarily renew social structures, but have in fact perpetuated oppression. They narrow the Gospel down to its "vertical" dimensions - with at most some implications for the social involvement of individual Christians. They are very aggressive about "winning souls", but are mostly fairly passive when it comes to social renewal.

In contrast to this the Ecumenicals believe that evil is situated in the first place not in man but in his environment. For this reason the renewal of social structures and the overturning of the oppressive "establishments" will change the world. Reconciliation between people is more important than reconciliation with God. They too are naïve because they do not see that the Gospel should call man first of all out of the darkness of sin, out of a Godless life. They limit the Gospel to its "horizontal" dimensions. Although they are aggressive in social reform they are satisfied with a more or less passive Christian "presence" as a means to evangelisation. (For a detailed discussion of the Evangelicals and Ecumenicals see chapter 11, section 11.2 and 11.3 as well as chapter 13, section 13.6.1 and 13.6.2.)

Both these groups of Christians in Africa fail at the same point, viz. in their faulty (dualist) worldview. They simply put the stress at different poles. Neither of them truly realizes that Christ is the King of heaven and earth, soul and body, individual and society. The solution for us is not to try and *combine* the Evangelical and the Ecumenical visions. Their dualistic worldview has to be *replaced* by the full Gospel of God's kingship in every sphere of life.

\* *Secularism in Africa*

People in African societies, who become modernized without obedience to the full Gospel, will become secular - as has also happened in the West. This has already happened in many African countries with the absorption of secular Western ideologies, such as socialism, mixed with traditional African communalism or even more radical Marxism.

And once these ideologies begin to lose their popularity, as is happening now, what remains? We can already see clear examples of naked, empty secularism in which neither the traditional nor the Christian worldview plays a role. (Secularism as an ideology is discussed in more detail in chapter 12, section 12.4.)

Secularism provides a fertile breeding ground for an endless variety of worldviews. Because I view them negatively, I prefer calling them ideologies. In modern Africa we have authoritarianism or totalitarianism (not only the head of state, but also the civil servant wants to exercise power!), tribalism, nepotism, sectarianism and many more. What is causing the greatest havoc in contemporary Africa, is materialist individualism - or individualist materialism. Allow me to explain.

In many African countries we today have the situation where nobody cares about the state any more. If one aspires for a political position, it will simply be to enrich oneself. Government is only a tool for enhancing the welfare of the individual or certain social classes like the politicians, retired army generals etc. The task of the state is no longer viewed as being the public good, government to the benefit of *all* the citizens. Even the cry for democracy is sometimes merely the voices of selfish individuals, because once they gain positions in government, they will amass wealth for themselves, build beautiful villas in Europe

and the USA, have incredibly large bank accounts in Switzerland, etc. Even an ordinary civil servant would enrich himself with state funds without any sympathy for his brother and sister who may be starving!

This tendency is totally different from the traditional African worldview according to which people shared and cared for each other. But it is at the same time also related to traditional African practices. One could overpower another tribe and one would be regarded as a hero - as long as it is not done to members of one's own tribe. In the same way the government is regarded as enemy territory. One may loot the state for personal gain. There is nothing wrong with corruption - as long as one shares it with one's own tribe or class, for instance, if one uses some of the money to build a hospital, church or mosque for one's people! In many cases it will not even help to criticise such malpractices because nobody will listen. When put in jail such a person will be a hero - the one responsible for his imprisonment will be the culprit!

This is a terrible situation, but it has become an accepted and dominant way of life in many parts of Africa. This is the way in which people look at things, understand and interpret reality, feel, make important choices and conduct their whole way of life - their new worldview.

This attitude is usually accompanied by a consumerist tendency. Everything that is produced in the West and is expensive is desired, because it provides one with a higher status than ordinary people have!

The tragic fact is that some of these thieves still regard themselves as Christians. How on earth could this be possible? It is possible because the West did not provide them with an *integral, holistic* Christian worldview, but with a *dualist* Christian worldview. One is at the same time an ordinary human being who can do as one likes *and* a Christian who has to obey God's commands. Accordingly one may be a Christian at home and on Sundays, but during the week one may rob the government. And there is nothing wrong with it as long as one uses a small amount of one's assets to build a church!

\* *A third possibility for Africa*

The correct choice for African Christianity is, of course, a return to the original Biblical worldview. Such a worldview is a prescientific attitude to life, which determines the spiritual direction of man's life. It is thus not the product of science (theology or philosophy), but lies at the basis of man's scientific thought.

In this Biblical viewpoint the concept of the kingdom of God is central. This perspective includes three coherent ideas: God's *kingship*, the *sphere* of His dominion (creation), and the *fruits* (or blessings) of his sovereignty. It is therefore nothing less than the basic Christian confession that Christ is King and that we have to recognise and give substance to his kingship in all spheres of life.

Although the church fulfils an important role in God's kingdom, his kingdom is much wider and broader than the church. It touches on all spheres of life: commerce (Acts 4:32-35), justice (1 Corinthians 6:1-6), the relationship between master and slave (1 Peter 2:18), the relationship between husband and wife (Ephesians 5:21-32) and many more - even the food and drink we ingest (1 Corinthians 10:31).

A real Christian worldview based on the Word of God is a total, integral and radical worldview. It is the real medicine for the sickness of African Christianity!

I once again want to emphasise the following: The crisis brought about by the transformation of Africa is basically a worldview crisis. The identity crisis of many Africans is simply a result of this deeper worldview crisis.

However, it is about time to move on to the next main part of this chapter.

## **2.4 THE POST-COLONIAL PHASE (FROM ABOUT 1960 ONWARDS)**

This period could be described as the phase of liberation (from colonial rule) and modernisation. The crisis mentioned above, however, did not subside during this period; in fact it deepened and widened. The crisis

was not only a political or economical one, but also included the social, cultural, the educational, the ethical and the religious.

During the sixties colonial administration *as a policy* was something of the past for most African countries, but the *effects* of colonialism were not. The tension between traditional culture and modernisation resulted in what Vaughan has called a "divided soul".

#### 2.4.1 The "divided soul"

As indicated above, many Africans have maintained their traditional religions and worldviews. This constitutes the one half of their souls. It is traditionally inclined and resists change. The other half, however, wanted modernisation and development - a typically Western product.

This also emerged very clearly in the political and social areas. During the post-colonial independence era the politicians tried to get rid of every trace of the old imperialism. Nevertheless they wanted the benefits of another aspect of Western culture, viz. modernisation.

Unless, however, modernisation is supported by the culture of a country, and unless it is rooted in the national culture, it remains an artificial importation and no real development will occur. And radical cultural change can only occur as a result of a change in the consciousness of people themselves. A real change in the ways people live, behave and develop is the result of *voluntary* change within themselves - in their worldview - which produces new attitudes and modifications in their way of life. Development and modernisation are not the result of the application of foreign, imported money, models, methods, assumptions, institutions, innovations and values *imposed* upon them from outside.

The compatibility or incompatibility, as well as the conflict of values between modern, Western institutions on the one hand, and African indigenous institutions based on African values on the other hand, has not been carefully studied. This has resulted in conflict, crisis and finally failure ...

Development failed and modernisation switched into reverse gear. If one takes stock of development in Africa today, one sees the opposite:

decline of productivity, creativity, initiative, lack of a sense of direction, purpose, goals and ideas, the absence of viable and stable political systems, a state of national confusion and chaos.

I do not intend to blame only colonialism or the consequences of colonial rule. Neither am I inclined to blame only the African peoples. To be fair, I do think that both parties are responsible for the mess. And I am also convinced that the deepest cause for the phenomenon of a divided soul is the lack of a new, coherent and consistent worldview which could again guide and inspire the African people.

I am also critical concerning some of the solutions offered to the problems of Africa. It was to be expected that Africans would react against colonialism and Christianity. I do understand and even sympathise with such reactions, but I doubt whether a reactionary tendency should be the final answer or could offer a real and lasting solution.

But in order to be fair, let us have a brief look at these reactions, first against Western colonialism and then against Western Christianity.

#### **2.4.2 Reactions against colonialism**

Western stereotyping and treatment of Africans was unacceptable. The African personality was treated as one without dignity, equality, worth, rights or freedom. Africans were viewed as primitive in their culture, savage and without history or civilisation with only elementary forms of religion and societal organisation.

The people who lead the reaction aimed at proving the following: (1) that Africans have dignity, worth and honour, (2) that Africans have a history, a civilised culture, societal structures and (3) that Africans are capable of becoming scientists, scholars, administrators, etc.

We could divide the people fighting for an own African identity in three main groups or categories:

\* *Africans in diaspora in the West Indies and North America* exerted a powerful influence on the continent of Africa, especially in stimulating racial solidarity and shared blackness. This movement had a great



influence also upon African nationalist movements and African literary works.

\* *Nationalist and Pan-African movements* fought for the political and cultural liberation and unification of Africa. Liberation was usually couched in ideological terms such as African personality (Blyden), negritude (Senghor), black consciousness (Nkrumah), ujamaa (Nyerere,) uhuru (Kenyatta), African humanism or socialism (Kaunda) and others.

\* *African scholars and writers* tried to convince the West that the African had a dignified personality, a civilised culture, a history and religion and that he is also capable of good scholarship.

In general it could be said that all these new pioneers of Africa were searching for a typical African personality, an African religion, worldview, philosophy and culture. They agreed that both the African identity and the African worldview experienced an identity crisis. But many of them doubted whether such a unique African personality and lifeview could be found in a varied and changing African context. Doubt had also been cast upon the idea of a collective African worldview. However, in spite of this, African scholarship seemed to emphasise the need of taking seriously the African traditional worldviews. They regarded these as significant to the development of new African thinking. Contemporary African systems could - at least partly - be built on the foundations of traditional worldviews. In doing so an attempt was made to elevate the pervading crises on African soil.

In my opinion one has to be careful to simply revive tradition and then assume that one has solved today's problems. It is impossible to turn the clock back to the past. One could, however, critically take from traditional Africa what is good and beautiful and use it as building blocks in erecting a new future.

### **2.4.3 Reactions against Western Christianity**

We have already indicated that the missionary approach towards Africa was that the African culture and way of life were downplayed and even negated . There was therefore no interest - at least not in the beginning - in developing an indigenous African Christianity and African

Theology. African Christians have reacted against this attitude in various ways, and have tried to make Christianity relevant to the African mind. Four of these ways will briefly be discussed.

\* *Indigenisation of Christianity*

Western theologians first came with the idea of indigenising Christianity, giving it roots in Africa, removing its foreign aspects. This was the earlier indigenisation "philosophy" of the "three selves". African churches had to become self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating institutions - while they were often ill-equipped and ill-prepared for such a task.

Africans regarded this strategy as paternalistic because the European churches were still regarded as "fathers" and the indigenous churches as the "children". Furthermore it was clear that the three selves were Western concepts - another Western model for the church was simply transplanted to Africa!

In the early 1960's Africans (like Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria) reacted against this earlier Western form of indigenisation by introducing their own, more radical idea. The primary idea was to strip and rid Christianity in Africa of all its foreign Western additions and coverings and to replace it with that which was really African. If Western culture was to be replaced by African culture, the African would understand Christianity better. Therefore Western categories of thought, forms and places of worship, prayers, music etc. should be replaced by African ones. Christianity should be defined from the perspective of the African.

The question concerning this approach is: has Christianity indeed become African or is it just a new tag? And what about an African Christian who is already more or less Westernised - does he want this kind of Christianity? More conservative Christians, who wanted to be faithful to the Bible, also want to know: is African culture accommodated to the Bible, or is the Bible accommodated to African culture?

### \* *Africanisation of Christianity*

According to the proponents of this principle, the need is not only to strip Christianity of its Western form, but also to control its destiny. Africans must be in charge of church and mission policies. More personnel must therefore be trained to take over the work from the missionaries. Where indigenisation emphasised cultural independence, Africanisation was concerned with organisational independence - even to the extent of a moratorium on all Western missionaries to Africa!

### \* *Developing an African theology*

During the late sixties and the seventies a new shift in emphasis occurred. This time it was to a more scholarly level: the search for a *theologia Africana*. It was an attempt to understand the essence of Christianity and to interpret that understanding in terms of the African situation. Africa has to develop its own theology - just as the West developed its own. John S. Mbiti and others contributed immensely towards elevating African religions and philosophy. African worldview, philosophy and culture were seen as *prolegomena* or preparations for a real African theology. An African theology of marriage, worship, God, the church, the ancestors, etc. was advocated.

### \* *Contextualising theology*

The most recent trend goes beyond the previous attempts and puts the emphasis on theological relevance. Christianity has to be made relevant for the African situation or context. An ongoing reciprocation between the text (Scripture) and the context (African culture) should take place.

The context thoroughly influences the understanding of the text. All theologies are contextualised, whether they are aware of it or not. If we ignore the context a real danger is that we regard our understanding of the Gospel as the Gospel itself - as happened in the case of Western theology. To be relevant one has to be true to the context. But the other side of the coin is just as important: to be Biblical, one has to be true to the Text!

The problem is that some African theologians tend to overemphasise the context (traditional African religions, worldview, culture etc.) in

such a way that it endangers the purity of what is being contextualised (the Gospel). Others again overemphasise the Text to the exclusion of the African context. The Gospel should, however, be transmitted both accurately and relevantly. Contextualisation is therefore a complicated process with both pitfalls and promises.

D.J. Bosch (1990:149,150) recently summarised the whole issue of contextualisation in an excellent way. Permit me therefore the following unusually long quotation from his article:

"It seems to me that one of the major 'discoveries' of recent decades is that every living theology is by nature a *contextual* theology. Early Christians sensed that the Gospel had to have meaning within the context of a particular situation, and they theologised accordingly. Our four Gospels are, to no small degree, four different attempts at contextualising the Gospel for different situations and readers. In the subsequent centuries, however, the Christian community began to lose sight of the intrinsically contextual nature of the Christian faith. Ideas and principles were deemed to be primary, eternal, and unchanging; their 'application' was merely secondary. Deviations from what was held to be 'orthodox' were declared to be 'heterodox', creeds were designed to encapsulate the 'eternal truth' and were used as shibboleths to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable views. This pattern persisted for many centuries in all branches of Christianity.

A breakthrough came only recently, with the discovery that not only was all theology contextual but also that this was the only way in which theology can be meaningful. J.L. Segundo expressed the new 'epistemological break' as taking the form of a 'hermeneutical circle' in which praxis has the primacy and reflection becomes a second (not *secondary*) act of theology. Thought is not to be conceived as prior to being, nor reason to action; rather, they stand and fall together.

Contextualisation means the end of any universal theology and suggests the experimental and contingent nature of all theology. This does not mean that the context is to be taken as the sole authority for theological reflection. In fact, where this happens, we do not have contextualisation, but *contextualism* (where 'God' is reduced to and identified with the historical process)...

Blind to the fact that its theology was culturally conditioned, the Western church in modern times exported its assumed supra-cultural and universally valid theology with little compunction to the non-Western world. In order to expedite the conversion process, however, some adjustments had to be made. In Catholic missions this strategy was usually called 'accommodation' or 'adaptation'; in Protestantism it was referred to as 'indigenisation'. These terms were, of course not applied to the church in the West: there the church was already fully 'at home'. What had long ago been completed in the West had, however, still to take place in the Third World ...

Protestant mission agencies pursued the ideal of the 'Three-Selves', for 'their' younger churches: the latter were expected to become self-governing, self-supporting, and self-expanding churches. A fourth 'self', self-theologising, is only now being added. For a long time any form of self-theologising almost automatically meant a schism from the mother body and the formation of an 'independent' church. Now, however, self-theologising is taking place also within the traditional 'mission' churches, Catholic and Protestant. The 1977 Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, as well as various Protestant documents and publications, state quite frankly that the Christian faith has to be rethought, reformulated, and lived anew in each human culture. This approach breaks once and for all with the idea of faith as 'kernel' and of culture as the 'husk'. A more appropriate metaphor would be that of the flowering of a seed implanted into the soil of a particular culture ...

In a very real sense, then, the Gospel is foreign to every culture and, likewise, inculturation is never a completed process. We should not, strictly speaking, use the past participle 'inculturated'. This is so not only because culture is not static, but also because the church may be led into previously unknown mysteries of the faith. Theology is always theology in the making, in the *process of* being contextualised and inculturated.

In our present situation yet another dimension has to be added: just as we have always taken it for granted that the church in the Third World needs the church in the West, we are now discovering that the obverse is equally true. We all need each other; we influence, challenge, enrich and invigorate each other. What we should be involved in, then, is not

just 'inculturation' but 'intercultural'. A 'homogeneous unit' church may become so in-grown that it believes its perspective on the Gospel to be the only legitimate one. The church must be a place to feel at home, but if only *we* feel at home in it, something has gone wrong. Local incarnations of the faith should not be *too* local. While acting locally, we have to think globally, in terms of the whole church."

#### 2.4.4 The need for a Christian worldview

All four above-mentioned attempts - whether they succeeded or not - have had one aim in common: to solve the crisis of the relevancy of Christianity for the *whole* life of the African, including his culture and even his personal identity. African Christians do not want a Gospel "high in the sky when you die", but are looking for a faith that will give them new direction, help them gain new perspectives and even offer solutions to the many vexing problems confronting them day by day.

The four efforts, however, also have in common that they lack a worldview perspective. In which way is the Christian worldview approach an improvement? It is an improvement because it penetrates deeper and also offers a wider perspective. In doing so it can really relate Christian faith to life. It is able to adequately and effectively address the African situation. Some of the reasons are the following:

- In the first place it offers a *coherent* perspective on life. It solves the problem which the prominent Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, formulated in the title of his well-known novel: *Things fall apart*. From the perspective of a real Biblical worldview (not a dualist Christian one) we are again able to see the unity of life.
- In the second place, closely related to the previous, a Christian worldview is a way of seeing, understanding, interpreting and approaching the *totality* of human life from a Biblical perspective. It is an all-encompassing view. There is no vacuum or neutral area that cannot be touched by the Gospel. Every choice and every deed is subjected to God-given norms. As a businessman one has to practice responsible stewardship, as a politician one has to be a servant leader, as a husband/wife one has to be faithful, as a parent caring etc.

■ In the third place it also solves the problem of negating, rejecting and replacing indigenous culture. It also does not have to indigenise, accommodate or Africanise from the outside, because it *renews and transforms from within*.

■ In the fourth place, because of the above-mentioned reasons, it can also solve the problem of the *African identity*. According to a Christian worldview we do not define our identity in terms of something which we own or that we can produce, but in terms of the fact that we are created in God's image, that we live in a close relationship of obedience to Him and his laws. Such an identity - given to us by God - restores human beings to real dignity.

This is the reason why this book has the title *The liberating message*. A radical, integral Christian worldview can really liberate Africa!

## 2.5 NEW HOPE FOR A BLEEDING CONTINENT

We should not conclude this chapter on a too pessimistic note. Quite a number of positive signs could be discerned during the last two years. I personally experienced some of these at a Pan-African Conference which I organized a few months ago (27 April - 1 May 1992) at Potchefstroom and which was attended by prominent Christian leaders from all over the continent. I would like to very briefly mention only eight of these hopeful signs to indicate that we are not really inhabitants of a "lost continent", as many would like to describe Africa.

### \* *A second liberation*

Africa has now gone through the following phases: the pre-colonial, the colonial, the post-colonial liberation and independence, a period of (mainly) one-party government, and at present some countries are already in or moving towards a phase of democratisation or so-called second liberation. Most African countries realize today that, although they might have been released from one form of oppression (colonialism) they were never really liberated politically (because of oppression by their own people), and in any case not economically. "Liberation" should take place on different levels. It is also not merely a negative concept (free *from*), but should in the first place have a

positive connotation (for example, free *towards* development). There are signs that we have now reached this new, positive stage.

\* *End of wars between East and West*

Because the East and the West have ceased their ideological war, and especially their efforts to fight it out on the African continent, our continent will now experience the necessary peace to pay attention to more constructive matters than war - should it be able to avoid its own ethnic clashes. Perhaps the East-West struggle did teach Africa not to expect its salvation from outside its own borders. And Africa has also learned the lesson that ideologies are destructive and cannot give peace, provide jobs or feed hungry people.

This brings me to the following point:

\* *Democratisation only a means towards a better future*

The realization has also come (probably not among all the people) that democracy is merely a means to an end (such as a more just society), and not an end in itself. It is not a magic concept which will solve all Africa's problems in the wink of an eye - injustice can still be committed, even in the name of democracy.

\* *New private initiative*

This goes hand in hand with a growing realization that the so-called state culture was not able to offer a real solution. Too much has been expected of governments, viz. to create and order the whole of society, to have direct control over all facets of life and to provide in every need. The whole of life has been politicised, because the principle of sovereignty in its own sphere of societal relationships has not been respected.

A fundamental depoliticisation of society is therefore urgently needed. This is presently happening in Africa - not necessarily as a result of a correct societal philosophy, but simply because governments have dumped their countries in chaos - and in more than simply economic chaos. Private initiative in various fields as against earlier state



absolutism is therefore becoming not only a possibility, but an absolute necessity for survival.

\* *Self-reliance as the solution*

The people of Africa do not have illusions any more about help from the East, the West or the North in order to help Africa out of the mire. During the conference it was repeated like a refrain that (1) the so-called new World Order should not invoke false hope in Africa, and that (2) we have to help ourselves, for if we should not do that, we will surely go under - finally.

This brings us to the next sign of hope for the bleeding continent:

\* *Openness towards self-criticism*

At international conferences in the past we often heard - *ad nauseam* - how Africans piled all the guilt for the terrible conditions in Africa squarely on the shoulders of either colonialism (of at least 30 years ago) or neo-colonialism (especially the multi-nationals). Of course they were not 100% wrong. I have, however, over the past two years noticed a healthy change, a greater openness towards self-criticism, instead of always accusing others. Somebody, for example, said at the conference: "There are outside factors, e.g. international. But most of our problems are our own creations - the results of bad leadership." And other speakers did not hesitate to expose the exact conditions of life in Africa publicly - even though they were criticised by other participants from Africa as not being loyal and fitting. Their response to such criticism of co-Africans was that we can only make progress if we are willing to face up squarely to realities.

\* *A new spirit of reconciliation*

In conjunction with the previous comments, it is clear that Africa is exhausted and impoverished by all the struggles and wars. A new spirit of reconciliation - even towards white South Africans - has settled on people. "One does not kill a human being when one differs from him. One reconciles with him", one of the conferees said pertinently.

The last sign of hope, which is very encouraging for me as a Christian, is the following:

*\* Awakening of a more radical and encompassing Christianity*

Christianity and the churches are one of the facets showing signs of awakening at present. The earlier tendency towards pietism is being exchanged for a greater reformational involvement in the fields of politics, society and economics. Christians, for example, are raising their voices against injustice in politics, and Christian actions are being organized across denominational borders. As a result of the respect which most people in Africa still have towards Christianity, it is possible to shut a politician's mouth, but not a prominent Christian leader's. One of the conference participants from Africa correctly stated that "Christians do make a difference in Africa. And I am proud to be one of them". Two examples which emerged during the conference can be cited to illustrate this: Through the private initiative of the churches in Kenya there will soon be no less than six Christian colleges. Because: "Our universities in Africa are killed by our own leaders - for political reasons." In Zaire, after the medical faculty of the University of Kinshasa closed down, different churches jointly started to establish their own (Christian) medical university!

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have followed the fundamental and rapid transformations which Africa experienced from its pre-colonial to its post-colonial periods. Tremendous spiritual changes, for instance the development from a pre-Christian to a Christian and finally to a post-Christian phase, which took the Western world two thousand years to complete, happened in Africa in the brief span of only one century! We have tried to plumb the inevitable crisis which resulted from such deep and vast transformations. And we have come to realize that contemporary Africa is at the cross-roads. Unless we develop, disseminate and start living according to a consistent Christian worldview - not a dualist or secularist one - it would not be long before we enter an era of post-Christianity and total secularism also in Africa - Africa which is the continent with the fastest growing number of Christians and therefore holds out the promise of becoming *the* Christian continent of the future!

In this book we try to provide in this urgent need. It has many limitations. The author, for instance, is able to write about a *Christian* worldview for Africa. But, because of his predominantly Western background, he will not be able to give an *African* Christian worldview. He, however, willingly and gladly shares with his fellow Africans what he knows and believes.

\* \* \*

But before we can give an exposition of what a Christian worldview entails, we firstly have to explain the nature, structure and functions of a worldview in general in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### THE NATURE, STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF A WORLDVIEW

The previous chapter identified the crisis that Africa experiences as essentially a worldview crisis. But what exactly is a worldview? If we do not have a clear idea of what a worldview entails, we will not really be able to plumb the crisis of our continent. The aim of this chapter is to provide an answer to this important question.

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION: WORD AND DEFINITION

Ideas give birth to deeds. Conversely, we may say that deeds have "fathers". Thoughts or ideas or convictions precede actions. How we think, determines what we do and how we live. For that reason it is important to know what a person or a group is thinking. This will enable us to understand their deeds more fully.

Apart from the content (*what* a group or person might think), it is also important to know *how* the thought process works: what can be said about the nature, the structure, the functions of the framework of ideas which have such a decisive influence our actions.

Many words have been used to describe such a framework: life perspective, confessional vision, life convictions, lifeview, world-and-life view, worldview, philosophy of life, philosophy, system of values, the whole of a person's ideas and principles or (in the case of Marxism) ideology. Personally I prefer the word *worldview*.

There are about as many definitions of what a worldview is as there are philosophers. I am not going to pay attention to all of them. Instead, by way of introduction, I will offer my own preliminary description of a worldview:

*A worldview is an integrated, interpretive set of confessional perspectives on reality which underlies, shapes, motivates and gives direction and meaning to human activity.*

Let us now look at the nature (traits), structure and functions (role) of a worldview.

### 3.2 THE NATURE OF A WORLDVIEW

The ten most important characteristics are the following:

\* *It is all-encompassing.* The term *worldview* implies that it encompasses the *whole* of man's life. An appropriate word to describe it therefore is *cosmoscope*.

Although the word *worldview* does not make this clear explicitly, a worldview always includes a specific concept of a god and some conception concerning normativity. This may be the true God and his ordinances, or something in creation that is idolised, which then gives rise to normativity. The totality perspective of a worldview therefore includes three main elements: a concept of God (or another absolute), a view of creation and a perspective on the guidelines for human action in the world.

\* *It is a mode of looking or seeing.* Think of the very word *worldview*. It is a mode of looking at the world, a perspective, a viewpoint. The primary concern, of course, is not with *what is seen*, but with the *result of the viewing*. In terms of an image, then, a worldview is the lens, the spectacles, the window through which we view reality. The glasses can be variously tinted: there are a large variety of worldviews, for nobody looks at reality "neutrally".

\* *It guides and orients us in our understanding of the world.* A worldview does not *create* the world of reality, but only *directs* us in our understanding of it and our life in it. (This distinction is important, as will emerge later, because it saves us from relativism: so many worldviews, so many worlds!) In order to clarify this guiding and orientating function of a worldview, we can compare it with a road map: a worldview is a "map" which helps us to determine *where* we find ourselves, and *how* we should determine our route through life.

\* *It reveals a unity.* This means that a worldview is not simply a random collection of ideas. It is a framework or a system of convictions which cohere in an orderly fashion in a pattern, and which reveal an

inner interdependence and consistency. (We can, of course, distinguish different "levels" in a worldview, and some elements of a worldview are more central and important than others.)

\* *It is both descriptive and prescriptive.* A worldview is not only an *image of the world* (and life in it), it is also a *blueprint for life* in the world. It not only (descriptively) tells us what the world *is* (what you *can see*), but also (prescriptively) tells us how the world *should be* (what you *should see*). A worldview therefore has both a factual and a normative side. It also provides standards according to which a distinction can be made between good and evil, right and wrong, ugly and beautiful, order and disorder. In this regard one could compare a worldview with the compass or rudder of a ship, because it indicates direction.

\* *It requires full commitment.* If a person or a community is unable to give full commitment to a worldview, this worldview, even if it is very healthy, cannot take on shape and form in a concrete way of life. In contrast to this, total surrender means satisfaction, inner joy and peace. Surrender in this sense means more than merely emotional commitment.

\* *It is typically human.* All people have a worldview, a view of life. Not that all people are aware of it. Most people live instinctively, from an intuitive frame of reference or frame of mind. In times of crisis this fact emerges more clearly. It also goes without saying that not even all individuals who are aware of their preconceptions hold to an equally clearly worked-out and systematised worldview. (Especially philosophers are people who reflect consciously and systematically about worldviews.) It should also be mentioned that a specific worldview is adhered to individually, but more often collectively. As a rule worldviews come into being within specific communities.

\* *It is pre-scientific.* This trait is linked to the previous one, viz. that it is typically human. Not all human beings are scientists or scholars. Worldviews should therefore not be confused with sciences or disciplines such as Philosophy or Theology, something which does indeed sometimes happen, seeing that they are pre-theoretical. *Pre-scientific* does not mean *unscientific*. Worldview and science are two ways of knowing. Each has its own right to existence. Worldview is

common sense, and not academic knowledge. (See chapter 15, section 15.2 for a detailed discussion of the difference between scientific and pre-scientific knowledge.)

The pre-scientific nature of such a worldview also means that the validity, truth or falsity, goodness or weakness of a worldview cannot be proven by way of logical or scientific argumentation. The opposite is rather true: The religious convictions of a worldview influence and even determine one's scientific arguments. Stated differently: one argues *from* the basis of a worldview, and not *towards* it.

\* *It is a deeply-rooted source of action.* We have already seen that a worldview is not only descriptive but also prescriptive. A worldview is also a vision of how the world should be changed. It therefore contains transformative power. It stresses man's calling in the world, his responsibility. For this reason I prefer the word *worldview* [wêreldvisie in Afrikaans] to *reflection* on the world [Afrikaans: wêreldbeskouing]. Reflection makes one think too much of a kind of *speculative contemplation* - which does not fit in with the pre-theoretical character of a worldview. In worldviews the emphasis falls rather on *active persuasion*.

\* *It is a definitive image of reality, and yet fallible.* For the adherents of a worldview it is the truth. And yet it has to remain open as a result of all the errors of human subjectivity. We are dealing here with a seeming contradiction: On the one hand we are obliged to confess the truth of our vision of reality, and to live accordingly. On the other hand we cannot canonise it as the only truth, because it is a human construct, full of weaknesses. It should therefore continually be refined, revised and further developed.

This discussion of the nature of a worldview brings us to the structure of a worldview, a point which we will explore further under the next heading. What has been said so far about these ten traits has hopefully enabled us to obtain a better grip on the sometimes slippery phenomenon which we call worldview.

### 3.3 THE STRUCTURE OF A WORLDVIEW

In dealing with this issue, we have to keep in mind that in reality a worldview is far more complex than our description of it. We distinguish and separate facets of a worldview, and then put them together again in accordance with our own "model" - while in reality it never exists in such abstracted and dismantled form.

Somebody could say, for example, that our way of looking at a worldview still does not escape the age-old dualism of "doctrine and life", "faith and action". And for that reason we still lack a solution for the familiar struggle between orthodoxy (*believing* in the right things) and orthopraxis (*doing* the right things).

To my mind this is a false dilemma: doctrine and life, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, are indivisibly linked. For that reason it is wrong to put the emphasis on the one at the expense of the other. (Earlier there was greater emphasis on orthodoxy; today it has shifted to orthopraxis.) Worldview and one's actions in the world are in reality indivisibly linked. In this chapter, however, we are involved in a study of the *structure* of a worldview, which should make it obvious that we cannot here look extensively at man's actions in the world - the *result* of his worldview.

The following five facets of a worldview will now be discussed: its formation, position, authority, criteria and crises.

*\* A large number of factors play a role in the formation of a worldview.*

By way of introduction it should be stated that a worldview is born not only of religious convictions. (Note that *all* people believe - it is only the *direction* of their faith that differs.) A large number of factors play a role in its development.

The formation of a worldview occurs through factors other than merely faith situated *within* the adherent of such a view, such as his/her emotional life, personality type, intellectual development, sex, etc. Factors *outside* the adherent of such a view also play a role, such as education by parents, school, college, etc., influence of friends and



peers, the prevailing socio-politico-economic-cultural conditions and so forth. One should therefore take into account a multi-dimensional network of influences in looking at the formation of a worldview.

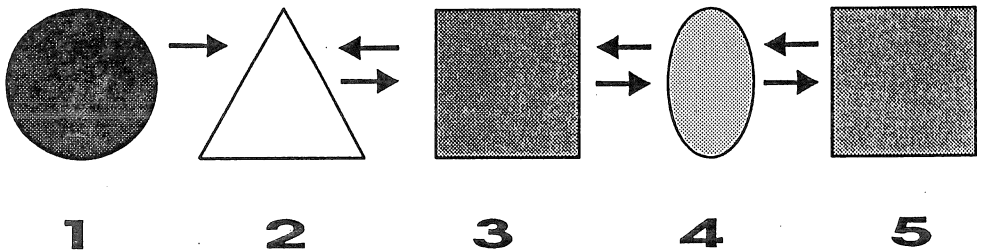
\* *A worldview is the bridge or link between faith and man's life in the world.*

In anyone's life (whether he believes in the true God or in a surrogate idol) faith plays an important role. Faith has a directional force. It aims to be concretized in one's life. As I see it, worldview is the link or channel between the deepest religious convictions of a person and his life in day to day reality.

In this regard the image of the lens as medium between man's faith and the actual conduct of his life mentioned earlier, could be used again. Perhaps a more applicable image would be that of a prism which breaks up the white light of faith into all the colours of the rainbow: the deepest religious convictions are broadened, spelled out clearly, made applicable and relevant in various spheres of life.

The primary direction is therefore from faith towards life in practice. Man forms a worldview (4) in keeping with his faith (3) and then seeks to shape the world (5) in accordance with his worldview. It is a vision *of faith for life*.

There is also, however, a second, inverse direction. Man also forms his worldview (4) according to his life experiences (5) and then shapes his faith (3) according to this worldview. In this case one can then speak of a vision *of life for faith*.



## Explanation of diagram

1 = God  
4 = Worldview

2 = Revelation  
5 = Reality

3 = Faith

This second direction (from 5 to 4 to 3) and the resultant interaction is very important, though it is often overlooked or even denied. A worldview (4) is not only the bridge between faith (3) and the wider life (5), it is *simultaneously* the medium through which our daily experience (5) can either confirm our faith (3) or question and correct it. The bridge therefore carries two-way traffic!

\* *Both absolutism and relativism give a twisted image of what a worldview is*

We have already mentioned that a worldview is at one and the same time a *definite* and yet a *fallible* image of reality. This problem now calls for further attention in conjunction with the bridging character of a worldview discussed above.

Some people (especially the older, more rationalistically inclined) tend to fall into *absolutism (or dogmatism)*. They tend to canonise their worldviews. Others (especially the present, more irrationalistically oriented ones) tend to fall prey to *relativism (or pluralism)* because they tend towards minimising the phenomenon of a worldview.

The first group believe that their worldview is definite, infallible, the final blueprint. Is it not true, after all, that it is based on (in the case of a Christian worldview) God's infallible revelation (2)? The second group, in contrast, stress the subjective-human character, the contextual situation and ongoing change in the course of the history of a specific worldview. In extreme form they adhere to the idea of "so many views, so many worlds".

Thus: *absolute* certainty - or *no* certainty!

This, however, is a false dilemma. The one tends to look at worldviews only from the security of faith (3) and therefore absolutises it. The other takes the point of view of the varying concrete life situations (5) and seeks to relativise worldviews.

Both views, however, reveal aspects of the truth. We have to agree with the absolutists that a worldview has no value if people are not convinced of its truth. And we have to agree with the relativists that a worldview can be very dangerous when it is over-estimated. Absolutisation leads to difficulties in a changing world - especially one which develops as rapidly as the world of the twentieth century. A healthy, balanced worldview will always be an open worldview - one which is amenable to testing, questioning, refining and even overturning by the concrete circumstances of life. Absolutisation implies, on the contrary, stagnation and fossilisation.

Keeping in mind the two-way traffic outlined above, we will realize that in the case of a fossilised worldview it is not only growing insight into reality which is blocked but also growth of faith. In such a case we cannot say that the worldview is any longer playing the role of transparent glasses, but that the glasses have become opaque or painted.

In such a case a worldview has degenerated into an ideology. An ideology is a petrified, hardened worldview which has no interest any longer in reality or what it looks like, but only wishes to impose its preconceived ideas on reality. (Cf. chapter 12, section 12.3.) The two-way traffic which is so important when dealing with a worldview has thus been replaced by a one-way traffic moving only from faith towards reality. By means of all kinds of rationalisations such an ideology can keep on existing for a long time until the realities of life become so overwhelming that the opposite road from reality (5) to faith (3) violently forces its way through.

With this we have arrived at the following two facets: in the first place what the criterion is for a good or true worldview, and in the second place how a worldview is thrust into a crisis, and how this crisis can be resolved.

\* *Criteria for a reliable worldview*

Living in a world replete with contradictory worldviews and worldviews which have degenerated into ideologies, how can we know which one is true and reliable?

I believe that this issue cannot be resolved at the level of logic, reason or science (cf. what has already been said in this regard earlier). The following ideas are therefore not final rational criteria but simply aids or pointers.

- In the *first place* the already-mentioned reciprocation is important. Does reality (5) accord with the way my faith (3) and therefore worldview (4) views it? And the converse: are my faith and worldview in accord with the realities in which I live? Do they make sense? Are they in conflict? Although this may seem like a circular argument, it is a touchstone.

- In the *second place* the *directions* in which various worldviews are inclined to steer life, tend to be different. We cannot escape the fact, however, that although we may interpret the realities of life differently, we all have to make do with the same *structures* of reality, and we are all bound to them.

God's law orders, structures and maintains creation. Inversely, creation is a response to this order. The worldviews which we accept are in turn responses to this response. That is, they have a second degree normativity. One's worldview is a result of the ongoing testing of the explicatory potential of one's convictions or accepted norms. As a result of its grounding in the creational order, a worldview is neither rationalistic nor irrationalistic. Order is not merely a reasonable or unreasonable matter. Orderliness and reasonableness are indeed related. But they are also very different. The order of creation includes more than rationality!

To the extent that a worldview succeeds in correctly understanding this universal order, it will render to its adherents a sense of security and safety. In spite of what is said by modern irrationalist relativism, worldviews are not the product of mere imagination or subjective whimsy. Each worldview ties in to something beyond subjectivity, historicity and relativity. In spite of all the possible distortions of the mirror (worldview) there is still a life order which it tries to reflect. (This does not mean that we accept the opposite viewpoint of the absolutists, viz. that a worldview can perfectly reflect God's order, so that we can consider God's laws and our understanding of them to be

on the same level.) The test for each worldview is therefore: does it reflect this order correctly and fully?

On the basis of this we can say to the rationalist: There is no rational way to finally convince someone who holds to a different worldview. And over against the irrationalist we maintain that we are not delivered into the hands of the relativity of subjective human choices. Neither of the two positions is true.

■ In the *third place* we can apply the criterion of utility or value. Utility as a criterion is not wrong as such, but it is wrong when - as in modern pragmatism - it becomes the highest criterion. We may therefore ask questions such as the following: Is it a positive worldview? Does it promote man's life or does it suppress it or even destroy it? (Even if it is only the lives of some, as was the case under an apartheid regime!) Does it bring healing, wholeness, freedom, and peace?

■ A final, *fourth* indication of the correctness of a worldview is the following. So far all the questions have been addressed from one viewpoint: the realities of life (no. 5 in the above diagram). In the final instance, however, one must fall back on one's faith (3), which in turn is based on revelation from outside oneself (2). In the case of the Christian faith the Source of the revelation is extra-cosmic. It is God (1), Who reveals his will for our lives in creation, in Scripture and in Christ.

At this point you will understand that I myself must make a choice. For me all unbiblical faiths are of necessity false and all other revelations nothing other than pseudo-revelations. Yet I cannot deny their existence or the right of some to trust in them.

Surrender is not an option but a given. Our choice is therefore not between having a worldview or not having one. Religious surrender - therefore also commitment to a worldview - is simply part of everyone's existence. Some people may refuse to acknowledge this openly. They think it impinges upon their dignity and freedom. But that does not change the way things are.

\* *The relationship between a Christian worldview and the Bible*

It is important to realise that in the reciprocation between faith (3) and revelation (2), worldview (4) is not to be eliminated. Modern hermeneutics, in which attention is diverted from the text towards the interpreter of the text, has indicated very clearly that presuppositionless or "neutral" exegesis is not possible. One does not read or listen in a "pure" or "innocent" way.

This is true of the ordinary believer and to an even greater extent of the scientific theologian. It is not difficult to indicate how different exegetes and theologians have, throughout history, read the Scriptures in accordance with specific philosophical categories which were fashionable in their day. Thomas Aquinas used Aristotle, Bultmann preferred Heidegger, and the so-called pure, presuppositionless approach to Scripture clearly reveals the influence of the *tabula rasa* philosophy of John Locke and his followers.

The question is therefore not *whether* certain presuppositions (in the case of scholarly exegesis the prescientific worldview presuppositions acquire the character of scientific philosophy) may play a role in our exegesis, but rather *what* kind of presuppositions. In the case of Christian theology we will therefore prefer Christian (that is, Bible-friendly instead of Biblically *alien*) philosophical categories.

The reader is therefore creatively involved in the reading process. We always use some kind of glasses through which we read the Bible. History offers many such "spectacles": dogmatist, moralist, political, psychological, historico-critical and many more.

Should one not simply want to read one's own presuppositions *into* the text (eisegesis) and then again extract them *from* the text (exegesis), one has to try and find one's presuppositions (worldview) from Scripture itself. Stated in terms of an image: your reading glasses have to be polished by Scripture.

This of course implies a circle: You continually attempt to understand Scripture better in the light of your pre-understanding of Scripture! However, no-one can escape from this. The issue is not *whether* we wish to be taken up into this hermeneutic circle, but within *what* hermeneutic circle we will work: one in which we use Biblically-alien spectacles, or one which uses Biblically-faithful ones? For that reason

one could rather use the image of a spiral than of a (vicious) circle: there has to be progress in the dialogue between worldview (4) and revelation (2) via faith (3). The believer questions God's revelation. The Bible responds to this. The answers are of such a nature that they question faith, change it, renew it. In the subsequent round of dialogue the questions from the believer directed at the Bible text will therefore be slightly different and so too the answers given by the text. In the ongoing dialogue faith (3) and worldview (4) are constantly renewed and brought closer to God's will for mankind.

Reliable exegesis therefore does not take place when we try to hide our pre-understanding or worldview, but precisely when we are aware of it. Then only is it possible to have an open and frank "discussion" rather than a pretended discussion between one's faith and the Bible.

The Christian worldview should therefore not only be subjected to scrutiny through the daily reality in which we live (5), but especially through the Bible (2). The route which we should therefore travel is from our worldview (4) back to Scripture (2) and from Scripture back to a more purified and even clearer worldview.

We should be very careful, however, and listen long enough to God's revelation before too quickly grabbing at a system. Do not misunderstand me. A doctrine or a system, such as the Christian worldview is not wrong, but a closed dogma can be very dangerous. A human system may *never* be closed off, but should always remain open to correction. The Bible may not be simply a midwife to the birth of a worldview while it further functions and matures independently. No, there should be living, ongoing dialogue with God through his Word.

If this does not happen, then we may think all too easily that our type of Christian worldview, philosophy or theology is not simply *an* embodiment of Christianity, but *the* Christian system, the purest, least contaminated and most powerful revelation of Christianity! In such a case the danger is great that our worldview will become the norm instead of Scripture serving as its norm. Then a worldview (4) becomes an idol standing between the believer (3) and God (1) and his revelation (2).

Here we again encounter the danger of absolutism or dogmatism. In this case the Bible becomes the prisoner of man's worldview-engendered prejudices. By rejecting this I do not plead for some or other form of relativist pluralism. Because that too is determined by a worldview (the only thing that is fixed, is that nothing is fixed or certain - except my presupposition that nothing is firm and certain!) the same lot affects the Bible: it becomes the prisoner of subjective human presuppositions.

God's Word and his Spirit continually have to remove the blinkers from our eyes and wash the wax from our ears, so that we can see and hear what we *have to* see and hear, and not what we *want to* see and hear!

\* *Crises and their solutions*

In chapter 2 we have extensively dealt with the worldview crisis in Africa. We will therefore not mention other examples of worldview crises again - as long as we keep in mind that such crises are not only characteristic of Africa. The important question at the moment is *when* does a worldview get into a crisis, or what are the *reasons* for such a crisis? There are mainly three reasons and all of them are also applicable to the African situation.

A worldview ends in crisis when it is (1) threatened by another, stronger worldview (stronger because of money, technology, weapons, etc.); (2) if the worldview that is held does not accord any longer with the changed realities of life. These are in actual fact the two most important reasons: a worldview hostile towards one's own worldview, or a changed socio-politico-economic environment. In both cases one's worldview becomes obsolete or irrelevant due to one's environment. (3) A third reason is situated in the adherents of a worldview themselves (which in itself might of course also be a result of the first two reasons), namely half-hearted allegiance instead of full surrender and commitment to their worldview.

When a worldview is in a crisis, there are only two possible reactions: either one sticks to one's worldview, or one changes it.



In the case of the first response, the adherents sink ever more deeply into the beaten track of their worldview and accordingly refuse to acknowledge the facts of reality which are in conflict with it. (A clear example of this is to be found in certain conservative rightwing white groups in South Africa who even today want to retain the old apartheid ideology.) This, of course, creates enormous tension, as already indicated earlier with regard to Africa. If the traffic across the bridge (cf. diagram above) cannot flow any longer, man becomes vulnerable. No man can keep on living in uncertainty. If one's spiritual home (worldview) threatens to collapse, it causes existential anxiety which can assume vast proportions. Life becomes very difficult once its firm foundations are gone. It should be kept in mind that (cf. explanation above again) a worldview crisis also implies a crisis of faith: one's faith ceases to make sense in one's everyday life.

The normal run of events in such a case is that the messages emanating from the realities of life become so overpowering that the road across the bridge is simply forced open - and the old worldview is rejected. (An example of this in South Africa can be seen among the more "verligte" whites who since 2 February 1990 started to reject their old apartheid ideology.)

Once the old worldview is called into question, certain steps follow: (1) The lens of the worldview is directed anew towards the realities of the environment, so that the worldview may try once again to make sense of it. The old worldview is then (2) either revised, or (3) a wholly new worldview is accepted which can interpret the circumstances more fully.

The moral of the story is therefore that it is far better to hold an open worldview right from the beginning, rather than a closed one, which can only be broken and forced open by a crisis in order to bring a person to new insights.

Closed worldviews are usually strongly traditionalist, do not show an awareness of alternatives, believe in the sacredness of their convictions, and have an abnormal fear of threats to their viewpoints. In contrast, an open worldview is characterised by less stress on tradition, a greater awareness and acknowledgement of other possibilities. Its adherents do not enshrine their own insights (a healthy awareness of relativity) and

also are not so negatively obsessed with everything that is considered foreign or alien.

This section on crises in worldview started with a reference to Africa. What is the case in the West? It does not look any better there. For many the changes have been so extensive, so fundamental and so fast that their worldviews could not keep pace. They were lost along the way, as they could no longer make sense of a rapidly changing life. For this reason many contemporary Westerners do not wish any longer to take a stand.

Such an attitude of seeming to hold to no worldview evokes as much uncertainty as when a worldview has become outdated. It means indecisiveness, passivity, spiritual paralysis and even chaos. Often it is propagated, however, under the false cover of "tolerance".

Rather than going into the question of how one lives without a worldview (which is probably impossible - one or the other concealed worldview always sneaks in by way of the back door), let us in conclusion try to indicate what the person who does adhere to one looks like.

### **3.4 THE FUNCTIONS OF A WORLDVIEW**

This section is in a certain sense the result of the preceding, and is therefore a brief resumé. For this reason some measure of repetition cannot be eliminated, and it will therefore be brief.

We can look at the role or meaning of a worldview from the perspective of the two poles outlined in the above diagram, viz. faith (3) and the conduct of life (5). We do this very briefly to concentrate on the meaning of a worldview for its adherents. In chapter 2 we suggested that there is a link between worldview and human identity. Now we can explain what we had in mind.

Seen from the perspective of faith (3) a worldview fulfils the following function: it offers a foundation for life in a final certainty (God or an idol, something of creation elevated to a final certainty).

Seen from the perspective of the realities of life (5), it has the following role: it invites and insists on purposeful "incarnation" or concretisation in everyday life. It makes our confession of a final certainty meaningful or relevant for everyday life in its multifarious variety.

For its proponents a worldview which is adhered to with commitment means the following:

- It provides interpretive keys to an understanding of reality and of man himself.
- It integrates (makes a unity of) and structures human experience.
- In this way it gives meaning to human existence.
- As a normative framework it enables man to make choices based on principle and to act according to a specific pattern.
- As active conviction it motivates man towards an awareness of a calling (vocation) and a responsibility to make a better place of the world.
- It is very important in the formation of a personal identity and integrity.
- It releases deep emotions in people and also offers great stability, because it supplies a sense of security, satisfaction, inner peace and joy.
- It is usually embodied in symbols which have a motivating, inspiring and cohesive force for a specific group or community.
- It has diagnostic value in the sense that it distinguishes friend from enemy. Especially in threatening situations the "enemy" plays an important role.
- Should a worldview get into a crisis its proponents are shaken to the depths of their beings.

From these ten points it emerges clearly that a positive worldview plays a cardinal role in the moulding of individuals and societies. But a faulty, negative (anti-this and anti-that), unbalanced, life-denying and destructive worldview breaks man down. The former promotes and the latter hinders spiritual growth.

A few examples to illustrate this statement would be the following. A materialist worldview can never promote human dignity, because man is more than his body and his possessions. A healthy human society can also not be built on an individualist worldview according to which the individual and his needs has the absolute priority. Neither can it be built on a totalitarian worldview when the state acts as a giant octopus dominating within its bureaucratic tentacles every sphere of life.

Because a Christian worldview regards man as the image of God, it can contribute immensely towards human dignity. A Christian worldview also emphasises love and brotherhood between human beings. It furthermore believes that societal relationships like marriage and family life are not the inventions of man so that he may fashion them according to his own whims and wishes, but they are institutions of God Himself. A Christian worldview also asks for the careful management of natural resources - the basis for the survival of future generations.

\* \* \*

We have explained now what a worldview looks like. The next step should be to give an exposition of a *Christian* worldview. A brief definition of a Christian worldview could be that it is a worldview based upon or founded in God's revelation. Before we arrive at the chapter on a Christian worldview, we therefore need a chapter on revelation. What exactly is divine revelation? Is it only the Bible or does it include more? How can we understand it correctly and how should we apply it in our thinking and acting? These are a few of the important questions to be answered in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

# GOD'S REVELATION: THE FOUNDATION OF A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

One of the biggest problems that we as secularised modern people struggle with is that we do not any longer experience God as being close and his revelation as being real. We as Christians also did not escape the vortex of modern man's secularisation of the world. We often live in a closed-off, dumb creation.

Do we really realize how truly wonderful our God, the God of the Bible is? He is not a hidden God. He is not a silent God. He is with us. He reveals Himself - in the whole of creation. He speaks to us, each and every moment. We do not live in a silent, speechless creation!

But what exactly is God's revelation? What does He reveal to us? How can we understand His revelation correctly? The answers to these questions are of the utmost importance to all Christians, but especially to those who wish to build the whole of their worldview on the revelation of God. Truly one of the most fundamental issues for the whole of Christian life and for each individual Christian is at stake here!

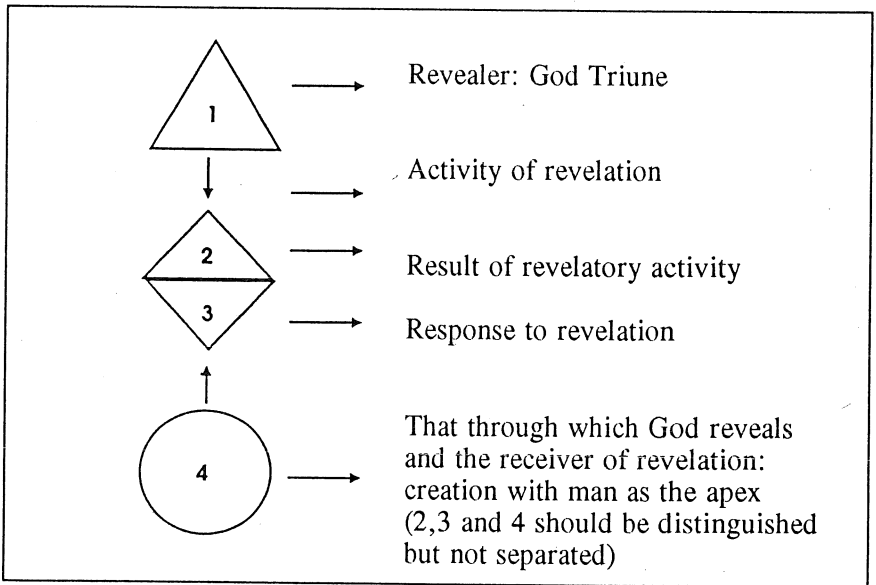
## 4.1 INTRODUCTION: FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Examples of basic questions which will be asked include the following:

- What is the exact nature of the relationship between God and His creation? (If we do not have clarity on this point, it will also be impossible to talk meaningfully about God's revelation in and through His creation.)
- What exactly is revelation? Why is it so crucial that God should reveal Himself to us?
- Can we speak of different "kinds" of revelation, for example, a general and a special revelation?

- In what does God reveal Himself?
- What does God reveal to us?
- What is the response of sinful man to God's revelation?
- Is it possible to know God's revelation correctly?

I would like to offer my ideas in the form of twelve theses with a fairly detailed explanation of each thesis. The following diagram may also be helpful in explaining my viewpoint.



## 4.2 TWELVE THESES ABOUT GOD'S REVELATION

Each thesis contains first a negative side which rejects a current idea about God's revelation, and second a positive side, in which my own view emerges. I want to emphasise that these theses are provisional and

are aimed at eliciting discussion. I am searching for greater clarity! My own pilgrimage developed from (1) the older concept of a two-fold revelation (general and special) to (2) the idea of a three-fold revelation (in creation, in Scripture, and in Christ) and finally (3) the view which will be presented in the following theses.

**4.2.1 If we want to understand God's revelation properly, we have to reject the unbiblical concept of a distant, hidden God and accept as a starting point the Biblical perspective of a God who is close to His creation, revealing Himself through creation**

A worldview that sees God as a far away, transcendent Being (as is the case in traditional African religion and also in some Western philosophies and even theologies) will have difficulty to accept Him as a revealing God.

Of course this does not mean that we do not distinguish between God and his creation. God and creation should neither be *confused* nor *separated*! It is possible to distinguish between God and creation, but it is not permitted to separate them. (See chapter 6, section 6.3.) In the light of this we should also be careful how we speak about God's revelation. It is not creation *itself* which reveals God, but God who reveals Himself *through* creation. To put this in a different way: Only because God reveals Himself through and in creation, can creation be revelation of God, and not because creation itself is God or divine (as in pantheism).

This thesis, however, wants to draw attention especially to the fact that God is close to his creation. Theologians would call it God's immanence. However, I do not like the word very much, because it is closely related to a very unfruitful debate: Is God immanent (in his creation) or transcendent (above creation) or perhaps simultaneously immanent and transcendent? Could we not simply say: God is God (not a creature) and at the same time close to his creation? His *difference* from creation does not imply a *distance* from creation!

We do tend so easily to think of God as Somebody far away. The teacher enters the class-room *after* talking to God. The sportsman/-woman runs onto the field *after* praying to God - instead of inviting God to the classroom *itself* and welcoming Him *onto* the track. The

old farmer who used to say "We (meaning himself and God) are going to plough today" lived much closer to his God.

After the fall we have been consistently building barricades behind which we can hide ourselves - from God and our fellow men. This began in paradise, when God had to "look for" Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8,9). We try to project this hide-and-seek game onto God - He is now the hidden one. God, however, does not hide Himself. We have to learn, day by day, to open ourselves up to each other, so that we can also be open to God's revelation.

Man has refined this hiding so well that he has even begun to use the sciences (such as theology) and concepts (even the idea of revelation) as barricades between himself and God. The Biblical way is very simple, however: "Lord, here I am, please talk to me!"

In the final thesis (12) more extensive attention is paid to how man tries to repress and replace God's revelation.

#### **4.2.2 We cannot know God in Himself, but only in or through His creation**

Although God cannot be detached from His creation, or creation from its God, theologians and philosophers have through the centuries thought that they could know God *as such*, in His essence, detached from creation. It is because of this that theology was often defined as "(sacred) knowledge about God"! The result usually was some kind of theo-ontology which held to the arrogant assumption that God's "essence" can be plumbed.

God does not, however, reveal Himself outside His creation (in the case of Scripture it is done by way of creaturely language and in the case of Christ by way of becoming a human being), and we can therefore never know God separately from, but only in and through, his creation. For this reason we have to take God's creation seriously. If we turn our backs on creation as is done in some schools of Christian thought, then we are also turning our backs on God! As we have to serve God *in* this world, and not outside it, so we also have to get to know Him *in* this world. We need not - and also cannot - rise above it in order to know Him.



All creation is revelation - an eloquent, clear, unmistakable and visible witness to God.

We therefore also do not need to relinquish the ordinary, natural means through which we know, such as our intellect, senses and emotions (in order to know God in some mystical dimension). The uniqueness of the God of the Bible is that He "enters into" His creation in order to be known. We as creatures do not need to climb up or out of our context. He comes to us!

Actually it is wrong to maintain that God steps down to us. He *is* with us. He does not need to come "down" just as we do not need to go "up". God is, after all, not spatially bound (or bound in any other way), as we creatures are. It is only because of the fact that we creatures cannot think in any other way than spatially - also about God - that we speak of God as being "up there" or "down here". However incredible it might seem to our intellect, God is omnipresent.

Usually Christians do not have a problem understanding how God reveals Himself in nature, in Scripture and in Christ. But how is He present in human culture and history? To help us in understanding that, the following examples are given.

God's creational order might be taunted for a long time, but cannot be set aside or destroyed. Slowly but surely, hardly noticeably but irrevocably, it appears that His creational order cannot be negated or repressed any longer. Those who have tried to do it are *forced*, by God's destruction of the false order they have established, to change it.

Two recent examples of this are the downfall of the Soviet Union and the elimination of the apartheid policy of South Africa. They *could* no longer continue.

Communism *had to* go bankrupt and could not be sustained, because as a totalitarian regime it mocked God's legal order in different spheres of life. The apartheid ideology likewise was a totalitarian system which sought to control every sphere of life to the exclusive advantage of a small group (the whites). This suffocated all of life and dehumanised people. Such systems and nations call down God's judgment on them (cf. Jeremiah 2:19 and 6:19).

Of course there are also all sorts of "direct" causes for the failure and disintegration of communism and apartheid (for example, a rebellious population, money-absorbing armament, economic boycotts, suffocating regimentation of all aspects of life and many more), but in the final instance it was God's creational order which won. His order therefore exerts a protective, corrective and law-restorative force in history. It is because of this that the powers of evil can never wholly and permanently take over the world. In His own time God destroys the old and renews the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30) - not only of nature, but also of culture and of history.

In order to prevent misunderstandings, a few remarks have to be added to these examples.

God's *works* (of which we have given some examples here) are not the same as his *revelation* (the topic we are busy with) - although God does reveal Himself *through* His works. Events such as these, therefore, have to be interpreted very carefully.

The example of the collapse of communism in the USSR does not necessarily imply that capitalism is good. Western secular capitalism is just as bad. Actually we should ask the question why it has not also - like communism - collapsed, because capitalism as little acknowledges God's norms for the politico-economic sphere as does communism. It is clear from the selfishness, corruption, crime, violence and moral decline that God's wrath also rests on the whole of the Western world. The West is already deeply in trouble and in an advanced state of decadence. The fact that in *one* field (the economic) it is still flourishing to some extent - at least in comparison with parts of the world adhering to other ideologies - should not make us think that *everything* is fine.

The fall of communism also does not necessarily imply that the situation in the erstwhile USSR has improved - on the contrary! (Just as the fact that the evil of apartheid is disappearing in South Africa does not mean that there will be more justice in a future South Africa.) The real tragedy of this situation is that the erstwhile communists are simply exchanging one ideology (communism) for another (capitalism) and are still not obeying God's creational order. They have, as it were, left one sinking ship to clamber onto another about to founder on the rocks!

### 4.2.3 God's revelation should not be divided into various revelations, but it is a single, indivisible unity

In the Christian tradition theologians used to speak of two and even three forms of revelation by God. Some divided God's revelation into a "natural" revelation (in creation) and a "supernatural" revelation (in Scripture). The first was supposed to be understood through "natural reason", but the second only through grace (cf. next thesis). These two revelations were regarded as more or less independent in spite of the fact that the second one builds on the first.

Revelation, however, is a single, indivisible unity: the one revelation of one God.

Does this not lead to a diminishing of the authority of Scripture? No, because it is only from the teaching of Scripture that we see "nature" as creation of God and therefore creation as revelation of God. Without Scripture we will not be able to see the meaning of creation as revelation. Scripture is therefore absolutely indispensable for our understanding of the meaning of creation.

Because of the indivisible unity of God's revelation the obverse is also true. Scripture is not only indispensable for our understanding of creation, but Scripture can only be understood properly within the context of creation. Scripture is not sent by God in a revelational vacuum. We therefore have to read Scriptural revelation in the light of creational revelation.

It is, however, not Scriptural and creational revelation which have to correct each other. They are equally true and authoritative - the one, unequivocal revelation of the one, unequivocal God. It is *our interpretation* of Scripture that needs to be corrected through creational revelation, and *our interpretation* of creational revelation that has to be corrected by Scripture.

But, if our interpretation of Scripture depends on something outside Scripture, does this not relativise Scripture? Is God's revelation not subjected to another authority and therefore not authoritative any more? This would be the case if creational revelation was a separate "natural" revelation the meaning of which is accessible to the "natural" reason of

fallen man. But according to the viewpoint of God's revelation as a unity which is only understood in faith, exactly the opposite is the case: it guards Scripture against all attempts to relativise its absolute, divine authority.

It is a simple fact that we cannot understand Scripture in isolation from our experience of ourselves and the world around us. Scripture communicates through human words that are only intelligible through their reference to the created order. When in Scripture we read about various minerals, plants and animals, kings and slaves, men and women, we know what these words mean. Not because Scripture provides careful definitions of them all, but because they relate to our experience of things in the reality to which we belong. For this reason, if Scripture is read by people who lack the experience of some of these things (Eskimo's will, for instance, not know all the plants and animals mentioned in the Bible) they will only be able to understand it if their experience is expanded, or if the words used by Scripture are explained in detail.

Because there is such a close, inescapable reliance between the experience of our world and our understanding of Scripture, it is of crucial importance *how* we view creation.

If it is regarded as a self-sufficient world understood by autonomous human reason, then our understanding of Scripture (in so far as it depends on our experience of the world) is subject to the shifting, uncertain interpretations and perceptions of man. When, however, we recognise that our world is a creation of God, and as creation is His revelation, we can base our understanding of Scripture on the firm foundation of God's all-encompassing revelation. Of course we will have to be open to be corrected by that revelation, but we know that our faith rests on the sure revelation of God.

The indivisible unity of God's revelation becomes even clearer if we also keep God's incarnated revelation in Christ in mind. The Word by which creation came into being and is maintained, and the Word given in Scripture, find their coherence in the one living Word who was in the beginning with God and was God, and who became flesh and dwelt with us (John 1:1,14). In the revelation of Himself in his Son, God enlightens us about ourselves and our world, because nothing has

meaning other than in the Son. In Him everything is created and through Him all things are redeemed (Colossians 1:15-20). God's revelation has its centre and focus in His Son, Jesus Christ.

But if we can know God only in and through His creation, if all revelation (including that of Scripture - in human language, and Christ - as a human being) is through creation (cf. thesis 2 above), if the whole of creation is revelation, in which way is Scripture different, what makes it unique?

Scriptural revelation, viewed in the context of revelation in general, is indeed "special". Its uniqueness is to be found in (1) the character of its message and (2) its unique function.

The reason why the Bible is unique is not because it is verbal and written communication. The uniqueness of Scripture lies in the fact that the contents of its communication (or its message) come from God. The Bible is not merely a written record of words that God spoke, but it is inspired by God Himself. This applies to all that the Scripture says and not merely to its record of God's spoken words.

Scripture is also unique, in the second place, because of its special function. It is the Word of God's covenant with mankind. It communicates to us that human beings, already from before the fall, have had a special covenant relationship with God. After the fall, it becomes a covenant of grace and salvation. This we only know through Scripture.

It is exactly for this reason that creational revelation will always be insufficient without Scripture. Without God's covenant Word that tells us who we are (His image, in His service), we would be lost and wander through creation not knowing who we are, what the world is or where we are going. This is the reason why God's creational revelation has never been given without His word of covenant spoken to man. In the very moment of His creation God spoke to man about His covenant with man (Genesis 1:28; 2:16,17).

It is therefore wrong - a sin - to try tearing the unity of God's revelation apart in order to turn creation into a self-sufficient revelation from the covenant Word (Scripture). Scripture is indispensable, not

merely for leading us to salvation in a life to come, but also for understanding ourselves and this present world as the creation of God reconciled in Christ. Without its teaching God's covenant with us, we would not know ourselves as God's covenant partners in this world.

It is, however, an equally serious violation of the unity of God's revelation to try and tear the Bible apart from its given context in creation as revelation. It is not possible to read it correctly in isolation from the revelational context of creation in general.

#### **4.2.4 The earlier distinction between "general" and "special" should not be made applicable to God's revelation, because God's so-called general revelation is also special or specific**

As I have already indicated I used to accept the distinction between God's general revelation (in nature and in history) as against His special revelation (in the Bible). The word "general" was used in an attempt to indicate the *scope* of creational revelation as against that of Scripture limited to Israel in the Old Testament and the believers after them.

- Apart from the fact that the word "special" indicates that Scripture was directed at a specific group of people (the question naturally arises as to whether Scripture is not today intended for *all* people), it also indicates that it is a *special* revelation which makes use, for example, of other *means* (for example, human language, prophecies, legal prescriptions, etc.).

In reality the dual manner in which God reveals Himself does not differ. In both cases He uses creation. Scripture as a Book is, after all, a part of creation.

- My next problem with this earlier view is that the word "general" creates the impression that God's creational revelation is rather vague and not directed at specific people. Revelation, however, is never general in this sense. It is always intimately personal, because one Person is addressing another person. The voice of God comes to me and to you! God involves Himself with each individual human being.

The above-mentioned clearly emerges from the Bible, as can be seen from the personal relationship which existed between God and biblical figures. He spoke to them and they replied. In their reaction to His revelation they praised Him, begged Him, even argued with Him.

But this also emerges from the many beautiful things which we are discovering in cultures which did not know the Bible, for example, traditional African culture - God has always been actively involved in the lives of these people. They knew and adhered to certain basic norms of life!

■ A more important reason why I cannot accept this distinction is because it is rooted in the unbiblical two-spheres doctrine, which divides the whole of creation (even God's revelation) into a natural (general) and supernatural (special) part (see next chapter). For this reason a distinction is often made between natural revelation (in creation) and supernatural revelation (in Scripture). However, God's revelation in nature (or creation) is not something natural but divine. Obversely, God's revelation in Scripture is also not supernatural but natural, a part of creation, because it occurred in human language, was put into writing and printed to become, as a book, part of our everyday existence, to be read by everybody.

■ My subsequent point of criticism is this: the fact that God's revelation was regarded in terms of the nature-grace (or natural-supernatural) scheme led to the fact that the unity of His dual mode of revelation was seldom respected in history.

More conservative (supranaturalistic) Christians tended to put all emphasis on the "supernatural" Scriptural revelation, with the result that the "natural" revelation in creation became practically superfluous. It is a well-known fact that within reformed and evangelical circles God's creational revelation has remained no more than an article in a confession of faith (for example, in the *Westminster Confession*, the *Canons of Dordt* and the *Confessio Belgica*). It was never (like the doctrine on Scripture) worked out in more detail - except erroneously in the form of a natural theology! (Could the reason for this be the 16th-century Reformation's one-sided emphasis on *sola Scriptura*?) The result of this under-estimation of God's creational revelation has been an over-estimation of His Scriptural revelation. Because they retained

more or less only the Bible, they began to expect *too much* of it, and regarded it as a sort of encyclopedia which had to provide answers to practically any question.

Obversely (in contrast to the so-called fundamentalists) liberal theologians so over-emphasised "general" revelation (or what they understood it to be) that they began to question, relativise and even make redundant Scriptural revelation.

It is against such viewpoints that we should understand the reaction of more conservative Christians to which we have just drawn attention. However, because they started from the wrong presupposition of two separate revelations (the one "natural" and accessible to the unregenerated, and the other "supernatural" and accessible only by faith through grace), they could not solve the problem correctly. In their attempt to safeguard the authority of Scripture, they had no other option but to weaken the significance of "general" revelation. "Word of God" becomes almost exclusively equated with Scripture and in the end creational revelation is left with no significance except as a basis for condemning the unbeliever! Their confession of the authority of Scripture was thus preserved - at least in a formal sense - but it was at a high cost: that of severing Scripture from the revelational context within which God gave it.

We may *distinguish* between the different ways in which God reveals Himself, but we are not allowed to *separate* them. A well-known "nature Psalm", such as Psalm 19, also does not do this. It deals not only with God's revelation in nature, but also with His teaching and commandments (*torah*) and moves from the one to the other effortlessly!

Therefore no one of the ways in which God reveals Himself is more important than another. We cannot, for example, know His will by only studying the Bible. Neither can we know it by studying creation alone.



#### 4.2.5 The more recent distinction between a three-fold revelation (creational revelation, Scriptural revelation and incarnational revelation in Christ) is not really useful, because in all three cases God reveals Himself in creation

Initially (call this my second phase) I was very impressed with this vision. Firstly, one has the worldless (non-lingual) creational revelation; then the more easily understandable revelation in human language (the Bible); and finally it becomes even more concrete in a Man, a Person, Somebody who lived as we should really live (Christ). Creational revelation would then be primary, while this original revelation is, following the fall, "republished" in the Bible to enable us to understand it better. With the aid of the "spectacles" of Scripture, we are now capable of reading again the original creational revelation. We can once again hear it clearly with the "hearing aid" of Scripture.

Upon closer reflection, this does not appear to be such a meaningful suggestion, however.

- In the first place, we have already said that God always reveals Himself *in* and never *outside* of creation. There is therefore practically no sense in typifying revelation more closely as *creational* revelation, as it can be nothing but creational! Scripture is part of creation, and the incarnated Word was also part of creation.
- In the second place the danger exists that we (even though it might not be our intention) can again fall back on the distinction of a revelation which is creational and another revelation (that in Scripture and in Christ) which is not, in other words, which is "supernatural". The unbiblical distinction of "natural-supernatural" is peering around the corner again!
- In the third place a three-fold revelation dissects that which should not be taken apart. The three ways of revelation are simply parts of the whole of God's one activity of making Himself known to us.

It would therefore appear to me that it may be better to regard God's revelation as one book with different chapters. Each chapter has a specific place in the book and we cannot at will tear out one of the chapters and regard it as a separate book. God's revelation in Scripture

and in Christ are simply specific moments of His total revelation in and through his creation. In this way God's creational revelation is not denied, but Scripture and incarnation become simply *special moments* instead of *separate revelations*.

We are therefore neither allowed to isolate Scripture from creation ordered through God's Word (as if Scripture is speaking in a vacuum); nor isolate God's creational Word from Scripture (as if the meaning of creation could be understood in isolation from Scripture); nor isolate the (through the incarnated Word) redeemed believers as if the Spirit of God which is in them would guide them in isolation from His creational and Scriptural Word. It is only in this dynamic interaction that we can really know God's revelation.

The image of water which is available in three forms - gas, liquid and solid matter - is helpful to explain that, although the Word assumes different forms, it is always the same Word of the same God.

■ In the fourth place, in the a three-fold distinction of revelation the impression is created that creational revelation would be more original than Scriptural revelation. This is erroneous, because Scriptural revelation did not begin the moment it was written down. Its special character is that it is oral revelation. According to Genesis God first speaks *about* His creatures and once man had been created, also *with* man. He describes His relationship with man as a covenantal relationship. (After the fall it became a covenant of *grace*, and His Word became a *redemptive* Word.) Many parts of the Bible were transmitted orally for a long time before being written down. The Scriptural revelation is therefore as original as the creational revelation.

■ In the fifth place a distinction into a three-fold revelation also creates the impression that the Scriptural revelation would be clearer than the creational revelation, because it has been given in words, as against the wordless nature of God's creational revelation. This sounds very rationalistic, however. There are many things in life which can be very clear such as, for example, love or the message of a work of art, but which are difficult to express in words! Furthermore, our fall into sin does not only affect our understanding of God's revelation in creation, but also of His Scriptural revelation. What is true, however, is that God's Word (either in creation, or in Scripture) cannot be understood

without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit the Word is hollow, empty and without strength. But without the Word our lives are without direction. The reformed tradition tends to over-emphasise Scripture and even to fall into Bibliolatry (idolatry of the Bible) - at the expense of illumination by the Spirit. Charismatic groups do the reverse: the Spirit is over-emphasised to the extent that it becomes zealotry - at the expense of the Word.

- My final (sixth) remark only re-emphasises what I have already mentioned in the previous two theses: We do have to read God's creational revelation through the spectacles of Scripture. But the obverse (which is mostly not mentioned) is that we also have to understand God's Scriptural revelation in the light of creation. Scripture, after all, is not a supernatural, super-creational book. It is directed at us, as creatures in creation. How could it be possible to understand it if we do not understand creation?

#### **4.2.6 God's Revelation is not something static from the past, but is dynamic and also occurs today**

We tend too much to see God's revelation only as a record of historical events. The reason is perhaps to be found in our one-sided association of revelation with a book (the Bible). Revelation, however, not only occurs in the past, and was not finalised 2 000 years ago with Revelation 22:21. God still reveals Himself to every generation, to each person - even today. Today we can still open the Bible, read it prayerfully and - in spite of the totally different culture and language within which it came into being - God can still speak to us clearly.

Because we associate revelation, especially in Scripture, with a specific text or set of events written down in the past, we tend to see God's revelation as something static. We identify His revelational *activity* with the *result* of His revelation. Scripture itself, however, is a clear example of how dynamic God's revelation has grown and developed from Genesis to Revelation.

This thesis should not be misunderstood: We do not reject the doctrine of a closed canon, in other words, that Scripture was completed with Revelation 22:21.

#### 4.2.7 God does not reveal Himself only in special places, at certain times and on special occasions, but in and through the whole of his creation

We tend so much to think that we are closer to God - and God closer to us - in special places and at certain times. This is also the reason why we assume that His voice will be clearer in such places and on such occasions than elsewhere. Examples of general misunderstandings in this regard are: clearer at the communion table than at an ordinary meal; clearer in a place of prayer than in a political meeting; clearer in a cathedral than in the noise and hubbub of a city or factory; clearer on a lonely mountain peak or beside a quiet stream than in a skyscraper or a busy street; clearer in the green of Natal than in the harsh and dry Karoo.

It is wrong to assume that one necessarily has to withdraw oneself from everyday life or flee to a quiet place, that God cannot be experienced in the ordinary round of every day. Perhaps it would be possible to have a quieter interaction with God in your bedroom, but it does not necessarily mean that you are closer to God or God closer to you. This view that God is closer to us or speaks to us more intimately in certain places often goes along with an incorrect dualism between nature and culture and a concomitant idealisation or romanticisation of nature, as against culture. Culture *as such* is then regarded as evil. This very popular view that we should be able to know God better in "untrammelled nature" than in the "godless city" (culture) is, however, totally wrong, revealing naivety and a very selective outlook.

One cannot only choose to see God in the beauty of a flower and shut one's eyes to the droughts and other natural disasters, cruelty of animals, etc. - things in nature which destroy nature. Nature also threatens man - who is part of nature. We further have to keep in mind that the majority of people today live in cities. Could they only be happy once a year should they be fortunate enough to have a holiday in nature? Is it not possible that God can speak to them among the concrete canyons of the city or in the shacks of a squatter camp?

God Himself does not seem to regard a city negatively. Bear in mind that His creation does begin in a garden (Eden) but ends in a city (the new Jerusalem)!

Of course God does not reveal Himself in the same way all over. In a beautiful garden He probably reveals Himself in the wonderful care that He accords creation. In a poor squatter camp with dirty, hungry children He reveals Himself as the compassionate, caring God. (Perhaps God has, subsequent to the fall, become even more intimately connected with His creation than before. He mourns with the mourners, suffers with those who suffer.) While studying one knows Him as the One who illuminates one's mind, and at a party as Someone who shares one's joy.

It is therefore also important that we should know God at different times and in different places, otherwise our knowledge of Him will be intolerably limited. Just as we ourselves do not know ourselves fully if we have not yet experienced inspiration, joy, heartbreak, pain, suffering and compassion, so we cannot know God if we have not met Him in a variety of places and circumstances. A student who only sees his lecturer in the classroom and not also on a hiking trip in the mountains or with his family, does not know him at all!

#### **4.2.8 God does not reveal Himself only in the good and the beautiful, but also in the bad and the ugly**

This thesis ties in with and extends the previous one. God also reveals Himself where man has destroyed and spoilt and twisted creation. God does not retreat from the ugly face of fallen creation.

What about God can we see in the ugly? I think we here have to distinguish between God's curse and God's judgment.

God's curse on creation (Genesis 3:17-19) is valid for all our human activities. Following the fall we cannot properly fulfil our cultural mandate - even should we act in obedience - without the negative as a result of God's curse also emerging. Instead of fertility we find infertility. There will always be thorns, weeds, destruction, exploitation, pollution, plagues, diseases, etc. This is to be expected!

As against His curse, God's judgments are sudden, unpredictable, unexpected. Examples are wars and natural disasters. Such judgments (the present drought in South Africa or the wave of violence) should not be interpreted, however, as if the special group, nation or country

affected should be more sinful than others. Luke 13:1-5 warns us specifically against that. God's judgments are only signs - signs to the *whole world* - to warn us that, should we not be converted, God's final judgment will affect all of us.

The wonderful part of it, however is, that in God's judgments it is not the judgments itself but the redemptive intention which is the primary consideration. Even the intention of the final day of judgment is the salvation of man, and this is true of all judgments. It is also true in the case of individuals: Job is stripped of everything and is nearly destroyed, to enable him to really know God. Paul receives a thorn in the flesh which is essential for his salvation.

We are confronted here with very difficult questions. For instance: How do we know when something is God's judgment and when is it simply the work of the devil - or even the result of our own sinfulness? Can we not too easily read our own preconceived ideas into an event? I may see the downfall of apartheid as God's judgement, but a member of the white Conservative Party may regard it as the work of the devil! To safeguard our interpretation of the Bible against such arbitrariness, more or less generally accepted hermeneutic rules are available. Should we have something similar to guide our interpretation of creational revelation? Or is the only rule that we should always read God's creational revelation in the light of the Scripture?

How does Satan fit into this picture? Unlike God, he cannot create something new. He can only twist, abuse and destroy that which already exists in creation. He succeeds in this in two ways: through imitation and through concealment.

Contrary to God who reveals Himself, the devil is essentially somebody who conceals himself. In the paradise already he disguised himself as a snake. He can, of course, also appear in the guise of somebody very attractive - such as a beautiful prostitute or the charming wife or husband of your neighbour. The Bible maintains that he can even disguise himself as an angel! The devil prefers us not to recognise him, such as when we go looking for him only in satanist cults or in the New Age Movement and not in our own secular culture or even church. He definitely does not present himself in the traditional horns and ears!

In the second place, and **this goes with his concealment**, Satan is a very good imitator - of God as well - as Scripture testifies in many places.

As somebody in disguise, and as an imitator, the devil will most definitely also simulate revelation. Together with his many spirits he will attempt to seduce man. Even Christians will have to ask themselves: "Am I now doing what God wants me to do, or am I perhaps under the influence of Satan, obeying my own sinful impulses?"

#### **4.2.9 God does not only reveal Himself, but also important facts concerning His creation as well as His relationship with creation**

According to Romans 1:20 we can clearly see from God's works that His power is eternal and that He is truly God. That He is truly God is His most important revelation. Paul only mentions His power, but God also reveals His justice, compassion, glory and many more.

The most important revelation about Himself is that He is truly God. His most important revelation about creation is that it is fully creation: at a given time it was called into existence by Him, it is upheld and governed by Him. It is therefore totally dependent on Him. And He guides it with a firm hand to the final destination of a re-creation.

From this emerges (as already indicated above) that God is not a God who wishes to be seen in isolation from His creation - He is personally involved in it - or obversely, that creation can exist independently of its relationship with God.

It is sometimes suggested that creational revelation is of little practical value because it is a revelation of the person of God and therefore tells us nothing about creation itself or how we ought to live in creation. The world in which we live is, however, so inseparably bound with God that it cannot be known apart from Him. Knowing our world as the revelation of God, is fundamental to knowing that world itself. Creational revelation is not something added on to the natural meaning of the cosmos or a mere dimension of our world. It is the very fundamental meaning of that world.

Thus far we have dealt more with God's revelation as such and have not yet looked in depth at the question as to how man responds to it, or how we can know God's revelation. The subsequent theses deal with this issue.

The first important thesis is:

#### **4.2.10 God's revelation and our knowledge of His revelation should not be confused, but should be clearly distinguished**

God's action is to reveal and our action is to know this revelation. The former is divine and clear, and the latter is human and fallible. Divine revelation is therefore not merely a question of human knowledge. And human knowledge can never be absolute, that is, divine. Philosophers perhaps tend to make the first mistake and theologians the latter.

Many Christians have not yet seriously questioned the assumption, namely that human reason is unimpaired in its functioning. Therefore it is presumed that, provided it works with the correct source of information, reason will inevitably arrive at the correct conclusions. The result is that human formulations arrived at by a rational systematisation of Scripture becomes invested with the infallibility of Scripture itself - since the source employed in arriving at these formulations is undoubtedly infallible! Serious questioning of the correctness of these (theological) formulations is ruled out. To do so is seen as questioning the infallible Word itself. In spite of the intention to honour the divine authority of Scripture in this way, it results in a weakening of its authority because of the blurring of the distinction between God's Word and our response or interpretation of it. If we want to maintain in practice as well as in theory the full authority of God's revelation, it is vital that we make a clear distinction between Scripture which is from God, and interpretations of Scripture, which are human. We should refuse to canonise any human interpretation!

Of course we have to use our senses in order to know God's revelation. God's revelation, however, breaks *into* our senses, it is something *above*, something *more than* our senses.



The idea that we could fully master God's revelation or fully possess it, therefore speaks of as much arrogance as if we should think that we could fully plumb God.

The reasons why this is not possible are not to be sought in God's revelation (for example, that it should be less than clear), but (1) because God is not a human being and is therefore incomprehensible; and (2) because our senses and intellect have also been affected by the fall into sin.

**4.2.11 God's revelation is not something abstract (like scientific knowledge), but is concrete. Therefore his revelation is not in the first place known in a cool-reasonable, abstract-intellectual way, but the whole human being is involved**

An example to illustrate this is Isaiah 28:23-29, in which it is told how God gave the simple farmer the knowledge about when and how to plough, when and what to sow, and how and when to harvest his crop. The whole of the Book of Proverbs is filled with such practical wisdom. And because God's revelation is directed at all people, we also find this in the proverbs of all nations - also in those who had never known Scripture.

In the Western tradition a strong tendency throughout the ages has been to associate knowledge one-sidedly with theoretical and scientifically abstract knowledge. It has therefore been regarded as the only means to understand God's revelation. But worse: God's Scriptural revelation itself was regarded, in the light of this, as a scientific textbook consisting of logical propositions. One therefore had to deduce intellectually certain rational principles from Scripture. However, if Paul says that man can *see* (N.I.V.) God's divinity and power from His works, he uses an unusual word combination in Greek which indicates both mental perception (*nooumena*) and visual perception (*kataratai*).

There is a real danger that we view God's revelation, especially in Scripture, as something directed primarily or even exclusively to the intellect. According to Scripture, however, God's revelation is addressed to us as human beings and not merely to one dimension or function of our humanity. To reduce Scripture to a primarily intellectual communication, is to limit Scripture in a way that Scripture

itself does not authorise. Scripture is even more than communication: it is the power (*energeia*) of God! (Hebrews 4:12).

The knowing ability by means of which we can understand God's revelation is therefore more than just intellectual. It is a kind of spiritual (in)sight. In order to be able to understand God's revelation, one has to have the necessary sensitivity. Should we consider other Scriptural passages here, the following emerge: Hebrews 5:14: insight and experience, Colossians 1:10: insight and wisdom given by the Spirit, Ephesians 1:18: illuminated spiritual eyes and Romans 12:2: a renewed intellect.

Could we say that the prerequisite for knowing revelation is an open, believing heart? An intimate experience - involving the whole of one's being? I think that God's revelation addresses man fundamentally in the core of his existence, his heart. And from this centre the whole of man is involved - his intellect and his senses.

Perhaps intuition plays a role here as it does in many other fields, even in science. Intuitive knowledge is immediate knowledge, it is not knowledge obtained through a long and intricate process of reasoning. One simply knows that it is so.

#### **4.2.12 Human beings do not only respond positively, in obedience, to God's revelation, but also negatively, in disobedience**

In the Bible we find many examples of how people respond positively in obedience to God's revelation. All these responses - even though they are positive - are of secondary importance, however. God's revelation is of primary importance. The most important thing is not to ask (to mention an example): What can we learn from the history of Abraham or Joseph, or how can they be examples to us? The most important question is: What was God doing in the lives of Abraham and Joseph and what does He want to tell us through that today?

We would, however, like to direct attention to what happens when one responds negatively to God's revelation. Romans 1:18 says that such people repress or push aside God's revelation. And in verse 25 it is further said that the unbelievers exchange God's truth or replace it with a lie.

Scripture leaves no doubt that the common failure to perceive God's creational revelation is the result of human sin and is not due to any lack of clarity or sufficiency in God's revelation in creation.

This does not, of course, mean that unbelievers do not know anything, or that we cannot learn anything from them. Should we go more thoroughly into what repression and replacement entail, it would become clear that God, in spite of their disobedience, keeps on talking to such people - and not in vain, either.

\* *Repression*

Pushing aside means to repress God's revelation, to thrust it out of one's consciousness. According to psychologists repression is something that occurs frequently in man, but it is such a rapid and effective process that one is practically unaware of it. At the same moment that man sees, he does not see any more. Because man now veils in obscurity the truth about God, he never really comes to full knowledge. This does not, however, absolve him of responsibility, for in doing this he is committing unrighteousness and thus sin.

The enormous implication of this action of man is manifested in the following three characteristics:

- Although this revelation remains repressed, man experiences a certain lack of quietude, he remains tense and anxious. At the deepest level he realizes that he is playing hide and seek with God, and that he is not being honest with himself - even though he will never openly acknowledge this. He does know, but does not want to know!
- The process of repression occurs differently in different people. For some people it would appear as though they have been perfectly successful in wholly repressing God's revelation, while for others it would be much more difficult, or they would fail completely. They are simply not capable of shifting the all-powerful force of God's revelation from them, and therefore they remain tense and anxious.
- What has been repressed has - remarkably - not disappeared completely. It has not been destroyed or rooted out, but has only been repressed. However hard man tries to hide God's revelation in the

deepest recesses of his consciousness, it remains alive. Much against the will of man it remains vibrant, and it is not possible for man to get rid of it effectively. Man, so to speak, goes around with a wound that will not heal properly. He will never be able to shake off the "crucified" truth. In an unguarded moment this truth leaps out of the dark cellars of the heart and grabs one by the throat - something which often happens during crisis situations. Compare for example the call "My God!" uttered even by someone who maintains that he is a complete unbeliever.

\* *Replacement*

Replacement is the direct result of repression. The void which appears as a direct result of the repression has to be filled, and for this reason human beings then become *fabrica idolatorum*, factories of idols, as Calvin mockingly called them. In paganism - old and modern - man dreams up his own gods. Paganism is a dream, a frightening, never-ending dream ... This also occurs unconsciously. Human beings reach this point due to loneliness, need and fear. If man refuses to acknowledge God, then only God's creation remains. Through an idolisation of creatures instead of the Creator (cf. Romans 1:23, 25), man now tries to fill this void.

Throughout the centuries man has been a creature needing to do filling-up. He so urgently needed to fill all the gaps that in Athens he even built an altar for the unknown god! (Acts 17:23.) One often gets the impression that man has in our day become so deadly tired of replacing the true God with substitute gods that he now prefer leaving the gaps blank.

This is pretence, however. Modern secularist thinkers do confess that they do not need God. But in reality, at the practical level, they still fill the gap left by the rejection of the true God with surrogate gods.

A very serious effect of secularism is the lack of commitment among many people. It is especially Western youth who are not encouraged to live for an ideal or a faith. This leads to the aimlessness and meaninglessness in their lives, with the concomitant awful results. (It might be better to have *a* faith than *no* faith!) For this reason they may easily fall victim to a person, a group or a movement with strong

beliefs about commitment to a greater and more important entity than themselves.

Finally, a warning: It is not only unbelieving pagans who repress and replace God's revelation. Christians are not immune - they only do it with a pious face.

### 4.3 RECAPITULATION: LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

In a nutshell, what I have been trying to say is that God is a close, a revealing God. He speaks directly, concretely, clearly and personally to every individual - today still. He does this in and through his creation and not through supernatural means. He also does not do this at so-called special times, places and events - it happens even in the midst of that which man has corrupted and turned ugly. He also does it in many different ways, of which one cannot be regarded as being more important than the others. His revelation contains fundamental truths about Himself, His creation and His relation to His creation of which we would not otherwise have known. In knowing His revelation we are involved in the deepest of our total being. We have to be careful that we do not repress and replace His authoritative revelation in disobedience. And we also have to take care that we do not confuse our fallible knowledge of His revelation with His infallible revelation.

We have perhaps progressed a few steps towards working out some new perspectives on God's revelation. The struggle has meant a great deal to me. I do hope that it might have brought some light to you.

Speaking of light: Perhaps the most wonderful thing that we can say of God's revelation is that it is light. It is often contrasted with darkness in the Bible. One does not need to go on a quest looking for light, nor to try to discover it. It is clear and bright. All one needs to do is open one's eyes. If we open the Bible, we shall see how it is drenched with the fact that God is light and gives light.

- In the first place, God Himself *is* light (1 John 1:5). Psalm 104:2 says that He is surrounded with a mantle of light. Ezekiel (1:27) also sees Him like this, and in the New Testament it is repeated that He lives in an impenetrable light (1 Timothy 6:16).

- In the second instance God *creates* light. He does this at the beginning of creation (cf. Genesis 1:3; also Isaiah 45:7), and Revelation (21:23) ends with a wonderful city that needs no illumination because the glory of God Himself will light it, and the Lamb will be the lamp of this city. (Cf. also Isaiah 60:1: the powerful presence of the Lord brings light.)
- In the third place *Christ* too is light. This is prophesied of Him (Isaiah 9:1) and John (1:4-9) announces that the Light has finally come to the world. He also testifies of Himself that He is light (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). "I am the bright Morning Star" (Revelation 22:16).
- In the fourth place *God's Word* is light. In this regard read Psalm 119:105 and 2 Peter 1:19.
- In the fifth place *the believers* have been called from darkness to the light (1 Peter 2:9), they have to accept God as their light (Micah 7:8), live in His light (Psalm 36:9; Isaiah 2:5) and therefore have to live like people of the light (Ephesians 5:8), be themselves a light for the world (Matthew 5:14; John 8:12), and testify to the light (John 1:7) - all this because they have illuminated hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6 and 1 Peter 1:19).

All this is beautifully summed up in a text such as 2 Corinthians 4:6: "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ".

Recapitulated: God is light, His revelation offers light, His Spirit illuminates our hearts and our intellects. With so much light *above* you, *around* you, and *in* you, it is impossible to live in the darkness and not to let light radiate *from* you!

May what the writer of Proverbs (4:18) said of the path of the just (in contrast to the ways of the godless who stumble because they walk in the darkness) also be true of our understanding of God's revelation: "But the path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day."

## 4.4 HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

When we discussed the relationship between a Christian worldview and the Bible in chapter 3, we emphasised the fact that one's worldview and philosophical presuppositions play an important role in one's interpretation of the Scriptures. We therefore stressed the need of an ongoing "dialogue" between one's worldview and the Bible to ensure that the glasses of one's worldview are polished by the Word of God.

My students usually have no problem with an awareness of our presuppositions and the necessity of a continuous reformation of our worldview in the light of Scripture. But most of them do not know *how* to read and interpret the Bible correctly. "If our presuppositions have such a decisive impact on our reading of the Bible, could you give us a few rules to ensure that we do not commit eisegesis instead of exegesis?" they often ask. As a conclusion to this chapter on God's revelation, I will therefore offer a few guidelines. Firstly I will indicate wrong methods of reading the Bible, and this will be followed by what I consider to be the correct procedure.

### 4.4.1 How not to read the Bible

Most people are aware of the historic-cultural gap between the times the different Bible books were written and our own time and circumstances in which the Word of God has to be applied in a relevant way. The problem is *how* to bridge this gap. The following ways in which many Christians - including ministers of religion - try to "make the Bible relevant" are unacceptable: allegorising, spiritualising, moralising and encyclopedising.

#### \* *Allegorising*

This is a very old method in the history of Christianity, which attempts to search beneath the literal meaning of a passage for the "real" or "deeper" meaning. Countless examples - some very amusing - could be mentioned from history where parts of the Scriptures or even whole books were understood in this way. Christ's parables were often the victims of this method. The parable of the good Samaritan was for instance interpreted by Origin in the following way: the traveller (= Adam) journeys from Jerusalem (= heaven) to Jericho (= the world)

and is assaulted by robbers (= the devil and his helpers). The priest (= the law) and the Levite (= the prophets) pass by without helping the fallen Adam, but the Samaritan (= Christ) helps him, puts him on his donkey (= Christ's body), brings him to an inn (= the church), gives him two coins (= the Father and the Son) and promises to return (= Christ's second coming). Often whole books were manhandled in this way. For nearly two thousand years the Song of Songs was understood as expressing the love between Christ and his church instead of ordinary faithful love between man and woman.

\* *Spiritualising*

This happens when the reader discards the physical, earthly and historical reality the text speaks about in favour of a spiritual analogy. Genesis 37:24, which tells the story of Joseph thrown by his brothers into a pit, is used to comfort present-day readers who are "mentally in a pit". And Mark 4:35-41, the narrative of Jesus stilling the storm, is spiritualised to "storms on the sea of life". Only certain elements of the texts are therefore selected in a very subjective and arbitrary way, with the consequence that the text is not understood at all and totally deformed.

\* *Moralising*

This is perhaps the most frequent interpretive pitfall. Every text is turned into a simplistic, moralistic programme of do's and don'ts. It is a very popular and also an easy method when reading the lives of Bible characters. Their vices should serve as a warning and their virtues as a motivation for us today: the worldliness of Lot, the faith of Abraham, the hope of Jacob, the stubbornness of Moses, the sensuality of David etc. etc.

The problems that we have with this method are (1) that the Biblical characters are not presented as ideal persons and models for imitation in the Bible; (2) a historical equation mark is drawn between then and now (we are Moses, Mary, Peter etc.) without any consideration of the vast gap; (3) a *description* of a specific character becomes a *prescription* for today, and (4) the theocentric focus of the Scriptures tends to be shifted to an antropocentric (man-centred) emphasis. A moralising reading of the Bible is therefore reductionistic or one-sided,



obscuring the Gospel and inhibiting the Bible from coming through on its own terms. This, of course, does not imply that the Bible does not contain any ethical demands. Moralising, however, reads its moral lessons *into* the Bible and therefore distorts the message of the text.

Both Greidanus (1988:116-118 and 161-168) and Spykman (1985c:53-63) provide numerous interesting examples of moralistic eisegesis and preaching and they also give in-depth critiques of this dangerous way of reading the Bible. According to Spykman moralising means distorting the Biblical message, missing the meaning of a text and losing sight of the heart of the Gospel. To summarise, his critique is that a moralistic reading of the Bible is reductionist, fragmentary, individualistic, legalistic, unhistorical and man-centred.

#### \* *Encyclopedising*

Some people go even further and do not only view the Bible as a handbook for good morals, but also as a kind of encyclopedia which has to provide answers to nearly every kind of question or problem. Scholars in various disciplines even regard it as a textbook for sciences like agriculture, astronomy, politics, economics, education etc.

Such people, however, do not realize what kind of book the Bible is. Therefore they expect too much from it. They ask questions which it cannot answer. They also do not keep in mind that Scripture is not scientific literature, but pre-scientific in nature. We will return to the unique nature of the Scriptures when we now try to indicate how they should be read in the correct way.

#### **4.4.2 How to read the Bible correctly**

I am not going to discuss obviously valuable aids for our Bible study like, for example, different translations (if you cannot read the original Hebrew and Greek), reliable commentaries on parts or whole books of the Bible, concordances (to help you compare Scripture with Scripture), Bible dictionaries (explaining the meaning of specific words) etc. We should remember that we are not the first to read the Bible. Millions of Christians have done so before us. We should not necessarily accept their interpretations, but at the same time we could also learn much

from the efforts over nearly two thousand years to understand God's Word.

The following key words have proved to be helpful in assisting my own students in understanding the message of the Bible: (1) presuppositions; (2) unity, (3) diversity; (4) context and (5) focus.

\* *Presuppositions*

- One has to accept in faith that the Bible as a whole is the reliable and trustworthy Word of the living God in spite of the fact that it is given in the words of men.
- It is impossible to understand the Scriptures without the illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Word and Spirit, Spirit and Word are inseparable from each other. Bible study will therefore be useless if not accompanied by our sincere prayers that God should open His Word to us.
- It is also important not to try to deduce more from the Bible than what it offers. The obverse is just as important: to say less than what God reveals is also wrong.

\* *Unity*

- Compare one part of Scripture with other parts, for instance, a text from the Old Testament with parts from the New Testament, or different pronouncements about the same topic in the same book. More difficult parts of Scripture, of which the meaning is not immediately clear to us, should therefore also be read in the light of sections or texts in Scripture which are more easily understood.
- We should not read isolated texts or parts from the Bible - usually to prove a specific viewpoint. The whole contents, meaning and tendency of the Scriptures always have to be kept in mind to be able to understand its "parts" correctly.
- Regard the Old and New Testament as belonging together and being basically one, because they are written by the same Author on the same topic. The one cannot be understood correctly without the other,

because the New Testament is the fulfilment of the promises of the Old Testament. They are therefore like two "acts" of the one "drama".

\* *Diversity*

■ One should, however, also distinguish between different phases in the progressive development of God's revelation in the Bible. This also applies to the central message of the kingdom of God. For example: a part of Scripture belonging to the *promise* of the kingdom should not be understood in the same way as a text from the epistles of Paul when the kingdom *already had become a reality* in the preaching and work of Christ.

■ We distinguish between different types of literature like a letter, a newspaper report, a legal document, a scientific article, a historical account, a story or poetry, and we will not interpret them in the same way. The same applies to the Bible. It contains quite a variety: narratives, prophecies, wisdom literature, psalms, gospels, epistles and apocalypses. Apart from these genres there are many other forms of literature like laws, dreams, laments, parables, allegories, miracles, autobiographies, exhortations, lawsuits, pronouncements, funeral dirges, reports etc.

If we do not recognise and honour these differences, we will be guilty of "genre mistakes" which leads to faulty exegesis because the reader asks the wrong questions. This happens, for example, when prophecy is understood as historical narrative literature or a descriptive statement as prescriptive, or when a parable is read as if it is a historical narrative or an allegory.

\* *Context*

■ Always keep in mind the wider context of a word or text. If we use the image of concentric circles, starting with the inner circle, the context of a word is the sentence in which it occurs; the context of the sentence is the paragraph; the context of the paragraph is the chapter; the context of a chapter is the whole book; the context of the book is the life and times of the author, the problems he dealt with, the aim with his book and his readers; the widest context is the Old or New

Testament and finally the whole Bible with its central message of God's kingdom.

The *original, historical* context is therefore very important. Questions like the following have to be considered: Who wrote the text? To whom? When? Where? Why? In other words: the author, the audience, the period, the geographical, social and cultural setting and the purpose of writing.

- Closely connected to the previous point is the need to be aware of the gap of about two thousand years between the original text and oneself as the contemporary reader. But at the same time overarching continuity is also important: (1) it is the same faithful God of Israel who is still addressing us today; (2) it is one covenant people to whom His message is directed, and (3) there is one "story line" which goes right through the Bible: creation, fall, redemption and consummation.

The correct method is to look for the permanent *norm* in the historical *form*. One example to illustrate: the point of John 13:14 (Christ's command to wash each other's feet) is missed today if we literally wash one another's feet. The customs, the (dusty) roads, transportation (travelling by foot) and the footwear (open sandals) have changed. We will therefore have to find other ways of humble service (the norm) to make the same point in our contemporary situation.

Our task therefore is not to *make* the Bible relevant for today, but to *find* and *show* its relevance. The Gospel (the good news) has to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of the men and women of today; they have to hear God's voice here and now.

\* *Focus*

- Apart from recognising the variety of literary types in the Bible, it is of the utmost importance that we should also honour the type of literature the Bible as a whole is. We already indicated that encyclopedising the Bible is based on an incorrect viewpoint concerning the character of Biblical revelation.

We could call the Bible a book of faith. The particular "focus" of the Scriptures is confessional. Central, leading and dominant is its

consistent witness, in its totality and in all its parts, to the redeeming work of God in Jesus Christ.

History, for example, is not given in Scripture simply for the sake of history, but to elicit from its hearers a response of faith, trust and obedience. The focus of the Bible writers is not on the economic, political or social side of the events, but on a deeper level of meaning: God's covenant, his coming kingdom. The authors or editors of the books of Kings and Chronicles, for example, refer their readers who may be interested in all the economic, political and social details to extra-Biblical sources (cf. 1 Kings 11:41 and 14:19,29). Their confessional focus is confined to what the relationship of a specific ruler was to the God of the covenant: was it good (obedient) or bad (disobedient). And this does not only apply to these two historical books, but to the whole Bible. This is also the reason why the Bible does not give us complete biographies.

Another example to illustrate the specific focus is Psalm 127: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain; unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain". The writer of this Psalm is not "spiritualising" and denying that building a house is hard work for which one needs bricks, mortar and lumber. But he does not focus on all these facets of such a building project. He gets to the heart of the matter by proclaiming: without the blessings of the Lord all the hard work is empty, without content and meaning. The house may still stand, but it defeats its real purpose, it no longer stands for obedient family life. The same applies to the watchman: his work will be in vain if it is not acknowledged that in the final instance the Lord protects the city.

We find the same focus in a text like Matthew 6:23 where it is stated that our heavenly Father feeds the birds. This does not imply that they do not have to look for food themselves!

Is the implication that the Bible then has nothing to say about our scholarly activities? No, it has a clear message also for this area of our lives. It does not speak in economic categories, but it addresses economics. It does not speak political language, but it definitely addresses politics. It does not use educational concepts, but it indeed addresses education. It addresses all spheres of life, including our

scholarly activities, but in its own unique way. We could therefore say that the Bible provides ground-lines, overarching perspectives. It focusses on the deepest, the core of our existence in everything we do: our religious relationship with God.

#### **4.5 THE REVELATIONAL FOUNDATION OF A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW**

In conclusion an important question: What now is the revelance of this whole chapter on God's revelation for a Christian worldview? The answer is very simple: A Christian worldview may only call itself Christian if it is built on God's revelation.

Many Christians limit God's revelation to His written revelation in the Bible. We have, however, indicated clearly in this chapter that God's revelation or His Word to us is much wider than merely the Scriptures. If we therefore ask about the foundations of our Christian worldview, we should not only ask for its *Biblical* basis. We should rather ask for its *revelational* foundations thereby including God's whole revelation!

\* \* \*

The next chapter will explain how a worldview constructed in the light of God's revelation looks like.

## Chapter 5

# A RADICAL CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW COMPARED WITH DUALIST CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEWS

In chapter 2 (section 2.3.2.2) we already briefly mentioned the type of Christian worldview which missionaries usually introduced to Africa. It was a dualist Christian worldview. We contrasted it with the Biblical, holistic worldview. In this chapter we are going to elaborate on this dualist Christian worldview and also indicate the different forms it can acquire.

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION: TWO QUESTIONS

Is it not a waste of space to pay so much attention to this wrong type of worldview? The answer is no, for two important reasons. In the first place this worldview even today has a strong influence on the way Christians think and live. In the second place, comparing and contrasting the Christian worldview which we prefer with the dualist (and to my mind wrong) Christian worldview, enables us to indicate very clearly the radical difference between the two types of worldview.

The next logical question to be answered before we proceed is: On what grounds can we claim that our worldview is better than the dualist Christian worldview? This question actually asks for the Biblical basis of our more radical and holistic Christian worldview.

As became clear from the previous chapter, God's revelation includes more than merely the Bible. The above question should therefore not only be asked with reference to its *Biblical* basis, but also to the whole *revelational* basis of a genuine Christian worldview. We cannot deduce a complete Christian worldview by simply studying the Bible!

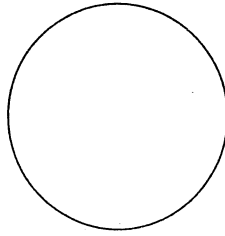
### 5.2 BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Does this imply that we do not need to use the Bible? No, as an important part of God's revelation we also have to use the Bible. Well,

if we do use the Bible, on which (key) texts do we then base our Christian worldview? This is an important question, but it is not phrased correctly, because we do not base a Christian worldview on a few verses or sections of the Bible. A Christian worldview is based more on *broad perspectives* than on *specific texts*. The Bible for instance reveals (1) that God created everything, (2) that mankind fell into sin and the rest of creation was cursed, (3) but that Christ redeemed creation and finally (4) that we are looking forward to a new creation at the consummation of God's work. These are perspectives or themes that we encounter throughout the Bible.

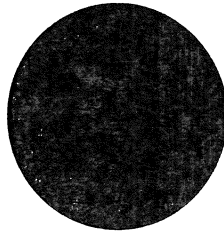
This Biblical perspective can be summarised diagrammatically in the following ways:

\* *Creation: a clean circle - one kingdom*



God created the heaven and the earth and everything that fills them - the entire universe - and it was "very good". This included the human being (male and female) to whom was entrusted the development and care of God's creation in obedience to His laws. God's kingdom was perfect.

\* *Fall: a darkened circle - a new kingdom*

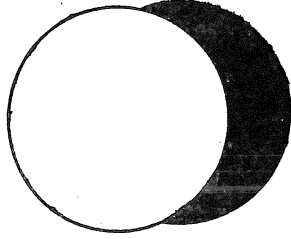


Seeking independence from his Creator, man and woman disobeyed God, became alienated from Him and slaves of the devil and of sin. Man was now under God's judgment and subjected to death. Because of



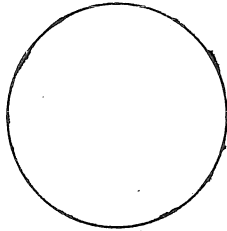
man's transgression the rest of creation (material things, plants and animals) were also subjected to futility and decay and is groaning for liberation. God's kingdom is replaced by the rule of the devil.

\* *Redemption: two overlapping circles - two kingdoms*



God did not reject his rebellious creation, but already directly after the fall into sin He promised salvation for mankind and restoration for the rest of creation. This was eventually accomplished on the cross by Jesus Christ, our Liberator and Saviour. Salvation is offered to everybody who is willing to confess his/her sins and believe in the Mediator. Through the Holy Spirit the redeemed are empowered to live new lives. The new age has broken into the old, but we still have to await Christ's second coming and the final restoration of God's kingdom. Satan and his kingdom were defeated but are still powerful.

\* *Consummation: one clean circle - only one kingdom again*



Christ's second coming will bring the final judgment of sin and Satan. Death and all the other terrible consequences of sin will be eliminated. The faithful will inherit a new, recreated creation. God will again rule as supreme, sovereign King in a new heaven and on a new earth.

The Bible therefore gives a clear view on the development of God's kingdom which cannot be *separated from* world history, but which is realised *in* world history. A Christian worldview therefore provides a totally different view of history and time than the ones we are used to.

### 5.3 TRADITIONAL AFRICAN VIEWS OF HISTORY AND TIME

What is history exactly, and what is its course like? Does human history run parallel to natural events? In animal life we find birth, maturity and death. The day can be divided into sunrise, midday, twilight and night. And in the course of the year the four seasons succeed each other with regularity. In the case of natural events, therefore, we have clear cycles which are repeated over and over again. Or is human history something completely different, because man has freedom of choice?

The traditional African view on history is conceived according to natural events and is therefore a naturalist-cyclical vision, so that the same things eternally recur in the course of human history. It is therefore totally different from a linear concept in accordance with which history begins in the past and runs through the present to the future. The traditional African view can be compared with a horizontal spiral: what has been will emerge again. This naturally means that one cannot easily speak of the sense or the meaning of history, because there is not really progression, only repetition.

This is also accompanied by a specific vision of time in Africa. Time does not move forward, but backwards. Where the present moves into the future for the Westerner, the present becomes the past for the African. For that reason some African philosophers state that where the West (in spatial terms) has a three-dimensional concept of time (past-present-future), the traditional man of Africa experiences time as two-dimensional (present-past). Others say that the future (which does not stretch very far forward) is for the African to a large extent an extension of the present.

This more static vision of time also has the result that time is not viewed, as is the case by Westerners, as something detached from man, which is fast-moving and which has to be used to its maximum efficiency. No, time is something that man himself creates and uses as and when he needs it. Time is not your master, but you are the master of time!

The backwards movement of time in accordance with the traditional African perception has the result that the traditional African is not

really future-directed, and does not really think in terms of planning for the future, especially in the long term. And the nature of time, which means that one can make it in accordance with one's needs and those of one's fellow-men, also results in a far more tranquil tempo. All this results in a more stable but at the same time more static culture with little progression and development.

You will understand that I cannot fully accept either the Western concept of time and history with its resultant rat race, or the African concept of time and history with its lack of openness to the future.

#### 5.4 THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Can the Bible possibly teach us something about the purpose of history? I think so. The meaning of history lies in the coming of the kingdom of God, already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

The kingdom of God is a central theme in the whole Bible. If we should give the Bible a title (the word *Bible* simply means *books*), the most suitable title would be *The book of the impending kingdom*. The idea of the kingdom is the heart of the whole of the revelation of the Word.

But what is meant by "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven"? As already mentioned in chapter 2 (section 2.3.2.2) we can distinguish three facets, of which the first is the most important: (1) the fact *that* God is King, that He rules over everything; (2) that *over which* God rules, His sphere of power, and the subjects of His kingdom; and (3) *how* He rules, in other words, what happens in His kingdom as a result of His rule, as well as the results, the fruits and blessings of His rule, such as salvation, glory, justice, peace, etc.

In a nutshell, kingdom of God indicates the *fact*, the *sphere* and the *manner* of the rule of God. (Stated differently, *Kingship*, *kingdom* and *royal blessings*).

\* *Promise and fulfilment*

Stated in an image, we could say that the coming of the kingdom reveals clear waves - and between the larger waves (for example, those

of promise and of fulfilment) there are many smaller waves or subphases.

The Old Testament contains (from the side of God) the *promise* and (from the side of man) the *expectation* of the kingdom, while the New Testament represents the *fulfilment* (from the side of God) and the *reception* (from the side of man). It can be said that the Old and New Testaments combined constitute a drama in two acts. Without Act 2, the New Testament, the Old Testament is incomplete. And without Act 1, the Old Testament, the New Testament cannot be understood.

\* *Phases in the coming of the kingdom*

From Genesis to Revelation the kingdom undergoes a long development (compare again the four diagrams above):

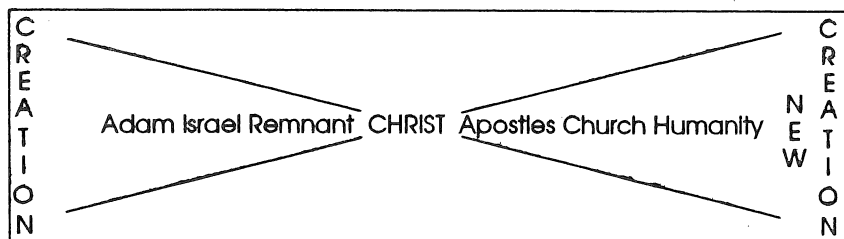
- In Genesis 1 and 2 we read about how the kingdom encompassed the entire creation.
- Genesis 3:1-7 tells us of the fall of the kingdom, but directly afterwards, and for the rest of the Old Testament, there is the promise of restoration.

From Seth, through Abraham and his descendants the subjects of the kingdom grow to become the whole nation of Israel. After the exile only a remnant of the nation remains, however. As a result of the centuries-old rebellion against the kingdom, finally only one Man remains out of the nation of Israel - Jesus Christ.

- In Christ, the promised King, and through His Spirit, the kingdom makes a breakthrough again.

From there it grows again: first only the disciples; then it is preached to the whole nation of Israel; from Israel it is disseminated (through Paul and those following him) to the pagan nations; and with the fullness of time God's kingdom will once again encompass the whole of the (new) earth.

S. Greidanus (1988:98) provides the following diagram to explain this development of the kingdom:



\* *Further sub-division*

We could divide these three main moments (establishment, fall and promise, fulfilment) further into sub-phases. As regards the third main phase, one could, for example, have the following with regard to the Christian days of celebration:

- *Christmas*: the birth of the long-promised King of the kingdom.
- *Good Friday*: The King pays the debt for our sin, viz. that we defected to the realm of evil.
- *Easter*: The King takes away the punishment, the death penalty as a result of our high treason towards His kingdom.
- *Pentecost*: The King builds a mansion in the hearts of His new subjects through His Spirit.

Stated even more succinctly: The King becomes God *with* us at His birth, God *for* us during His suffering and resurrection and God *in* us at the fulfilment with the Holy Spirit.

\* *The coming of the kingdom in the New Testament*

A more detailed overview of the coming of the kingdom according to the New Testament would look like this:

- First, the *coming* of the kingdom *before* Pentecost.

- *John the Baptist* announced that the kingdom is at hand and that people should repent to become part of it.
- With *Christ* the King of the kingdom arrives and its blessings become clear.
- Secondly the *establishment* of the kingdom *during* Pentecost. The King sends His Spirit (after His ascension) to dwell in His subjects, so that they can fulfil their calling and can share in the blessings of the kingdom.
- Thirdly, the kingdom which *has come* and is *still to come after* Pentecost. Acts records the *extension* of the kingdom, the Epistles the *meaning* of life in the kingdom and Revelation prophesies its *fulfilment* when the King shall come again.

In an image: In the Old Testament we have *the bud*, in the New Testament *the blossom* and *the fruit* comes at the fullness of time.

\* *Between "already" and "not yet"*

At present we are still living in the time between the first coming and the second coming of the King. The kingdom has already come but still has to arrive finally. Scripture is so full of our duty and our responsibility in this period of time that I do not need to tell you as Christians more about that. I only need to say two things more.

In the first place I would like to direct attention to the all-encompassing kingdom perspective. In Scripture the concern is not in the first place with the church, but with God's all-encompassing rule - no centimetre of creation excluded - to which we as subjects of His kingdom have to contribute in all spheres of life.

In the second place you will see that, as opposed to the traditional African cyclical view of history, there is meaning and sense in history. History is the history of the coming of God's kingdom in spite of the opposition by the realm of Satan. The *coming* kingdom will one day be a kingdom that *has arrived*. And this perfect kingdom on the new earth does not mean a *destruction* of the old creation - all the nations will carry the best of their cultures into the new Jerusalem. It is also not

simply a *continuation* or a *repetition* of history. No, it is a glorious *renewal!*

Further, in the rest of this book (especially from chapter 7) it will become clear that we do base our worldview on God's revelation - including the Bible. Sometimes we will refer to specific Bible texts. But in essence a worldview - as the *view* indicates - provides perspectives. And these perspectives - like the kingdom perspective - are not our own inventions - they are derived from the infallible Word of God.

\* *The correct use of the Bible*

It is of the utmost importance that you do not have the impression that I devalue the Bible. Allow me therefore, in conclusion, to explain my viewpoint by contrasting it with two extremes about how we should use the Bible. (Compare again chapter 4, section 4.4.1.)

The "Bible-in-the-heart" group believes that the Bible has nothing to say about issues concerning worldview or philosophy. The Bible is only concerned about one's soul and personal salvation. At the utmost the Holy Scripture could be used as a Book with all kinds of exemplary moral lessons for the solution of personal problems. People with this viewpoint expect *too little* from the Bible. They do not realize that it should be used as a light for every sphere of life.

The "Bible-in-the-hand" group in turn expects *too much* from Scripture. It is the viewpoint that the Scriptures contain statements about virtually every conceivable subject. The Bible is regarded as a kind of encyclopedia. God's Word is not the light to our path, but the path itself! One simply has to look for the appropriate textual proofs!

I do not deny that the Bible also provides specific texts which can solve certain concrete problems. (It, for instance, gives clear guidelines about marriage and family life). What I want to emphasise is (1) that the Bible does not only provide specific texts as proof, but also wider perspectives, and (2) that it cannot be studied in a vacuum, isolated from concrete reality.

My viewpoint is therefore that the Bible is a light and should also be used as a light. (Cf. chapter 4, section 4.3.) We should live *by* the light

and not only look *into* the light. To use an image: If one is working in the dark passage of a gold mine, one's attention is not fixed on the lamp on one's forehead. One's attention is focussed on the rocks illuminated by the light. Another well-known image is that of the Bible as spectacles. We have to look *through* the spectacles at God's creation and not stare *at* the spectacles themselves! The role of the Bible is not to provide answers to all our problems, but simply to provide the light by means of which we can find the answers in creation ourselves.

These metaphors draw our attention to the fact that the Scriptures provide us with *perspectives guiding the direction of our thinking* instead of merely supplying specific truths. To be faithful to the Scriptures is therefore much more difficult than many Christians - who simply quote their favourite Bible texts - would imagine.

## 5.5 FOUR CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEWS

Why do we not simply accept the traditional dualist worldview? Why do Christians, who are all believers of the Word of God, hold divergent worldviews? Most Christians should after all agree with the following core confession of their faith: "God the Father redeemed His creation, which had fallen into sin, through the death of His Son and renewed it through His Spirit to become the kingdom of God."

There are many, but one of the most important reasons for the differences is that not all Christians understand the core concepts in this confession of faith (creation, fall, redemption, kingdom of God) in a universal, all-encompassing sense, but limit it in one way or another. According to Scripture creation includes *everything* that God made, the fall corrupted the *whole* of creation, redemption is intended for the *entire* creation and the concept kingdom of God points to the fact that God is King of the *whole* of reality.

\* *Starting from the wrong perspective*

In the history of Christianity, however, creation (as nature) has often been regarded as a specific (delimited) *area*. The fall has been regarded as a loss of *something* and not a totally penetrating corruption of everything. Or else it has been *localised* in an area of creation which would be neutral or even bad *as such*. In the same way redemption is



seen simply as the return of *something* and not as total and integral renewal. In this way too the kingdom of God is seen as an area or *separate sphere* of creation or even apart from creation.

The end result of such a mode of thought is a dualist Christianity. Reality is divided into two spheres: a secular, profane or natural; and a religious, sacral or supernatural one. Nature (creation) and grace (redemption) are situated alongside, above, or even in opposition to each other. Redemption, according to Scripture, does not mean, however, that creation is *rejected* or *replaced* or that it is situated in *opposition* to creation, or that we have to *move away* from creation. No, redemption is rather a *recovery* of creation. Redemption does not mean *another* but rather a *new* creation. Redemption is therefore *re-creation*. Salvation does not make a new cosmos, but makes the cosmos new!

#### \* *Four Christian worldviews*

This confusion about how nature and grace should be viewed and what their reciprocal relations are, has given rise to the following four Christian worldviews:

At the one end of the spectrum there are Christian worldviews which declare natural life - of which, *nota bene*, God is the Creator! - as "illegitimate". On the other hand there is the Biblical-reformational worldview, which believes that God's redemption is intended for his entire creation. And between these two polar opposites we can distinguish a further two mid-positions.

In Latin we can sum up the four viewpoints as follows: *gratia contra naturam*, *gratia supra naturam*, *gratia juxta naturam* and *gratia in naturam*.

The position of *gratia contra naturam* (grace against nature) was assumed by the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, and in modern times we have encountered it in Karl Barth and Jacques Ellul and some Pentecostal and earlier Evangelical groups among others. They find an antithesis between creation and redemption, and according to them Christians should reject worldly things such as politics, philosophy, and science.

The viewpoint *gratia supra naturam* (grace *above* nature) has been the classical Roman Catholic vision since Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. According to this grace (redemption) does not reject nature (creation), but only perfects it. Because grace only completes creation, being something like the cherry on top, it cannot inherently change nature. Redemption keeps floating on top like oil on water, not effecting an integral change.

The third vision of *gratia juxta naturam* (grace *alongside* nature) is the classical Lutheran and more recent Evangelical view. Redemption is situated alongside nature, both of them being equally valid, but without liaison between them. Luther maintains the well-known two-spheres doctrine in which the Christian lives all the time. A Christian can be a politician, but his Christian faith does not have anything to say to his politics. One can marry, but *in addition* and not *in* your marriage you should also be a child of the Lord.

*Gratia in naturam* (grace *penetrating into* nature) typifies the reformational worldview, because according to this grace (redemption) is able to reform, to change creation. Grace is not situated against, above or alongside nature. No, like a healing medicine it penetrates into nature and renews and transforms it from the inside out. We can therefore also describe this viewpoint as *gratia naturam transformans*: grace is in the process of transforming creation.

The diagram on the next page is intended to give visual shape to these four Christian worldviews:

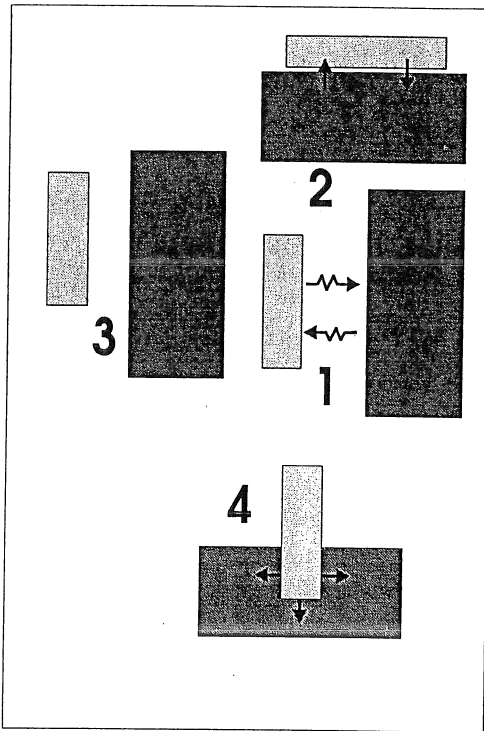
1 = grace *against* nature

2 = grace *above* nature

3 = grace *alongside* nature

4 = grace *transforms* nature

## Diagram illustrating the four Christian worldviews



Naturally a schematic representation like this has its limitations. Not one of the four groups can be fully represented, quite apart from the fact that life is often stronger - in the good or the bad sense of the word - than doctrine. For example: In the Anabaptist model there is, apart from the trait of "grace against nature" also a trend towards "grace above nature". And the Roman Catholic model includes, apart from "grace above nature", also the concept that grace elevates or perfects nature. This is also true of individual thinkers.

Where the first vision *rejects and replaces* nature, the second viewpoint *subjects and perfects* it, while the third *correlates with but ignores* nature. The fourth, and to my mind the Biblically correct one, wishes to *heal and sanctify* nature. Of all four these Christian worldviews, the reformational therefore has the most positive attitude towards creation:

creation and redemption are not situated opposite each other dualistically, but redemption is rather directed at creation.

The basic mistake of the first three dualist worldviews is that they confuse *structure* and *direction*. The fall does not in the first place change the structure of creation, but rather the religious direction for or against God. And this double direction cannot easily be localised in specific areas (grace = good and nature = bad). The antithesis cuts right across everything - even one's own heart.

This distinction between (creational) structure and (religious) direction is an oversimplified attempt to explain something far more complicated. Sin, for example, cannot exclusively be connected with the directional side of creation.

Everything in creation has a legal (order) side and a subject (factual) side. The fall did not affect the legal side of created things but only the subject side. By way of His laws God restrains the effects of the fall. This is basically why creation was not totally corrupted after the fall.

If the fall is viewed as radical, affecting everything, it also includes the (factual side of the) structure of creation. Explained by way of an image: a ship (structure) which has lost its course (direction) will finally (as structure) be wrecked on the rocks. Or a human being not living according to God's will (wrong direction) finally destroys his own life (structure). The obverse is also true: Christians (people whose lives are basically moving in the correct direction) can still create very sinful structures!

Life is too complicated to be forced into simple distinctions or formulas. The fall into sin is something inexplicable and evil fits no logical scheme. Perhaps we could, in conclusion, only state that both structure and direction is affected by the fall, but each in a different way.

These remarks should be kept in mind when, in this book, the distinction between structure and direction is referred to again.

Let us, however, leave this difficult issue and return to the reformational worldview.

It is a liberating perspective to realise as a Christian, in accordance with the reformational worldview, that one need not reject or have contempt for creation if one wishes to be obedient to God and so serve Him. Or the inverse: that one will of necessity be unfaithful to God if one wishes to work in creation. We have to serve God *in His creation!*

For that reason the core of the reformational worldview is simple: our whole life is religion, service to God. We believe that man's religious relation to God is *total*: it permeates everything that one does; it is *radical*: from a heartfelt commitment it offers security to one's entire existence; it is *central*: it offers direction and purposefulness to one's whole life; it is *integral*: it binds together everything that one does into a meaningful whole.

\* *Examples*

A few concrete examples may further help to clarify the differences between these four worldviews. However, before we have a look at the illustrations, it should be mentioned that apart from these four *orthodox* Christian viewpoints, we also have a more *liberal* position. In Latin we could formulate this viewpoint as *gratia instar naturae*. (Grace is something similar to nature.) It sees very little difference between nature and grace. Grace actually develops *from* nature. Whatever good and humane exists in reality, is also considered to be Christian. To have a morally good life is to be Christian! (This viewpoint is encountered already in the Renaissance, with Immanuel Kant and in deistic Christianity.)

The relationship of the Christian to politics, technology and a rock concert will be discussed to illustrate these five different worldviews.

The relationship between a Christian and politics could be regarded in the following ways:

1. The Christian should take a stance *against* politics. He is not permitted any involvement in politics whatsoever, because political life as such is evil and a contradiction to the Christian faith.
2. According to this viewpoint the Christian regards himself as *superior* to politics. Politics has to be guided and even dominated from

"above", it has to be Christianised. It is impossible, however, to change political life in a fundamental way because it is in fact an autonomous area. A political meeting may therefore be started with Scripture reading and prayer, but the subsequent political debate itself will not necessarily testify to a Christian approach.

3. The Christian should have a position *alongside* politics. Being a Christian and practising politics are two totally different issues, in no way related to each other. A Christian may *also* be a politician, but his Christian faith could and should have no influence on his political activities because then he will confuse entities which should be clearly separated or kept apart.

4. The liberal Christian will try to *baptize* political life (civil religion). According to this viewpoint, the Gospel is forced into giving religious support to a particular group or nation's political identity and ideals even to the extent of justifying its sinful actions. (My own country, during the apartheid regime, is an excellent example of this position.)

5. The reformational viewpoint differs from all the preceding ones in that it teaches that the Christian should be directly involved in politics to *transform and renew* it to serve God. Political life should be changed in order to respond obediently to God's norms for justice. A Christian politician should not, like a minister in the church, deliver a sermon in the political arena, but nevertheless accept the responsibility to witness *politically* about God's will for man's political conduct.

In the case of the relationship between the Christian and modern technology, proponents of the five worldviews take the following stances:

1. Technology is by nature something evil. The Christian should be against it and resist technological development.

2. Technology should be kept in check by the Christian, the church and theology. We need a "theological perspective" on contemporary technology. This, however, does not imply an integral change from *within*, but resembles a layer of varnish at the *outside*.

3. Technology is technology and religion is religion. Technology may therefore develop as it desires. Christian norms are not applicable and should not interfere.

4. Productive technology, i.e. technology providing results, is good technology. Technological development heralds - in spite of some negative side-effects at present - the liberation of mankind. There cannot be any radical difference between "ordinary" technology and a technology practised from a Christian perspective!

5. Technology is neither inherently bad (viewpoint 1) nor inherently good (viewpoint 4), but simultaneously reveals both positive and negative trends. Both should be recognised. Because negative elements are also a reality, the Christian has a reformatory duty in this area.

Our last example addresses the question of whether a Christian should attend a rock concert. The advice of the Christians adhering to five different worldviews, will look like this:

1. Stay away - it is 100% wrong!
2. You may attend - but you have to pray before or afterwards!
3. Please go - but I want to see you in church on Sunday!
4. If it is a good performance - no problem!
5. Ask yourself whether your attendance will be to the honour of God. Will it be possible to serve Him - not *before* the event or *afterwards* - but *in* your attendance?

It should be remembered that there are activities and their subsequent results which a Christian should *reject*. These are usually things which God explicitly forbids in His law like stealing, fornication, murder, etc. In other instances, however, the existing could be *reformed*, and in the third place the relatively good should simply be *improved* to be able to answer more fully to the will of God.

The reformatory approach to life therefore, is not an easy, simplistic approach, simply accepting or rejecting the existing or *status quo*. It can sometimes be very difficult, because such an approach requires careful discernment. It is also not without real dangers: we should not underestimate the power of secularism when involving ourselves in our environment to improve or reform it! But at the same time the

reformational approach is the only really liberating approach. It does not flee the world in order to serve God, or betray God in order to be present in the world. Its aim is to serve God *in His world!*

Two final examples to illustrate this viewpoint. One does not have to choose between being a Christian *or* a sportsman/-woman. Neither do you have to strive to be both a Christian *and* a sportsman. (A prayer *before* the match or Christian witnessing *off* the sportsfield.) One should simply be a Christian sportsman. *In* the way one practises one's sport (in fairness, showing respect for one's opponents, obeying the rules of the game, not fighting etc.) one should be salt and light. The same applies to scholarly work: not Christian *or* scholar, neither Christian *and* scholar, but simply a *Christian scholar* should be our ideal.

\* *Meaning of the word "reformational"*

I hope it is clear from the preceding in what sense we use the word *reformational*. It is not used in an *ecclesiastical* sense, referring to a group of (Reformed) churches. Nor is it used in a *confessional* sense, denoting adherence to a certain number of (Reformed) creeds which originated in the 16th century Reformation. These two meanings of reformational are not wholly excluded. My idea of reformational, however, points to a transformational *worldview* which stands for a perspective that calls for the renewal of individuals and the reformation of society according to God's revealed norms. This is the vision of not only the Reformed churches but also of Christians from other ecclesiastical traditions.

I prefer to use the word *reformational* rather than *reformed* to indicate my own worldview, because it stresses the fact that this worldview is not static but dynamic. The reformed worldview was not given final shape in the sixteenth century, so that we need only conserve our "reformed heritage". Because reformation is an ongoing process in which we always seek to bring every thought and action in agreement with God's will, it can never be completed.

*Reformational* or *reforming* (instead of *reformed*) also helps us to guard against complacency and pride. Being truly reformed does not mean that we can sit back in smug satisfaction that we "have arrived", but



should rather remind us of the fact that our convictions, confessions, dogmas, worldview - the whole of our lives - have only made some progress in the way that God truly wants.

Sustained, prayerful Bible study frequently makes us discover that we do not understand the Bible fully and correctly in all points - or even that we understand it incorrectly. We ought to be grateful for the growth in our understanding of the Gospel which has evolved over generations, but we should never see it as final and adequate.

Certainty and stability are normal human needs - especially in our rapidly changing times. Unfortunately the Bible does not offer us such "lack of change". While the whole Bible stresses the unchangeable faithfulness of God, we are not allowed ever to accept that our *status quo* is acceptable to the Lord. The opposite is rather the case: with shocking regularity Scripture reminds us that even his elected people did not at all times live in obedience to Him. His call to convert and to reform can be found on almost every page of the Bible!

To think and act reformationally is therefore to think and do Biblically.

This, of course, does not imply that I am elevating the reformational worldview to the status of a final and only Biblical worldview. There is a difference in how people categorise others and how they categorise themselves! Most Christians will describe their position as "grace transforms nature", while they categorise the other Christian viewpoints as grace against, above or alongside nature. We therefore have the tendency to describe what others do as a retreat from the world, and our own as an attempt to change it!

The reason is often that different Christian groups advocate different *manners* of changing society. (This issue will be discussed in detail in chapter 11.) Traditionally, the Evangelicals have viewed social transformation as coming about largely through individual action; the Anabaptists through the church as an alternative community; and the Reformed people have emphasised that transformation will come about largely via Christian organisations. Each of these groups has the regrettable tendency to view the other's form of action as a kind of withdrawal from society, rather than another way to change it.

Our strategy should rather be to recognise positive elements in all the different approaches and to make use of them in our efforts at reforming society.

This, however, does not cancel our responsibility to fight against all kinds of hidden dualisms in Christianity - also those in a reformational worldview.

## **5.6 DUALIST CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEWS: A DESCRIPTION AND CRITIQUE**

Let us now have a detailed look at the type of Christian worldview rejected in this book. We will first provide a hint as to how to identify a dualist worldview, then a brief indication of its origins, the different types to be encountered and finally the reasons why it is an unacceptable worldview.

### **5.6.1 How to identify a dualist Christian worldview**

Whenever you encounter certain contrasts like the following, be careful - they may be the result of one or the other form of dualist thinking: kingdom(s) of the world - kingdom of God; secular - religious; autonomous man - sovereign God; the god of the philosophers - the God of the Bible; God the Creator - God the Redeemer; earth - heaven; visible world - invisible world; flesh - spirit; lay person - clergy; world - church; state - church; emperor - pope; politician - priest; marriage - celibacy; natural (general) revelation - supernatural (special) revelation; reason - faith; natural theology - supernatural theology; university - seminary; class room - chapel; natural law - divine law; horisontal - vertical; temporal - eternal; natural virtues - Christian virtues; research - prayer; human - Christian; love for the world - love for God; physics - metaphysics; natural history - redemptive history; general grace - special grace; historical - transhistorical; worldly - spiritual; citizen - Christian; science - religion; this world - the next world; secular - holy; profane - sacred; worldly - heavenly; immanence - transcendence; material - spiritual; etc. etc.

Especially Christians advocating a two-realm theory will try to "prove" the above distinctions from Scripture itself. They will, for instance, quote Christ Himself saying that His followers should not - like pagans

- be concerned about earthly things like food, drink and clothes, but should be concerned above everything else with the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 6:25-34). They should not store up riches for themselves here on earth, but in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). Christ also explicitly says that His kingdom does not belong to this world (John 18:36). And in line with this Paul reminds the Colossians (3:1-2) to put their hearts on the things that are in heaven and not to fix them on things here on earth.

Other parts of Scripture, however, warn us to be careful not to deduce from the above texts a dualism of earthly as against heavenly things. In Genesis 2:15 already God gave Adam and Eve the mandate to cultivate *the earth*. And in Matthew 5:13-14 Christ gives his followers the task to be the salt and light of *the world*. He also prays that the Father should not take us out of the world but keep us safe from evil (John 17:15).

Christ's kingdom is certainly not *from* (out of) this world, but it is very clearly intended *for* this world and directed *towards* this world. We have to find the "treasures in heaven" *here on earth*, in our daily, often difficult labour (cf. Matthew 13:44). This treasure is the same as God's kingdom, where we obey God's commandments - *here and now*. Paul's expression "the things that are in heaven" should also not be contrasted with "the things of the earth", but with *sinful things* (cf. Colossians 3:5,8,9). The "things of heaven" are gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to people *on earth* (Colossians 3:12-17). The expression "kingdom of heaven" (used by Matthew because his Gospel was written for Jewish people who avoided using the name of God) does not indicate that his kingdom has nothing to do with this earth. It simply indicates that its *origin* is with God in heaven.

We therefore do not have to retreat or withdraw from the *world*, but from the *worldly* (sinful) things of this world (1 John 2:15). None of the above-mentioned texts prove the doctrine of two realms! We have to look for its origins outside the Word of God.

### 5.6.2 Historical background

The dualist two realm doctrine originated in the pagan Greek distinction between the profane (or secular) and the sacred (or holy).

The word "profane" is derived from the Latin *pro* + *fanum* which literally means in front of (not in) the holy sanctuary. The word "sacred" is derived from the Latin *sacer* which has two meanings: sacred and accursed. Both the sacred and the accursed are withheld from common use. They are handed over to the gods - to either their care or their wrath. The sacred was therefore connected with the divine which exists separately from ordinary human life.

The early Christian thinkers accepted this pagan distinction when they wrestled with problems regarding the relationship between pagan philosophy (in which most of them were trained) and their newly acquired Christian faith. One of the popular solutions for this problem was that pagan thought was regarded as a preparation for the Gospel (*praeparatio evangelica*). In the same way as God prepared the Jews by way of the Old Testament in order to accept the New Testament, He has prepared the gentiles by way of (pagan) philosophy. The Old Testament and Greek and Roman philosophy are like two rivers both flowing into the New Testament. According to this viewpoint the Gospel does not bring a totally new message, but it is merely the fulfilment of that which was potentially already present in pagan philosophy. In this way Greek-Roman thought is sanctioned as a preamble to Christianity!

This distinction between two levels of knowledge gradually developed into a distinction of two ontological realms in the whole of reality. The Medieval theologian-philosopher Thomas Aquinas is a good example of such a viewpoint. Man's faith and religion are separated from the rest of his life. The Bible and everything in connection with God and Christianity are declared supernatural. According to Aquinas the two orders (of nature and grace) are to be distinguished but never to be separated:

Grace:	Bible	faith	church	spiritual life
Nature:	Science	reason	world	material life

The relationship of grace towards nature (from the top down) is that nature is subjected to grace. This means the church (belonging to the realm of grace) has to dominate the sphere of nature. For example: the church has to be in charge of the university. The implication is an *ecclesiastical* university instead of a *Christian* university, *church*

schools instead of *Christian* schools and even a *church* state (like the Vatican), instead of real *Christian* politics. Instead of acknowledging the sovereignty of *God* in all areas of life it is replaced by ecclesiocracy - the *church* dominating all areas of life.

The opposite relation of nature towards grace (from below upwards) is that nature is completed, elevated or perfected by grace (*gratia non tollit sed perfecit naturam*). This is seemingly a Biblical idea, viz. that this world does not have meaning in itself, but points above, outside itself. Unfortunately it also implies that we as humans should detach ourselves from this world, live a "spiritual" life, be directed towards heaven. If you really want to be a Christian, you should leave this world! You cannot serve God *in* this world. This world should also not be *changed*, but only be *elevated* to the sphere of grace. This is clearly a viewpoint fostering *accommodation* rather than *reformation*!

### 5.6.3 Different types of two-realm theories or dualistic Christian worldviews

Different two-realms theories are the result of different views on the extent and consequences of the fall into sin and the need for redemption. We can distinguish between four types of which two (1 & 2) represent extreme positions and the other two (1.1 & 2.1) represent a compromise:

- |     |  |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 1.  | <i>Extreme: NATURE</i><br>(very important, because it is not really affected by sin) | - | <i>Grace</i> (not really necessary)   |
| 1.1 | <i>Nature</i> (more or less intact - only something lost in the fall)                | - | <i>Grace</i> (of less importance - returns the small part lost in the fall)   |
| 2.1 | <i>Grace</i> (important but still needs nature as point of contact)                  | - | <i>Nature</i> (corrupted, but something good remaining as a point of contact) |

2.      *Extreme: GRACE* (very important, because nature is totally depraved)      -      *Nature* (perverse to such an extent that it has lost all its value)

According to the first type of the two-realm doctrine (no. 1) the emphasis is on nature, because the effects of the fall into sin are totally underestimated. With the use of his more or less unspoilt capacities the human being will be able to reach his destination. The grace of God is not really necessary - at least not in everything we do. Human reason, for instance, is not really affected by sin.

The opposite type (no. 2) takes as its starting point the total depravity of man. So much emphasis is put on grace that rebirth is more or less viewed as a totally new creation instead of a renewal of the old. "Supernatural" revelation is man's only hope because his reason is totally corrupted by sin. This viewpoint may look like the Biblical perspective, but this is not the case. Grace is still viewed as being in a dialectical tension with nature. Ordinary, so-called secular human life is rejected instead of reformed!

In between the above extreme viewpoints we find positions of compromise (1.1 and 2.1). The first of them still gives priority to nature but grace is not totally irrelevant. To a certain measure nature is defective and needs grace as its perfection. With his natural powers man can attain much, but finally God's grace is necessary!

The second position of compromise is the opposite of the first. It gives priority to grace, but also accepts the necessity of nature. Nature is not totally corrupted. Something good has remained. And these "sparks of goodness" which have remained, serve as "points of contact" for grace which provides perfection.

It is possible to mention from the history of Christianity representatives from all four positions - as well as a number of other variations of dualist Christian thought. More important, however, is to weigh these two-realm doctrines in the light of the Bible. Actually it would be more correct to speak of two-realm or dualist *worldviews* instead of two-realm *doctrines*, because people adhering to it view *everything*, the *whole* of reality through bi-focal lenses.

#### 5.6.4 A wrong distinction in creation

The division of creation into profane (secular) and sacred (holy) spheres originated (as indicated above) in pagan thought. It is not a Biblical idea at all. The Bible clearly teaches that everything which God created was good. Certain parts or sections of creation (the so-called lower ones) are not *by nature* bad or unimportant. And when Adam fell into sin, the whole of man and the entire creation were affected.

Grace, therefore, is not the opposite of nature, but the opposite of the wrath of God. The Word of God therefore teaches a struggle between two *kingdoms* (the kingdom of God or the kingdom of light, and the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of darkness), but not a tension between two *domains or areas* in creation. The struggle between the two kingdoms is a *religious* struggle which is not confined to certain areas of creation. The distinction between two realms, however, is an *ontological* distinction in creation, it is an attempt to localise good and bad to specific parts of creation. The kingdom of God is identified with the realm of grace (Word of God, faith, church etc.) and the kingdom of the devil with the realm of nature (science, reason, government etc.). This is, however, impossible according to the Bible. Since the fall we live in a "mixed" situation. (Cf. Christ's parable of the wheat and weeds in Matthew 13:24-30.)

#### 5.6.5 A confusion of domain and direction

Since the fall there are two different religious directions in creation: obedience to and service of God or of something (an idol) in the place of the true God. These directions for or against God are "spiritual" in nature. They are not of an ontological nature so that they can easily be located in specific areas of life. Obedience and disobedience, good and bad occurs *throughout* creation and cannot be *limited* to a specific thing or area.

Because of this spiritual antithesis creation after the fall is full of tension. This tension exists due to the struggle between good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust, redemption and sin in *every* area of life. The tension does not lie between *two* areas of which the one is by nature good and the other by nature bad or at least neutral.

Creation as such or a part of creation should not be regarded as bad or of less importance, for example: the soul or spirit is good and important, but the body or flesh is the source of evil and should therefore be ignored, suppressed or rejected. (Cf. chapter 7, section 7.4.) Creation, or part of it, is not bad in the sense that it should not exist. It is bad in the sense that it is dominated by the wrong direction, a spirit of disobedience to God.

When bad and good, sin and redemption are localised as is done in two-realm or dualist worldviews, the implication is also that only part of creation will be in need of redemption (the rest is more or less unspoilt) and that redemption is viewed as a mere (ontological) addition of something instead of as a total and radical spiritual renewal. The great variety in two-realm theories is simply a result of different viewpoints about the following: (1) the specific place in creation where sin is located, (2) how serious the effects of sin are regarded to be, and consequently (3) how great the need for redemption will be.

#### **5.6.6 Detrimental consequences for the involvement of the Christian in the reformation of the (sinful) world**

In the first place the spiritual struggle of a Christian may be totally misdirected. He does not fight sin in the *whole* of creation, but he/she fights against an *aspect or part* of God's creation which he/she regards as bad. Examples are the following: He fights against his bodily needs - and in his heart the devil reigns. She fights against so-called dirty politics - but she does not recognise the sinful practices of her church. He fights against philosophy which he regards as mere human wisdom - but in theology (which he considers to be Christian by nature) all kinds of unbiblical ideas infiltrate. She distances herself from married life - not realising that the devil follows her into the solitude of the monastery.

It goes without saying that when you are looking for the enemy in the wrong place, you are fighting a futile battle!

In the second place, in localising sin, you are to a certain degree also localising it. The lower area of "natural life" is to a certain degree protected against the renewing power of the Gospel. This becomes very



clear in the case of the "Christianity next to nature" and the "Christianity above nature" positions.

Any form of the two-realm theory condemns a Christian to powerlessness. He simply has to *accept* life as it is (the position of the Christian *next to* the world), try to *churchify* the whole of life (the position of the Christian *above* the world) or try to *destruct* it (the position of the Christian *against* the world). He can never *reform* it (the correct position of the Christian *in* the world).

A third reason for the ineffectiveness of a Christian adhering to one or the other kind of dualist worldview is the following: The Christian with his Bible, faith, church and religion is limited to the higher sphere of grace. God's all-encompassing kingdom is usually identified with the church and therefore also spiritualised. The rest of God's creation is ignored and in fact handed over to the devil.

In recapitulation: the only correct viewpoint for the Christian is to be *involved in* the world - not to become like the (sinful) world, but to reform it, to reclaim it for Christ to whom it legally belongs.

The only other options are the following: one either *withdraws* from the world (tries to live *above, next to* or *against* the world) or one is *drawn into* the world. In the first case one *isolates* oneself from the world and in the second one *identifies* with the (sinful) world. But in both cases one becomes powerless to improve the world, because when one isolates oneself, one becomes irrelevant, and when one identifies with or accommodates the world, one loses one's identity as a Christian. In the first case the salt is kept in the salt shaker and in the second case the salt has lost its saltiness. It is only when the salt is mixed with its environment that it can be effective!

### 5.6.7 A radical rejection the only solution

Dualist Christian worldviews could be compared with a chronic disease which has paralysed and crippled Christianity for two thousand years and robbed it of any energy to reform the world around it. It is such a dangerous enemy of Christianity, because most Christians are not even

aware of the fact that they are infected with the virus. It has become the most natural thing for them to wear double-focus glasses and to see the whole of reality divided into secular and sacred domains.

The only cure for this serious disease is to get rid of the wrong spectacles, the distorting worldview. It should be exchanged for a genuine Christian worldview which sees the whole of reality as a place where we should serve and glorify God. According to a Christian worldview religion is radical, total and integral. We do not serve God only in certain places, times and occasions, but we have to be everywhere and always in his service - irrespective of the type of work that we are doing.

Get rid of the wrong worldview! Do not try - as so many Christians have done in the past - simply to modify or reformulate the dualism. Whether "hard" or "soft", a dualist worldview remains dualist in nature.

This is the only way to finally free Christianity from its imprisonment of nearly two thousand years!

#### **5.6.8 Viewed from different perspectives**

The careful reader will have noticed that, in the preceding pages of this chapter, I have applied three different approaches to compare a radical Christian worldview with the dualist types. I used (1) *a systematic approach* (the relationship between nature and grace or creation and redemption), (2) *a historical approach* (the sovereign God's all-encompassing kingdom in its historical development: creation, fall, redemption and consummation, and (3) *a religious approach* (structure and direction).

The following diagram indicates that the above-mentioned three perspectives are not totally different, but in fact closely connected:

1. Systematic perspective	2. Historical perspective	3. Religious perspective
Nature	{ Creation } { Fall }	Structure
Grace	{ Redemption } { Consummation }	Direction

## 5.7 THE ORIGINS OF A RADICAL CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Christians are usually divided according to their church denomination. There are, for example, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Charismatic and Independent churches. This is not what this book is about, however. It deals with matters of *worldview* - and these go deeper than the confessional or theological differences between churches. If we categorise according to worldview, we will find that some churches are nearer to each other than expected, and some further away from each other.

Where should we then begin to look for the origins of a reformational worldview? In the Bible, of course! But we have just heard that most Christians did not see the all-encompassing relevance of God's revelation.

### 5.7.1 It began in Africa

In a certain sense one could say that the great North African Christian thinker *Aurelius Augustine* (354-430 AD) is the father of the reformational idea. Naturally he was, like all of us, a man of his time, who reflected the spirit of his time (e.g. Neo-Platonism) in his worldview too. The central Biblical truths (including creation, radical fall and redemption) are central in his worldview, however. The reformational attitude to life was therefore born on our own continent!

After him, for about a thousand years during the Middle Ages ( $\pm 400 - \pm 1400$ ), Christianity declined into the un-Biblical dualism already explained above.

### 5.7.2 It revived in Switzerland

From about the first quarter of the sixteenth century ( $\pm$  1525) the reformational idea revived less radically in the well-known *Martin Luther* (1483-1546), but more radically among the Swiss reformers such as *Ulrich Zwingli* (1484-1531) and especially *John Calvin* (1509-1564). Although somebody like Calvin's thought was to a degree still entangled with the Medieval two-spheres doctrine, he succeeded in breaking through this dualistic Christendom. He also provided the motto that the Christian should continually be *reforming* otherwise he would begin *deforming*. He therefore held a view that is not *reformed*, but *reforming*. And although his reformation was still mainly limited to the field of the church and theology, the basis had been laid for reformation of the whole of society.

Unfortunately the church and Protestant Christianity soon after Calvin again fell back into dualism (so-called Protestant Scholasticism). His followers therefore did not work out a comprehensive reformational worldview and philosophy.

### 5.7.3 A new awakening in the Netherlands

After a hibernation of more than two centuries the reformational idea re-awakened again in the person of *Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer* (1801-1876) in the Netherlands. He blew on the banked fire again, so that the reformational flame could be seen again.

From then onwards a whole array of people saw to it that the flame did not go out again, but kept on burning ever more brightly. Some of them were the following:

\* *Abraham Kuyper* (1837-1920) was undoubtedly a giant among those who were responsible for the revival of a reformational worldview. He began with the liberal Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk) as a theologian and minister, but later broke away. He was the editor of a daily and weekly newspaper and wrote a great deal, founded (in 1880) a Christian University (the Free University of Amsterdam), became leader of, and member of Parliament, for the reformational Anti-Revolutionary Party, and was even (from 1901 to 1904) Prime Minister of the Netherlands. The reformation which he

had in mind was not only ecclesiastical or theological in nature, but had to encompass the whole of life: political, social, economic, educational and academic.

\* *Herman Bavinck* (1854-1921) shared Kuyper's reformational ideals, although he had a completely different nature from Kuyper's. He also began as a theologian. He was a minister for only one year, however, before he became a professor of theology (first at Kampen and later at the Free University). During the last ten years of his life he also paid more attention to philosophical issues. His academic work was characterised by an impressive width and balance, as well as an ecumenic spirit.

Although Bavinck and Kuyper (and also people like J. Woltjer and W. Geesink) were interested in philosophy, they did not have the time to specialise in this field. It would become the task of a second generation to disseminate the reformational worldview in philosophical terms.

\* *Dirk Hendrik Theodoor Vollenhoven* (1892-1978) also began with theological studies at the Free University, but finally obtained a doctorate in philosophy (1918). After a few years in the ministry he became a professor at his alma mater in 1926. Apart from his original work in the field of philosophical systematics (ontology) he will be remembered especially for his unique method for the description of the history of philosophy.

\* *Herman Dooyeweerd* (1894-1977), a brother-in-law of Vollenhoven, was a professor of law at the Free University. He worked with Vollenhoven in the development of a reformational philosophy. He also offered a unique vision on Western philosophy, gave a detailed analysis of reality, his own reformational view of scholarship, as well as history and human society. Because he wrote more than Vollenhoven, and many of his books were translated into English, he is much better known internationally.

The work of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd did not fade away, but was continued by a third generation of Dutch philosophers like J.P.A. Mekkes, S.U. Zuidema, K.J. Popma, H. van Riessen and A. Troost. They have since been succeeded by a fourth generation of philosophers

such as J. Klapwijk, J. van der Hoeven, S. Griffioen, E. Schuurman, K.A. Bril and H. Geertsema.

#### **5.7.4 It spread across the whole world**

The reformational worldview and philosophy fortunately did not remain confined to the small Netherlands. Its liberating message was carried far and wide by students who studied at the Free University.

We find representatives of the reformational school of thought at present working in the following countries: The USA (e.g. H. Evan Runner and G.J. Spykman, emeriti of Calvin College, and John vander Stelt and John van Dyk at Dordt College), Canada (e.g. Calvin Seerveld, Hendrik Hart, Jim Olthuis, Paul Marshall, Harry Fernhout, Brian Walsh and William Rowe at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, and Albert Wolters at Redeemer College in Ancaster), Australia (Stuart Fowler and Duncan Roper), New Zealand, England and South Korea.

#### **5.7.5 The flame also burns in South Africa**

It began about 1500 years ago in North Africa with the church father Augustine. Our survey of the reformational tradition ends (in 1993) at the other end of the African continent, South Africa. Here too the reformational idea lives, although not among the masses.

Already in the time of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, a South African, Hendrik Gerhardus Stoker (1899-1993), worked with them and created his own philosophy ("The philosophy of the Creational Idea") at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. He became one of the best-known and greatest South African philosophers. He was succeeded by Jan Adriaan Louw Taljaard (born 1915). The present lecturers in the Philosophy Department of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education are therefore already a third generation of reformational thinkers - N. Theo van der Merwe, M. Elaine Botha and J.J. (Ponti) Venter.

Other universities such as the University of the Orange Free State have also yielded reformational thinkers, including E.A. Venter, P. de B.

Kock and H.J. Strauss. The new generation figures there include D.F.M. Strauss, J.H. Smit and J. Visagie.

\* \* \*

In this chapter we have explained what a radical Christian worldview entails by comparing it with half-hearted or dualist Christian worldviews. We have also given some indications of how this worldview developed through the centuries from about the fifth century after Christ and mentioned a few representatives up to the present time. In the next chapter we will continue by giving a brief exposition of the viewpoints of these proponents of a Christian worldview as elaborated in the form of a truly Christian philosophy.

## Chapter 6

# THE BASIC OUTLINES OF A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

We concluded the previous chapter by indicating the origins of a radical Christian worldview as well as mentioning a few representatives - among them Africans. They were, however, not people who simply *lived* according to a genuine Christian worldview. They also *thought* and *wrote* about it - they are theologians and philosophers. In this chapter we are going to have a look at what some of them have to say. We are therefore moving from a pre-scientific worldview to scientific philosophy. (Philosophy could be defined as the scientific investigation and explanation of a pre-scientific worldview.)

For this reason the material in this chapter will be more abstract and perhaps more difficult to understand. But be at ease: it is not absolutely necessary to understand everything in this chapter to be able to follow the rest of the book. However, there might be some readers of this book interested in at least the outlines of a Christian philosophy.

In this chapter attention will be paid to the following:

- the relationship between religion, worldview, philosophy and science;
- the six basic distinctions of a Christian philosophy;
- the distinction between God and his creation;
- the distinction between God's laws and human norms;
- the distinction between (about) fifteen different aspects of reality.

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION, WORLDVIEW, PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

In the course of one's personal development windows should be opened on more levels. These levels are: (1) the religious level, (2) the worldview level; (3) the philosophical level and (3) the scholarly level. The word *levels* does not mean that the one is more important than the



other, but that they are *different from each other*. A brief word on each of them:

\* *The religious level*

As a child one receives one's basic religious moulding in a family and as a member of one's church. As a Christian, one knows on the basis of Scripture among other things that God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) exists; that God created heaven and earth with everything on it; that as a result of the fall of man everything was corrupted by sin; that because of God's grace in Christ man and the rest of creation could be redeemed, and that this redemption will one day culminate in a new heaven and a new earth. This basic religious education as well as knowledge is very important, because - if it is not merely intellectual knowledge - it touches one deep in one's heart. This, however, is not adequate for having a *full* Christian life.

\* *The worldview level*

The basic religious education has to be developed further. It should be given scope and comprehensiveness by way of one's worldview. Opening up in terms of worldview means that one's window on reality is opened more widely. (With *reality* we mean everything that is or exists, that is, both God and His multifaceted creation.) During this phase one begins to understand more clearly who one is, and not only *that* but also *how* God wishes to use one in his service in the whole of creation. One's being a Christian is no longer limited to reading the Bible, praying, devotions and church attendance, but it is broadened towards obedience to God in a variety of spheres of life. A Christian *worldview* is therefore essential should one want to live as a Christian in the fullest sense of the word.

\* *The philosophical level*

Students and lecturers, however, cannot stop at the level of the worldview. Apart from a basic religious education and the extension of both vision and action brought about by a worldview, one also needs philosophical maturation, in other words, a deepening of perspective. It is not my intention to try and explain what philosophy is; it is enough to keep in mind that this phase brings one to the scientific level - the

level at which a college or university should function. It therefore *differs* from the preceding (or second) phase which has a prescientific (note: not *unscientific*) nature. It does, however, *tie in with it closely*, because we can also define Philosophy as the scientific reflection on and extension of a specific worldview.

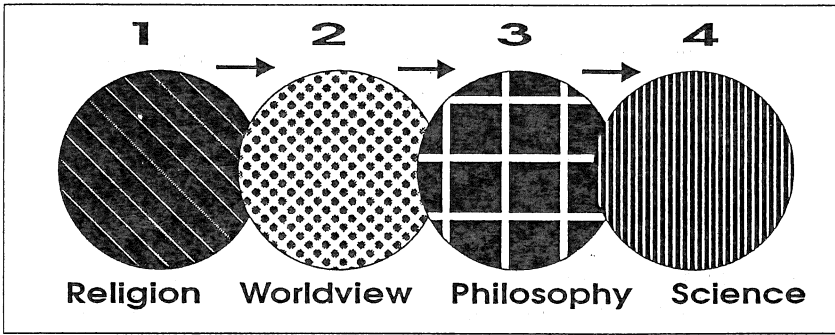
\* *The scholarly or scientific level*

In phase three (philosophical deepening and maturation) phase four (scientific or scholarly education) has already begun. But this is just the beginning, because science or scholarship encompasses more than the one science or discipline of Philosophy. Here we have in mind study in a variety of fields: Sociology, Psychology, Law, Political Sciences, Economics, Physics, Maths and many more. Philosophical schooling is the foundation or the basis of all these. Without the worldviewish and philosophical education one will not be able to understand *that* and *how* one can practise any science from a Christian point of view. (For details in this regard, see chapter 15.)

\* *Conclusion*

These four phases might well be *different* (the perspectives become broader and also more complicated) but they are not *in collision*. One can visualise the four phases by drawing four circles. These circles have to overlap partly in order to indicate that the four phases cannot be separated from each other rigidly, but that the one gradually passes into the next one. Within the first circle one can also draw an arrow which runs in the direction of the second, in the second an arrow which points to the third and so forth, to the last circle.

The Christian's whole life therefore constitutes a unity, because although the religious, worldviewish, philosophical and scientific facets of her/his life are all different in nature, they also cohere very closely. They also all bear a Christian character. The following diagram is an explanation:



We could also explain this with another (more organic) image, viz. that of a tree. The roots of the tree (the religious), the trunk (the worldview), the branches (the various branches of philosophy) and the leaves or fruit on each branch (the different scientific disciplines) all form a unity.

## 6.2 SIX BASIC DISTINCTIONS IN A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

In the rest of this chapter we will, even if only in an elementary way, say something about the above-mentioned third level, viz. the Christian philosophical. We take as starting point six important distinctions. In order to think clearly, it is necessary to distinguish clearly!

Of course a Christian philosopher does not only make *distinctions*. Just as important are *relations*, for instance between God and His entire creation, between God and man/woman in particular, between human beings, and between humans and the rest of creation. And if we discuss relationships, issues like responsibility, authority, power, freedom, stewardship and many more may not be ignored. In the rest of this book there will, however, be ample opportunity to pay detailed attention to all these relationships because they are indeed of crucial importance in a Christian worldview and philosophy.

All the thinkers mentioned at the end of the previous chapter hold basically the same Christian worldview. As can be expected, they differ in terms of its philosophical elaboration. H. Bavink's philosophy is known as the Philosophy of the Revelational Idea, H. Dooyeweerd's as the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea and H.G. Stoker's as the

Philosophy of the Creational Idea. These names already indicate differing emphases.

What are, however, the shared traits of their Christian philosophies? One could summarise these in the following six distinctions:

- The distinction between God and His creation.
- The distinction between heaven and earth.
- The distinction between God's creational ordinances and that which is subject to them.
- The distinction between various irreducible facets or modes of existence of the earthly reality.
- The distinction between different phases in the development of the earthly creation.
- The distinction between structure and direction.

### **6.2.1 The radical distinction between God and His creation**

Naturally all Christian worldviews distinguish between God and that which He created. We intentionally talk about the *radical* distinction between God and His creation, however, because it is not characteristic of all Christian views. The reformational vision does not believe in a *quantitative* but in a *qualitative* difference between God and cosmos. God is *totally* different.

There is thus nothing godly/divine in creation (for example, the "soul" of man). To deify something in creation is wrong. And obversely, there is nothing of creation in God - we may not think about Him in cosmic terms.

This *distinction*, however, does not mean *separation*. The total difference of God does not mean that He (expressed in spatial language) is not "near" His creation and does not from moment to moment uphold and direct it. He loved His creation so much that He let His own Son die to redeem it!

### **6.2.2 The distinction between heaven and earth**

Heaven is the residence of the angels, the earth of matter, plant, animal and man. Heaven also belongs to the earthly creation, however, in the

sense of the firmament which encloses the earth. The word *heaven* in the Bible therefore has two meanings - both created by God but different. God's own residence, "the heaven of heavens", is a third meaning. Knowledge of heaven (as the residence of God and of the angles) is limited to what God tells us about it in the Scriptures. The earth and the firmament are the horizon of our everyday experience to which our scientific study is limited. We cannot, however, get to know everything about it without referring to the Bible. If we did not have His Word, we would not, for example, have known about creation, fall, redemption and consummation.

### **6.2.3 The distinction between God's creational ordinances and that which is subject to them**

Everything in cosmic reality (the earth and the firmament) is subject to God's sovereign will, His creational ordinances. This is true not only of "nature", viz. matter, plant and animal (for example, the law of gravity, the law of thermodynamics or organic growth), but also of the whole of human life (for example in the social, political, economic, artistic and religious fields). These ordinances *are valid* in the field of nature and in the human domain they *demand* obedience. And they remain valid even though man might in disobedience disregard them. Man can *discover* these laws, but never *create* them. They are not dependent on man. Precisely the opposite is true: man is subject to them. It is only by living in obedience to them that he can experience life in its wholeness and fullness.

### **6.2.4 The distinction between various irreducible facets or modes of existence of earthly reality**

Earthly creation is not simply a monotonous, uniform mass, but shows a great diversity of, for example, inorganic matter, plants, fishes, birds, animals and people. At a deeper level, these different *things* reflect different *facets* or *sides*. We can, for example, distinguish between numerical, spatial, organic, psychical, historical, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical aspects and the aspect of faith. They are all *different* facets or modes of existence of concrete things, such as a plant, an animal, a house, a state and a work of art.

We therefore should not reduce the one to the other. For this reason it is wrong to absolutise one of them and to reduce all the others to this one aspect and, for example, to say that man is nothing more than an economic being.

These facets, also called modalities or functions, also help us to see that man is a totally different creature from an animal because he has so many more facets.

Although these aspects of reality are *irreducible*, this does not mean that they do not also *cohere*. A Christian philosophy does not only recognise great diversity, but also an unbreakable coherence in creation. We could therefore talk of a principle of coherent diversity or diversity that coheres.

### **6.2.5 The distinction between different phases in the development of the earthly creation**

Christian philosophers accept the cultural mandate which God gave to man at the beginning: live on the earth, cultivate it and exercise control over it (Genesis 1:28, Genesis 2:15). The earth has to be developed by man in a responsible fashion, so that the potential which God put into it can be realised, be deployed to the honour and glory of God. Human cultural activity should therefore not be denigrated but is acknowledged by God Himself to be valuable, as an inherent part of the movement of creation towards ultimate fulfilment. This cultural task is not a result of the fall - God had already given it to Adam and Eve prior to the fall - and it should therefore not be considered trivial. A quietistic (even fatalistic) or reactionary (even revolutionary) attitude towards human cultural development is therefore unbiblical.

### **6.2.6 The distinction between structure and direction**

This is the last, although very important, categorical distinction of a Christian philosophy already discussed in the previous chapter (see sections 5.6.4 and 5.6.5). "Structure" indicates the creation as it was meant to be by God. "Direction" indicates what happened to creation after the fall, and how it was redeemed by Christ. It was pointed in the wrong direction by the fall (away from the worship of God towards

service to Satan), but through Christ's redemption it was recovered and set on the right track again.

The important thing is that a Christian philosophy sees the fall as well as redemption in the total and radical Biblical meaning of these concepts. They affect the *whole* of the cosmos down to the *deepest* level of existence. This also implies that (as already stated in a previous chapter) redemption does not mean a *different* creation, but a *re-creation* of the earth. God's grace in Christ is not merely an *addendum* to the old, or something that has been put *next to* the old, or (even worse) something which has *replaced or destroyed* the old, but God's grace *restores* the old. (Cf. the four kinds of Christian worldviews distinguished in chapter 5, section 5.5.)

It has already been indicated that one should distinguish between creation (God's work), fall (man's responsibility), redemption (through Christ) and consummation (through His Spirit). Or: reformation (God), deformation (man), reformation (Christ) and renewal (Holy Spirit). When, therefore it was stated above that God's grace *restores* the original good creation, *reformation* should not be understood as simply the same as *restitution* (returning to the old). Reformation implies transformation and renewal. It not only refers to the good of the past, but also to the present and the eschatological future. (For more details see chapter 11, section 11.4.2.)

\* \* \*

These six distinctions are the bare "skeleton" of a Christian philosophy. We will only have space to give some "flesh" to three of these distinctions:

- the distinction between God and His creation;
- the distinction between God's laws and the creatures subjected to them;
- the distinction between various facets of the creatures.

### 6.3 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN GOD AND HIS CREATION

A Christian philosophy accepts, in the light of Scripture (1) that God exists, (2) that He called into existence earthly reality, and (3) that He

proclaimed His word/will/law/order for creation to be obedient to it. We therefore have to distinguish between the Author of the creational order and the ordered creation. (*Ordering* indicates the activity, and *ordered* indicates the result).

Within Christian philosophy, however, there are various differences when it comes to the further elaboration of this basic point of departure.

### **6.3.1 Advocates of a three-factor ontology**

One group of thinkers (for example, D.H. Th. Vollenhoven, H. Evan Runner, J.A.L. Taljaard, G.J. Spykman and H. Hart) adhere to a three-factor ontology: God, law and creation. The middle factor (the law which God sets for His creation) both separates and links God and his creation. The law is therefore a separate entity which is different from both God and creation.

The question which subsequently arises is: How do we move from our experience of the ordered creation to knowledge of the ordering laws?

Advocates of the reformational philosophy offer different answers to this. Some speak of discernment, others of (Scripturally) enlightened reason. Yet others maintain that the laws for creation are revelatory.

I find problematic (along with, among others, Stuart Fowler) (1) the above-mentioned three-factor ontology which regards God's law as a "link" between God and His creation, and (2) the view that God's law is rationally accessible. Regarding this, I have two questions: (1) Is there really a distance/gap between God and His creation which has to be bridged by the idea of a law? (2) Is the law itself, which orders reality, accessible to human reason? Is this not a form of rationalism?

### **6.3.2 Advocates of a two-factor ontology**

H.G. Stoker and S. Fowler are examples of this direction in reformational thought. Where I originally tended more towards the former group (propounding a three-factor ontology), I find myself more and more attracted to Fowler's views (1987).



Fowler does not deny that there is a "distance" between God and his creation. He distinguishes between an ontic distance and distance as a result of alienation. By the former he means the ontic difference between God and that which He created. (Even though this is very difficult, we should not think of God in earthly terms, because He is different. Obversely, we are not allowed to deify anything in creation.) By the latter Fowler has in mind the alienation which man has effected as a result of his sinful rebellion against God.

Fowler does not believe, however, that any of the two forms of "distance" needs to be bridged by an impersonal factor such as the law. According to Scripture the *difference* between God and creation does not mean *alienation*. God as person is always actively present in His creation, and He structures and renews it.

The typical Biblical image of God is of somebody who is actively present and involved in His creation (cf. Genesis 1 and 2; Psalm 33, 104, 147 and 148; Isaiah 40). The "link" between God and His creation does not occur through a legal order but through His Son, the original Word of God. It is, however, not through His Word (Son) alone that God links creation to Him, but through His Word and Spirit in equal measure.

It is also He who, in Christ, suspends the second kind of "distance" (the result of the fall) and reconciles man and creation with Himself.

We therefore do not need the law as a kind of third category "between" God and His creation, which both separates and links them. Biblical testimony with regard to God as a personal God, who is actively present in His creation and who reveals Himself through His Word and Spirit, contradicts such a construction. The Word of God which is the ordering law for creation, is not a legal order which can be detached from the active presence of God, but the will of God which is implemented through His personal activity in creation.

According to Fowler God's laws are simply His *direct, sustained, faithful* and *personal* government of His creation through His Word and Spirit. (If He should withdraw from His creation for even a moment it would collapse.) For this reason miracles are not a suspension of His government, but only a different, unusual way for Him to govern.

The way of implementing God's will is therefore not by means of a legal order which distinguishes and links God and creation, but by way of God's personal activity in creation. Because: the concept of ordering laws, distinct from God and His ordering activity, undermine the immediacy of the God-creation relationship which is so fundamental in Biblical revelation.

This divine cosmic ordering also has to be clearly distinguished from the law-like features of the ordered creation. We can study (scientifically too) the law-like functioning of the ordered reality, and formulate this as "natural laws". Of course, this is always tentative and deficient. It is important, however, to distinguish between the law-like features of creation, and the divine ordering laws themselves. (The order *of* and the order *for* creation.) Science can only have knowledge of the first of these. It is an effort to give a satisfactory account of the persistent regularities which we experience in reality.

We know from Scripture that the ordered reality of our experience is the result of the ordering activity of God who is actively involved in the world through His Word and Spirit. (Cf. for example Psalm 19, 119:89-91, 147 and 148; Proverbs 8 and Jeremiah 33:20-26.) God is also personally present in His Spirit and involved in teaching and guiding people, also in their cultivation of creation. (Cf. Exodus 31:3-5; Isaiah 28:23-29 and Colossians 1:9-10). Scripture also instructs us regarding God's will for human life through its normative objectives which we have to realize and fulfil under the guidance of His Spirit and with our understanding of an ordered creation.

To recapitulate, Fowler's criticism of the idea of law in those Christian thinkers who advocate a three-factor ontology can be stated as follows:

- It is not necessary to regard the law as a *border* between God and His creation.
- It is also not necessary to regard the law as a *bridge* or a *link* between God and His creation.
- Among the advocates of a three-factor ontology the law is, in the final instance *linked* more closely *with creation*, instead of with God.

(As order of *God* for creation, Fowler links the law more closely with God Himself.)

- The impression could easily be created that the laws function *independently* of God, while they, just like creation, are totally dependent on the Law-giver.
- This viewpoint may tend to offer a *static vision* of the law, seeing that it is not strongly enough linked with God's dynamic presence in His creation.
- We never get to know God's *law itself*, but can only know the *orderly functioning* of creation, which is a result of the fact that God's laws are valid for creation.

Why have I introduced this discussion between Fowler and the advocates of a three-factor philosophy? Not to confuse students, but to indicate that even Christian philosophers may have different opinions which we should appreciate. In spite of the differences (when it comes to the details) they all agree that God and His creation, however closely related, should be clearly distinguished.

#### **6.4 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN GOD'S LAWS AND THE CREATURES SUBJECTED TO THEM**

We will try to indicate the value of this distinction by asking the following two questions: What is a norm and how is it possible to know the correct norms? (Most people today do not use the word "norms" any more, but prefer to speak of "values" instead.)

What is the meaning of the word "normal"? Even though there are more, I would like to mention the following three meanings:

- Normal in the sense of the *good and healthy*, for example a normal person meaning a person having a healthy mind. In conjunction with this, there is also the idea of useful, working, functioning, for example a normal organ, such as liver, heart or kidneys.
- Normal in the sense of *the usual, the ordinary*, for example normal people with normal customs and habits. Here "normal" means that

which is generally accepted by the majority, in other words that which occurs most often.

■ Normal in the sense of being *in line with or answering to the norm*, rule, standard, criterion or example. This meaning of the adjective "normal" is therefore more directly derived from the Latin word *norma*, from which our word *norm* is derived, and which originally meant a carpenter's square. This was the instrument or "criterion" used to ensure that the carpenter would not make a skew product, because all the angles were properly squared. The same idea is captured in the earlier use of the term "normal" (noun) for a school or college (now education college) where students were shaped in normative terms for their calling as teachers.

We are especially interested in the latter meaning of the word, as well as in the opposite, viz. "abnormal" in the sense of opposite, away from, not in line with the norm. The reason for this is that we wish to go back along the road, from normality to normativity or the normative.

This is very important, for there is a strong tendency to accept normality as normativity: the ordinary, the average, that which is mostly seen as normal (the second meaning above) should be the norm. For example: if most people regard abortion as "normal", it should be legalised. In this way the cart is put before the horses, for what is normal is then not derived from norms, but norms are derived from what people see as normal!

We are therefore compelled to reflect on exactly where and how norms fit into a Christian worldview.

#### **6.4.1 God's laws: thrice revealed**

As Christians we believe that God is the Creator. He called everything into being. He is also the Legislator, however. He subjected the whole of creation to laws. We live in an ordered world. The Bible uses different words to express this. Think of Psalm 19 and its hymn of praise directed at the words, teachings, commands, demands and instructions of the Lord. They are perfect, reliable, clear, right, good and more precious than gold, because they offer insight, wisdom, direction and joy to those who obey them.

This order which God set for His creatures has been revealed to us in three ways (see Chapter 4 above on God's revelation):

\* *Creational Word*

In the first place we can find it in creation itself. From the regularities to be discerned in nature, we can read the laws. God allows people to transgress His creational ordinations, but sooner or later one finds oneself before a wall, one runs into trouble. If in the field of politics one does not observe the criteria for righteousness and justice, one will come to a point where one cannot be certain of a future in one's own fatherland any longer. If in the field of economics one exploits the earth and one's fellow men, one will be faced by pollution, unemployment, poverty and even famine.

\* *Scriptural Word*

After the fall disobedience to the law entered into the world, and it also affected man's ability to know God's laws. Stated differently: since the fall we live in a world where the abnormal has become the normal. If abnormality (in the sense of disobedience) is now the norm, how can we know what is really normative? Now that we can no longer read God's creational word or will clearly, He helps us with his Scriptural Word, the Bible in which He "re-publishes" in clear human language His will as expressed in His laws. I put the "re-publish" in quotation marks, because the Bible is not a simple or full repetition of what God has already revealed in creation with regard to His will. But apart from His non-lingual creational revelation God expresses His will clearly in lingual terms in the Bible. His law-words thus come very close to us (Deuteronomy 30:14). It is true that we cannot simply use the Bible as a textbook and apply what it contains without more ado in our day and age. We have to distinguish between the *erstwhile form* and the *permanent norm*, so that we can formulate *contemporary norms* along those lines. (If we don't do this, we face the danger of either absolutising the historical form or of relativising the permanent norm.)

\* *Incarnated Word*

God's goodness extends so far that He clarifies His will to us in a third way. He does not only speak to us through creation and the written

Word. He has also incarnated His Word concretely, in a human being like us. And Christ is not a Platonic model, which we should try to *imitate*. He is our example, whom we can *follow*. In Christ we do not only see a perfect embodiment of God's will. He also saves us from disobedience through His Spirit, so that we can once again voluntarily and joyfully obey God's laws.

With the strength and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and with the aid of the glasses of Scripture, we can once again know and obey God's original creational will.

It is true: creation is still caught in disobedience, so that we often have the difficult task of deriving the positive (obedience) from the negative (disobedience). God's laws remain valid, however, even if they are transgressed. And illuminated by the Spirit, the Bible offers us clear examples of what true obedience to the law entails.

Creational Word, Scriptural Word and Incarnated Word: three clear guiding stars in a dark world, God's directions for the whole of our lives!

#### 6.4.2 Human norms

God's laws are valid, they demand obedience. For man - the image of God, a responsible being - the "must" of the law assumes the nature of an "ought to", the law does not only command, it also demands. Where matter, plant and animal are *forced* to "obedience", man *ought to be* obedient. Some try to express the difference between the laws applicable to man, and those applicable to the rest of creation by speaking of norms in the case of man and natural laws for the rest of creation. Man, of course, is also bound by natural laws, such as, for example, the law of gravity. Norms then indicate especially those facets of man's life in which he totally differs from the rest of creation.

Norms, however, are not the same as God's creational order (called normative principles by some). They are man's *responses* to these. Our investigations bring us *into contact* with God's order for creation, but our thinking does not *create* this order. For this reason our formulation of God's laws cannot be set on a par with God's order. That would mean that instead of *discovering* the order, we *lay down* the order.

Because divine law and human norms are not the same, it is also possible that norms can and even should change: because they might be a deficient or even faulty understanding and formulation of God's will, and because God's will has to be embodied differently at different times and for different circumstances by man.

An example to illustrate this is found in how we have to use the Bible. Scripture gives us examples of how people had been obedient or disobedient, in other words, the norms of specific people from specific periods under specific circumstances. If we apply Scripture in our own lives, the following steps are therefore necessary: In the first place we have to view it in the specific context. In the second place we have to determine what God's universal will or law is which will transcend the specific context. And in the third place we have to recontextualise God's will for our own times, that is, formulate it as a norm for our own specific circumstances.

Most norms which the Bible gives us cannot simply be transferred to our own lives just like that. This would not only imply laziness, but would also mean disobedience. As we have said earlier, God's laws have to be positivised by each person and each generation anew. (Cf. again chapter 4, section 4.4.2: How to read the Bible correctly.)

Norms are of the greatest importance in man's life. They are not only criteria for judgment, but are also indicators of how to act. Norms indicate the route to a truly meaningful existence.

Up to now we have distinguished the following: (1) God's *laws* for that which has been created, and (2) man's understanding and formulation of these laws in the shape of *norms*.

The third phase (3) implies that people should accept these normativities and arrange their lives in accordance with them. Behaviour which is in accordance with these normative indications should then be regarded as *normal*, while deviations should be regarded as abnormal. The transition from step 2 to 3 is therefore the change from normativity to normality. Just as we should never equate our (normative) formulations of God's ordinations with the ordinations themselves, so our behaviour (in accordance with norms) is never

normative. Normality is not the same as normativity, and still less can it be equated with (divinely stated) laws.

This mistake is often made by people who prefer to use the word "values". Values are things which have to be realised when men obey/disobey God's commandments. Think, for example, of the Biblical concepts of good/evil as the result of obedience/disobedience. The good is valuable and the evil is valueless. "Value" is therefore situated on more or less the same level as the concept of normal. For that reason values cannot be regarded as being normative. Values do not offer the norm, but exactly the opposite: norms, which are adhered to, give rise to values.

In conclusion we can thus say that Christians have the opportunity to base their norms on the firm foundation of God's revelation. Because we are also sinners our norms will not be perfect or infallible. We should always clearly distinguish between God's laws and our understanding and formulation of His laws into concrete norms. It is possible, however, to be much more confident that we are moving in the correct direction. This will become clear when we finally have a look at how most people today try to determine their norms.

#### **6.4.3 How norms (values) are determined today**

In the previous century the philosopher Nietzsche certified God as dead. In our own time even theologians have expressed a willingness to bury Him! Nietzsche already, however, realised that as the Legislator disappeared, the laws themselves would become obsolescent and be consigned to the rubbish bin. A disappearing God also means the disappearing of laws! It was only a matter of time - and our own time is witness to this - before the final(?) consequence would manifest itself: even the distinction and contrast between good and evil, right and wrong, true and false, have become vague and have disappeared. This does not only mean double standards, but even more: evil can be good (or good evil), wrong is considered right (or the obverse), murder becomes a noble deed, a criminal a saint, and "yes" need not mean "yes" but can also mean "no".



Of course one cannot consistently maintain this. Man has to choose, to judge. And to be able to do this, he needs norms. Without the distinction between good and evil, man simply cannot live!

Let us look briefly at some ways through which in our time people try to keep their heads above water in this subjectivistic maelstrom. The various ways that I am going to mention here are distinguishable from each other, but in reality may overlap and in some cases a person may grasp at more than one of these straws, trying - in vain - not to disappear into the threatening quicksands.

\* *Do as the majority does*

Examples of this include the acceptance of premarital sex as normative simply because 50% + 1 of the community in a questionnaire responded that for them it is normal. The normality of "hit-and-run sex" has been elevated to normativity!

The most important point here is not only to realize that the majority is not always right, but especially that norms are not determined in terms of numbers, cannot be quantified. The aspect of number does not determine norms, but it is determined by (numerical) norms itself.

In the final analysis man does not determine norms, but God's law determines our norms.

\* *Do as your own intellect, feeling or conscience tells you to do*

The only difference here is that instead of many people setting the criterion, only one person determines it. Man's brain, however, cannot create norms, because it is subjected to norms itself. Personal feelings or conscience, likewise, do not rise above the law, but remain under the law, so that they too cannot pass final judgment about norms and guidelines. (This emerges clearly from the Biblical meaning of the concept "conscience" which in reality means co-knowledge with God.)

Yet the idea of "I do my own thing, exactly as it pleases me" has become the vogue of our time. Thinkers of our time do not without reason direct attention to the fact that we are living in the "I"-period, the period of the religion of narcissism. The individual is no longer (as

for Protagoras) merely the criterion for all things. He is not simply an egoist any longer. He is far more: he has become the centre of all things!

\* *A recourse to authority*

The authority to whom one has recourse could be any of a great variety: from an important church leader to a famous film star. One may have recourse to the leader of one's party or the commander of one's terrorist squad. His wish - whatever that might entail - is one's command. One may not - and fortunately need not - ask questions!

Or one might have recourse to something as impersonal as "science". It is for this reason that many people today maintain that if it is possible for science to create an annihilating weapon, it has the right to do so. Therefore science is the norm instead of science being normatively structured.

Basically the same subjectivistic mistake is being made here. But this point of view also implies that one's own responsibility - each of us is finally responsible to God - is shifted onto someone/something else.

\* *Let's see what the best thing will be under the circumstances*

Of course we have to formulate God's laws in terms of norms, which will then provide direction and guidance to us as adequately as possible in our concrete circumstances. Situationism is something different, however. According to this the norm is not made applicable for a specific case, but the situation itself creates the norm. Opportunism (the "best" as the "most useful" for oneself) also peers around the corner here.

\* *Keep sight of your ultimate objective*

Formerly there was a proper distinction between principle (= norm) and objective. Today the objective has devoured the principle. Instead of thought based on principles or starting points we have thought based on final ends.

At first sight this does not seem to be that bad. But it is very dangerous. The Biblical way is that the principle or beginning should determine the end. One cannot cherish objectives which have not weathered the test of God's commandments. Objective-directed thought, however, has the implication that the end becomes the principle. For that reason there is the saying that the end also justifies the means. If dishonesty, violence or whatever should be necessary for me to reach my objectives, then they become legitimised!

## 6.5 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE ASPECTS OR MODALITIES OF EARTHLY REALITY

Up to now we have distinguished between God and that which He *created* and *ordained*. He *created* heaven and earth (which includes the universe and the stars). He has also *set* laws for the earthly reality so that it can comply with His will. We have already reflected on his will and have seen how the laws in the realm of matter, plant and animal simply *obtain* or *hold*, but when it comes to man they *demand* voluntary obedience.

We have therefore broadly reflected on (1) God, (2) His creation, and, inextricably linked to both God and creation, (3) His creational ordinances or laws for each creature.

In our understanding and experience of reality we can further distinguish a threesome: *entities* (or "things"), their *characteristics* and the *relationships* in which they stand towards each other. In this section we would like to concentrate on the characteristics, facets or aspects of (earthly) reality.

It is important beforehand to keep in mind that these are facets of *earthly* reality. They are therefore not applicable to heaven (as the habitation of the angels and of God) nor to God Himself. Because the aspect of number is not applicable to God, He can be a Triune God (that is, one "being" and three "persons"). Because the spatial aspect is not applicable to Him, He can be omnipresent.

The following are important things to know about the facets or modalities of reality:

### 6.5.1 The modalities are not concrete entities

We do not here ask the *what*-question. (For example, *What* is this? It is a dog, a thorn tree, a diamond.) We ask questions concerning the *how*. (For example, *How* is the dog, what is it like: large or small, strong or weak, cheap or expensive, mine or yours?)

The concern is therefore not with *what* exists, but with the *mode* of existence. Inferring from the Latin word *modus* (cf. *modus operandi*, way of acting) we therefore also speak of the modalities of things, their aspects or facets.

In our scholarly work the diversity of aspects plays an important role. Should one ask a variety of people, such as a theologian, ethicist, jurist, aesthetician, economist, sociologist, linguist, historian, logician and psychologist to analyse the same event, for instance a beer party, one will find that each one will be interested in another facet of the same event. The theologian may be interested in the religious convictions of the group (there could be a Christian and an atheist talking together); the ethicist may note the strong bonds of friendship; the jurist the legal implications of the fight in which the party culminates; the aesthetician may be interested in the play of light, shadow, colour and shape of the whole "picture" in front of him; the economist may be interested in the amount of money spent and how much profit the pub-owner is going to make; the sociologist may focus his attention on the social interaction which is occurring; the linguist may be fascinated by the interesting - at times "colourful" - language usage; where-as the historian realises that in terms of what is being discussed (such as a *coup d'etat*) this may be a historical event; the logician may not understand how one of the members can mislead others with his sophistry; the psychologist, finally, may not be interested in any of the foregoing but rather in the emotions, the feelings accompanying the drinking and discussion.

The party in the pub is an example of how a *human event* can be analysed modally by different scientists. To indicate that not only scientists have to do with modalities, we will use another example, viz. that of a *human societal relationship* (a nuclear family). The concrete things or activities in the right-hand column serve as examples of how

all aspects of reality (those in the left-hand column) are found in the family too.

religious	devotions
ethical	family troth (can depend on each other)
juridical	parental authority
aesthetic	harmonious co-existence, typical style of a family
economic	family budget or finances
social	family entertainment, games, parties, relationships
lingual	family (nick)names, expressions, idioms
historical (technical-formative)	family upbringing, planning
logical	family opinion, discussions or negotiations
psychical	family feelings, nostalgia for home
biotic	blood bonds, paternal or maternal "instinct"
physical	family traits (son looks like father, grandfather)
spatial	house (space) in which they live
numeric	family unity

The family has especially two points of orientation, viz. the bond of troth (the ethical) and the bond of blood (the biotic). There is no relationship on earth in which one lives as closely as in marriage leading to a family, because people in a family are bound by links of blood and troth. (A more extensive analysis of the family is given in chapter 13, section 13.3.)

### 6.5.2 One can distinguish between a number (between 12 and 16) of modalities

H. Dooyeweerd (1969) and L. Kalsbeek (1975), following him distinguished the following fifteen modalities:

Modal Aspect	Meaning Kernel
Pistic	Faith, firm assurance
Moral	Love in temporal relationships

Juridical	Retribution (recompense)
Aesthetic	Harmony
Economic	Frugality in managing scarce resources
Social	Social intercourse
Lingual	Symbolic meaning
Historical	Formative power
Logical	Distinction
Sensitive (psychic)	Feeling
Biotic	Vitality (life)
Physical	Energy
Kinematic	Motion
Spatial	Continuous extension
Arithmetic (Numerical)	Discrete quantity (number)

H.G. Stoker acknowledged only the following twelve:

*Religion* (revelation - faith - service of God)

*The moral/ethical* (love of the person, that is, of self and of neighbour)

*The juridical* (retribution, law)

*The aesthetic* (beautiful, harmony)

*The economic* (consideration of value; gratification of needs)

*The lingual* (articulated revelation of meaning with the aid of observable signs e.g. audible sounds)

*The logical* (thought, including deduction)

*The psychical* (consciousness)

*The biotic* (life)

*The physical* (including the chemical - movement, energy)

*The spatial* (dimensional extensivity)

*The arithmetic* (number, discrete quantity)

As a third and last example, we mention S. Fowler's (1991a) suggestion for sixteen different modalities:

Confessional

Ethical

Jural

Economic

Social intercourse

Lingual  
Technico-cultural  
Logical  
Aesthetic  
Affective  
Percipient  
Biotic  
Physical  
Kinematic  
Spatial  
Numerical

The reason why philosophers differ about which and how many modalities have to be distinguished, brings us to difficult philosophical arguments which are not of importance here. What is important, however, is that in the main they are in agreement.

### **6.5.3 There is a specific order in the modalities**

This also emerges from the above suggestions of Dooyeweerd, Stoker and Fowler. Once again there are small differences because of philosophical differences, but all of them acknowledge that there are *earlier* modalities (such as the numerical and spatial aspects) without which the *later* ones (such as the ethical and the pistical) would not be possible. The earlier or foundational modalities are usually called the *substrate* (modalities) and the later ones the *superstrate* (modalities).

An example: the biotic facet (life) of a tree is not imaginable without the physico-chemical, spatial and arithmetical aspects.

### **6.5.4 Each modality has a meaning core or a core moment**

This is indicated in the above outlines of Dooyeweerd and Stoker. You will immediately note that their circumscriptions of the core moments do often differ, and the reason for this is to be found in the fact that determining the core moment or the meaning core, brings us to the limits of human knowledge - actually they are indefinable. Augustine already realised this in relation to something like time: "I know what time is, but as soon as somebody asks me to define time, I don't know any longer."

Although we are not exactly able to determine what faith, the ethical, the economic, etc. "essentially are", it is still important that we should try, because in our ordinary and also in our scholarly work we may not confuse the facets of life. An ethically qualified act, for example friendship or loyalty, is different from an economically determined one, for example a commercial transaction. Friendship should not be bought, after all, and conversely a business enterprise will soon be bankrupt when, due to considerations of friendship, it charges prices that are too low.

### **6.5.5 Each aspect is unique and cannot be reduced to another**

This has already clearly emerged in the previous point. But there are also differences among the philosophers: where some distinguish *two* different aspects, others want to accept only *one*.

An example similar to the one cited above could also be used here: do not confuse religious, ethical, economic, social, etc. issues with each other, because they are *different*. More clearly stated: they are qualified by *different* facets.

### **6.5.6 All aspects are intimately interwoven**

The obverse side of their uniqueness is the unbreakable coherence among the modalities of reality. Within the structure of one aspect of reality there are moments which refer to all the other modalities of reality. Each modality can therefore be seen as a mirror reflection of all the others.

An example: artistic movement, historical movement, emotional movement and growth movement (in respectively the aesthetic, historical, psychical and biotic modalities) are phenomena which refer back to (retrociate to) the modality of movement (kinematic modality).

Artistic feeling, ethical feeling, logical feeling, juridical feeling, economic and lingual feeling are all phenomena in the psychical modality which anticipate the aesthetic, ethical, logical, juridical, economic and lingual modalities.



These anticipations and retrocipations result in the fact that each aspect reflects all the other aspects of reality. Should this fact not be accepted *together with* the recognition of the uniqueness (and therefore irreducibility) of each modality, it would be easy to fall into misconceptions.

Take the example above relating to the various anticipations from the psychical modality to the later modalities. Artistic feeling, moral feeling, religious emotion, a sense of logic, a feeling for economic affairs or language can easily make a psychologist (who studies the sensitive facet or feeling) think and decide that the aspect of feeling is the most important. Religion is then *nothing other* than emotion, art is *the same thing* as deep emotion, and moral choice simply *depends* on personal feeling.

It is easy now to imagine how other aspects of life can be violated in this way. Religion, for example, does have an emotional component, but at the same time it is so much more than feeling. Religion as the final certitude is not dependent on *our* feeling (sense of security). One does not find certitude of faith in examining one's own emotional life. That would mean throwing the anchor *inside* the boat rather than *outside*! Of course one's life of faith has an element of feeling as well: if one does not *feel* and *experience* one's certitude of faith in God, one's faith is poor. In all reductions there are therefore also (twisted) moments of truth.

Should one succumb to the temptation of reducing different modalities to just one or two, then one falls into an -ism. Indicated above, we have an example of what might be called psychologism, that is everything is reduced to the psychological sphere. There can be as many -isms as there are modalities, however. Economism, for example, teaches that man is no more than an economic being. Rationalism, on the other hand, absolutises the logical facet of humanity. Historicism is another example with very dangerous consequences. And in this way we can continue.

### **6.5.7 There is a distinction between subject-subject and subject-object relations**

All physical entities (a stone, a metal etc.) function subjectively in the first four modalities (arithmetical, spatial, kinematic/movement and physical). An example of this is a chemical reaction. A physical entity, however, (such as, for example, H<sub>2</sub>O), fulfils an object function in the case of a plant (water is a physical and not a biotic subject). Paper, which is something physical, can in the shape of a hymn book have an object function in the life of faith.

### **6.5.8 Modalities have a subject side and a law side**

We can distinguish, in each aspect, a law (order) side and a subject (factual) side. Each aspect of reality is therefore subject to God's creational law or creational ordinances. As in the case with concrete things, we can *distinguish* between the law and that which is subject to the law, but we can never *separate* them. For this reason it is more appropriate to distinguish between a law *side* and a subject *side*.

### **6.5.9 Modalities are important for an understanding of the process of opening up**

From the foregoing it has become clear that the aspect of emotion, for example, opens up, develops, becomes richer and more profound in all its anticipations, such as towards economic, aesthetic and juridical feeling. This is something that does not occur in the case of the animals. It only occurs in man and it is part of his cultural mandate to cultivate creation.

The process of opening up is especially applicable to human society. In the beginning there was just a marriage between Adam and Eve. The first family followed. Initially the head of the family was responsible also for the juridical life and the life of faith. Later on, however, the state (with rulers) and a church (with priests) developed and took over these functions. First the family had to see to the education of the children, but as culture developed schools and universities were established.

In an undeployed (so-called primal) society authority is still undifferentiated (in the hands of one or a few). In an open, fully deployed society, the society (and therefore also authority), is differentiated and distributed among different kinds of office-bearers.

### **6.5.10 The important role of the pistical function or modality**

All people have an aspect of faith and a specific faith. The word "unbeliever" is therefore not suitable, except if it is meant to indicate that somebody does not adhere to a specific faith, such as Christianity.

The facet of faith does not have further anticipations, but (in the shape of a concrete act of faith) is directed at something *outside* man - at the true God and His revelation, or at a false surrogate god and a pseudo-revelation.

And emanating from this religious directedness (towards God or a god) the facet of faith and concrete faith have a great influence on the foregoing facets of life and activities of mankind.

Should you not believe in the true God, you have to turn something in creation into a divine entity. In "primitive" religions natural forces (such as lightning or the heavenly bodies) were made divine. In modern apostatic religions cultural forces (such as, for example, science and technology) are made into idols. All such forms of faith, however, we call a closed faith, as it does not offer a "window" to let us see beyond creation.

Such closed faiths have a restrictive or limiting effect on the whole of man's existence. The other aspects of life are also closed off within themselves and they lose their meaning.

Faith in the true God offers the possibility, however, that man's whole life can be meaningful, that is, everything that he does in each sphere of life (physical, psychical, social, economic, etc.) is directed at the glory, honour and service of his Creator.

These have only been some flashes to indicate to you how important the distinction between the different modalities of reality is for both science and practice.

### 6.5.11 Real practical value

Distinctions, distinctions, distinctions! Are all these distinctions so important - especially in Africa where we traditionally, and also today, tend to think in more holistic terms? I regard them not only as necessary, but also of real practical value. Allow me to explain why by way of three examples.

A human being is, according to a Christian philosophy, different from matter, plants and animals. He/she is more than merely a creature of flesh and blood. Humans reveal the richness of all the above-mentioned modalities, while material things (like a stone) participate only in the first three, plant life only in the first four up to the biotic, and animals in the first five modalities (apart from being living things, they also have senses). To regard a human being as a physical thing is therefore a one-dimensional picture of man. Such a viewpoint not only impoverishes but also dehumanises him/her. The same will be the case when we define a human being as "nothing more than an economic being". There are many such one-dimensional views of man today. All of them are, however, distortions because man/woman is a multi-dimensional creature.

The distinction of a variety of modalities also helps us to distinguish between the tasks of different societal relationships or human communities like a marriage, a church, a state and a business enterprise. They are qualified by different modalities and therefore have different tasks. Marriage is an *ethical* relationship of mutual truth or fidelity; the church is a relationship of people sharing the same *faith*; the state is a *juridically* qualified relationship and has to take care of public justice, and the business is an *economically* qualified societal relationship. Each of them should concentrate on its own task and area of competence and should not usurp the tasks of other communities.

A third example of the practical value of the distinction between modalities is that it can safeguard us from or warn us against distorted views of reality. We call these distortions "-isms", because the words describing them usually end in this way. Examples are for instance materialism, economism, scientism, rationalism, socialism etc. The basic reason for their existence is usually a very narrow-minded view of reality: one aspect of rich reality is absolutised and everything else is

viewed through this keyhole. Such *-isms* can also develop in worldviews and even ideologies like, for instance, socialism which overemphasises the social aspect of reality. With our wider perspective on a variety of aspects in creation we know that one can never grasp the richness of creation if one elevates and overemphasises only one aspect.

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The value of all these distinctions will become even clearer in the following chapter. The topic will be a Christian view of man or a Christian anthropology.

## Chapter 7

# ON BEING HUMAN ACCORDING TO A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

A nostalgic, very old song, which has lost none of its topicality, runs like this:

"I came - I know not whence  
I am here - I know not why  
I have to die - I know not when  
I shall go - Where to I do not know."

This is because man is a creature who cannot flee from himself. At one time or another he has to ponder the important question: "Who am I really?" This is a universal, generally human issue.

From antiquity we have the humorous story of how the followers of the great philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.) spent a great deal of energy in the Academy in order to satisfactorily define man. Finally they decided on a "featherless, two-legged creature". (Man is the only two-legged creature among the living that is not feathered!) In great complacency the philosophers sat back, until the mischievous Diogenes plucked a chicken and chucked it over the wall of the learned Academy. Suddenly the confused philosophers were confronted with a "featherless two-legged creature" that was definitely not human. They simply had to think again. The result, however, was not very encouraging, for what they came up with was that man was a featherless two-legged creature with broad nails!

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION: THE QUEST FOR SELF-IDENTITY

Everywhere today man is trying to understand himself: Who am I? What does it really mean to be a human being? This is the case in Africa where people are frantically in search of their own identity, dignity, meaning, in short, their humanity. But also in the Western world the quest for self-identity is high on the agenda.

For a change we are going to use the West as an example - otherwise one may get the impression that it is only Africans who are trying to discover the secret of being human. The following list gives only a few of the more theoretical anthropological attempts which appeared on the Western market the past few hundred years:

- The traditional Christian dichotomist (or trichotomist) view.
- The mechanical view (R. Descartes).
- The rationalist-moralist view (I. Kant).
- The naturalist-materialist view (L. Feuerbach).
- The evolutionary view (C. Darwin, H. Spencer).
- The revolutionary view (K. Marx, H. Marcuse).
- The psycho-analytical view (S. Freud).
- The pragmatist view (W. James, J. Dewey).
- The vitalist-superman view (F. Nietzsche).
- The existentialist view (S. Kierkegaard, J.P. Sartre).
- The behaviourist view (B.F. Skinner).
- The structuralist view (L. Strauss, M. Foucault).
- The technological view (N. Wiener, K. Steinbuch, G. Klaus).

It should be remembered that these scientific anthropologies are not innocent theoretical speculations with no practical consequences. The way in which you *view* is also the way in which you will *treat* the human being! If you, for instance, regard man as nothing more than a biochemical organism, you will treat him accordingly, and biotechnical manipulation of an unborn human fetus or even abortion will in such a case be quite acceptable.

This dehumanisation is very evident in, for instance, the following models of man which are widely practised in the contemporary Western world:

- *Man is a political creature* - a pawn of the state.
- *Man is an economic commodity* - a product and consumer, target for media manipulation.
- *Man is a mathematical digit* - a number stored in the memory of a computer.

- *Man is a biochemical machine/organism* - whose chief end is bodily gratification.

I have merely used Western anthropologies (the word is derived from the Greek *anthropos* = man + *logos* = science) as an illustration. It is not my intention to go into more detail. Perhaps I should only direct the attention to the most important shifts which have taken place in the last century:

(1) Where man tended to be seen as a duality, he is mostly seen as a unity nowadays; (2) where man was thought of in ontological terms earlier (man being looked *into*), he is looked at more relationally nowadays (looked *out of*); (3) while earlier views of man were more static (what man *is*), they are more dynamic nowadays (what man is *for*); (4) where the universal traits of humanity were first stressed, the accent today falls on individuality and uniqueness, and (5) while Western anthropologies were largely rationalist earlier on, they tend today to be more irrationalist.

It is important to mention here that I am not going to offer a scientific anthropology but, because in this book we are engaged in the exposition of a Christian worldview, I am merely providing a pre-scientific view of man.

The final introductory remark is that it is important to compare the Christian view of man penetratingly with (traditional) African perspectives of man. The focal point of this chapter is, however, not a dialogue with African views of man. The intention is in the first place to outline a Christian view of man as part of a total Christian worldview. Even though traditional African ideas on man will be referred to in the course of this chapter, this will not be done in terms of a systematic comparison, but rather as an illustration and in an attempt to clarify the meaning of a Christian view of man.

The following is a preview of what can be expected:

- Man as a gift and a duty.
- Man as a duality of sexes.
- Man as a unity.
- Man as a holistic, multi-dimensional being.



- Man as a religious being.
- Man as image of God.
- Man as a sinner.
- Man as fellow-man.
- Man as a creator of culture.

This is, of course, not everything that can be said about man. Subsequent chapters (like chapter 10) will for instance discuss man as office-bearer (his authority, power) etc.

## 7.2 MAN AS A GIFT AND A DUTY

"What is man that you think of him;  
 mere man, that you care for him?  
 Yet you made him inferior only to yourself;  
 You crowned him with glory and honour.  
 You appointed him ruler over everything you made;  
 You placed him over all creation ..."  
*(Psalm 8:4-6)*

In the text above David poses the same question about which everybody at some time or another has to gain clarity: "What is man?" The cause of his question is the majesty of the night sky: the moon and the countless other heavenly bodies (verse 3). If God's works are so majestic, how great must He not be Himself! And how then is it possible that He should still involve Himself with man - an insignificant little mote of dust in the cosmos?

The response to this question is quite surprising. David already knows that even though man is small, insignificant and mortal, he is at the same time the masterpiece of God's creation. For five creational days God first prepared the "house" of creation, before placing in it man, the crown of creation. Should we look upwards to compare man with God, then David even goes so far to say that man is little less than a heavenly being. And should we look at the other creatures (matter, plant and animal), then the glory and the honour with which God has endowed man become even greater: he rules the whole world, land, water and air. Man occupies a unique position *below* God and *above* the rest of creation.

We could also say (and this is a well-known Biblical concept): man is at once a *gift* (the crown of creation) and a *duty* (his task being to be a steward of God's creation). Man is the only creature of whom this can be said. Matter, plants and animals are also wonderful creatures of God, but they merely *are*. There is no *should* added to their existence. It is only to man that God has given the calling to *become* that which he *is*. His status and his calling are closely related.

Our everyday experience also confirms that it is not simply a question of man *being* human, but *becoming* human. Not only does he go through different psycho-biological stages (childhood, puberty, adolescence, maturity, etc.), but he also develops as a whole being. The wonderful thing about this is that being human has a constant side (you are still the same person, whether you are 10 or 80 years old), and a changeable side (at 80 you are very definitely also different from what you were at 10!). This change is both a *fact* and a *duty*. In the execution of this task there will be failures, but a person who does not make mistakes is not truly alive either!

The main idea binding together the following eight points of this chapter is: man as a gift and a duty - his status and his calling.

### 7.3 MAN AS A DUALITY OF SEXES

One of the greatest miracles of humankind is the fact that it is always a duality (NB: Not a dualism). God created mankind man and woman. This does not mean that He created *two kinds* of people, but that humanity is inherently *two-sided*. An anthropology which does not pay attention to this is incomplete and one-sided. Without woman man cannot be described, and *vice versa*.

Both sexes are therefore human. At the same time they are different. (Thank the Lord for the difference!) Difference, however, does not imply either inferiority or superiority of the sexes.

Unfortunately this is often the case - and Africa is no exception. Women in Africa have to experience much misery because of the fact that they are regarded as inferior human beings and dominated and suppressed by men. We should have spent a whole chapter on this very relevant topic. Lack of space does not permit it. We will, however,

give some basic directional perspectives in order to stimulate our readers in thinking through the issues in detail. These guiding perspectives are given in the form of ten theses.

### 7.3.1 Gender is a mystery

Just as being human is unfathomable, so sexuality (being man and being woman) is mysterious. We know what it means, but when we have to attach words to it we have nothing to say. It might already help to clarify our terminology: (1) *Man* and *woman* are indications of *humanity*. (2) *Masculinity* and *femininity* are indications of *gender*. (3) *Man* and *woman* can also be *sexual* terms. (4) *Husband* and *wife* are *marital* terms.

It is important to distinguish at least between the following terms:

- *Gender* is the overall difference (especially learned differences like gender roles) between males and females.
- *Sexuality* is the (mostly inherited) biological differences.
- *Sex* is the mutual attraction between female and male, including sexual intercourse itself.

Usually all the emphasis is one-sidedly put on *sexuality* and *sex*, and the more comprehensive concept of *gender* is not dealt with adequately. Anthropology and Sexiology have been given a great deal of attention, but Gynaecology (the study of women) and Andrology (the study of men) have not received the same amount of attention. Sexuality and sex, however, remain essential facets of man's gender. We should not regard it with contempt (as has been done in the past) or idolise it (as is the case today).

### 7.3.2 Gender difference applies to man/woman in his/her totality

Gender does not simply manifest itself in external (e.g. biological) characteristics. The *whole* human being is either man or woman. Our nurture (gender) and nature (sexuality) emerge in the way we feel, think, speak, behave, socialise, love and even believe. When saying

this we should, however, not be tempted to fall back into the age-old stereotypes about the two sexes - our next thesis.

### **7.3.3 Gender should not be defined in terms of stereotypes**

Prescribed stereotypical roles force both sexes from childhood onwards to unconsciously act accordingly and to play a specific gender role.

These age-old patterns can be summed up in the following comparison:

#### **Woman are**

weaker  
soft, tender, sensitive  
submissive, dependent, shy  
followers  
open, giving  
people-oriented  
concrete thinkers  
subjective, impulsive, emotional  
aware of beauty

#### **Men are**

- stronger
- harsh, coarse, without feeling
- dominating, aggressive
- leaders, decision-makers
- closed, self-centred
- task-oriented
- abstract thinkers
- objective, calculating, rational
- not aware of beauty

The above-mentioned could be strongly criticised. Only two points: in the first place this is not totally in line with reality. In the second place, and more important, it is also not in line with Scripture. Galatians 5:22-23 mentions typically female traits as the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Should men then really be like pagans in order to be men?!

It would therefore be foolish to argue that women should show more male traits or that men should be more feminine. This whole stereotypical scheme should be rejected. For this reason most feminist movements are not radical enough to liberate women - they still carry the stamp of a one-sided reaction to male stereotypes.

### **7.3.4 Both sexes are fully human**

Unfortunately this has not always been accepted in the Christian tradition about woman:

- She was *lowered* to the status of a *whore*, a sex object who simply had the task of giving pleasure to men.
- She was *exalted* to the level of a *saint*, a virgin who had to be worshipped.
- She was *persecuted* as a *witch*, because men did not know what their attitude towards her should be.
- She was *limited* to being only a *housewife*.

During early Christianity and the Middle Ages the woman was seen either as a holy being, a witch, a whore or a servant - and she was seldom recognised as a human being equal to man (in theology at any rate). The Reformation released her from the nunnery only to trap her in the kitchen among the children. Present conservative theologies too are still man-centred, as emerges from the fact that women have never been granted their rightful position in the church.

### 7.3.5 According to Scripture the sexes are equal

The Bible nowhere teaches, in spite of fully acknowledging sexual differences, the inequality of the sexes and the inferior and subjugated position of women. In fact, it teaches full equality and reciprocal need of each other.

To prove that the use of Scripture with regard to the subservient position of women is more a case of *eisegesis* (reading into) than *exegesis* (explication) a few examples from Scripture may be given. (The detail is given in my book *The Bible as eye-opener on the position of women* (1988)).

- From the fact that Eve was created *after* Adam, one should not deduce that she is his inferior. Whoever uses this kind of argument, will also have to accept that Adam is the inferior of matter, plant and animal - all created before him.
- The Biblical concept of *helper* used for the woman (Gen. 2:18), is also used of God, so that woman is not the (weaker) servant of the

man, but (like God) rather the supportive one who has to support the (weaker?) man.

- If it is said (Genesis 2:24) that the man will *cleave unto* his wife, it clearly indicates a dependent taking sanctuary - as Israel does in God.
- The word *head* in the Bible has a variety of meanings and in the relationship man-woman it does not mean that the man is the figure of authority who has to guide and rule the woman.
- The punishment which the woman (according to Genesis 3:16) has to bear because of the fall (amongst others also oppression and domination by the man) is a *fact* and not a *norm*. The woman therefore should be released from it.
- Authority and submission of man and woman are also reciprocal (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:4 and Ephesians 5:21). The Bible does demand obedience from slaves and children, but never from women towards their husbands.
- Christ's attitude towards women - something novel for His time - should serve as a guideline for us in our reflection on the position of the woman.
- In Scripture there is no prohibition about leadership positions for women in the church. Man is not automatically the bearer of authority over *all* women in *all* societal relationships.

### 7.3.6 The two sexes need each other

This emerges from what God Himself said at the creation. It was not good when Adam was alone. Things only became good when He gave Eve to Adam. We do not only need each other in the spheres of sex or in marriage, but in all spheres of life. Negatively, this also means that if a man does not allow his wife and all other women to be themselves, he only denigrates himself. Liberation of the woman cannot take place without the man - and the converse is also true.

### **7.3.7 Sexuality is an important facet of gender**

The most important thing to be said here is that sex and mutual fidelity (marriage) can never be separated from each other. Sexual intercourse without fidelity is playing with hellfire. A man and a woman should *first love each other*, pledge permanent marital fidelity to each other, before they enter into a sexual relationship. If this is not the case, then the sexual relationship is nothing other than mutual exploitation. Both man and woman then become mere sex objects. Either man and woman *use* each other temporarily *outside* marriage, or they *give* themselves permanently to each other *in* marriage.

Sexual intercourse is therefore intended to *confirm and reinforce* the truth of love, it cannot *create it and it cannot maintain* it on its own. (For details see our analysis of marriage as a societal relationship in chapter 13, section 13.2.)

### **7.3.8 Those who are unmarried are also fully human**

Being married does not mean completion, while at the same time the unmarried state does not signal incompleteness. This does not mean that the enriching quality of marriage is denied, or the fact that those who remain unmarried are deprived of a great deal. For this very reason we should not ignore those who are single (the unmarried, divorced, widowed) as if they have a disease, or neglect them or even banish them from society. They too are fellow human beings, our fellow-"men". The single woman often does not have it easy - especially in Africa.

### **7.3.9 One can speak about God in both male and female images**

Scripture is far richer than our generally male representation of the figure of God. In the Bible there are clear examples of God also revealing Himself to us in female terms. For example: God is the wife or mother of Israel. Because it is impossible to capture the greatness of God in one image only, Scripture uses even more images than just those based on gender, such as father and mother. As long as we remember that these are simply *images*: God is not a Being with gender, because He is not an earthly creature.

### 7.3.10 Gender identity is also a duty

We are not simply born man and woman. We also have to develop that way. We have to live out our gender identities in everything. Especially because God wants us to live specifically as man or as woman and to serve Him and our fellow-men/women in that specific way. Each sex therefore has unique gifts and contributions to make. What this entails, however, is not always easy to say.

The Biblical worldview clearly brings a liberating message to all areas of life and also to the sexes. I hope these few flashes will make a small contribution towards the liberation of both sexes - in Africa also.

Please do not call me a male chauvinist where I use only the word *man* or *he/his*. I am simply doing it because it is easier than each time to add *woman, she/her*. Actually I am using the word *man* in the neutral sense of (hu)mankind.

## 7.4 MAN AS A HOLISTIC BEING

The instruction to "know oneself" - as old as Greek philosophy (Socrates) - is a very difficult one, because it is not really so easy to "step outside" oneself and to achieve a distance enabling one to think and talk about oneself. One keeps thinking from inside one's own skin! The embarrassment becomes even greater when one becomes conscious of the fact that man - perhaps more so than the rest of God's creation - is a riddle, basically an impenetrable mystery. The unique nature of each human being could never be described. In our description of man we therefore talk in general of *man*, and never specifically of *this* man.

The Christian thinker, too, can never unravel the mystery of being human. Yet he has an advantage over those who do not share his faith. He knows the Creator of man, and can therefore ask Him what the man He made looks like. God's Word offers us a perspective on man which comes from outside man.

### 7.4.1 How the Bible speaks about man

We should be careful, however, about how we deal with God's revelation about man. We cannot set up a Biblical view of man by



simply stringing together random texts about man. The Bible is not a textbook of anthropology, but a book of faith. In the language of faith it teaches us what we should believe about man. Because faith is our last certitude, the Word of God then also offers us the most important, the most profound and essential information about man. It tells us things about man which we could not ordinarily obtain in a scientific way, because these are perspectives based on faith.

In the light of this the Bible also never talks about man on his own, outside his relationship with God. The Word of God does look at man from different angles, but because his relationship to God encompasses his whole existence, the Scriptural perspectives on man are always totality perspectives, holistic views of man. They do not analyse man into different parts or compartments.

Many Christians, however, believe that the following riddle conveys the Biblical viewpoint of man: A house is standing on two pillars. It has two windows of which the shutters are closed at night. What is this house? The answer: the body. Next question: Somebody lives in this house. Who is it? The answer: the soul. This is the old dichotomous (or dualist) view of man which can no longer be sustained in the light of contemporary Biblical exegesis.

#### **7.4.2 Some anthropological concepts**

With this in mind, let us have a look at some examples that will illustrate the meaning of certain "anthropological concepts" in Scripture.

1. *Man as heart* indicates the whole of man in the deepest core of his existence, the seat of his religious life.
2. *Man as spirit* directs the attention to the motivating, guiding power of his existence (under the guidance of God or an idol), the whole of man looked at "from the inside out".
3. *Man as body* indicates man in his visible embodiment and functioning as a creature of God, that is the whole of man seen from "the outside in".

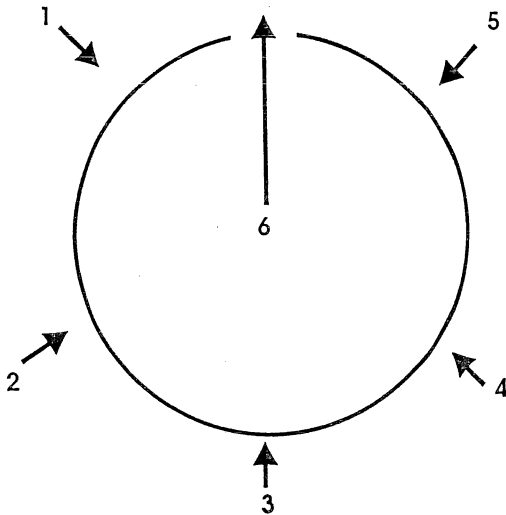
4. *Man as flesh* demands attention to the whole of man as weak, fragile and mortal, in contrast to God, who is eternal and immortal. (Flesh at times indicates sinful man as opposed to spiritual man, that is, man controlled by the Spirit of God.)

5. *Man as soul* indicates the whole of man as a living being, who owes his life, his breathing, to God.

Exegetical studies indicate that the Bible does not use these words as technically exact concepts. They therefore have many more meanings, but what has been given here are the most basic ones.

Our conclusion is therefore that Scripture always deals with the whole of man in relation to God, and not with his composition or "parts". Body, soul and spirit, are not simply "parts" of the human being, but the whole of man, seen from different angles. Soul or spirit is therefore not something *in* or *of* man, man does not *have* a soul or a spirit, but man *is* soul and *is* spirit.

The following diagram indicates how all the above-mentioned words describing man in the Bible (1-5) are totality perspectives, but from different angles or directions. The vertical arrow (6), pointing upwards, indicates that in the Bible man is never described detached from his relationship to God.



### 7.4.3 Mortal body, immortal soul/spirit

It is very clear that there is nothing in or of man that has not been well-made. Corporeality, for example, is highly regarded in Scripture, and the contempt with which it has been regarded in the Christian tradition is unbiblical.

The centuries old Christian concept of the soul (and/or spirit) as the highest, most important and above all immortal part of man was carried into the Bible, but cannot be justified from Scripture. According to Scripture only God is immortal. Man does not have immortality, not even his "precious soul". It is granted to him by God - and then also as complete man (not only to the soul) - on the day of resurrection.

How did the idea of immortality come into being among pagan thinkers? It emanated from the fear of death. Man realizes only too well that death is not something normal, and will do anything to be saved from it. In paganism this means self-redemption - the arch-sin of man. The dichotomous anthropology is the philosophical means to achieve this self-redemption, because it is believed that in death man is simply taken apart, dismantled, broken down into body and soul. The worst part of man, namely his body, in which evil is localised, dies, whereas the better part, the soul, has immortality.

God did, however, in Paradise say to Adam and Eve that they would die the day they do not obey Him. It is not stated anywhere that He said: Never mind, I do not mean it quite so seriously, it is only your bodies which will die.

With the idea of an immortal soul man therefore tries to evade God's punishment by redeeming himself in contrast to what Scripture teaches, namely that man is totally dependent on God throughout the whole of his existence (birth, life and death). It is not man's immortal soul, but God who carries him in and through death until the final resurrection.

In traditional Africa man was also seen as a dichotomous being, consisting of a body and a soul. The body is the visible side of man, subject to growth but also to disease and death. The invisible spirit lives inside the body, but is also capable of leaving it temporarily during dreams and permanently upon death. The origin of death is

explained by way of the many myths from which it emerges that death is the result of the alienation between man and the divine being. (It is therefore not to the same extent as in Scripture seen as punishment for sin.) Immortality of the spirit following death is, however, not seen as eternal immortality. Immortality depends on how long the dead will be remembered by the living. Life after death is not something totally different, but rather a vague, unclear continuation of earthly existence. Belief in the resurrection of the dead and a final judgment by the divine being is absent in traditional African religion.

#### 7.4.4 Between death and resurrection

What happens when man dies according to Scripture? Scripture is much clearer about what happens *after* death (resurrection) than what happens *during* death. Is there continuity, and if there is, what does it consist of, or is there total discontinuity between death and resurrection?

Next to the idea that man is *dismantled* at death, other Christians believe that man is *broken* upon death, so that man is at once in the grave and with God. This does not mean that man becomes two men at death - an earthenware pot that is broken into two pieces still remains only one pot! No logic can explain how this is possible, but death is precisely anti-normative, abnormal. Whatever does happen is beyond our understanding. The only result of scientifically trying to transcend this frontier will be speculation. (The history of theology is full of this kind of speculation). The three phases in man are therefore: *Unity* here, *brokenness* at death and *resurrection* upon the advent of Christ.

A third view among Christians is that of people wishing to take even more seriously the fact that man is an indivisible whole, as well as the fact that death is God's punishment for sin. The consequence of this view is that man is not simply broken upon death, but is utterly *destroyed*. Between death and resurrection man, as it were, disappears. The question that remains, however, is whether something of the punishment remains once man has been eradicated. And should we in death consider only God's punishment and not also His grace? This reminds one of the Greek philosopher who said that he was not afraid of death, because as long as he was there, death was not there, and once death occurred, he would not be there any longer!

### 7.4.5 A tentative answer

Of the three views of death mentioned, the second seems for the moment to me to be the closest to Scripture. Could one compare the three phases of man (life, death and resurrection) with the three stages of a caterpillar, a chrysalis and a butterfly? As the insect develops through all three stages, so man also keeps on existing, albeit in different forms. The chrysalis is not a caterpillar any longer, and at the same time not a butterfly, and yet he lives and exists in the transitional state. Because we are still in the caterpillar stage on this side of the grave, we can do no more than dream of butterfly glory while still in the body of a caterpillar. As with all comparisons, this one also tends to break down. The chrysalis stage, in contrast to death, is no punishment, but something entirely natural. The chrysalis stage also simply explains that man still exists after death - it does not explain that man also dies.

I am therefore of the opinion that both the dichotomous anthropologies, with their emphasis on the duality of man, and the resultant dismantling upon death, as well as the monist anthropologies with their stress on the unity of man, and the resultant vision that death would mean (temporary or permanent) destruction, are wrong.

How a dead person can still live, I do not understand. Nowhere is Scripture quite as mysterious as in this case. What does Christ, for example, mean when at the grave He says to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life: whosoever believes in Me shall live even though he has died?" Does this mean that there is life between death and resurrection, or only upon resurrection? And what does the *today* mean that Christ promises the criminal crucified with Him? Perhaps the most important promise of God's Word that we should cling to is: "Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:8b).

### 7.4.6 A psychosomatic unity?

When Romans 12:1 therefore calls us to offer our bodies to God as living and holy offerings, this does not mean that we should present a part of ourselves (our body without our soul) to God, but simply that we should devote ourselves, the whole of our concrete existence, to

God. And if mention is made in the subsequent verse of the renewal of our mind (or spirit), so that we can know God's will, this also indicates the whole life of man, and not simply a separate intellectual substance.

It will be much easier to represent man as an addition sum: half (soul) plus half (body) = 1 (man), but unfortunately it is not that simple. Many people, for example, believe that man is a psychosomatic unity. Between *psyche* (spirit) and the *soma* (body) different relations would then be possible. There can for instance be (1) a parallel relation, that is, no influence is exerted on each other; (2) the spirit alone can have an influence on the body, or (3) the body alone can have an influence on the soul, or (4) they can influence each other reciprocally. From this interaction theory explanations can then be offered as to why one becomes spiritually depressed when physically ill, or why mental stress can lead to physical effects e.g. an ulcer.

I am of the opinion that the only thing that this (monistic interaction) theory proves, is that we do not experience anything such as, for example, illness only spiritually or only physically, but always as total human beings.

Even those who define man as a "spiritual body", or conversely as "bodily spirit", do not succeed in hiding by means of their vocabulary their ultimately dichotomous thinking. To my mind there is no real difference between viewpoints setting body and soul/spirit *above* each other, *next* to each other or *within* each other.

Christian thinkers often use the inward-outward model instead of the traditional higher-lower view (the soul as the higher and more important and the body as the lower and less important part of man) referring for instance to 2 Corinthians 4:16 and 5:1-8. They then, however, explicitly direct attention to the fact that "man within" and "man without" are not *parts* of man, but the *whole* of man simply looked at from two angles. Thus not the addition-sum of  $1/2 + 1/2 = 1$ , but the riddle of  $1 + 1$  which remains 1.

Instead of a monistic or dualistic I would prefer to talk about a holistic view of man. In doing this I am not promoting a materialistic anthropology. I do not maintain that when man is crying his eyes are simply leaking, or that man is simply that which he eats.

## 7.5 MAN AS A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL BEING

This holistic perspective does not of course mean that man does not also have a rich variety of facets or sides. He has, amongst others, a chemico-material, a biotic and a psychic side. He is able to create culture and to make history, to think, to talk, to communicate socially, to trade, to create art, to maintain justice and fidelity and to practise faith.

The reader is again reminded of chapter 6 (section 6.5) where the different facets, functions or modalities of the created reality were discussed. Man, the crown of God's creation, participates in or reveals all these facets. Compared with matter, plants and animals, he is the richest and most complicated of all creatures.

In the course of history attempts have often been made to define man simply in terms of one or the other of these functions. Thus man has been called a rational or moral or economic being or (somewhat wider), rational-moral being. You will realize that this implies a reduction or a simplification of what man is, because they are simply one-dimensional or two-dimensional views of man, while man is a multi-dimensional being.

All these definitions which hold that man is "nothing other than a political/economic/revolutionary/biochemical/cybernetic being," involuntarily remind me of the riddle which describes man in terms of his legs only: "What being has four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three legs in the evening?" (At the beginning of his life he crawls on all fours, then he walks on two legs, and at the end of his life he uses a walking-stick!)

In the full knowledge that any definition of man would be incomplete, I offer the following tentatively: "Man is a very complex and dynamic configuration of a variety of functions, centrally directed in all his actions in terms of his religious commitment."

I hope that this description will be saved from its obvious poverty in the course of my discussion. The most important is that man is both a *unity* (rooted in the religious concentration point of his heart) and a *variety* of functions.

## 7.6 MAN AS A RELIGIOUS BEING

Man *is* not only a religious being. He *must* also give expression and live according to his religious character. Religion means surrender: totally and radically. Man cannot retain his life for himself and also give some of it to God. It is either the one or the other. Christ states this explicitly: Whoever commits his life fully to God and is willing to relinquish it shall retain it. But whoever is not willing to take this step will lose his entire life (Luke 9:24-26).

Unfortunately many people - Christians too - do not understand the religious status and calling of man. Apart from being a human being, man would also *have the (extra) duty* of serving God! Man, however, does not have a religious calling supplementary to his humanity, his whole existence *is* service to God or to an idol. (Cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole man".)

This is true of all activities of man: whether he eats or drinks, practises sport or politics, and not only when referring to so-called religious activities, such as prayer, hymn, sermon, church-going or Bible-reading. If one is married, one does not have the duty to love God *in addition* to one's love for one's spouse. No, *in* one's love for each other one loves God! Man does not as a Christian practise scholarship and *in addition* to it also serves God, for example, on Sundays. No, *in* one's scholarship one has to serve God! Certain professions such as those of minister or spiritual leader are of no more importance in the eyes of God than other jobs.

As indicated previously (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3.2.2) our religious relation to God is therefore total, central (or radical) and integral:

- *Total*: Our religious commitment encompasses our whole life. Each moment, and everything that we do, should be service to God. Stated differently: our total existence, and not only our life in prayer, should be adoration of God. (Cf. the *Soli Deo gloria* of the 16th century Reformation.)
- *Central*: Our lives should be centred. In all that we do, our hearts, our most profound being, should be present. Our religious calling is not simply a superficial addition, it is something radical, it emanates



from the core of our beings, from which we live as if it has been set aflame.

■ *Integral*: Our lives have to be integrated. It should be clear to Whom we have given our hearts. Christians can be people without cracks, who reveal true integrity, because they serve the only true God.

In as far as I understand traditional African religion, it too is holistic. In this regard Christian religion is therefore nothing new for the African. What is new is the fact that man in his religious life lives *directly* in the face of God. The God of the Bible is a personal God and not the distant, uninvolved divine being of traditional Africa, who does not demand of man direct accounting for all that he does.

## 7.7 MAN AS THE IMAGE OF GOD

Most African tribes used to believe that man is a descendant of the divine being. Linking with him, however, was only considered possible through the ancestors, who were supposed to be nearer to him. An intimate, personal, direct relationship between man and the supreme Creator was usually not possible.

What does the Bible teach about the relationship between man and God? Although man looks like a chimpanzee, Scripture does not say that he has been created in the image of the ape as in evolutionism, where man is simply seen as a higher form of development of the baboon. Rather - and what an honour this is - he has been created in the image of God Himself (Genesis 1:26, 27 and 5:1).

The way in which this is stated in Genesis 1:26 indicates that this is not simply a random thought but that God deliberately made a creature in accordance with His image.

### 7.7.1 The meaning of the concept

But what exactly does this mean? Many have struggled with this issue. (1) Some theologians have thought that it should be something ontic (for example, his "divine soul") *in* man. (2) Others, again, have thought of something that man *possesses, carries or has*, such as, for example, certain characteristics or virtues. Therefore man is often

described as the *image-bearer* of God. (3) Still others have located it in the *cultural task* which only man among all creatures has received from God. (4) A subsequent group of thinkers have maintained that the image should not be sought in a static "something" or a characteristic, but in the *dynamic relationship* between God and man. (5) Some even maintained that the essential nature of the image means that human beings were created as *man and woman*.

In my opinion viewpoint 3 and especially 4 are the closest to the Bible when it calls man "God's image". God's image is reflected in man when he lives in the correct relationship with his Father. And this relationship between God and man can only be right when man obeys God's commandments. Since the fall into sin this is only possible through redemption in Christ and the renewal of the Spirit which enables us to live again in obedience to God's laws for life. As God's incarnated Word, Christ shows us again what it means to be God's image(r)s. We therefore have to be continually renewed according to His image.

Whoever wants to know who man is, should therefore in the first place know who God is. Self-knowledge without knowledge of God is impossible. And how shall we know who God is? Christ says (John 14:9) that whoever has seen Him has seen the Father. And in Colossians 1:15 it is stated that He is the image of the invisible God. As image of God, man therefore has to reflect, echo or image Christ. This means that we have to follow (not imitate!) Christ. We have to reflect his love, justice and holiness in all that we think and do.

### **7.7.2 Gift and duty**

The status and the calling of man are again interwoven: man has been created in the image of God, but at the same time he has a duty as imager of God. This facet of humanity therefore also holds a responsibility. Our being image does not mean something static in the sense that we have been established as completed beings by God. We have to be renewed in accordance with his image every day. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the insight given to us in his laws, this is impossible. To reflect God's image thus means that I have to enact God's commandments (recapitulated in the central love

commandment) in all my abilities, talents, time, strength and means, in service of God and my fellow men in the whole of creation.

### **7.7.3 Being an image in a broken world**

We have to keep in mind, however, that we live in the disposition after the fall. Where man (Adam and Eve) was perfect upon creation (living according to the image of God) this perfection was deformed after the fall and should be reformed in the power of the Spirit. It is not easy to reflect God's glory in our present state of corruption and imperfection!

While the believers, the children of God, strive to reflect the image of God, the unbelievers too cannot detach themselves from their essential creational nature. All that they are able to do, therefore, is to deflect God's image. This does not mean that they have an ontic lack, or something less in their human structure that Christians do have. Their religious direction of life, however, is simply the opposite of that of the true followers of Christ. Instead of it being directed at God and reflecting His love, it is directed, through the seduction of Satan, at a surrogate god and reflects its image.

### **7.7.4 Enormous results**

The importance of this concept emerges from the following three steps: (1) man either serves the true God or an idol; (2) subsequently man increasingly becomes the image of the God of the Bible or of the pseudo-gods of the devil (cf. Psalm 115:8); and (3) man creates societal forms (marriage, family, school, state, etc.) in accordance with his own image.

The whole Biblical concept of man as image(r) therefore is not something abstract-theoretical, but very practical. This makes us realize that societies are reflections of our deepest religious convictions. Fundamentally they are the result of which God/god is served by a community. Social life is a visible testimony of our faith!

Africa should urgently ask of itself the following question: who am I serving as God, if this continent looks the way it does? And the same question should be asked by the Western and the Eastern countries.

We as Christians should hang our heads in shame. We know the true God - who is higher than any worthless idol. We should therefore have a high view of man, and also treat each other in accordance with that view. However, our so-called Christian societies - in my country too - often allow too little to be seen of the image of the God whom we say we serve!

## 7.8 MAN AS A SINNER

The fall in Paradise is closely linked with the image of God. Instead of man being the *image* of God (*imago Dei*), man wanted to be *like* God (*sicut Deus*). This centuries old - and automatically doomed - desire has not been relinquished even by modern man. In the previous century the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said that "if there are gods, how can I bear not being one", and his atheist brother from our own century, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, viewed it as the project of man himself to be god.

### 7.8.1 Terrible consequences

What does Africa look like today, and what does South Africa, my country, look like?

In order to help you orientate yourself within the realities of our continent, I would like to begin with a prayer, emanating from deep within the heart of an African:

"Today, Lord, this Africa of ours is bleeding - its ideas and thoughts are bleeding. Its knowledge is bleeding, its theology is bleeding, its servants are bleeding. The whole history of Africa is bleeding. And Africa will bleed even more if you are not with her ...

Africa is ignorant. Teach Africa with a knowledge that brings the eternal life you offer.

Africa is hungry and doesn't want to be nourished with tobacco and drugs. She wants to be loved with your love, fed with your love.

Africa is thirsty. Oh, give her the water of life.

Africa has been blind. Give her spiritual eyes to be able to discern that which comes from you and that which comes from man.

Africa is weak, she has been beaten and hurt, she needs the One who has risen from the dead ..." (Abstracts from "A prayer for Africa" by Rev. Mavumilusa Makanzu in *Facing new challenges - the message of PACLA*, Kisumu: Evangel Press, 1978.)

Africa is indeed a bleeding continent - in some cases it has already bled to death. Africa is typified by unimaginable violence, war, disease, poverty, famine and ignorance. Whoever has not yet travelled in Africa will have no realization of what it means to say that Africa is dying of loss of blood.

Possibly a few figures about one African country would help someone who does not know Africa form a vague image of the situation. A country such as Mozambique, with about 14 million inhabitants, has only approximately 400 medical doctors. Its infant mortality rate is the highest (350 per 1 000) in the world. The average annual personal income is only 80 US\$ - the lowest in the world - compared with, for example, Switzerland, where the average income is 29 880 US\$ per person per annum.

The reason for this is not lack of potential. Mozambique has some of the most fertile agricultural land in the world and some of the richest mineral resources.

In two journals on my desk I read the following: "The real income of the average African is now 10% lower than in 1970. A baby born in Guinea is three times more likely to die before the age of four than one born in (poorer) Burma. AIDS has spread further in Africa than anywhere else: half of all adult Ugandans may have it by the end of the century. The Sahara moves south, the Kalahari north, getting 100 miles closer each year. The Ivory Coast's rain forests have shrunk by four-fifths, its elephants all gone. Governments in Africa are changed by guns, and 3 million refugees are the living victims of the fierce wars. In Africa, it seems, life is still poor, nasty, brutish and short, and likely to remain so."

Africa today lurches towards a total catastrophe. It is not too late for Africa yet, but it will soon be. (If you want to obtain a general overview of the situation in different African countries, do read *Squandering Eden; Africa at the edge* by M. Rosenblum and D. Williamson, first published in 1988). The strong as well as weak points of the present situation on our continent are discussed in more detail in chapter 15 (section 15.3.1).

It is said of South Africa that: "Southern Africa, and moreover South Africa, is being consumed by flames. These contrasting fires of smouldering hatred and burning love, bitter distrust and glowing faith, cruel vengeance and trusting forgiveness, unrelenting war and conditional peace, are all burning within South Africa, but ultimately one of these fires will overcome the other. The all-important question is: Which is the one? And which the other? The challenge to the Church in South Africa is to ensure that the flames of burning love, glowing faith, trusting forgiveness and unconditional peace, do overcome the numerous other flames."

All this is the result of man's alienation from God. Our century has shown to us how terribly cruel, how demonic even Christian people can be!

The disobedience in Paradise - wanting to be God, instead of being a child of God - has had disastrous results for mankind. Instead of being a ruler, he has become an oppressed being. Satan, his new god, does not like children and has in his kingdom room only for slaves. Man can only fulfil his task of stewardship in the world with great trouble. Alienation between man and man has replaced the earlier relationship of openness and trust. Man and woman do not serve each other in love, but the man represses the woman. Cain replied to God's question of what had happened to his brother Abel: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

After his rebellion in paradise, man thus does not emerge as a god, but as a cheated, disappointed and broken being in a hostile environment. And the final punishment for sin is death ...

### **7.8.2 Accepting the seriousness rather than reasoning it away**

A Christian view of man will have to seriously deal with the reality of the fall and its consequences for man. This means that it will not be a popular viewpoint. Because, although all people acknowledge the fact that something is wrong, most are not willing to see this as the result of their own rebellion against God.

The wrong actions of man are simply seen as remnants of his "animal instincts", which will gradually be overcome by his reasonable nature. Or they are simply regarded as functional disorders, which can be set right with the necessary treatment. The physical, organic, sensitive and sexual facets of man are often called man's lower nature, which can be irrational, uncontrolled and dangerous, and which could seduce man to do wrong. Man has to suppress these tendencies with his so-called higher, reasonable/moral nature!

Proponents of this type of dualist vision of man tend to forget that it is not so simple to localise sin. Actually, man's heart is the first sinner: that which man truly desires, seduces him. Man should not try to evade guilt by stigmatising a certain part of the creation as bad!

The degradation of certain so-called lower or bodily functions of man can have serious results (such as neurosis) because in such a case man does not really know how to deal with these facets of his existence and unconsciously represses them.

### **7.8.3 The source of evil and hope to the unbiblical viewpoint**

Everybody - not only Christians - is aware of the fact that life is not normal. At some time, somewhere something went wrong - terribly wrong. Those who do not know or accept God's revelation, however, usually identify something in creation as the source of evil. Another part of creation is then viewed as the source of hope.

An example is, for instance, that some (the conservatives, traditionalists or romanticists) regard the past as good, while others (the progressives or utopists) view the good only as something in the future and thus ignore the past. Another example is the chauvinists who idealize the male sex and do not regard females very highly. Feminists do exactly

the opposite: being female is by nature good and the only hope for males is to acquire more female characteristics! The struggle between intellectualism and anti-intellectualism offers another example: the first viewpoint views man's intellect as the source of hope while according to the latter, it is the source of evil! A last example is taken from politics: my own party is viewed as the angel of light, but that of my opponent as the incarnation of the devil!

In this way part of God's creation is depreciated and even demonised, while another part is appreciated and even divinized. The anti-theses in each of these examples is, however, misplaced. Past and future, male and female, rationality and emotion, my party and his party, all are participants in both good and evil. *Everything* that God created at the beginning was good, very good, but *everything* has become corrupted after the fall.

People who do not know or accept God's Word, will therefore inevitably look for the culprit in the wrong place. But they also look for hope and put their trust in the wrong place: absolutizing something of creation, replacing the true God with an idol. Furthermore they indirectly blame God, the Creator for the evil. They do not want to accept personal responsibility for the evil in the world. This is, of course, nothing new. Directly after the fall in paradise Eve blamed the snake, Adam blamed Eve and even God Himself for giving him such a wife!

#### **7.8.4 The Christian attitude**

Dualistic Christian worldviews make exactly the same mistake as illustrated in the above-mentioned unbiblical attitudes. In spite of their (Christian) name we therefore cannot call them Biblical.

The Christian should know that there are actions and their accompanying results that are definitely evil and should therefore be rejected and avoided. Mostly, however, we live in a "mixed" situation in which it is difficult to separate good and bad, simply accepting parts of creation while rejecting others. Our task is to distinguish them (God will finally separate them.) Our criterion to do so should be the laws of God. Judged in the light of His law we will find that apart from



outright sinful things, there are also aspects of our world that can be improved or should be reformed.

Reformational Christians are therefore neither optimists, nor pessimists, but realists.

Christians who are *of* the sinful world, that is, who live *like* the world, do wrong. They are too optimistic about the good in the world.

Opposed to these are the Christians who see their faith as hovering *above* the world, or *alongside* the world, or even *opposed* to the world. They are too pessimistic about the sinful nature of the world, and the power of redemption, and they do not have the strength to change the world. Their Christian faith floats like a bright drop of oil on the troubled waters of the world.

The correct attitude is not to *adapt* to the world, or to *withdraw* from the world, but to be *present in* the world and to reform, like salt, yeast and light that which has been deformed. (The reader is reminded of what has already been said in Chapter 5, especially section 5.5.)

Christendom in Africa can be compared with a very wide but also shallow river: the number of believers increased rapidly, but sufficient spiritual depth and strength are still missing from their lives. Many African leaders complain that the Christians - in spite of their large numbers - are not really involved in trying to change society for the better. Outside the church they practically play no role, no renewing force emanates from them into society. They simply drift along like a boat on the muddy stream of the sinful world.

We in Africa should see the ugliness of sin. We should realise that man has been affected by sin in his deepest being and in all the structures he creates. Then we will also realise that our duty to combat this has grown a hundred-fold!

## 7.9 MAN AS FELLOW MAN

In this subparagraph we will in the first place look at the way in which the traditional African viewed the relationship between man and his fellow men. Attention will also be directed to how this differs totally

from Western ideas. Then some indications of our duty in terms of Scriptural commands will be offered.

### **7.9.1 A communalist view of man**

According to Africa, man is of the utmost importance: the whole of creation is man-centred (anthropocentric). Man is also group-directed. In order to describe this emphasis on human community I shall use the term communalist. Where Western culture takes the individual as the point of departure, and regards society merely as a conglomerate of a number of individuals who joined hands voluntarily, the opposite is true of Africa. As opposed to "I am, therefore we are", the African says "We are, therefore I am"; for the African man only assumes humanity through his fellow men. An individual without his social relations is unthinkable. The whole world is seen in terms of the (own) group. Interpersonal group relations have the absolute priority.

All this is in stark contrast to modern Western society. We can here, for example, refer to extreme individualists like Hobbes who said that one man is the other's wolf, and Sartre who even maintained that man's hell is situated in man's fellow man!

### **7.9.2 The lighter sides**

This great emphasis on the community has both positive and negative sides. The following would for example be positive points: The close communal life - as against the increasing loneliness and alienation experienced in Western individualism. Communal ownership of, for example, agricultural and grazing land - as against often egotistical Western private ownership. The communal decision-making concerning important issues - instead of forcing one's own opinion to predominate at all costs. The fact that people are appreciated and cared for simply because they are there, and not because of their successes or status - as is often the case in the "First World". Therefore caring professions, in contrast to technico-administrative positions, are not popular in the West any longer. Western man has lost the ability of communicating with his fellow-man.

In the traditional African society there are also all sorts of character traits with which the children are imbued from their childhood

onwards. The ideal person, in the African view, is somebody who reveals such virtues as being peace-loving, friendly, forgiving, having appreciation and respect for each other. You will note that these are all characteristics which promote a close and intimate relationship with others.

In accordance with a more individualistic orientation, the Westerner tends to place a high premium on qualities such as honesty, openness, integrity, perseverance, etc. For this reason the Westerner will often consider the African as being dishonest, and the African may consider the Westerner as being impolite.

### 7.9.3 Darker sides

Communalism has its dark sides as well, and we have to face these squarely if we want to accomplish a new Christian view of man for Africa. It is no use to idealise "the good old days" uncritically. It is a general human need to belong to a group. This need is, to my mind, *overdeveloped* in Africa and has therefore impaired the balance of the individual and his community. This has resulted in an *overappreciation* of the community and the consequent *underappreciation* of the individual.

I would like to mention some examples to illustrate this negative side of African communalism more clearly. African communalism has led to the fact that the individual does not have a clear identity of his own outside the family relationship any longer: man *is* not a man, but only *becomes* man because of his incorporation into the group. The individual has to wait for the group (and groups tend to be sluggish), because personal initiative is not highly regarded. There is fear of opposing the group - even though the group may be wrong. There may also be a strong tendency to evade personal responsibility by shifting it onto the group. The individual has to fit into the social hierarchy at a certain level. Should he break out of it, he would upset the balance of the group structure. Should he, for example, obtain more possessions and influence than is considered suitable for him within the group to which he belongs, some people may be jealous of him and he may even be pushed out into the cold - the most terrible punishment that can be inflicted.

#### 7.9.4 Critical questions

If we look at the results of this view of man, certain questions present themselves: Is this social uniformity really to be regarded as beneficial? Does it not lead to a very static attitude? While Africa, especially today, is in great need of initiative, openness and dynamism to be able to compete with the rest of the world in order to gain a place in the world community.

Community is important, but it should not be the criterion. Group loyalty may never be of more importance than the truth. Wrong things may never be tolerated patiently, or even covered up for the sake of peace. Even Africans concede that the own group is an *absolute criterion* in traditional Africa. According to T. Adeyemo, the greatest sin is to commit a transgression against your group. And salvation for the African is acceptance by the group.

What we have here is nothing but group egoism as against Western individual egoism. The dedication and loyalty, however, do not extend further than the own family or group, whence the many tribal faction fights and the struggle in modern Africa between political groups. Just as little as one can approve of racism can one approve of tribalism.

#### 7.9.5 What the Bible says

What does the Bible say regarding the relationship between man and his fellow man? What is our duty in this regard?

In the same way that one can never be fully human without being in a relationship with God, one cannot be fully human without being in a relationship with other people. Being human is not like being an island, but means being a fellow man to someone else. Among the first questions which God asks of man is not only "Adam, where are you?", but also "Cain, where is your brother?"

God's Word also says explicitly that our relationship with God and our relationship with our fellow men are indivisibly linked to each other. There can be no growth in one's relationship with God if one's relationship with one's fellow man is not right, or is ignored.

Conversely, Scripture also teaches that true religion is service to our fellow-man. In the double love commandment (enjoining us to love God with all our being, and loving our neighbour like ourselves - Matthew 22:37-39) the second commandment is not a second-rate commandment. The love of one's neighbour should be a reflection of one's love for God. If one does not love one's neighbour, one does not truly love God! (1 John 4:20)

### 7.9.6 Self-love and love of the fellow man

The same unbreakable bond that exists between love of God and love of the fellow man, is to be found between love of the self and love of the fellow man. Usually this is represented as a dilemma: either I strive for selfish love (self-satisfaction) at the expense of my fellow man, or I am devoted to selfless love (self-denial) - at my own expense. Theologians have even come up with two Greek words, to describe the different kinds of love: *eros* for the former kind, and *agape* for the latter.

This is to my mind a false dilemma. In loving myself, I am the more able to love my neighbour, and by loving my neighbour I am able to care for myself. If I am not concerned with my neighbour, then it is to my own detriment, because then I cannot be fully human!

Racism (as in my own country, South Africa) and tribalism (throughout Africa) are therefore not innocent ideologies. Both affect one's own humanity, both are an injustice to one's fellow men and thus a direct sin against God.

Therefore we cannot and may not understand man solely from the perspective of society (as communalism insists), but equally we cannot understand man solely from the perspective of the single individual (as Westerners insist).

### 7.9.7 The greatest of all is love

The question "Why am I?, Why on earth do I exist?" is a fundamental question and therefore one to which all human beings have to find an answer. Many answers have been supplied: I *think*, therefore I am; I *do*, therefore I am; I am *cast* into the world, therefore I am; I am a *group person*, therefore I am. The Biblical answer to this is: I am

*loved*, therefore I am. We exist, because God loves us. He created us out of love!

But not only *out of love* - also *towards love*. It is only when we have learned to open up to Him, to our fellow man and to the whole of creation, that we will be able to know what it means to be fully human.

Love is one hundred percent a *gift* of God and one hundred percent a *duty* imposed on man!

## 7.10 MAN AS CREATOR OF CULTURE

Because this last facet of being human is so important - also for the material to be discussed in the following chapter (8) - we will go into it in more detail. The reader should keep in mind what has already been said in Chapter 2 (section 2.2) where a distinction was made between eight cultural layers and the relationship between them. The next paragraphs give an exposition of the following Biblical perspectives on cultural activity:

- the perspective of God's *ownership or proprietary rights* over all of creation;
- the perspective of God's *cultural mandate* to man;
- the perspective of *man's stewardship* over God's creation;
- the perspective of *God's norms* for the whole of His creation.

### 7.10.1 From the perspective of God's proprietary rights over all of creation

"In the beginning God created heaven and earth" (Genesis 1:1). These seemingly simple words that the Bible begins with encompass an enormous amount. These words mean, among other things, that there is a difference between God and that which He created. Only He is God and there is nothing divine in creation, not even man. He also sets clear laws for His creation. It also means that He - and not man - is the owner of everything. (Cf. for example, Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it".)

This is a primal truth and has to be emphasised over and over again, because it is so easily forgotten. The reason for this is because we are

so easily seduced towards selfishness, egotism and even anthropocentrism (man in the centre of everything). Therefore it is once again essential to underline the following (well-known) truths which we can derive from God's absolute ownership:

- Creation does not belong to us.
- Man has *no absolute rights* over any of God's creatures. Only God has complete power of disposal over everything.
- Man can therefore never, as an ancient Greek philosopher said, be the criterion. God sets His laws, norms and criteria - which man has to obey - also in his relationship to the rest of creation.
- God's whole creation has meaning and is of value to Him. This is true of each of the separate creatures. Each one is unique and has his own, unique and intrinsic value *in itself*.
- God did not create animals only to the benefit and service of man. Therefore we should not degrade animals simply to the level of being useful for human purposes. We should not regard and use them as "objects", "raw materials" or "laboratory apparatus".
- Because God's animal creatures are valuable and precious in His eyes, He also has compassion for them and cares for them. This emerges clearly from the following Scriptural passages in which God points out to man that the animal kingdom has to be treated with respect: Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:6-7 and Jonah 4:11.
- As we can already deduce from the above-mentioned texts, God has transferred his care for matter, plant and animal to man, as His representative on earth.

This first perspective indicates that anthropocentrism (man is the centre, the purpose and meaning of the whole world, and his happiness is the one and all) is totally unacceptable. God's creation and His purpose with creation is far larger and richer than man. One should never regard the fact that God created man as the crown or acme of His creation anthropocentrically (man-centredly). The meaning of creation is that it exists for the glory of God, and therefore it is theocentric (God-centred).

I am under the impression that our reformational theology and philosophy have on this point failed to think truly Biblically. It often created the impression that the whole of creation was created mainly or solely for the benefit of man and his welfare. The interests of all other

creatures were subsumed under and made subservient to the interest of man. Other creatures might have relative value, but man's value is absolute. If we say this, we are actually turning man into a god, for the word "absolute" may only be applied to God. Other creatures of God merely exist to serve man. The Biblical vision is the opposite, viz. that man should serve his fellow-creatures!

We therefore seem to have a blind spot in our reformational worldview. We have an urgent need for a Biblically justified and inspired vision of nature and man's place in nature. This will have to be a vision with far more compassion about and greater sensitivity for our fellow inhabitants of the planet, namely those who have wings, fins and other coverings, whether they have four or two legs. This is not only necessary for their survival, but also for ours because God's law is also applicable here: should you do harm to others, you will do harm to yourself.

### **7.10.2 From the perspective of God's cultural mandate to man**

From verse 26 of the first chapter of the Bible the culmination of God's creational work is described. The creation of man is not only the completion of His work but also the climax.

It is not only the *time* when it happens (viz. the very last day) but also the *way* in which it is done that is significant. On the sixth day we hear for the first time that God first deliberates with Himself (verse 26) and then fulfils His plan to make man (verse 28).

God makes a creature in His own likeness and image (verse 27). This means that man is a religious being who can stand in a relationship of obedience or, following the fall, of disobedience towards Him. Man reveals the image of God by living according to His commandments, but reflects the image of Satan when he lives in accordance with Satan's wishes for man. In this way man either resembles the God or the idol whom he serves.

As already stated above, man is therefore not merely the image *bearer* of God (or Satan). The image of God is not something which man could simply relinquish or put down like a used tool. Man *is* the image of God, this is the core of his being. He can do nothing but stand in a



positive (or negative) relationship towards God. An a-religious (non-religious) human being is a fiction, a figment of the imagination.

Man's task is irrevocably bound to his being the image of God. Verse 26 clearly states this relationship: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and to rule ...'" The task or the mandate that God therefore gives man once He has blessed man is: "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" (verse 28). In Genesis 2:15 we further read that God also gave man the instruction to *take care* of creation. This theme is repeated in the rest of Scripture. Just think of the well-known Psalm 8 verses 6-9: "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas".

Increase, inhabit, rule, cultivate and care for: this is usually called the cultural mandate of man. It is part of God's plan for creation.

In the same way as we see our being image of God as inseparable from our humanity, we should also not see this cultural mandate as something extra or supplementary to man, as if God first made man and then gave him the command. No, God made man for the very reason that he could increase, cultivate and care for creation. This is how we have been made, it is "innate" to our humanity. We can be no other than cultivators and people who have to care. These concepts have to be understood within a very wide frame of reference. "Inhabit", for instance, does not simply mean that people should build houses for themselves, but also that they should investigate and understand the world in which God has placed them. In this way man also creates a "home" for himself. And in all these formative and caring activities we have to reveal the image of God. Stated differently: this should happen in obedience to Him and out of love for Him and his creatures.

The first command that God gave man is - remarkably - not to pray, build a church or to be involved in some or other "spiritual" activity, but rather to care for a garden, to rule over creation. And this was not simply a secondary task - it was *the* task given to man, his *encompassing* religious calling.

The command to man was also not simply a call to be an agriculturalist. The garden represented the *whole of* creation and the task of cultivating the garden and to take care of it therefore encompassed *all* human activity.

Many Christians unfortunately do not know this cultural mandate any more. They only remember the great missionary command of Christ, viz. to take the Gospel to all nations and languages (Matthew 28:19,20). Our calling as Christians, however, should not let us forget our cultural mandate, neglect it or (in contradistinction to the call to mission) give it a secondary place. No, we have to proclaim redemption in Christ *within* our cultural task. God's two commands (in Genesis and in Matthew) are basically the same - it is not a matter of the one being something secular (the cultural mandate) and the other (the call to mission work) something spiritual or sacred. (A detailed discussion of this two-sided command is given in chapter 11, section 11.2.5.)

God in his Word does not acknowledge our dualism regarding a spiritual as opposed to a material world. The very first chapters of the Bible indicate to us God's pleasure and joy in the creation of matter, plant and animal, for it is repeatedly stated that God found it good. From the rest of the Old Testament too one can infer that God was interested in food, hygiene, animals, agriculture and true religion. The "spiritual" was not considered as a separate sphere - it was a "complete" Gospel which encompassed the whole of Israel's existence.

In the subsequent chapters of Genesis and in the rest of the Bible we learn how man responded to God's cultural command. We read of the building of cities (4:17), the making of tents and the domesticating of animals (4:20), the manufacture of musical instruments (4:21), the mining and processing of metal (4:22), etc. The first chapters of Genesis therefore tell the story of people as the makers of history - some doing it in obedience (cf. Noah) and some in disobedience (cf. Cain).

The fall did not end the cultural mandate. Adam still had to till the soil, but now by the sweat of his brow, and Eve would still be the mother "of all the living", even if through pain and suffering. When God drowned the earth in the flood, He saved a remnant, and He renewed his covenant with Noah (9:8-17). With Noah the cultural mandate

continued: the earth could be repopulated (9:7) and as a farmer Noah could plant a vineyard (9:20).

Because God made man a creator of culture, he cannot cease carrying out his task, even though he fulfils it in imperfect ways. Because this is the way God has made us, we cannot even survive without being culturally busy!

With the advent of Christ this command is renewed, but also redeemed from the bonds of sin. We have become children of God again, his heirs (Romans 8:16,17). In Christ we are liberated, enabling us to fulfil our cultural tasks in obedience.

With the second coming of Christ the human cultural mandate will be perfected. Redeemed human history will be subsumed under the recreation, the new heaven and earth where Christ will reign as the unchallenged King (Revelation 11:15). Man will bring the treasures and the cultural wealth of nations into the holy city (21:24). In the second verse of this chapter the final reconciliation between God and His children take place, no longer in a *garden* (as in the beginning) but in a *city*, a product of human cultural activity. What was started in a wrong way in Babel (Genesis 11) will be represented in perfection here.

### **7.10.3 From the perspective of man as steward of God's creation**

The two Scriptural perspectives which have been discussed up to now and also the one following below are inseparable from each other. The perspective that God is the owner of all is linked to His command to man to accept the cultural mandate over all creation. And the cultural mandate essentially implies that man is the steward of God's creation. It is in reality *one* perspective which we have to work out in more and more detail.

Man's rule over God's creation should not be misunderstood. Man is not a substitute for God, but only His *servant*, not a master, but only a *steward*, not an owner, but only a *representative*, a *manager* or a *trustee*. This is an important concept in both the Old and the New Testament (cf. for example some of the parables of Christ). It involves a great deal, for example:

- God entrusts His whole creation to man.
- Man has to rule over creation in the way God would have Himself. (This does not mean that God has now stopped upholding creation.)
- Man has a double responsibility: towards God - for Whom he has to fulfil this mandate - and towards creation (matter, plant, animal and his fellowmen) over whom he has to rule. A steward does not have *less* responsibility than an owner - as we often tend to think! - but rather has a *greater* responsibility.
- Apart from the fact that man has to *cultivate* creation (to enable him to eat and live), he also has to *care for* it, to *conserve* it. This includes, among others, that he has to see to it that creation is not damaged, for example, through pollution or over-exploitation. It therefore means that man has to protect creation against all the terrible results of the fall - especially against man's own evil heart!
- This also implies that man may only use creation for his *real needs* and not for artificially created *selfish desires*.
- Our stewardship therefore does not only affect our fellowmen but *all* our other co-creatures. And stewardship means *service* to them.
- In recapitulation we can therefore state that God has appointed man in a very high office indeed - that of manager of His entire property. As an official of God man therefore has authority over the whole earth.

*Authority* presupposes *power*. God has given power to man, but unfortunately, the danger exists that man can abuse his power over creation and exploit the different creatures on earth to his own advantage. In such a case man tends to forget what the true meaning of authority is in the light of the Scriptures.

Authority presupposes that we will have *insight* into the *norms* that God has laid down for creation in all its rich diversity. Authority also means that we have to be willing to fulfil our God-given office as manager of creation in *obedience* to these norms. This further implies that we have to *protect* and *promote* the interests of the creatures over

which we have been appointed. And because we live in a world corrupted by sin, our task will also include the *struggle against evil*.

To sum up: office and authority in the Scriptures simply mean *service*. To be a manager therefore does not mean to *rule* to your own advantage, but rather to *serve* those over whom you have been appointed.

And because you are only the steward and not the owner, you owe God an account of *how* you fulfil this service. Stewardship, in a nutshell, is to be involved in God's creation in a responsible manner.

And how badly have we not failed in this task. For example, how many plant and animal species have not become extinct, and how many more are on the list of endangered species. Other examples are deforestation, erosion, overpopulation and pollution.

#### **7.10.4 From the perspective of God's norms for the whole of His creation**

God Himself has appointed us managers of His creation, therefore we can never be meticulous enough in fulfilling this mandate. For this reason it is important to say more about *how* we should fulfil this mandate: which criteria should be applied? Our responsibility towards creation is always a *normative* responsibility. God's norms are the guidelines, the directional pointers, the instructions for responsible cultural activity (Cf. chapter 6, section 6.4.).

We have previously directed attention to the fact that God not only brought creation into being, but also provided clear laws or ordinances according to which it should function. Man, however, is the only creature who can voluntarily obey or disobey these laws. As steward man has also received clear guidelines concerning how he has to fulfil his cultural mandate - it is not simply a matter of acting according to one's own insights, but according to God's guidelines.

As has been stated, the love commandment is the summary of the law. We can view the law as love in its fullness, while the different commandments are "analysed love". This implies that love of the neighbour and also of the rest of creation can be manifested in various

shapes or forms. Love is never something abstract but always very concrete.

It is clear that man's love towards the rest of God's creation (matter, plant and animal) will, for example, be different from the love between husband and wife. This means that man in a *unique manner* should embody his obedience to God's love commandment in this field. My son, for example, loves the old Alpha Romeo, my wife loves her potplants and my daughter spoils her dog.

Perhaps love towards the many other creatures who cannot protect themselves against man and are not capable of caring for themselves should be embodied by way of *caring* and *protection*. In Proverbs 12:10 both obedience and disobedience are outlined in terms of this norm: "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel".

Ethically correct actions towards matter, plant and animal occur when man acts in *solidarity* with them and shows *respect* to them. Immoral actions, on the other hand, occur when man would, without any respect, exploit and abuse them to his own advantage. In this case the ethical norm would be: "Protect creation and treat it with respect!"

## **7.11 CONCLUSION: ON THE WAY TO A NEW AFRICA**

In the simple narrative poem *The blind men and the elephant* which you probably all know, a great deal of truth is encompassed. The story (for those who have not heard it) involves the following: Six blind men from Indostan, eager to learn, for the first time have the opportunity to meet with a wonderful animal, an elephant.

The first one lands against the wide and solid side of the animal, and his conclusion is: an elephant is a wall. The second man touches one of the rare animal's long tusks and comes to the conclusion that the elephant is (very much like) a spear. The third one grasps the elephant's trunk, and finds that there is a definite similarity with a snake. The next touches one of the hard, rough legs, and cannot think of anything other than a tree trunk. When the fifth has his turn, he feels an ear, and comes to the conclusion that not even the blindest man will

not agree that an elephant is a fan. The last blind man of Indostan grasps hold of the tail, and decides that an elephant is simply a rope.

Then follows a long discussion about what an elephant really is. None of the six can be convinced of the incorrectness of his conclusions. And if this is true of an elephant, how much truer would it not be of our study of the human being!

The Xhosa proverb is also applicable in this case: "If you want to measure a deep pool, you need a long stick".

When we study God's creation, we should never be without an attitude of reverence. God's creation is so variegated and it has so many dimensions which cannot be encompassed and penetrated by the human intellect. Modesty and humility - even embarrassment - are suitable if we try to understand the crown of His creation, man. In this spirit one could say that we have come to the following conclusions from the foregoing:

The human being, (1) man and woman, is (2) a complex and dynamic configuration of (3) a variety of aspects or functions (4) religiously directed in all his/her thoughts and actions, (5) the image of God who has to live in obedience to God's laws, is (6) called to work as steward in God's creation, as (7) a redeemed sinner in Christ, has to fight against the brokenness in the world, (8) has to love his/her fellow man/woman like him-/herself and (in the light of what will also be said in the following chapter) (9) has to know his/her duties within the various societal relationships and (10) execute his/her office, authority and power within these relationships with insight and responsibility, motivated by service.

The central idea with which this chapter began, should also be adhered to at the end: being human is glorious, an unfathomably rich *gift* from God. But at the same time, in the same breath, it is a tremendous, never-to-be completed *duty*.

If this view of man could be visibly embodied in our lives, I see a brand new Africa on the way!

\* \* \*

The last human characteristic discussed in detail in this chapter was man as creator of culture. The next chapter will concentrate on the result of man's cultural activity - culture itself. It will draw the attention to the fact that a variety of cultures exist, how difficult it is to understand each other's cultures, but also the necessity of cooperation between African and Western culture.



## Chapter 8

# CULTURAL PLURALITY IN AFRICA

In two previous chapters we have already discussed culture in more general terms. In chapter 2 (section 2.2) it was indicated that culture is an all-inclusive term for the way people relate to and cope with the realities they encounter in their everyday lives. It concerns the way we make sense of our lives. It is therefore not something practised only in grand theatres by an elite. It is reflected in our behaviour, customs, values, language, art, technology - even the way in which we eat, work and relax. In chapter 7 (section 7.9) we had a glimpse of what traditional African (communalist) culture looks like, and in the same chapter (section 7.10) a few Biblical guidelines for cultural activity were given.

The topic that will be discussed in this chapter is cultural plurality and cooperation in Africa. We are going to do the following:

- give a few examples of cultural differences;
- make an extensive comparison between traditional African and modern Western culture;
- look at one of the characteristics of traditional African culture in greater detail;
- try to determine the reason for the strong collective consciousness among African people;
- spend some time on the encounter and cooperation between African and Western culture in South Africa.

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION: A FEW EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Most of us are aware of cultural differences. But to bring the point home clearly a few examples could be valuable. We will use the same cultural feature but will indicate how the assumptions and conclusions in Africa and in the West can be totally different.

- *Buying*, Westerners will assume, is an impersonal economic transaction and their conclusion will therefore be that prices are fixed. One is not really interested in the person (seller) and therefore wants to

get it over with as quickly as possible. Africans (and also people in Asia) however, view buying as a social person-to-person transaction and therefore they will take their time to dicker over the price in order to establish a personal relationship between buyer and seller.

- *Age* is undesirable and dreaded in the West, and therefore old people are unwanted, while in traditional Africa exactly the opposite is the case: age is desirable and old people are revered. *Youth*, on the other hand, is desirable in the West and therefore one has to look and act in a youthful way. In traditional Africa, however, youth is tolerated because it will be overcome and one therefore has to prove oneself to be mature!
- In the West a *family* is centred around the spouses whose compatibility is all-important. In traditional Africa it is centred around the children and the mother-child relationship is of paramount importance.
- *Education* in the West is primarily formal, outside the home, teacher-centred and specialist-oriented. In rural Africa it is primarily in the home, learner-centred and discipleship-oriented (learn by doing).
- A last example is to be found in the different assumptions and conclusions in the case of *rapid change*. In the West this will be evaluated positively, it is good because it indicates progress. The conclusion will therefore be that change and innovation should be encouraged. In traditional Africa the assumption is that it is a threat to security and it is concluded that conservatism should be valued because it guarantees stability.

Many more interesting examples, for instance the different meanings of clothing, kissing etc. could be mentioned, but the above will be sufficient to clarify our point regarding cultural differences.

## **8.2 A PROVISIONAL COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN CULTURE AND WESTERN CULTURE**

Before looking closely at the following comparison, I invite the reader first to read the following comments carefully:

- The comparison offers a ten-minute, quick journey through the mind of the traditional African and the Westerner - it is therefore incomplete.
- Although based on a great deal of reading and observation, it is still preliminary - it is therefore intended for discussion, change, supplementation and greater precision.
- At times the contrasts between the two cultures are deliberately exaggerated in order to clarify the typical differences. One should therefore guard against stereotyping. (It is even possible that some Westerners will fit fully into my characterisation of the African and vice versa!)
- The intention is to contribute to a better understanding and a reciprocal enrichment of the two cultures, and is therefore not to propagate apartheid and incite conflict. Better mutual understanding can of course also be effected by directing the attention to the generally human similarities between Africans and Westerners. (In South Africa it is essential to realize that, in spite of cultural differences, we are all human beings.) Should one stop at this point, however, the mutual understanding could be quite superficial.
- Acculturation which has already occurred between the two cultures and has caused differences to become less sharply outlined, has not been included in this comparison, so that it will not coincide fully with the present realities. It is, however, a proven fact that the deeper traits of a culture do not disappear very quickly, but can keep on functioning for generations.
- Both the concepts "African culture" and "Western culture" imply great generalisation - the internal diversity in both cultures is thus not reflected in this scheme.
- Neither of the two cultures should serve as a criterion for the Christian. Although Western culture has for a long time been influenced by Christianity, important Biblical values are absent today. In its turn (traditional) African culture testifies to the fact that a great deal of God's creational revelation has been absorbed, even though the revelation of the Bible has not always been known. Neither of the two

cultures may therefore be idealised uncritically or be completely rejected in an over-critical stance.

- My intention is especially, as a white African with a predominantly Western educational background, to understand African culture better. For this reason I am taking it as a point of departure, comparing it with Western culture.
- It is difficult to decide which "keyhole" to use to take a peep at African culture. I have chosen the spiritual world because it seems to me that it plays a key role in the traditional mode of African thought.
- I acknowledge that my approach is not neutral - this can never be - but that the whole scheme attests to my Western approach and mode of thought. Science always generalizes. In concrete reality one would therefore seldom find anybody who fits into this scheme completely.

## **AFRICAN CULTURE**

### **1. Spiritual world very real and important, because it determines and balances the physical world**

The spiritual world includes, among others: things with magical power, ancestors, various divinities, as well as the ultimate deity, who is the creator, but who does not really involve himself with the world, cannot be directly approached or served and who also does not demand direct accountability.

#### **Implications:**

1.1 Man is afraid of spiritual forces.

## **WESTERN CULTURE**

### **1. Natural-physical world real and important - spiritual world is simply superstition**

At times there are still vestiges of the worship of the God of the Bible. Large-scale secularism, which does not exclude new gods (such as idolatry of progress, prosperity, science and technology) is, however, pre-dominant.

#### **Implications:**

1.1 Man involves himself with nature.

1.2 Man has to determine what the spiritual forces are in whose power one is, and has to get to know the spiritual laws which govern him. *Example*: If there are no children in a marriage, spiritual reasons are sought - e.g. somebody has cast a spell on one through magical practices.

1.3 Man has to protect himself against all sorts of spiritual forces through the use, for example, of all sorts of potions.

1.4 The emphasis is on the understanding of *constants*.

1.5 Safeguarding occurs through *conformity* or *adjustment* to the spiritual world, and not through change.

1.6 Culture therefore does not manifest much development or dynamism - it even tends towards the fatalistic.

1.2 Man must get to know nature and natural laws in order to protect himself and make life more pleasant. *Example*: If a couple cannot have children, medical science has to determine the physiological reasons for this.

1.3 Domination over (physical) nature means protection.

1.4 The emphasis is on the understanding of *change* and flux in nature.

1.5 Man controls his environment by *changing* it through knowledge of the natural laws.

1.6 Ongoing change and development characterise culture.

**2. Limited, hierarchically-ordered life force with a predetermined position (and life force) within which each individual fits**

**Implications:**

2.1 The whole cosmos is an integrated unity and this cosmic balance or harmony should be protected/restored.

2.2 There is little room and encouragement for individual initiative. (If man moves out of his predetermined position, he disturbs the balance.)

2.3 A strongly holistic but static culture.

**3. Holistic-religious orientation**

Religion is an inherent part of one, like one's *skin*.

**Implications:**

3.1 The whole of life (birth, marriage, death, agriculture, stock farming, trading, war, etc.) is religiously determined.

**2. Unlimited, non-hierarchically ordered philosophy of power (for example, science, technology, organisation) without individual limitations**

**Implications:**

2.1 The cosmos is taken apart and reconstructed by man, with resultant disintegration.

2.2 Individual initiative is allowed and encouraged.

2.3 A fragmented but dynamic culture.

**3. Dualistic religious orientation**

Religion is like *clothes* that one can put on or take off at will.

**Implications:**

3.1 Life is divided into two areas: the secular opposed to the sacred, the profane against the holy, the material against the spiritual, the "ordinary" as opposed to the religious.

3.2 The traditional African is described as "incurably" or even "notoriously" religious. (Should one be clever enough, one can deceive God - this a secular trait.)

**4. Spiral-shaped vision of history**

History is linked to the origin. The nearer one comes to the origin, the more perfect, holy, strong and wise one is. The further one moves away from it, the less perfect, holy, strong and wise one is.

For this reason there are all sorts of legends, myths, ceremonies and rites to make the past live again, to bring back to the present the powerful, perfect, original period, to enable man in the present to be strong and healthy.

The direction is therefore from the present to the past. History is a continuous cyclical repetition.

**Implications:**

4.1 The good is locked up in the past and not in the present.

4.2 There is little sense and meaning in the future - life does not become better, but rather worse.

3.2 The average Westerner has a schizophrenic religious life and tends strongly in the direction of total secularism (so-called irreligious attitude).

**4. Linear vision of history**

History does not only have an origin but is developing in the direction of a purpose. The purpose at which history is aimed is more important than the origin.

The commemoration of historic events can serve as instruction and inspiration for the present, but these events do not have the same powerful meaning that it has in traditional African culture.

The direction is definitely away from the past to the present and to the future. History shows a linear development.

**Implications:**

4.1 The past is not perfect, but "primitive".

4.2 History has sense and meaning - the best is yet to come, because life is getting better all the time.

4.3 The future brings nothing new, and man also may not change the things of the past. (For example, change to a better type of hoe, because the present one was invented by the ancestors.)

4.4 There is therefore little change, development and progress - a static culture.

4.5 Age is respected and the aged are cared for at home. This is because the older one is, the nearer one is to original time and thus the wiser, with greater authority. Authority is therefore a given and is not acquired.

## **5. Two-dimensional time perspective**

A long past which continually "swallows" the present (today becomes yesterday) with a very limited future.

### **Implications:**

5.1 A limited (or no?) eschatological vision. Or an inverted eschatology: the African looks "forward" to joining the past (the ancestors).

5.2 Lives in the present but oriented to the past, because the best things are in the past.

4.3 The future brings that which is new, and man should therefore not cling to the old or remain caught in it.

4.4 Large-scale renewal, progress - dynamic culture.

4.5 Old people are pitied and placed in old-age homes outside the mainstream of the community. (Youth is the "golden time"). Authority is something which is attained through ability, and is not automatically achieved through old age.

## **5. Three-dimensional time perspective**

Time moves in the opposite direction: from the past across the present to the future (today becomes tomorrow).

### **Implications:**

5.1 Eschatology (future perspective) is very important. Looks forward to the future when the past will be irrevocably the past.

5.2 Lives in the present but is directed to the future (what is past, is past), because the best is still to come.



5.3 Great respect for and bound to traditions, habits and customs, and an unwillingness to leave the old paths and to change.

5.4 Order and continuity are regarded as very important.

5.5 Not too worried about tomorrow.

5.6 Relaxed attitude towards life: slowly but surely. (Tomorrow is another day!)

5.7 Does not mind waiting, will *make* time for interaction with others (cf. point 6 about man-centredness).

5.8 Lack of motivation, because what is enough for today is enough (cf. subsistence farming, for example).

## **6. Communalism (NB: not communism or socialism)**

First the community, then the individual. (I am because we are. I share in the community, therefore I exist.)

This is linked to the African's conception of the relation between blood and life. All my blood relations are my brothers. If my "brother/sister" is killed, my own blood, as it were, is spilt.

5.3 The tradition is easily changed, with dedication to the new.

5.4 Continuity is not so important.

5.5 Future planning is very important.

5.6 Tense attitude to life: hurry up! (It should have been done yesterday!)

5.7 Highly aware of time, time *has to be used* and not wasted (clock-orientated).

5.8 Strives towards a higher standard of living (for example commercial farming).

## **6. Individualism**

First the individual, then the community or social relationships. (We are, because I am. The community exist, because it is constituted by individuals.)

Blood-relationships are of less importance for the Westerner.

## Implications:

- 6.1 Inclusive attitude.
- 6.2 Security.
- 6.3 Intense, strong personal relationships.
- 6.4 Group pressure strong.
- 6.5 Individual initiative is not appreciated or encouraged - happy human relations are a priority.
- 6.6 Co-operation.
- 6.7 Great degree of uniformity.
- 6.8 *Duties* towards the community are emphasised.
- 6.9 The law has to restore social harmony - *restitution* is important.
- 6.10 Shares with others readily, generosity. (Venda proverb: Children share the head of a locust.)
- 6.11 Eating is mainly a social event with a view to sharing food and discussion.

## Implications:

- 6.1 Exclusive attitude.
- 6.2 Loneliness.
- 6.3 Casual, impersonal interpersonal relationships.
- 6.4 The opinion of the group is not so important.
- 6.5 Individual initiative is highly regarded - personal achievement is more important than attention to the community.
- 6.6 Competition.
- 6.7 Individual differences are preferred.
- 6.8 The *rights* of the individual are stressed.
- 6.9 The law has to determine which individual is guilty/innocent - *punishment* is important, even though it causes bitterness at times.
- 6.10 Acquisition for personal use, the danger of materialism.
- 6.11 Eating is mainly directed at acquiring new energy.

6.12 Peaceful co-existence is highly regarded.

6.13 Dialogue: decisions have to be taken with the approval of the group, and everybody has the opportunity to air views.

6.14 Modesty, compliance, pliability, willingness to compromise - character traits which lead to peaceful co-existence with one's fellow man (Westerners see this perhaps as a sign of dishonesty.)

6.15 More casual and *indirect* way to ask and to answer questions. Would rather keep quiet than disturb relationships. Prefers to give the answer one thinks the other would like to hear.

6.16 Values such as friendliness, helpfulness, hospitality, a forgiving nature, patience and brotherliness are highly regarded.

6.17 Poverty means that one does not have children or does not belong to a family.

6.18 *People* are important.

6.20 A man-centred culture: *be available* to others.

6.12 Confrontation is not avoided at all costs.

6.13 Monologue: decisions are often taken individually or by a few - don't waste time through endless discussions!

6.14 Honesty, frankness, incorruptibility, steadfastness and perseverance - all individual virtues. (The African might, as a result of these, regard the Westerner as rude.)

6.15 More *direct* questions and answers. If necessary, somebody is told the unmitigated truth - even if it hurts and is injurious to relationships.

6.16 Formality, self-sufficiency, etc. are highly regarded.

6.17 Poverty is an indication that one (as an individual) does not have a (large) house, (expensive) car and (huge) salary.

6.18 *Things* are important (possessions, buildings, machines).

6.20 A task-oriented culture: *do* something for others.

6.21 Builds relationships by greeting people.

6.22 Prefers to do things *together*.

6.23 It is not fitting to work for individual status - the norm is group status. (Good social character implies acceptance and guarantees status.)

6.24 Salvation is acceptance by the group.

6.25 Responsibility is easily shifted onto the community - and everybody's responsibility easily becomes nobody's!

6.26 Group egoism.

6.27 Ethnic or tribal ethics or morality. Right means defending your own group and wrong means to sin against your own group. (To kill an outsider is not regarded as murder but as a heroic deed.)

6.28 Shame plays a more important role than guilt in ethics. (It is important that people should not know that you did wrong, so that your public image should not be damaged.)

6.21 Obtains information in greeting someone.

6.22 Prefers doing something yourself, *on your own*.

6.23 Strives for individual achievement and excellence. (For this reason academic qualifications can provide status).

6.24 A more individualistic concept of happiness and therefore also of the Biblical concept of salvation.

6.25 Individual responsibility is emphasised.

6.26 Ordinary, individual egoism.

6.27 More universal ethics: any transgression against other individuals is therefore wrong.

6.28 Guilt is perhaps more important than a sense of shame. (Personal guilt is felt even though nobody else knows about it.)

6.29 Greater tolerance towards and easier acceptance of others' viewpoints and religions.

6.30 Marriage is compulsory for all, and intended in the first place to engender children.

6.31 Strong bonds with the extended family (many brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers).

6.32 More personal communication by way of the spoken word (cf. riddles, proverbs, poetry, stories, dramas and songs). Thus: oral tradition, strongly developed memory, danger of parroting in study.

## 7. Style of thought

\* Direct experience foremost (situation-experiencing).

\* Concrete-practical-synthetically inclined.

\* Sensitively-emotional.

\* Both-and.

6.29 More intolerant - something is either true or false.

6.30 Not such strong pressure to marry, and marriage is in the first place intended for the sake of the couple.

6.31 Slacker bonds with a nuclear, more mobile family.

6.32 More impersonal modes of communication by means of the written, printed word and electronic media.

## 7. Mode of thought

\* Systematic reconnaissance important (problem-solving).

\* Abstract-theoretical-analytically inclined.

\* Cerebrally-intellectualist.

\* Either-or.

The implications of all this emerge clearly from the differences between African and Western languages and modes of language usage.

Before we have a detailed look at African communalism, one example will be sufficient to illustrate the important and far-reaching implications of our comparison between traditional African and Western culture.

Development is one of the main priorities of our continent. In the past, however, not much attention was paid to the fact that development presupposes underlying views of man, society, time, history, nature and land. Development therefore does not have the same meaning for the African as for the Westerner.

The Western idea of development is dominated by the following presuppositions: (1) *Progress*, e.g. immediate growth in quantifiable benefits. Land and labour also become marketable commodities. (2) *Mastery over nature*, e.g. large-scale technology to extract mineral and other resources. (3) *Material and economic growth*, (4) *Europeanisation* of the indigenous people and (5) an *individualistic* approach.

If the term *development* has any meaning for the African, it must be a multi-dimensional concept including not only economic and technological, but also cultural, communal, political and spiritual growth. It has to foster self-esteem, dignity and greater freedom.

The wrong paradigm or normative framework for development that does not take the cultural differences between Africa and the West into account may therefore result in *underdevelopment*!

### 8.3 AFRICAN COMMUNALISM

Some heated debates have occurred in the past about what could be called the "essence" or "mother idea" of the traditional African culture and worldview. In the above comparison we have taken the spirit world as "point of entry". Other people will consider other aspects of traditional African culture as of more importance. An example could be the first book on African philosophy written already in 1946 by father P. Tempels (published in English in 1953).

Tempels was the first person to maintain that the basic idea of African people (in the erstwhile Congo, where he was a missionary) is that the whole of reality is in fact a conjuncture or movement of forces. Where the old Greeks would have asked what the essence or nature of a thing was, the traditional African would want to know what force it exhibits. Man's vital force (French: *force vitale*, Afrikaans: *lewenskrag/sterkte*, perhaps better rendered as *vital strength/energy*?) can be increased or

decreased. His aim in life is to attain the maximum amount of hierarchically ordered vital strength allowed to him in his society. To tie in at the correct place in the whole hierarchy of forces (God, forefathers, chief, father, animals, plants, inanimate things) means strength.

If Paul could have known Africa, 1 Corinthians 1:22-23 might have sounded like this: "For the Jews require a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom and the *African seeks strength*, but we preach Christ crucified".

Keeping in mind that it may be impossible to determine a "central idea" in the traditional African worldview, we leave this issue to concentrate on something more tangible. There is one aspect of traditional African culture which is of the utmost importance to grasp the "African mind", and that is its communalist or collective consciousness already mentioned in chapter 7, section 7.9.1-7.9.4.. In the comparison on the previous pages (section 8.2) we only mentioned very briefly 32 implications of this dominant feature of African culture. We will therefore have to spend more time on it in this and the following section (8.4). It is so important, however, that it will be a recurring theme also in subsequent chapters (for instance 9 and 10).

### **8.3.1 Man as a communal being**

Creation is man-centred and man is socially directed. Tempels already noticed this: "The created universe is centred on man" (1953:43) and "Man is the supreme force, the most powerful among created beings" (Ibid.:64). Even while God is the Origin or the Creator of reality, man takes the central, most important place in creation.

But, "for the Bantu, man never appears in fact as an isolated individual, as an independent entity. Every man, every individual, forms a link in the chain of vital forces, a living link, active and passive, joined from above to the ascending line of his ancestry and sustaining below him the line of his descendants ... the Bantu is quite unable to conceive an individual apart from his relationship ..." (1953:71,72).

Subsequent to Tempels, many researchers have confirmed and reconfirmed this. I mention as a passing example only Marguerite Kraft's (1978) study on the Kamwe in Northeast Nigeria: "... the

Kamwe person, according to tradition, has no identity apart from his family - he reflects his family, he is obliged to his family, and he depends on his family ... The family unit is the 'glasses' through which the world is seen" (Ibid.:13). And Mbiti (1970:14), an African, puts it as follows: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am".

### 8.3.2 A comparison with Western styles of thought

If we cursorily compare the traditional African view with the Western way of thought, the uniqueness of the first will emerge more clearly. According to the Westerner man is born as man; but according to the African man *is* not man, he *becomes* man through a gradual process of integration into society. In the West man is defined especially as an individual; in Africa man is seen from the perspective of the community. Western thought moves from various individuals to a view of society; the direction of the traditional African's thought is precisely the opposite: society is the point of departure. One could also say that the West often has mere *collections* of individuals as against Africa's true *communities*. Westerners often agglomerate in a societal structure simply out of individual, selfish motives, because this will enable them to attain things that they would not be capable of if they were simply separated individuals. The *our* is an addition, while this is an essential and innate component for the African.

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

### 8.3.3 The ideal man according to the African worldview

This tendency has the result that virtues of sharing and compassion are regarded very highly in Africa. The individual also has a social



commitment to share with others what he has. Stinginess is anti-social and thus one of the greatest imaginable sins. One seldom hears the traditional African saying that "this is *my* land", or "*my* cattle". Usually they will say that "this is *our* land" or "*our* goats".

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

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

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

#### **8.3.4 An appreciation of man for his own sake**

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

K. Kaunda (1966:22-32), former President of Zambia, mentions the following characteristics of his people: "(1) we enjoy people for their

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

A last example of which I personally have had experience in church council meetings, is that important decisions are always taken in concert. A Westerner does not hesitate to make a quick decision by himself. Africans do something like that *together* - they talk about a matter until everybody agrees, never mind how long it takes. Decisions are not simply taken by means of a majority vote.

### **8.3.5 God talked to Africa long before the missionaries came**

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

The big question that presents itself is how long this traditional African view of man will still survive. What is certain is that it will not easily become extinct. Whoever looks closely can see examples of this daily. Even Africans who have for years worked in an isolated, individual and in many ways Western fashion in factories and mines can suddenly be overwhelmed by an irresistible homesickness to return to the security and the solidarity of their tribal home.

### **8.3.6 The shadows of communalism**

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

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

### **8.3.7 Envy, the ethics of shame, keeping quiet and unreliability**

Envy is therefore a very general phenomenon in Africa. (Somebody once referred to it as the "national evil" in a country like Malawi.) As long as someone gains his riches through honest, hard work, a Westerner will usually not have many problems with him. The traditional African does not always realize that greater wealth is mostly

the result of hard work. This kind of envy undoubtedly hinders development and progress.

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

People are important, but people (whether the individual or the community) cannot be the criterion. This unfortunately happens in Africa. The fact is that one cannot live in harmony at all costs simply to avoid making waves. The reasons why one refrains from doing wrong should not simply be shame when one's faults come into the open, causing one to lose one's position in society. A good example of this is that personal relationships are often more important for an African than is the truth. A Westerner feels that he has the right to speak the truth. If an African realizes that speaking the truth is going to cause trouble and incite people to hostility and hatred, he will rather keep quiet. To say to somebody's face: "You are lying!" is a great sin. Therefore you simply remain quiet or you pretend to believe what he is saying. You will say to someone who wishes to drive with you that you will pick him up tomorrow - rather than to say that he cannot come with you. Another example: if your father-in-law asks for a goat, you dare not say directly that you do not wish to give it to him. If he enquires again later, you simply say that you are still looking for a goat! It is much more important to respect people than to speak the truth. Fear of trouble often makes Africans say *yes* when they mean *no*.

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

### 8.3.8 A form of idolisation

An African Christian, T. Adeyemo, reveals the negative side of African communalism unequivocally when he comes to the conclusion in his *Salvation in African tradition* (1979) that salvation and blessedness for

the African (even Christians among them) often mean acceptance by society. Another researcher does not hesitate to say: "Good group liaison is to me the central core of the urban African's view of life, and constitutes his actual idol, to which he is enslaved ..." In contrast with the romantic idealising of this communal awareness (for example, "Only the African can really know what the communion of the holy means") he postulates that the church should take note of this, and that churches will have to be much more strongly cohesive groups in order to obtain the necessary attraction, but the churches should also be keenly aware of the fact that traditional communalism is by nature (group) egoism, and differs radically from the true communion of Christians.

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

#### **8.4 POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE STRONG COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG AFRICAN PEOPLE**

When we discussed the nature, structure and functions of a worldview (cf. chapter 3) we indicated a two-way traffic between worldview (the core of culture) on the one side and the realities of life on the other side. Our worldview determines the way in which we see reality, but the realities of every day life also influence our worldview. Perception shapes experience and experience shapes perception! A philosopher would like to emphasise the influence of a worldview on one's day-to-day behaviour. An anthropologist would stress the opposite direction: how concrete circumstances shape your worldview.

J.C. Kotzé (1990) is such an anthropologist, who worked closely with (black) Africans in South Africa. He speaks of a pervasive collective consciousness overriding the differences in language, tradition, education, occupation and creed amongst black people. This collective consciousness (what we have up till now indicated as communalism) is, according to Kotzé, derived from a common experience. And the common experience is general and total deprivation: low income,

unemployment, lack of social stability (in terms of marital instability in the family), lack of residential stability (because of, for instance, migrant labour), malnutrition, poor health, little or no education. In other words total (material, physical, social and intellectual) insecurity as a consequence of which an individual is totally dependent on the rest of the community.

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

People therefore think and behave in the way they do mainly as a result of their experience. People who differ in experience will also differ in the ways they react to the same situation, because they interpret the meaning of the situation differently. "As such collective (like individualistic) consciousness is an all-inclusive, omnipresent, subconscious worldview - the way people view the world, life, nature, people, themselves. It determines, for instance, how one defines human nature, masculinity and femininity, authority, love, justice and other ingredients of life" (op. cit. p. 53). Even values, therefore, cannot be changed fundamentally, independent of the conditions which cause them.

Kotzé mentions interesting examples of how African people in remote rural villages, a neighbourhood in Soweto or in a small black township experience and know life as members of a group. For the sake of mere survival one has to depend on and cooperate with others in the same situation of deprivation. Because people with a collective consciousness are far less aware of themselves as individuals, their ego's or personal selves are far less of an issue. They are less aware of themselves because they are (in comparison with individualists) acutely aware of others. There is a far greater perceptual fusion between one's own person and those of others.

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

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

- Persons with c.c. are socially open, whereas persons with i.c. are socially closed.
- Persons with c.c. are inter-individually (that is, in private situations) closed, while persons with i.c. are open in inter-individual, private situations.
- Persons (particularly males) with c.c. in various emotional ways constantly seek physical contact with members of the same sex, while males with i.c. shun it.
- By reason of the fusion between the self and the others, persons with c.c. require far less physical space than persons with an i.c.
- Communities characterised by c.c. require collective democracy, consensual procedures and consensus, whereas people with i.c. regularly demand their individual democratic rights.
- In communities dominated by c.c. adjudication is a matter of reconciliation, while the legal process in societies dominated by i.c. is clinically geared to establish right or wrong, innocence or guilt.
- Persons with c.c. are forced to divide their loyalty between the group or community and the workplace, whereas persons with i.c. subordinate group loyalty to professional loyalty.
- C.c. creates an insatiable need for people and social situations; i.c. creates an acute need to escape from people at times.
- C.c. defines time socially and in terms of the immediate present, while i.c. defines time in terms of economic surplus and the future.
- People with c.c. view a handshake as a friendly message of goodwill and brotherhood and it should therefore not be too forceful or

aggressive, whereas people with i.c. greet with a firm grip, looking each other boldly in the eye.

This also has implications for the kinds of virtues that are inculcated from childhood and are highly valued in African societies. Ruch and Anyanwu (1984:140) arrange the typical African virtues in the following three categories:

- *"Self-control and humility:* prudence, patience, moderation and politeness are the clearest expressions of this self-control, and incidentally those which most often exasperate Westerners. It is the old *in medio stat virtus*: no precipitation, no undue anxiety; don't do or say anything which you might regret or which might destroy the always precarious harmony of the group ...
- *Faithfulness in friendship:* Many a Western employer considers it a breach of faith when one of his African employees suddenly breaks his contract and goes back home. For the African a signed piece of paper is not necessarily a promise. Faithfulness assumes a bilateral relationship of personal friendship, of empathy, of family relationship ... etc. It is not necessarily sealed by legal formalities which do not add anything essential to it. Here too one sees the radical difference between the cold, rationalistic and legalistic West and the warmheartedness which ideally ought to dominate personal interrelationships in African societies.

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

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



## **8.5 THE ENCOUNTER AND COOPERATION BETWEEN AFRICAN CULTURE AND WESTERN CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In the preceding part of this chapter we have been trying mainly to understand cultural plurality by contrasting African and Western culture, emphasising their difference. This was necessary, because one has to understand the differences and not simply respond emotionally. But if the differences are identified and understood, a second step should be taken: cooperation between cultures. This is the theme of the final section of this chapter. We use as an example the South African situation, because I am well acquainted with it. A very popular topic of discussion at the moment is the possibility of basic shared or common cultural values (between Africa and the West) in a future South Africa.

The decline of apartheid for the first time makes a real meeting of cultures in South Africa possible. Inter-cultural contact can also really help speed up the process of the dismantling of apartheid. It is a general truism in South Africa that whites and blacks in the country know and understand each other well, having lived together in the country for 350 years, but I have always doubted this, and I think with good reason.

A second introductory remark is that I am writing here as a white South African. You will note that in this section I often refer to "us" and then most of the time mean the Western whites in South Africa. I am doing this definitely not because I am of the opinion that only whites have a task in South Africa; also I do not consider myself qualified to speak on behalf of the people of other cultures in South Africa in outlining our task in the new South Africa, as that would be tantamount to neo-apartheid or paternalism. It is precisely because I have a high regard for the black citizens of our country that I know they are capable of speaking for themselves, and therefore I will refrain from doing so.

### **8.5.1 Obstacles on the way to inter-cultural contact**

As a white, Afrikaans-speaking South African, I am therefore directing my message primarily at my fellow white South Africans. Black South Africans have experienced the situation differently and will therefore have a different message for their people.

For you as outsiders it might seem incomprehensible if I put it like this, but I do hope that it will become clear in the course of this section that we in South Africa are caught up in two separate experiential worlds. Our future task is precisely not to remain captive. But because I know my fellow whites better than my black fellow South Africans, I can only speak freely to them.

In spite of this possibly disappointing limitation I hope that something of a more universal message will emerge.

I see two self-imposed obstacles towards inter-cultural contact, namely:

\* *The whites rob other South Africans and Africans of their human dignity*

Black people in South Africa and elsewhere are not opposed to the white *people* of South Africa but to the *political system*. Fortunately more and more whites in South Africa are beginning to realize that this policy is both wrong in principle (on Biblical grounds) and cannot succeed in terms of practicalities. The people of Africa - and the rest of the world - hate apartheid. The simple reason for this is that it robs black people of their human dignity.

I have had the privilege of being in close contact with black people in many African countries, from simple farm labourers to academics and even a person like Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, the former president of Zambia. And the key in these contacts has always been an acknowledgement of the human dignity of people.

It is essential that all whites in South Africa should get to know this secret if it is our earnest desire to reach out to our fellow black countrymen specifically and the rest of Africa in general. In the absence of this attitude we will still, deep in our hearts, retain a spirit of superiority towards our fellow Africans, and not be able to reach out.

By the way, I am convinced that most - if not all - human beings are at heart racists because of ethnic and cultural differences. Two types may however be distinguished. The one will be aware of his/her ethnic/cultural prejudices and struggle against them daily in order to get

rid of them. The other person does not acknowledge his wrong attitudes and consequently does not try to eliminate them from his mind.

\* *The whites in South Africa do not know who they are*

Apart from our political policy, there is a second obstacle in our way, and this also has to do with us. We do not know exactly who we are. And if one wants to open up and reach out honestly (which means that one also wishes to give *oneself* and not only *something of oneself*), then one has to know oneself, and not be the victim of an identity crisis.

Many black people in South Africa are suffering from an identity crisis because they cannot choose between their traditional religion and culture, and Christianity and Western culture (cf. chapter 2 above). Although we do not notice this in ourselves, or do not wish to acknowledge it, the same is true of us: we have the same dilemma as to whether we are Westerners or Africans - or both.

Our name (Afrika-ners) and our language (Afrika-ans) do indicate that we are of this continent. Yet many of us feel ourselves to be more European than African. One sees this in the world picture of many white South Africans. The world for them consists of South Africa itself, stretching as it does to the Limpopo River in the north. From there on it is a vast blank up to the Mediterranean where Europe begins and "our friends" live.

There is not only the blankness of Africa, however. Many of us also have a blind spot with regard to South Africa itself. We live in our little white world - much like Alice in Wonderland - and we know very little, if anything, of black South Africa. We therefore live, as it were, like aliens not only on our own continent but in our own country as well.

We have to eliminate the blind spots in our image of Africa. Personally I have had the privilege of travelling and lecturing in Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Zaire and Kenya and to have visited some of the large black townships in our own country. One then has the feeling of travelling from an unreality (a little piece of [white] Europe in Africa) to the reality: one discovers the larger African reality. And one finds out that South Africa is much

larger than the white "wonderland". Naturally this is accompanied by a rather formidable culture shock, but this is essential, because one cannot always be a stranger in one's own environment, and be happy.

I return to the question: Who are we as whites exactly? As long as we simply exist as Europeans *in* Africa, we will be aliens. We have to become Europeans *of* Africa. We are (Euro-)Africans because (1) we cannot deny our Western roots, and at the same time, (2) we cannot detach ourselves from Africa. As there are Africans that are yellow, brown or black, so there are us white Africans.

### **8.5.2 Possible reactions from the side of whites counter-productive to cultural contact**

The possible reactions which I mention here have not been fabricated. We can learn a great deal from what happened after independence in other African countries with white minority populations.

\* *Some will wish to escape into the past*

Black Africans would possibly also want to escape back into the original "romantic" Africa, with the wide unpopulated plains where man and animal lived in harmony with nature. That time has passed for ever, however, and has been replaced in many cases by over-populated cities, squatter camps, unemployment, poverty, disease and famine.

White Africans would possibly like to escape to their countries of origin in Europe, but most of them have been away for too long. And those who do not see South Africa as their fatherland any longer should rather get out as soon as possible, because we have no need in times such as these for temporary fortune-seekers. Even less do we have a need for people who avidly run to the past, having turned their backs to the future!

\* *Others will wish to retreat into their own national groups*

They will want to return to the fairytale in which they lived for so long as whites - in a land of milk and honey, a country and society which had been created almost exclusively for their advantage and existence. But the fairytale has gone for ever. Their European appearance will no

longer give them an automatic edge over their coloured fellow South Africans.

This attitude of flight and retreat into the laager will mean impoverishment. An old Indian proverb captures this well: "The problem with building fences around oneself or one's ethnic group is that one always excludes more than one includes".

I think that we have now entered the phase in South Africa where our cultural differences should no longer be seen as an embarrassment but as a wonderful opportunity.

Culture binds people together and makes them feel at home. The natural result of this is that there is a distinction between "us" and "them". There is nothing wrong with this, as long as the diversity does not result in divergence. There is a very real danger of people thinking that, because somebody else's culture is *different*, it is of necessity also *inferior* to their own - thus by definition superior - culture.

It is quite human to accept one's own culture fairly uncritically - as if there cannot be anything wrong in it - while one tends to be very overcritical of an alien culture, as if nothing good can come of it.

The fact of the matter is that there is no model culture, but that each culture contains good and bad, ugly and attractive elements. Cultural diversity thus does not only indicate the *wealth* of cultures, but also the *limitations* of each culture.

The correct attitude would therefore rather be one which is critically directed inwards (towards your own culture) and sympathetically directed outwards (towards other cultures). Try to see the good in others' culture - and point this out to them. We should learn to assume the attitude of listener, pupil and recipient, rather than that of speaker, teacher and giver.

In this way the usually strong emotionally laden stereotypes of each other can be demolished. In South Africa Whites, Blacks and Coloureds usually say that they know each other very well - seeing that they have lived and worked together in the same country for so long. The question is whether we know each other as *fellow human beings*. Don't

we simply know each other as employers and employees? Don't we simply, in our cultural apartheid, endure each other? Is the defensive attitude necessary? One can also go so far as to defend an empty fort! In each case isolation of necessity has an impoverishing effect.

Cultural diversity at the same time indicates the fact of reciprocal exclusion and the need for reciprocal communication. The meeting between cultures can therefore lead to both conflict and enrichment. Often the enrichment only takes place because of a clash! The contact can also have destructive effects, however, and can alienate people from their own culture and make them live in a state of cultural schizophrenia. (Cf. again chapter 2 above.)

The challenge facing us in South Africa is: how can cultural diversity and cultural contact be handled in such a way that the negative is avoided as far as possible and the positive obtained as profit? Even if taking note of other cultures only helps one to see one's own culture with other eyes, this is already an enrichment.

In South Africa this means *on the one hand* that I will be able to say: "I am an Afrikaner and proud of it". And I will not begrudge my fellow South African saying the same: "I am a Zulu/Xhosa/black man and proud of it". *On the other hand* both I and other South Africans should realise that our shared humanity is infinitely more important.

\* *Playing at being black*

There will even be those who will try to escape the situation by trying to "play at being black". They will be in the minority, true, but in transitional times such as these this reaction is a reality. Is it not true that our brown people, when the whites came into power, "tried for white"?

I do not think, however, that the solution lies in trying to reject your cultural identity. Be what you are: a *good* (White) African, rather than a *bad* imitator of (black) African culture. Identification with a new South Africa does not mean complete conformity, because cultural diversity is an asset. Each cultural group has a unique contribution to make to our country.

*\* The danger of a negative reaction*

All three previous reactions are essentially negative, seeing that they wish to escape realities rather than facing up to them. I would like to mention a fourth possible reaction which I regard as being especially negative, because it is probably the reaction which a minority of white South Africans will embrace.

We know the prophets of doom who hold the view that a new dispensation will let South Africa slide into chaos and bankruptcy. Each stone that comes loose is a sign of a landslide, each breeze the herald of a tornado! They only look for cracks and dangers - instead of shouldering the burden of making South Africa a great and strong country.

This attitude turns people into frightened, passive spectators, as they tend to sit and watch events to see what will emerge when the dust settles. Will there still be a place for whites in South Africa? They cannot bring themselves to believe this.

Negativism in the most extreme form manifests itself in people who turn to all kinds of violence. This, however, is not only unbiblical but has never offered lasting solutions.

**8.5.3 Positive points of departure (at the personal level) for mutual contact**

Our road to Africa's people begins in our own hearts. It begins in hearts which really love God and therefore can do no other than also love the neighbour. It begins in people who realise that not hatred but love enables us to mean something to others. Not hatred, but love reaches out, convinces and triumphs.

It is at this very personal level where we can begin to reach out and help build a better South Africa for ourselves and our children. I direct attention only to three basic prerequisites, because I know that if one would attempt to meet them, there would not be enough time to do all that one would notice.

The three injunctions are:

- Acknowledge each other as people
- Know each other's worldviews
- Share each other's gifts and talents

\* *Acknowledge each other as people*

I have already said that this is the absolute prerequisite, but also the very simple recipe for reaching out to any fellow human being and not merely to our fellow South Africans.

Because God created us as people - in His image - we cannot do other than acknowledge everybody's humanity. (We are all descendants of father Adam and mother Eve!) Refusing to do this, is rebellion against God.

Acknowledgement of *humanity* also means acknowledgement of *equal dignity*. This means, among other things, that we cannot divide humanity into different groups of which some are "more" human than others, who are less human - perhaps even barbarous sub-humans. The Bible does not know this type of apartheid which violates the individual's human dignity, for in the sight of God all people are equal, that is, they have the same value for Him.

Naturally "of equal dignity" does not mean the same or identical. Each person is an individual, unique human being and thus different from all other people. Each person has a special nature, gifts, etc. So different nations and cultures also have their own talents and weaknesses. Apart from our unity (in Adam, and also as believers in Christ) there is a rich diversity. *Both* have to be acknowledged - without seeing the unity as uniformity and making division of the diversity.

If we *acknowledge* each other as people we will also like to get to *know* each other, and this leads to the next point:

\* *Know each other's (worldview) convictions*

The great danger is that we think that we know each other. I very strongly doubt, however, whether we really know each other as *people*, with what that entails. Whites often only know blacks as labourers - the extension of a spade or a broom. Conversely, many blacks only know



whites as bosses - in practically every sphere of life. (They call a white man "Baas" [Boss] even though he is not their employer.) Good human relations do not mean, after all, that we acknowledge other people only for what they can *do* (for us) or *mean* (to us), but what they really *are* (as people). Should this not be the case, we do not really regard them as people but as mere utilities.

In any case, the encounter between white and black is mostly a very formal and artificial relationship lacking completely in honesty and openness - prerequisites to really getting to know each other. We mostly have not really met face to face, and looked into each other's souls.

For this reason we go around with many stereotypes firmly entrenched. *Stereotype* comes from the Greek *stereos* = fixed, clichéd + *typos* = example or model. A stereotypical view of somebody else is therefore a definite image which one has of somebody else or another group. And one is not willing to relinquish this clichéd, fixed image. Some whites firmly believe that all blacks are dirty, stupid, lazy, heathens, etc.! Conversely, many blacks believe that all whites are rude, untrustworthy, rich - or even Christians!

The only way in which one can get rid of stereotypes is to really get to know each other and to be confronted with the *real* reality instead of your *supposed* reality.

When I just stated that we do not know each other, I could have stated it more explicitly: We only know each other *at certain levels* (for example, as employer - employee). If I say that we have to get to know each other, I mean that we should get to know each other *at more and deeper levels*, because man is not only a labourer.

For this reason I would like to plead that we should really try to get to know each other's cultures, values, worldviews and religions. It is only when we do this that we will begin to understand each other's actions, because a person's (or group's) *view* of life determines his *way* of life. People *do* differently because they *see* differently, and *think* differently.

Personally, this has been my strategy over the past twenty years. I have deliberately tried to understand, to plumb the most profound

worldviewish convictions of my fellow black South Africans. This has helped me to understand their actions much better - and in many cases to gain great appreciation for them.

Should we get to know each other in such a fundamental manner, we will know exactly what the potential of each group is, and what the strong and weak points are, which leads to my third point:

\* *Share each other's gifts and talents*

First *acknowledge* each other, then *know* each other, and finally *share* with each other. The one step leads inevitably to the other, and each step becomes easier. If we are willing to acknowledge each other as people, the rest should follow of its own accord.

My comparison of the Western worldview with the African view of life (cf. section 8.2 above) has convinced me of the fact that in South Africa we can both *give* and *receive*. As stated already, each culture has both strong and weak points. By sharing in each other's strong points (gifts and talents, positive convictions) we share in growing strength. And by pointing out each other's weak points, we strengthen our mutual potential.

So as not to be too abstract, I offer one example of each. The *contribution* of white South Africans could well be their technological knowledge. The white population of South Africa is the only large group with the necessary technological knowledge in the whole of Africa. We also know African conditions (within which technological knowledge has to be applied) better than do the Europeans, Americans or Orientals.

But we can also *receive*. Our fellow black South Africans can definitely teach us what good human relations are. Anybody who knows anything of the way in which black South Africans think, will know that human relations are their number one priority. Human dignity is very important to them. In the light of this one can also appreciate why apartheid was such a horror to them, because it violated the most profound of their convictions about people.

The temptation to mention more examples is great. But because of constraints of space, I would rather mention a few important conditions or prerequisites with which this "share with each other" has to comply. In reality this speaks for itself, but I do want to mention them:

- In the first place, national interests will have to enjoy priority above own or group interests and "rights".
- In the second place, if we want to share with each other, this definitely means that the attitude of dominance of many whites will have to be put aside for the sake of a Christian attitude of service. Unfortunately, I have to say this: It will demand a great deal more humility from whites than we have been able to acquire over the last three hundred years.
- Thirdly, in conjunction with this we will have to rid ourselves of every scrap of superiority. By saying this, I do not mean that an attitude of inferiority has to be adopted by the whites. (In the preceding section I clearly stressed the equal dignity of all people.)
- In the fourth place it also means that what we try to do *for* our fellow South Africans has to be done *with* them. Side by side, next to each other - and not in a hierarchical manner - we have to work towards a new South Africa.
- Finally we will have to work very hard to arrive at general or commonly-accepted "values". In this process the following steps could be followed (preferably in a multi-cultural group): (1) *sensitising* people to the fact of different and even clashing values; (2) *formulating* these values; (3) *evaluating* them critically; (4) *transcending* the own values (e.g. by deciding which of one's own values may be recommended as common values for the whole society and which of them may not be suitable because they are too particular), and (5) *inspiring* the group to experiment with the shared values identified during the whole process.

Sometimes, however, the only possibility will be an agreement about our disagreement, because shared values (e.g. religious values) are not always possible. In such a case we do not *accept* their viewpoint, but *respect* the right of others to differ.

#### 8.5.4 What about structural changes?

Your response to all that I have said so far might well be: "I have heard all that pious talk from white South Africans before. All that is needed to make apartheid disappear is an individual change of heart. What about the truly horrible structures put in place by apartheid"?

My response to this would be that personal change of heart is the *beginning*. (For that reason I stressed it in my "heart to heart talk" with fellow white South Africans above.) This might never be the *end*, though. Should change of *heart* not also result in *societal* change, it cannot be complete or genuine.

But the inverse of the process is just as important. Outward change in the broad society can also lead to inward change in individual hearts. To a large extent this process has been gaining momentum in South Africa recently, when it became ever clearer that the apartheid ideology could not work, and when the realisation dawned that it was wrong.

\* \* \*

In this chapter we have focussed on cultural differences between Africa and the West, as well as on the necessity of cross-cultural contact and cooperation between the two. One of the most outstanding differences we encountered pertained to the different views of society, viz. communalism versus individualism. In the next chapter we will have the opportunity to discuss in more detail these conflicting views of human identity and society and also offer a Christian response and alternative to both of them.

## Chapter 9

# CONFLICTING VIEWS ON HUMAN IDENTITY AND SOCIETY IN AFRICA

In the previous chapter we have already encountered two outstanding but clashing characteristics of African and Western culture, namely communalism and individualism. When these two worldview perspectives are applied to society at large, they will result in two conflicting models or philosophies of society.

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION: THE BACKGROUND

Actually this is nothing new. Until very recently (1990) Europe was also divided between a more individualist-capitalist Western bloc and a more communalist-socialist Eastern bloc. The media usually portrayed the two as worlds apart, archenemies of each other, while in reality - as we will soon see - they originated from the same root.

Until recently the African countries were also divided according to the capitalist or socialist policies which their governments applied. I still remember vividly when lecturing to Christian students in different African countries during the eighties one serious question which came up regularly during discussion time: "Prof, what should a Christian choose: socialism or capitalism?" This question was asked in both capitalist and socialist countries.

Since then - also because of the dramatic changes in the Eastern bloc countries - the African scene has changed considerably. African countries previously experimenting with all kinds of African socialism have changed their course to either a more mixed economy and social policy or started advocating openly a capitalist system.

It is nonetheless important to know something about the political and social history of Africa during the past more or less thirty years. Where previously (directly after independence during the sixties) most African countries rejected Western liberalist-individualist views in favour, first of a variety of homemade brands of socialism, and later on even in favour of classic hardline Marxist-Leninist one-party socialism, they

nowadays reject socialism in favour of individualist capitalism and multiparty democracy. The burning question is: is this real improvement?

In this chapter we will therefore concentrate on the following:

- First a brief comparison between the Western individualist and socialist views of man and philosophy of society will be given.
- Then one example of African socialism, applied for about 27 years in Zambia (1964-1991), by Dr. K. Kaunda will be discussed.
- Individualism and communalism will be treated in more detail in order to give a Christian response and alternative. We will also indicate what the nature of genuine community is. This part will serve as preparation for the next chapter in which we will discuss in detail a Christian view of society and societal relationships in confrontation with the individualist and communalist models.

## **9.2 A BRIEF COMPARISON BETWEEN WESTERN LIBERALIST AND SOCIALIST ANTHROPOLOGIES AND VIEWS OF SOCIETY**

The comparison will be done in such a way that both differences and similarities will emerge clearly.

### **9.2.1 The liberalist viewpoint**

The liberalist view of man and society can be summed up in the following seven characteristics:

1. *Liberalist*. Freedom, liberty, is regarded as the highest norm. This movement came into existence as a reaction against the erstwhile hierarchical ideas and structures which oppressed the citizenry. Should individual freedom be realised, it was felt, the necessary equality would follow.

2. *Humanistic rationalism* is the driving force behind the ideal of freedom. Autonomous, sovereign man will be able to freely work out

his self-realisation by means of his reason (which is an idolised intellect).

3. *Economistic materialism* indicates the way in which autonomous man attains self-fulfilment. Man is therefore basically a *homo economicus*, an economic being. Labour, effectivity and utility are key concepts. Because labour is seen as the highest and noblest aspect of man, one could speak of "labourism" and a "labourist" anthropology.

4. *Optimistic*. The liberalist anthropology is full of confidence in the reason of man, which will guarantee a bright future. Adam Smith believed that, if the state does not interfere with the individual rights of people and their initiatives, and if it protects their rights, guided by reasonable insight and self-interest, it will through the free market system lead the society to prosperity, peace and happiness. A strong faith in progress marks this vision.

5. *Individualistic*. The liberalist view of man stresses the inalienable rights of the individual as opposed to society. The future is in the hands of the individual and not society. Individual responsibility is the key to a good future.

6. *Atomistic*. The individualistic anthropology leads to an atomistic view of society. All societal relations are lowered to the level of free purpose associations, that is, self-willed clusters of individuals working together simply for the purpose of realising a limited (often selfish) objective. The state then is not a divinely ordained institution, but simply an association entered into by free individuals on the basis of a social contract with the explicit purpose of offering organised protection to the rights of individual citizens.

7. *Man of achievement*. From the foregoing one can deduce that man is seen as an achievement being.

This liberalistic view of man and the resultant economic activities have fundamentally changed Western culture. It has not been without negative results, however. Think of the incessant pursuit of money, the misery of many labourers in industry and their families until recently, the large-scale alienation and loneliness in the Western world.

## 9.2.2 The socialist viewpoint

The socialist view of man and society could be characterized in the following way:

1. *Egalitarian*. Where liberalism advocates freedom, socialism regards equality as being most important. After 1830 the awful consequences of liberalist *laissez-faire* capitalism in society became clear. (Adam Smith's prophecies did not come true.) The liberalist constitutional state did not guarantee equality. (The state simply became an instrument of oppression in the hands of the class of owners.) Equality should therefore be effected not on the formal juridical level, but on the level of material economy. And this equality will not be effected through competition, as in the case of capitalism, but through class struggle and the socialisation of the means of production.

Socialism therefore not only propagates equality. It is also a movement of liberation. Where liberalism speaks of liberty and equality, socialism speaks of equality and liberty. The difference between these two anthropologies is therefore not really that radical!

2. *Humanistic rationalism*. The earlier utopian socialism expected equality and liberty through the light of reason (just like liberalism). Later Marxist socialism leans more on the irrational violence of the revolution. (From Lenin onwards there is a clear irrationalistic tendency.) Leninism and Maoism, however, still seek a *rational* organisation of society as a whole. Democratic socialism too has given its heart to a "*planning* for freedom"!

3. *Economistic materialism*. Socialism too (like liberalism) sees man as a *homo economicus*, an economic being. According to Marx's materialist philosophy the all-determining economic substrate guides the whole culture and even the religion of man!

4. *Optimistic*. Socialism too has its utopia. Marx even predicted with "scientific certainty" that the classless society would break through to the point where government might not be necessary any longer. When this did not happen, it did not cause his neo-Marxist followers to drop the idea, but just convinced them that man had to assume greater responsibility in order to make it possible!



From the four traits already mentioned, the spiritual relation between liberalist individualism and socialist solidarity is very clear. Many people in Africa are not aware of the fact that these two visions of man are so closely related. Governments and their media tend to represent them as complete opposites. However, even the following points of difference (5-7) cannot eradicate their deep spiritual kinship.

5. *Collectivist*. Socialism rejects the individualist anthropology. It stresses that man is always among men, a societal being, the linking point of societal relations. The emphasis is on class, comradeship, and collectivity.

6. *Socialist*. They also view human society in accordance with their collectivist anthropology. Societal relationships are not secondary, with the individual holding primary position as in liberalism, but the opposite holds true. Socialism, therefore, does not in the first place fight for the inalienable rights of the individual, but for the creation of a more just society. Concrete attention has to be given to man in his historical social situation. For a better future it is not individual man who should be changed (as in liberalism) but society. If this should happen, then the individual will also change. Community responsibility (as opposed to individual responsibility) is highly regarded.

7. *Community worker*. Where liberalism has focussed on individual achievement, socialism emphasises the community worker. The labour class will work out a golden future with their communal inputs!

### 9.2.3 All the same ...

From this brief and necessarily incomplete rendition it appears that these two dominant views of man and society in reality are very closely related to each other. It seems as though the striving of the Enlightenment (Aufklärung) for human self-realisation only split into liberalist and socialist wings for a brief while. They are at present moving closer to each other again. An important reason for this is that both these viewpoints are one-sided and do not work in practice.

The socialist vision of man and society easily leads to a hunger for power and the tyranny of one societal relationship (e.g. family, tribe or

state) over all the others. The children of liberalism, on the other hand, are often guilty of anarchy and licentiousness.

#### **9.2.4 Capitalism and socialism**

In the economic field, liberalism (usually called capitalism) believes that as long as the individual has the free disposition of resources and can deal with them autonomously by means of a free market system, justice will be guaranteed in society. A socialist economy wants precisely the opposite: society (usually the state) has to have absolute control of economic resources. Consequently capitalism and socialism accuse each other as the great culprits - while they do not realise that in fact they are estranged twin brothers!

If it does not go well in a society, we should not only seek the cause in the bad individual, as the liberalist does. There is also such a thing as structural evil in social structures. We also cannot one-sidedly seek the fault only in society, as the socialists like to do. Individual man, who brought about these structures, is guilty as well.

### **9.3 AFRICAN SOCIALISM WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON ZAMBIAN HUMANIST SOCIALISM**

"African countries are searching for their own way in the jungle of ideologies ... African countries are faced with a difficult task. How should they unite the different tribes and languages in their territories? How should they organize their economies? Should they choose Marxism or Capitalism? The vast majority of African leaders reject in theory both Marxism and Capitalism. They want to go their own way and declare: *African Socialism - a Third Way*" (Hirmer, 1982:78).

As already indicated, the situation has changed dramatically over the past ten years, but when Hirmer wrote these words (1982) at times fierce debates between these two ideologies were still part of the daily news - especially in the newly independent Zimbabwe where Hirmer's book was published.

### 9.3.1 Looking for an ideology

It is an old controversy whether ideas and ideologies originate in society (or specific groups in society) for the justification of specific interests and objectives or whether, obversely, they steer society in a certain direction. To my mind the problem will be solved if we accept the notion of a two-way traffic.

I am, however, of the opinion that in the case of African socialism we have a clear instance of the former case. African leaders and their collaborators have in this instance grasped an ideology to justify their own government, to have their people cohere and to mobilise them for specific objectives.

It is especially remarkable that African socialism is not the product of only one thinker. It "broke out" among a whole number of African leaders at about the same time: Jomo Kenyatta and Tom Mboya of Kenya with their democratic African socialism; Leopold Senghor of Senegal with his *négritude* and human solidarity; Mamadou Dia (also of Senegal) with his African socialism; Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana with his conscientism; Julius Nyerere of Tanzania with his *ujamaa* socialism and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia with his humanist African socialism. The idea of an own indigenous socialism for the continent gained momentum to such an extent that a special conference was devoted to it in December 1962 in Dakar, Senegal.

### 9.3.2 Some characteristics

African socialism is not a clearly delineated ideology or plan of action. It is more of a potpourri of thoughts with little coherence. One should also keep in mind the divergent backgrounds of the supporters of it (some of these men encountered socialism during study periods in Europe). Yet one could lift out some main themes or shared characteristics.

- One could, in the first place, typify it as *a search for an own identity and an effort to unite various groups within one particular country*. During the struggle for independence there was a mutual enemy (the colonial power) which caused a strongly cohesive nationalism to bloom. The vacuum which came into being after independence had to be filled

with new ideals. The ideology of African socialism was chosen for this purpose. The question was whether an ideology could have the same cohesive strength as a concrete enemy.

- Linked to the search for a new identity one encounters *a reaction against the earlier European masters and their identity-suppressing and dehumanising ideologies*. European capitalism, socialism and Marxism are rejected in favour of the establishment of a unique kind of socialism.

Capitalism is not only rejected because it advocates private land ownership, but also as a result of its individual and materialist tendencies.

European socialism is not acceptable, because it does not carry a strong enough national character.

Marxist socialism also cannot make a contribution, seeing that its basic tenets clash with the realities and values of Africa. Africa, for example, does not know the concept of a class struggle, and it also does not have a materialist anthropology and an atheist religion.

- It is therefore obvious that, in the third place, an attempt was made rather to sow the seeds of this new ideology in African soil. By letting *it take root in the traditional African culture, it was believed that it would grow to a vital worldview*. Traditional Africa was marked by, inter alia, communal land use, a classless (although not egalitarian) society, and mutual social duties. In this way, instead of having to accept an unnatural, imported product, a natural, indigenous socialism had to be established.

- In the fourth place African Socialism was also seen as the *solution for the very practical problem of economic under-development*. In this way the considerable powers which some of the new leaders exerted over their citizens could be justified.

### 9.3.3 The results

Fifteen years after the publication of their *African Socialism* (1964), a follow-up was published by Rosberg and Callaghy, called *Socialism in*

*Sub-Saharan Africa: a new assessment* (1979). The picture is not a pleasant one. Problems are encountered everywhere in the concrete implementation of this ideology. (Tanzania, Guinea and Zambia are discussed in detail.) In spite of the anti-capitalist rhetoric capitalism flourishes in certain countries, and many maintain a mixed socialist-capitalist economy. Instead of an ideological slant many African countries have now begun to take a more pragmatic view.

The writers also mention that an important reason for the failure of African socialism is to be sought in the very effort to tie in with an idealised version of traditional communalism. Instead of this being a strong point it has emerged as one of the greatest weaknesses of the new ideology. The roots of socialism in the traditional society were weakly anchored, and the ideological plant would not grow. Socialism appeared not to be all that "natural" for Africa. Communalism and socialism were clearly different views and ways of life.

I think that one of the greatest mistakes was that African leaders in their reaction saw only the bad characteristics of Western systems and saw only the good in their own culture. In their enthusiasm they did not see the shadowy sides of communalism. The community after all cannot progress if individuals in the community are taught that personal ambition is a vice.

#### **9.3.4 The second wave**

Rosberg and Callaghy thus devote the greater part of their work to a more radical "second wave" of socialism in Africa. A.M. Babu captures the shift that has occurred in the title of his book: *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* (1981). This second wave differs from the first wave (African socialism) in that it is less synthetic and both traditional communalism and Christianity play practically no role in it. There is now no more objection to accepting Western "scientific socialism" (Marxism-Leninism) as ideology. Subsequently there is no hesitation in enforcing efforts to make the ideology succeed, and even to propagate a class struggle.

Countries in which this new socialist experiment was started included Somalia, Congo-Brazzaville, Benin and especially Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Ethiopia, and one could include Zimbabwe.

After this background, we can now have a look in more detail at  
Zambian humanism as an example of the first wave.

### 9.3.5 Zambian Humanist Socialism

"... the question being asked all over Black Africa is 'Who am I?' I believe that man must be the servant of a vision bigger than himself ..."  
(Kaunda, 1966:51).

"The philosophy of humanism is the guiding star in the economic, political, social and cultural development of Zambia" (Kandeke, 1977:xxvii).

I am using especially one publication by Kaunda himself (1966), and to supplement that, those of a few other Zambians in an effort to determine exactly what this ideology, according to Kaunda "Zambia's most precious gift to Africa", precisely entails.

#### \* *Why Zambia needs a new worldview*

According to Kaunda, African nationalism, "that explosive force which has changed the shape of the continent", has attained its goal in Zambia, viz. liberation from colonialism and the resultant independence. Once you are rid of the enemy, however, a part of the dynamism of nationalism is also lost. He acknowledges the truth that a negative ideology, which infuses the struggle *against* something, usually has more motive power than a positive one which stands *for* something. Therefore: "The ideology of Nationalism must find a new mode of expression" (1966:49). Normally patriotism is a facet of nationalism. Kaunda distinguishes this as two phases, however. According to him, Zambia, following independence, has now reached the stage where nationalism has to be changed into patriotism (Ibid.:76). Nationalism is not only too vague, but also too narrow. Nationalism had a mainly political objective. Patriotism, love of the country, does not only include love of the country, but also social, cultural and religious elements (Ibid.:77). In a nutshell, "Nationalism can inspire men to struggle, and if necessary to die for a great cause, but patriotism alone will enable them to live for it" (Ibid.:83). What this president is looking for is something which is neither a colonial product, nor merely the heritage of the tribal past, but an effort to

discover what it means to be a *modern* African (Ibid.:52). It should also be practical and not a mere intellectual exercise in a college lecture hall, such as Senghor's *négritude* (Ibid.:51).

\* *Birth of a new humanism*

The vacuum which followed the nationalist phase can not be filled with something entirely new, however. There must be a continuity between the past and the future. According to him African socialism is precisely this effort to develop a socio-economic system which is in accordance with the character of the African. He devotes many pages (Ibid.:22-29) to the typical traits of the communalist African society and anthropology. "African society has always been Man-centred. We intend that it will remain so" (Ibid.:25).

This view of man in traditional African society brings him to the term "humanism". With this he probably does not mean European humanism, because he is opposed to European (dehumanising) colonialism. He also acknowledges that he has not read the standard works on (European) humanism (Ibid.:16). He endows the word "humanism" with a new content, probably conveying thereby simply that he believes in the values and potential of man. (One could possibly here be closer to the truth in talking of *humanitarianism* rather than humanism.)

He prefers a "Man-centred" to a "power-centred society" (Ibid.:19). Elsewhere he maintains that "the point of departure must surely be to look afresh at Man - not Man *for* anything or Man *as* anything, but Man in himself - and sing his praises unashamedly" (Ibid.:37). Man (he uses a capital letter ) should be the object in himself, and not merely a means to an end (Ibid.:41).

\* *Great tolerance*

For a Biblically oriented Christian this sounds rather extreme. For Kaunda, however, this is not a problem. He directs attention (Ibid.:27) to the fact that the African is religiously very tolerant. He can adhere to both Christianity and the traditional religions. "The African does not find it easy to think in terms of Either-Or. He is open to influences which make Both-And seem desirable" (Ibid.:27). In conjunction with

this he mentions something else that is typical of the African mentality, viz. that, as against the Western "problem-solving" mind, an African has a "situation-experiencing" mind (Ibid.:26). For this reason, too, there is no sharp distinction of spiritual trends.

Accordingly the Zambian statesman feels free to include eclectically, apart from the traditionally African religion, elements from Islam and Christianity in the new ideology for his country. This of course does not imply that this new synthesis will not change certain of the constituent elements from the various religions. His humanism wishes to reaffirm faith in the goodness of man, and therefore "certain types of Christianity which emphasise the sinfulness and depravity of Man are more of a curse than a blessing to us" (Ibid.:34). He follows this up by saying that "yet I cannot help feeling that the growing impact of Islam upon Africa is that it is a religion which reinforces men's belief in themselves without denying their dependence upon Allah ... Is Christianity a faith for men?"

A complicated potpourri of religions, spiritual trends and ideas finally converges into Kaunda's humanism. They include *inter alia* the following: (1) his own Christian belief, (2) ideas borrowed from Mahatma Gandhi (for instance his idea of peaceful civil disobedience), (3) nationalism (in the form of anti-colonialism), (4) a kind of practical socialism, (5) which (under the influence of Teilhard de Chardin?) is of an evolutionary nature and (6) traditional African communalism. In a pragmatic way he tries to transform all these elements to a new unity for the advancement of his political and social ideals. A synthesis of so many divergent ideas makes it very difficult to classify Kaunda's new ideology for Zambia.

#### \* *Christian Humanism*

In spite of his criticism of Christianity, he still regards the basis of his humanism as Christian and he calls himself a Christian humanist (Ibid.:35).

The best description which we could find of his humanism is the following: "By Christian humanism I mean that we discover all that is worth knowing about God through our fellow men and unconditional service to our fellow men is the purest form of the service of God. I



believe that Man must be a servant of a vision which is bigger than himself, that his path is illumined by God's revelation and that when he shows love towards his fellow men, he is sharing the very life of God, who is Love. When man learns ... that the only hope for the peace and happiness of the world is to give political and economic expression to love for others we shall have entered not the Kingdom of Man but the Kingdom of God" (Ibid.:35-36).

To my mind this statement contains a great Biblical truth, but at the same time man may be over-emphasised in this way.

\* *Enthusiastic followers*

Meebelo (1973), Kandeke (1977) and Zulu (1978) were, apart from the father of the idea, three of the most important Zambian exponents of this African humanism.

It emerges, however, in the first place that they - in contrast to the father of the new ideology - have done some reading on European humanism. Kandeke even goes back to the Greeks and quotes Protagoras who taught that man himself is the measure for all things (1977:4). Man is not for him simply the *purpose* of everything (Kaunda), but also the *criterion* of all things. The book teems with the expression "Man-centredness". According to Kandeke Zambian humanism is the philosophical ideology which will establish this man-centred society (Ibid.:38).

In the second place it is still not clear precisely what is meant by the term "humanism". Kandeke (1977:15) defines it in the following terms: "Humanism is understood as an intellectual and scientific movement codified into an ideological philosophy of socio-economic and political development and progress of society". Zulu (1978:6) gives a description with somewhat more body: "... Zambian Humanism is an act of faith, a profound belief in Man. Man must not only be at the centre of society, but also at its growing apex; Man is not only a means for economic and social action, but also setting for the action ...". Meebelo does not provide anything that is essentially different from what we have already read in Kaunda.

\* *A Lack of clarity about the link between humanism and socialism*

In the third place the whole question of the relationship between humanism and socialism is also left in the air. Kandeke clearly has problems with certain statements by Kaunda. At times he says that Zambia will become a socialist state. Then he stresses humanism again. Yet again he says that "we are humanists first and foremost and Socialist in consequence ... Humanism is our charter and Socialism is only one of the rules of procedure in its implementation".

The vagueness as to what Zambian humanism exactly is, keeps bothering Kandeke. On page 212 he distinguishes, apart from Kaunda's vision, two other interpretations. He remains vague about his own standpoint, however. Near the end of the book (Ibid.:220-222) he openly acknowledges again that among Zambian government officials at least three different and competing viewpoints can be discerned: (1) humanism as the conservation of traditional values; (2) humanism as a kind of reformed capitalism, which would prefer to leave certain capital means in private ownership, and (3) humanism of which the dominant trait is its radical (more Western) socialist character. Kandeke himself is a proponent of the latter, because he does not wish to view Zambian humanism as being isolated from the growing radical socialist thought elsewhere in Africa. He also insists on the people of Zambia having to decide which of the three interpretations outlined above they would like to constitute the essence of their ideology.

\* *Rhetoric and reality*

Kandeke realises that the discussion around Zambian humanism often leads to a lot of fireworks but that little heat emanates from it. Therefore he offers, on the last page of his book, *Socialist Humanism* as a source of inspiration for his countrymen, but he adds a BUT: "BUT only if Humanism as Rhetoric become Humanism as Reality, a living flame in the hearts of the people".

Tordoff (1974) outlines the implementation of Zambian Humanism in the following three stages: The first phase (since 1967) involved a rural edification programme in which co-operative production methods had to play the key role. The second stage (1968-70) involved the Zambianization by the state of the urban and industrial economy. Since

1970 a third step has followed, viz. the limiting of the privileges and opportunities of the Zambian middle class through inter alia wage control, income tax, nationalisation of land which is held in absentia, etc.

The success of especially the first step was disappointing. African tradition did not know co-operative agriculture. Cultivation took place simply with the objective of individual subsistence needs. The second and the third steps have also encountered great opposition.

If one visits Zambia today (my privilege in 1984 and again in 1987) then it would seem as if rhetoric has not influenced reality all that strongly, and as if the humanist flame is not burning all that brightly any more. In public and by day socialism is propagated, but by night (without the outside world needing to know about it) capitalism is practised. Kaunda himself has acknowledged (1974:327) that "it is ironical that some of our economic reforms intended to further the cause of humanism, have provided the basic for the entrenchment of an elitist/capitalist attitude".

In spite of its massive agricultural potential (some experts have maintained that Zambia has the potential to feed the whole of Africa) and metal and mineral wealth, this country is hovering on the brink of bankruptcy. The man in the street does not have the need (any more) for an ideology but - in spite of the humanist ideology - for very basic human needs to be met, such as work, housing, a lower inflation rate and cost of living, less corruption ...

In spite of Zambia's man-centred humanism the question has not been answered as to how one can truly find a new identity and be fully human in Africa. When are we going to learn the lesson that ideologies, whether they succeed in seducing the masses, or whether they do not get further than the elite, are dead-ends?

## 9.4 HUMAN IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY ACCORDING TO INDIVIDUALISM, COMMUNALISM AND ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE<sup>1)</sup>

The question of human identity is an important one in Africa - even thirty years after the dehumanisation of colonial rule. But it is also of great importance to South Africa because the apartheid ideology severely affected the human dignity of both black and white people. What should a future South Africa look like once we have rejected the mistakes of the past in order to build a new society?

Therefore all over the continent people are seriously searching for an answer to the question: "Who am I?" Or stated differently: "What does it mean to be human?"

For many people in Africa the question "Who am I?" simply implies: "Am I a Westerner or an African?" (or perhaps a Westernised African?). This is by no means an unimportant question, but such a question does not penetrate deeply enough. We will have to delve much deeper.

As has already become evident in the previous pages, two totally different answers can be given to the fundamental question of human identity, namely that of individualism and of communalism. Please note at the outset that both of them are -isms, in other words exaggerations or absolutisations and finally, therefore, ideologies.

### 9.4.1 Individualism

Individualism is the dominant Western viewpoint. It identifies the human person with the individual. To be an individual is to be human. And to be human means to be an individual. The answer regarding the question of identity "Who am I?" is very simple: "I am a unique individual".

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1) For the contents of this section I want to acknowledge indebtedness to S. Fowler's paper *The school as community*, published in 1988 by Antithesis Educational Services, Eltham, Victoria, Australia.

The faith in man as master of his own destiny already emerged during the Renaissance of the sixteenth century, matured in the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and ripened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Renaissance thinkers emphasised the freedom of the human being against a repressive social order. Because the repressive order was identified with the church and Christianity, this development which emphasised individual freedom became a secular movement. Today it is such a dominant perspective in the whole Western World that it is taken for granted and no one dare question it.

This type of secularism is so powerful that even Christians are reading the Bible with individualistic preconceptions. We are convinced that the individualist viewpoint is the authentic Christian position supported by Scripture!

This viewpoint concerning the human being also determines how human community is viewed, what one's philosophy of society looks like. Individualism cannot escape the fact that man is also a social being. But, because of its wrong perception about what it means to be human, it has precluded the possibility of seeing human communal life correctly.

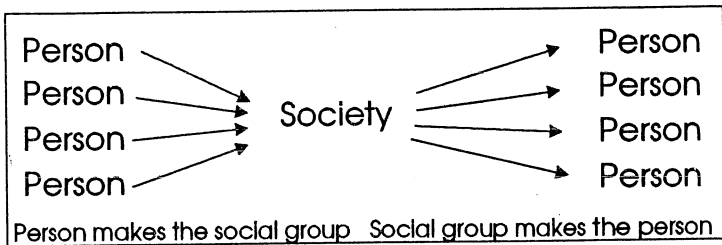
For example: Marriage, instead of being experienced as an enriching community in which two are one, is regarded as a contractual agreement between two individuals who consent to live together as long as they prefer. The family is not experienced as a lifelong community of love founded in blood relationships but simply becomes a temporal arrangement for the care of dependent individuals until such time as they are able to fend for themselves. And churches are changed into religious clubs which individual believers join on the basis of worship services suited to their individual tastes, instead of functioning as a community of faith, as one body in Christ through the work of the Spirit.

Because of the fact that real community was lost in the Western world (our "communities" are changing, temporary, mobile, superficial), while the inherent human need for fellowship cannot be ignored, Western man attempted to meet human communal needs by way of

social organisation. One could even call this tendency - to solve all kinds of problems by way of organising - a modern idol of the West.

### 9.4.2 Communalism

Communalism stands in sharp contrast to the individualism of modern Western society (NB: communalism should not be confused with communism!) Adherents of communalism do not think about humanity in terms of individuals. When they think about human identity, they immediately have in mind the human being within the group of which he is part. Because of his involvement in the community he is a human person. The individual who does not function as a full member of the community, is less than a full person. Through total involvement in the community, the individual establishes his personal identity and thus becomes a complete human being. This viewpoint therefore constitutes the opposite of individualism which teaches that a person has to distinguish him-/herself from his/her community to be human. In a nutshell, the viewpoint of individualism is: "First the individual and then the community", while communalism says: "First the community and in the second place the different individuals". Explained by way of a diagram:



### 9.4.3 The liberating perspective of the Gospel

It was mentioned above that many Western Christians try to prove their individualistic perspective from the Bible. In the same way other Christians, frustrated by Western individualism and its consequences (loneliness, estrangement and the falling apart of marriages and families) regard communalism as a Biblical remedy to the dehumanising effects of an individualistic way of life. Indeed, because of the extreme

poverty of our Western experience of community, there is much to be learnt from communalist societies such as those of Africa.

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

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

Both individualism and communalism provide unsatisfactory answers to the question "Who am I?" because each alike asks the wrong question. Each of them asks what is *within* the human person that gives identity to that person. They each look for something *within* the human world that gives meaning to human existence. They only differ in what they identify as the source of this meaning within the human being.

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

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

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

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

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

This, of course, does not imply that there is no place for resisting communal authority. No human authority is absolute! This is, however, not based on the priority of the individual over communal judgment. It



is based on the illegitimacy of the claim to authority or the abuse of that authority - never because the authority's judgment is simply in conflict with my individual judgment!

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

#### **9.4.4 The nature of genuine community**

In the Western world the meaning of "community" has been changed to indicate a collection of individuals organised to be able to pursue a common interest and nothing more. As indicated above, organisation plays a very important role in the Western world of today. In the absence of real communities they attempt to meet human communal needs by way of social organisation!

A few examples to illustrate this tendency are the following: Instead of communal consultation they substitute professional research by individuals to determine people's needs. Instead of communal leadership they substitute hierarchical, authoritarian structures. Instead of communal decision-making they substitute winner-take-all voting procedures.

In doing so they use social organisation as a substitute for real community. Of course any community or societal relationship needs a measure of organisation to facilitate its functioning. But the organisation will always be subordinate to the community, a mere means to an end and not an end in itself. The nature of a community is something more than organisation!

What then is the nature of a genuine community? This is a very important question because neither individualism nor collectivism could provide a satisfactory answer. In a future Africa we are trying to build a new community and we should carefully guard against falling into the

trap of either Western individualism or African communalism as the ideal model.

In the following five theses we will attempt to clarify the nature of a community.

*\* The basis of a community lies in the fact that people share a common interest under circumstances which make it possible for them to pursue this interest together*

A shared interest is the first requirement for a community. It could be diverse in nature: from stamp collecting to a just political order or Christian education.

In the second place circumstances should make it possible to advance the natural interests. For example, in a marriage it is necessary that marriage partners should live in a relationship of intimacy. Other kinds of interests, however, may be pursued by people who live apart from each other, as for example in the case of national and international organisations.

In the third place a community only exists where people function together and pursue their common interest together.

*\* The shared interest and the possibilities to pursue it together set specific boundaries to a community*

The above-mentioned examples have already indicated that different societal relationships exist for the attainment of *limited* interests (stamp collecting, political justice or Christian education). For this reason the societal relationships themselves will also be limited.

We therefore reject the communalist viewpoint which sets the boundaries so wide that they embrace the whole life of members of a community (clan, nation etc.). All of life is brought within the boundaries of a single, all-embracing community like the state. This inhibits normal human development because (1) the individuality of the members of a community is stifled and (2) the development of different life-enriching societal relationships is prevented.

Human life cannot develop to its rich fulness within any single societal relationship or community. It can only develop where there is room for a diversity of mutually complementary societal relationships functioning side by side. A societal relationship functioning in subordination to another can never develop to its full potential. This will happen, for example, when a school exists in subordination to a church, a business enterprise to a government, or a university is regarded as a "subdivision" of the state.

It is also important to keep in mind that the only proper conditions for membership in a community are the sharing of a communal interest, and being able and willing to participate in the life of the community. No-one who meets these requirements should be excluded from any societal relationship.

*\* A community exists where two or more people function as a single, enduring unit*

A genuine community has an identity and a character of its own, distinct from the individual identities and characters of its members. It is not simply the result of the collective will of the individual membership. Therefore the membership can change, but the identity of the societal relationship remains unchanged. It has an enduring identity.

A group of individuals acting together, even very harmoniously, is not a community. The reason for this is that members of such a group still function as individuals and their acting together depends on their individual consent. What distinguishes a real community is that its members function as a single unit - not as a cluster of individuals. The members do not think of themselves as individuals with a right not to participate or support a communal endeavour. Having participated fully in the communal decision-making process, each member regards this decision as his or her own.

For those brought up in the values of Western individualism this is difficult to accept. Because they have accepted the false identification of "person" with "individual", they regard any situation in which they do not retain an absolute right of individual decision as diminishing their personal integrity.

Our integrity as persons, however, is neither diminished nor threatened by the limitation of individual rights that follows on genuine communal commitment. What really robs us of a full experience of human life is our failure to surrender ourselves to real communal relations!

The surrender of this false belief in the absolute rights of the individual, however, does not mean the surrender of individuality. As indicated above, the boundaries of all societal relationships are limited, leaving enough room for individual action.

Apart from this, even within communal life, we are not called to suppress or surrender our individuality. Our individuality is part of our contribution to the societal relationship of which we are members. Each member can make a unique contribution!

This individuality, however, should *serve* and not *disrupt* the community. A societal relationship should be governed by communal interest and not by individual interest and will. In any societal relationship one acts, with one's individuality intact, not as an individual but as a member of that community.

\* *Every member participates in shaping the life of a community*

The so-called democratic decision-making process of Western social organisations creates a great barrier to real communal life. Because the procedure is deeply rooted in individualism, it is designed to determine the sum of the judgments of a group of individuals. The agreement of a majority of individuals is taken as a mandate for action on behalf of the group. Basically it is a winner-take-all process. Organisational power is concentrated in the hands of a few office-bearers skilled in winning the vote of the majority. It is a process that generates parties and factions which compete for control.

Participatory democracy (which submits all important decisions to a vote of the members) merely places greater emphasis on the majority vote. It does nothing to foster a genuinely communal decision-making process.

In order to understand communal relationships, we will have to change our thinking in terms of a *group of individuals* in favour of a *living*

*organism*. Then the members of a societal relationship are like the interdependent "parts" of a living organism. In a healthy organism the members do not *compete with* one another, but *work together* in promoting the well-being of the organism. It is self-destructive to both the community and its members when in communal affairs the members of a community compete against one another.

In the Bible the image of a variety of members working together for the benefit of the one body is often applied to describe the nature of the church (cf. Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27 and Eph. 4:14-16). This provides a totally different perspective on human society in which each member has an important contribution to make and is an active participant in shaping communal life.

There should be an open discussion of the viewpoints of all the members of a societal relationship. The purpose of this debate, however, should not be to win votes in support of my proposal against some counter-proposals by others. Everyone should contribute to the discussion in order to form a communal judgment. I should have no interest in winning a vote, but in giving my very best to help the community reach a responsible judgment. Nobody should therefore be asked - as happens so often - to choose between competing proposals. The whole purpose of the exercise is to reach agreement instead of division!

Voting procedures may therefore have a place in the decision-making of a societal relationship, but their purpose is to test the measure of communal agreement on an issue rather than to decide (on the basis of majority support) between competing proposals.

According to a Biblical reformational philosophy of society, each member has an office - not just a few "officers" at the top of a societal relationship. Each one has a particular way of serving the community. This viewpoint provides a perspective totally different from the modern model of social organisation.

An important consequence is a fundamentally different style of leadership. The office of leadership in a societal relationship is not a mandate to direct the affairs of the community according to the judgment of the leaders alone. Leadership is a calling to serve (not to

dominate!) the community by fostering and nurturing communal life, enabling and encouraging each member to contribute according to his/her office, gifts and talents. And in the matter of communal decision-making the leader(s) has the calling to guide the whole community in the formation of a real communal judgment.

*\* In the area of communal interest, the interest(s) of the members is one with the interest of the community*

While some human purposes can be achieved by the action of individuals, other purposes require the combined efforts of more than one individual. The family is an example. Only a genuine communal environment like the family, where the interest of one is the interest of all, can provide the security, love and discipline that is necessary for the effective nurturing of children. The radical individualism of the West has weakened family life because it views the family as a group of individuals. They merely share a base of operation, the chief purpose of which is to facilitate their individual purposes! Renewed awareness of community as a fundamental requirement for healthy human life is a basic requirement also for a recovery of genuine family life. Its members should have a common interest, purpose and will. The personal interest of each member should be one with that of the family community. As 1 Corinthians 12:21-26 indicates, the frustrations and disappointments of the members are the disappointments of the community - as the successes are shared by the community as a whole.

Therefore in healthy societal life each member will be supported and encouraged in developing individual gifts and talents to the highest level. The purpose, however, is not that of gaining personal glory, privilege or status as a reward. Every effort is directed towards advancing the interest of the community. Many examples of this could be mentioned from traditional Africa, whereas Western man will regard it as being unrealistic.

However, to achieve a real experience of community requires a fundamental change in values that breaks the stifling dominance of individualism. Communal values are also basic values of the Gospel.

Abandoning the values of individualism does not mean accepting communalism. It also does not imply ceasing to value individuality,

individual judgment, action and achievement. It simply means that alongside individual values we should also allow for the equally important communal values so that human life can be experienced in its richness and fullness.

\* \* \*

In this chapter we have warned Africa against choosing between two false views of man and society: liberalist individualism on the one hand and communalist socialism on the other. Our continent is encouraged to explore and follow a third way: the Biblical idea of man and community.

We, however, merely gave the bare outlines of three different models of society. How will they look when they are worked out in detail? And how exactly will a Christian view of office, authority, power and responsibility look? The next chapter intends to provide answers to these kinds of questions.

## Chapter 10

# A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SOCIETY IN DIALOGUE WITH THE INDIVIDUALIST AND COMMUNALIST VIEWS

At this stage we already know the meaning of communalism and individualism. We also know that we should not choose between the two when we want to construct a real Christian philosophy of society. Why we should not do this, will become even clearer in this chapter when we compare these two views and realise how both of them are dead ends, *cul-de-sacs*.

The essence of our problem in this chapter will be: What is a Christian view of society? We are looking for a third way out of the impasse of both communalism and individualism. Perhaps there is nothing which we at the moment need more urgently in Africa and elsewhere than a Christian philosophy of society. Otherwise many people may conclude that the Gospel is merely something for the individual with no relevance for the greater political, economical, social issues. And for this reason they may reject Christianity as useless.

A warning in advance may be appropriate: the temptation to continue thinking in individualist or communalist categories will be strong. Like pioneers we will, however, have to chart a totally new route.

### 10.1 INTRODUCTION: THREE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

The reason why Christians either condone the establishment or join the revolutionaries, is to be found in the dualist Christian worldviews which have infected our thinking also on this point. Most Christians still try to live in two kingdoms: the one spiritual, where the commands of Christ are supreme, and the other one secular, of this world, where we have to make it on our own. Therefore most Christians strongly believe that the Gospel provides spiritual clothing and footwear, but when it comes to socio-political clothes and shoes, the Gospel cannot provide. Because we cannot go naked and barefoot, Christians then buy socio-economic-political clothing at the secular market and walk in shoes which do not really fit them as Christians. On the surface this secular market place may offer a great variety of fashions. Closer



investigation will, however, reveal that there are only two basic ones: communalism and individualism.

We, however, believe that the Gospel also provides excellent, distinctly Christian clothes and footwear to appear in public and not only pajamas or a Sunday suit for private life.

I will provide three different but nevertheless closely related Biblical starting points for a real Christian philosophy of society. The first will start from the idea of man as the image of God, the second from the idea of different offices and the third from the idea of diversified love. These three ideas are not at all new to Christians. We also have already encountered them in previous chapters. The implications drawn from them for an own philosophy of society are, however, surprisingly new.

### **10.1.1 From the perspective of man as the image of God**

When discussing the meaning of man as the image of God in chapter 7 (section 7.7) we indicated that the essence of sin lies therein that, instead of being an image of God, man wants to be like God, God Himself. In reality this sinful attitude usually results in the fact that man "replaces" the real God with the gods he prefers. The line of thought which we developed then consisted of three phases: (1) Man serves other gods; (2) he himself resembles more and more the god(s) he serves; (3) he also creates societal relationships according to his own image. A line could therefore be drawn from the god one serves to the type of society which one creates. Because this is an important point, allow me to explain in detail.

■ The main phases in the history of the world are creation, fall and redemption (or formation, deformation and reformation). The second phase (fall) has caused man to come to stand in a relationship of disobedience rather than obedience towards God. Instead of being the image of God (His viceroy on earth) man wanted to be God (the only king). Because man has now lost his firm anchor and deepest certainty, he cannot do other than create new certainties for himself. From creation itself man creates new idols. He now expects of his idol to provide him with protection, salvation, redemption - while the self-made god can never provide this. Idolatry is self-deception. But

unfortunately an idol is able to deceive people because Satan uses it to seduce mankind.

- After the fall there are only two possibilities for man: he either loves the true God, or he serves an idol. In both cases man more and more resembles the God/god to whom he has given his allegiance. Should he serve the true God, he is renewed more and more towards the image of Christ. Should he give his allegiance to Mammon, he becomes a greedy, loveless and obsessed person.
- Idolatry, however, is not something merely individual. It has social effects, because an idolator does not only resemble his god, but also creates institutions which look like himself. What man makes of his marriage, his family life, political party, etc. is a mirror image of himself. In the various societal relationships we therefore see the deepest convictions, hopes and expectations of a specific person or group, from which emerges, for example, whether they are obeying the laws of the true God or not.

Also in our public or social life we should therefore ask the basic question: Which god are we serving? Stated in simple terms: in communalism (where every "I" is a "We") the "we" or the community is the god. In individualism the "I" (individual) is the god. As Christians we reject both the "I" and the "We" as gods. God is our (only) God!

This sounds very pious, but does it bring us any closer to a solution? One may agree that the "I" should not be *drowned* in the community (like in communalism), but at the same time the "I" can never be *without* the "We"! How does the individual then fit into society?

### **10.1.2 From the perspective of different offices**

Let us have a look at how the true God guided his elected people, Israel, in their societal life. As almost all societies, it started with a family, then a tribe and finally twelve tribes. A tribe is not a state. Israel became as state (kingdom) only after the time of the judges. A tribe is rather like a large family, unified by ties of blood, loyalty and tradition and governed by a family of chiefs. The chief decides what land each family may use, where they may build houses, whom they

should marry and even what their religion should look like - their whole life. Tribalism is basically an authoritarian and totalitarian view of society. Justice is also not fair towards everybody (like the foreigner) but favours members of the own tribe.

The history of Israel shows, however, how tribalism disintegrates where Biblical faith takes hold. Already when Israel was travelling through the desert under the leadership of Moses they had a well-organised government (cf. Exodus 18:13-26), not identical with the tribal chiefs any more. Also the independent office of prophet (Deuteronomy 18:14-22) and that of priest (Exodus 29) were instituted.

Later on, when Israel became a kingdom under Saul, the office of king was added. Long before Israel had a king the Lord already gave specific commandments for the kingship (cf. Deuteronomy 17:14-20). In contrast to other despotic kings of the East, Saul had only *limited* power, status and wealth.

In this way the initially "closed" society of Israel, where all the functions were concentrated in only one figure (the family or tribal chieftain), gradually "opened" to a diversification of functions held by different people (the king in the state, the priest in the church, the father in the family etc.) with different responsibilities. Israel started using their historico-cultural formative power in a positive way, because the diversity and richness which God has given in creation was deployed in this way. Different human relationships, each with their own sphere of authority, came into existence.

It was also clear that the previously unlimited power of the tribal head was now limited. The king's power was limited to the specific task he was assigned to fulfil. The same applied to the priest(s). Also, the prophets did not have royal or priestly responsibilities. Their task was to proclaim the Word of God to everybody - also to priests and kings.

We can mention quite a few examples where the kings of Israel did not respect these limits set to them by God and transgressed, for instance, into the sphere of the priesthood. Every time this happened they were severely punished by God himself. Compare for instance Saul who did not wait for Samuel to offer to the Lord (1 Samuel 13:8-14), or Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-21) who took over the priest Azariah's

responsibility and burned incense on the altar in the temple. Both of them finally died because of disrespecting God-given boundaries.

Offering incense in the temple as such was not wrong. The priests did it on a daily basis. But when the king did it, it was a very serious sin. He used his royal status and power to go out of the sphere of his God-given royal responsibilities and to intrude into the sphere of the God-given responsibility of the priests. In direct opposition to the will of God, he did not want to make use of the institutions God provided, but wanted to provide for his own religious happiness. He pretended to be a priest. And by appointing himself to the priesthood, he was in fact "playing God," because in the time of Israel God appointed people to various offices. God so seriously regarded this transgression that Saul was removed as king and that Uzziah was not only punished with leprosy, but God declared him unfit for his royal responsibilities too.

Because God also reveals Himself in creation, every human being - even those who have never heard of the Bible - intuitively knows that a family is something different from a business, a church something other than a state, that a school should not be identified with a soccer club etc. Also non-Christians agree that we should not mix politics and sport and, as a consequence, select (or reject) players on political grounds instead of on merit. Or, to mention just one final example, if the government in Nigeria acts in favour of the Christians, the Muslims may with perfect justice protest, because it is not the task of a government to *choose* between religions or to get religiously involved, but only to guarantee *freedom* of religion for all its citizens.

Some Christians - also in my own country - have difficulty in understanding this. Have I not emphasised previously that a Christian can never be neutral, but always has to serve the true God or an idol? Am I thinking consistently when I now propagate religious neutrality in the case of government and the state? Do I myself not fall prey to dualist Christianity with its Christian private life but neutral public life?

The answer is: No. The state cannot be religiously neutral. But its God-given (religious) task is not to favour one or the other religion or faith. Its God-given task is to administer justice fairly to each person within its boundaries. It cannot be religiously neutral to this command from God: it either obeys or disobeys!

It is therefore even possible - as was the case in apartheid South Africa - to have a so-called Christian government (= a government consisting of mainly Christian members) governing in a very unchristian way, because they did not know - or did not want to know - what the real task of government has to be.

### **10.1.3 From the perspective of diversified love**

We can also explain what has been said thus far from another Biblical perspective, viz. that of love. God is king. His kingdom is a kingdom of love. He rules in love. Because He loved us so much, He redeemed us in Christ. He, however, also commands love from us towards Himself and our fellowmen. This is the only way to achieve real happiness individually and also in society at large. When we start looking for other ways to make us happy we substitute the real God with our own god, we replace our only Saviour with another saviour.

It should be kept in mind that love is not a feeling of affection: we also have to love those we do not like - even our enemies - just as God loved us while we were still his enemies. Real love is sacrifice and service!

Thus far nothing has been said that a Christian does not know and will not endorse. New doors, however, will open when we realise that love is not simply love. There are different kinds of love, because love has to take on different forms in different situations. The following types of love are all different: love for one's parents, wife, children, cattle, dog and farm. This fact offers promising perspectives for a Christian philosophy of society.

A secular philosophy of society will have much to say about competition, contracts, rights etc., but definitely not about love. Love is limited to the private life in marriage, family and the church. To speak of love in the case of politics (government and the state) will make people laugh. The state may have something to do with justice, but definitely not with love! Justice, however, is not the opposite of love. It is simply another form of love, the form in which love is realised or concretised in the case of the state as societal relationship. In the same way God's central love commandment has to be realised differently in the various other relationships: as fidelity in marriage,

care in a family, stewardship at work, compassion for the poor, health for our bodies, clarity in our thinking and many more.

Our conclusion: If we are able to again discover the richness and diversity of love, we will have no difficulty in surprising the world with a unique Christian philosophy of society.

## **10.2 THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALISM, COMMUNALISM AND A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SOCIETY**

On the preceding pages we have already indicated the desired direction from a closed (undiversified) to an open (diversified) society. As an example of a closed society we used the primal societies of Israel (before it became a kingdom) and Africa (during pre-colonial times). Other examples of closed, undiversified societies could be the Medieval society (about 500 - 1500 A.D.), in which case the church had authority over and dominated the whole of society, or the terrible regime of Adolf Hitler in Germany (prior to and during World War II), when the German government acted in a completely totalitarian fashion.

True development and progress, however, can only occur when and where the different spheres of life (marriage, family, school, church, business, university etc.) grow towards independence, and authority is differentiated rather than centralised. Of course this should occur, as already indicated previously in this chapter, in obedience to God's laws, proclaimed in His creational and Scriptural revelation, for the various societal relationships.

As against the *individualist* view of society and the *communalist* view, the Christian worldview therefore holds to a *pluralist* view of society. It wishes to do justice to both the individual and society. The reformational Christian worldview therefore does not make a choice in the framework of the false dilemma of an individual or a social Gospel. It does not perceive tension between either proclaiming the Gospel or restructuring societies. This does not indicate that the reformational way is simply a combination of the two other worldviews or the golden mean between the two struggling groups. It indicates a wholly new third way.

Before we go into details, I would like to present the following diagram which provides a summary of the three models for society. The diagram may be of help in obtaining an overview. It indicates very briefly the aim, philosophy, practice and final result of each of the three philosophies of society.

## A COMPARISON OF THREE MODELS FOR SOCIETY

	Individualism	Communalism	Pluralism
<b>Aim</b>	First liberty, then equality	First equality (unity, solidarity, brotherhood) then liberation	Freedom (individually and socially) to serve God
<b>Philosophy 1.</b>	Parts (individuals) more important than the whole (society)	Whole (society) more important than the parts (individuals)	False dilemma solved by the principle of unity in diversity or diversity in unity
<b>2.</b>	Higher ontic status for the individual	Higher ontic status for social collectivity	Individual's existence interwoven with a variety of different social relationships
<b>3.</b>	Societal relationships are artificial and contractual collections of individuals	Individuals find meaning and fulfillment only by belonging to the larger group	Pluralism does not overemphasise either the individual or community



4.	Overestimates individual and underestimates associative nature of human life	Overestimates community and underestimates individuals	Balance (not a compromise) between individual and society
5.	Human (individual) autonomy (one's own boss)	Obedience to collective will of "people"	Obedience to God's will (in His creational ordinances and in Scripture)
<b>Practice 1.</b>	All activities towards enhancement of individual (e.g. primarily individual rights)	All activities only a means to serve the purposes of the community at large (social rights)	All human activities in the service of the kingdom of God
2.	Atomistic relationships - also between societal relationships	One over-arching social institution (e.g. church, state, business as megastructure)	Societal relationships exist alongside/next to each other in mutual service

3.	Totalitarian via an indirect route - because human beings cannot live without societal relationships	Totalitarian simply by being consistent in applying its basic philosophy	Anti-totalitarian (only kingdom of God all-encompassing). Each societal relationship has (limited) authority in its own sphere
4.	Destroys unity of mankind	Destroys plurality and diversity in human life	Enhances both unity and diversity
<b>Result</b>	Libertinism (but finally also tyranny)	Tyranny	Real freedom - for individual and society

### 10.2.1 Individualism

Individualism is basically an atomistic vision. What is real are the individuals who together constitute society. Because the individual is the fundamental building block of society, social institutions are not realities, they are mere ideas, names given to associations which are nothing more than collections of self-determining individuals, which only come together as a result of their shared purposes and interests. Social institutions therefore have only a provisional contractual nature. Societal relations are necessary, but they are nothing more than human inventions. They also hold a continuing danger for the autonomy (being your own legislator) of individuals.

The following two examples illustrate this viewpoint clearly:

- The *state* is an artificial, contractual agreement between free individuals who co-operate for the sake of their own advantage. The government receives its authority from each individual citizen, and the main purpose of government is to protect the inalienable rights of the individual citizens, and should the government exceed its limits, it can be removed and replaced with a better one. In chapter 2 (section 2.3.2.2) an example was given of excessive individualism becoming rampant also in Africa when government officials and civil servants enrich themselves illegally with state funds and property without even feeling ashamed about it. They do not take their social responsibility seriously anymore.

- In *education* a system is advocated which maximises individual freedom. In the case of school education parents have to have the freedom to determine education. Authority does not reside in the state or in the church, but in the individual parent(s) of the child/student (the "consumer" of the educational services). Schools and other educational institutions have to be established and controlled through private initiative. The only role that is permissible for the state is that of providing funds for education. The curriculum also bears an individualistic stamp: the development of individual talents and potential is more important than that of communal aims and values.

## 10.2.2 Communalism

Communalism is the opposite of individualism, because it holds an organic, holistic view of society. The social collectivity (the tribe, political party, nation, church, state or utopian world order) is the primary reality. This is not simply something artificial (as in the case of individualism) but has ontic status. Where in the case of individualism the parts are more important than the whole, the parts (individuals) only find their meaning within the context of the whole in this view of society. The whole is considered to be more important than the sum of the parts. The universal is more important than the individual and is therefore also normative for all the sub-groups and their members.

In conjunction with this, the communalist collectivists also emphasise the universal bond of the brotherhood of mankind. The individual receives a corporate personality. The feeling of belonging to the group gives meaning to his whole life. It is only in obedience to the collective will that man can have a full life. It is therefore not the individual but the great whole that has rights. Apart from his participation in the collective aims of society the individual is in reality nothing. All human activities (cultural, religious, economical, political) are simply means to serve the purpose of the larger unity. The implications for the two societal relationships already mentioned in the case of individualism will be the following:

- It is understandable that in this view the *state* is all-encompassing, absolutely sovereign and all-powerful. It has the right and the power to organise individuals and groups in order to fit into its all-encompassing aims. The state could *grant* certain rights and powers to individuals and sub-groups (which do not belong to them *inherently*), but this is always on condition that the corporate whole be kept healthy and strong. The collective state integrates all the "parts" of the "whole" - the other societal relationships are only there as a means to help realise the state's aims and objectives.

This type of totalitarian rule or state absolutism is something very common in post-independence Africa. I do not have in mind here only the many military governments and dictatorships, but also the phenomenon called "statism" or the state cultus. In the post-colonial era most African states for instance took over the control and financing of

schools, tertiary education and hospitals, mostly established by missionaries and churches. The reason advanced was that the state would be able to offer a better service. But it failed in a dismal way. Because of statism governments have led their countries into chaos. The governments overestimated themselves!

But also the citizens expected far too much from their governments. They expected them to create order in the whole of society, to have direct control of everything and provide in every need. The whole of life has been politicised. A fundamental depoliticisation of society is therefore needed. Africa has to realise that one of its famous leaders, Kwame Nkrumah, was totally wrong when he declared: "First seek the political kingdom and all the other things will come of themselves". Initiative in other societal relationships than the state is an absolute necessity for the future survival of our continent!

■ According to communalism the seat of authority in *education* is also one overarching social institution. In the past it was either the church or the state, or the struggle between the two led to their seeking a kind of co-operative agreement. Modern communalism, however, sees the state as the one central institution which has to create a community by means of its education. Education (schools, universities, etc.) is therefore seen as a "branch" of the state, owned and managed by the state. Only state educational institutions therefore receive financial aid. Educational institutions under non-state control may well exist, but then only because their existence is permitted by the state and not because they have the inherent right. Teachers are the servants of the state and have to educate children/students in such a way that they find their rightful place in the society dominated by the state. The curriculum then is the means by which the youth is taught to serve society in a better way and to develop a sense of community spirit.

### 10.2.3 Pluralism

Just like individualism and socialism the word *pluralism* has many meanings, so that it is important to explain it clearly right from the beginning. In this chapter we use the word in a completely different sense than in chapter 3, section 3.3 when it served as the opposite for the dogmatism of a closed worldview.

When applied to heterogeneous societies Fowler (1993) proposes the following distinctions: (1) In a *plural* society the political order is organised along the lines of a division represented by the ethnic and/or religious diversity in a society. (2) In a *pluralist* society the cultural, ethnic and religious divisions within the wider society have no settled and significant role to play in the organisation of political life, because the political order claims to be neutral. (3) In a *monopolistic* society political power is used to impose the cultural and/or religious values of one section of society on the whole of society.

I use the words *pluralist/pluralism* to indicate (1) at once the diversity and the mutual connection between societal relationships. I prefer to indicate this principle, which is usually called *sphere sovereignty* in the reformational tradition, as *structural pluralism*. I therefore use the term in a much broader sense than Fowler, who merely indicates the way a society is organised politically. (2) I also advocate *confessional pluralism* (see section 10.4 below), which comes closer to what Fowler calls a *plural* society. But again I use the concept *pluralism* in a wider sense than merely the political. To me it indicates the right and liberty of people to establish all kinds of organisations, institutions and societal relationships, like schools, colleges, labour unions etc., according to their specific religious convictions. Confessional diversity may therefore assume structural form.

Pluralism is not simply a synthesis of, still less a compromise between individualism and communalism (or socialism), but is a totally different (third) perspective on society. Where the two other viewpoints give a higher ontic status to the separate individual or the collective community, pluralism holds that (individual) man is by nature a social being. He lives within a *variety* of societal relationships. Man is always man-in-different-associations - that is, not man in one encompassing collectivity.

Where the autonomous individual is the highest reality for individualism, and the collective community is the highest reality for communalism and socialism, a variety of societal structures is the true reality sought by pluralism. These societal relationships exist *alongside* each other, and *next to* the state, and are not *part* of it, as in collectivism. Each of these relationships has its own competence and

power within its own sphere. This can be illustrated again with the two examples already used in the case of individualism and collectivism:

■ According to this position the *state* is neither a single all-encompassing structure with higher ontic status than all other human relationships, nor is it simply an artificial social contract among individuals. According to pluralism the state has its own identity and limited sphere of competence - balanced by the rights and competences of other societal relationships. The specific purpose of the state is to promote public (general) justice, that is, to balance the rights and duties of the other societal relations, to cope with differences between them and to protect the rights of all. The state, in terms of an image, is the balance wheel, which has to co-ordinate and regulate the other wheels (relationships) so that all of them can fulfil their own functions and also function in mutual harmony.

Although the state has to play a kind of refereeing role, it may not under normal circumstances interfere in the sphere of competence of another societal sphere. It should play a supportive role and promote the free and equal development of each societal structure - in partnership with all the others. The state only has the right to interfere if a societal relationship, for example, does not fulfil its own task or interferes in the sphere of other societal relationships.

Because the state (consisting of government and citizens) is such an influential societal relationship, allow me to say something more about it from a pluralist-reformational perspective. (For more details see chapter 14.)

Because of sin man tends to misuse political power for his private interests. As Christians we have the duty to call governments back continually to God's order for the state otherwise we will have no freedom, peace and justice. It is a pity that, through inappropriate use of Scripture (cf. passages like Romans 13:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:13-14) - and by overlooking the many passages in the Bible that describe the duties and limits of rulers and also God's judgment over unfaithful rulers - Christians have often been satisfied with sinful passivity. In this way they have furthered corruption among government officials, furthered its pragmatic approach and finally its total secularisation.

What is the norm for faithful government? The great commandment of love should be the basis of all man's activities - including government. The *promotion of justice for all* is a government's way of practising love, as already stated above. God's norm demands that a government provide fair treatment for all its citizens, all societal institutions and organisations. Public life ought to be regulated in such a way that all citizens can fulfil their tasks responsibly and in peace. All people and all areas of life ought to be allowed free development. One person or group should not be favoured above another. Government should interfere where and whenever unfairness threatens. It should make laws and provide public services (especially for the basic requirements of life, such as housing, water, food, medical care, etc.) that ensure a free, safe and healthy society. People also ought to be protected against violations of their persons and property - if necessary through a police force or even the army.

We should therefore not ask (like the individualists): how much government do we need? The real question is not *how much*, but: Is the government truly promoting fair treatment of everybody, and does it truly allow all sectors of life the necessary development? We need enough government to provide justice for all.

This norm for government therefore stands in direct opposition to the popular idea of (individualist/socialist) democracy: the rule *of* the individuals/people, *by* the individuals/people, *for* the individuals/-people. The subjects (citizens), however, are not a law unto themselves through the government they have elected. There is a God-given norm to which *both* rulers and citizens are subjected.

■ Pluralism also sees *education* as an independent sphere. The school/college/university is not subject to parents, family, church or state, although it should have a harmonious relationship with all of them. The authority is vested with the educational institution itself. The school therefore does not only exist to serve the interests of the individual or the state, but has its own educational objectives.

The role of the family, church and state in education is supportive and creates of opportunity. The state must see to it that everybody has access to education, and the state must, as far as possible, contribute financially to education. It is not allowed to discriminate in its financial



subsidy, and should not try to exert control over the internal affairs of the school/university. In the same way the parents should have the right to choose the school or other educational institution which best suits their own worldview (cf. confessional pluralism below). And the church should exert its influence in the field of education by shaping its members' conceptions of life, education and teaching. (For more details on the school see chapter 13, section 13.4 and for a detailed discussion of Christian tertiary education see chapter 15.)

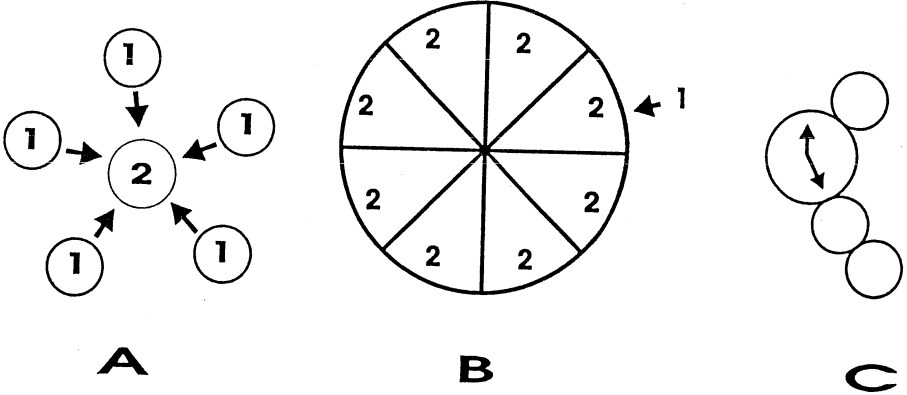
The Christian, pluralist view of society can be summarised in the following seven points:

- In an open, plural society a great variety of relationships in which people live and work are acknowledged and respected, and not only one encompassing societal relationship which dominates society (for example, the state, family, clan or tribe) as in a closed society.
- Societal relationships can be institutional relations, that is, instituted by God, such as marriage, family, church and state. We are born into most of these relationships. There are all sorts of relationships, however, which come into being through human initiative and endeavour, and of which man becomes a member voluntarily (and from which one can withdraw again), such as a sports club, a trade union, etc. Such kinds of societal relationships are, however, also subject to God's creational norms.
- A societal relationship binds people according to a specific yet limited purpose, and under specific conditions. Each relationship therefore has its own norms to give direction to it.
- Each societal relationship has its own nature, and therefore differs from all others as regards objectives and the way in which authority is maintained.
- Not all societal relationships are equally important (for example, a state as compared to a soccer club), but they are still equal.
- Because each societal relationship is equal it is also sovereign in its own sphere. Other relationships may not interfere in its sphere without fundamentally good reasons.

■ This competence in their own sphere does not mean that societal relationships are divided from each other in watertight compartments. They should not compete or be threatened by each other. One also cannot expect everything from one societal relationship (such as family or marriage). The wealth and diversity of being human will only emerge when the various relationships come to full deployment.

In recapitulation, we could compare the three visions of society discussed above with the following images: that of a collection of atoms, that of an orange and that of a clock. According to the individualist model society resembles a cluster of atoms - there is no social reality apart from the individual identity. According to collectivist communalism the segments of the orange have no separate identity apart from the whole orange, which is then of course more real and more important than the segments. Pluralism teaches that, as every cog in a clock has its own place, and simultaneously all interlock so that the clock can run, in the same way each societal relationship is a reality and has its own place and right to existence - in harmony with all the other societal relationships or structures.

Visualised in a diagram:



Explanation:

A = *Individualism*: individuals (1) loosely connected in a societal structure (2)

- B = *Communalism*: individuals and societal structures (2) merely part of the greater, more important whole (1)
- C = *Pluralism*: societal structures closely related but also independent

There are, of course, many variations on these three models, as well as many combinations which occur in practice, but they are the basic ones, and nobody has as yet brought forward a fourth model.

I have already indicated (see chapter 9, section 9.3) how many African states have, in the wake of independence, and in conjunction with traditional African communalism, experimented with various kinds of socialism. In the Western world, again, individualism is the dominant view of society - even in the East Bloc countries there has been a movement away from socialism to individualism in the course of the last few years. More or less the same thing is at the moment happening in Africa, with the push towards Western models of democracy (Cf. chapter 14, section 14.5.)

### 10.3 SOME CRITICAL REMARKS ABOUT INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMUNALISM

#### 10.3.1 Individualism

Individualism contains an element of truth, a true insight, which has, however, been worked out incorrectly. Individual people are important, but the right of the individual is overemphasised. People are not autonomous, a law unto themselves. Individual rights, too, are not absolute. There are norms which rise above the individual, because man also always lives in relation to his fellow men. Man's existence is interwoven into a network of different societal relationships with other people. The social facet is an inherent part of man's existence. For the individualist, however, this is an afterthought, as he sees societal relationships only as an addition to human nature. Individualism therefore *underestimates* the associative nature of human life, violates human solidarity and the unity of human society. It atomises and fragments society. At the same time it *overemphasises* the individual, and ascribes to him an autonomy and independence which is at variance with Scripture, which teaches that the whole of creation is totally dependent on its Creator.

Individualism is an impossible possibility. Possible because people still try to cling to it with all their might. But impossible because it cannot consistently be maintained as a social theory. It does not contain social substance. In the end individualism loses that which it would most like to sustain: the individual's rights within the public legal order. Individual rights can only be protected within a viewpoint which sees society as associative. For this reason we often find a pendulum movement between individualism and socialism or collectivism.

### **10.3.2 Communalism**

Society, human solidarity and unity are important, but should not be overemphasised. No human institution - however strong or big - can be the all-compassing standard for the whole of life. (This is true for both the Medieval church and the modern state.) Communalism makes a megastructure of one societal relationship and gives it a soteriological, messianic, trans-historical status, which the Christian should only accord to the kingdom of God. No human institution may be absolutised and given a divine character in this way.

Collectivist communalism first makes the distinction between state and the rest of society (that is, other societal relationships) become vague, and then deletes the difference. It obscures the identity and integrity of the many societal relationships which co-exist with the state. It destroys true plurality or diversity by allowing one societal structure (usually the state) to take illegal possession of the just authority of other societal relationships. Although this need not be deliberate, the usual end is tyranny.

Because individualism and collectivism spring from the same unbiblical root (the autonomy of either the individual or the community) we should not be surprised that their results might not differ all that much at the end of the day: both lead to a society which is controlled, directed and dominated from the top down.

The communalists reach this point simply through consistently sticking to their point of departure. Their point of departure, that one societal relationship has a higher ontic status than the rest, and that it embraces all the others, is realised in an all-encompassing megastructure.

By way of an indirect route the individualists, however, reach the same point. The reason for this is that individuals are not and cannot be self-contained atoms, nor can they remain thus. They need a society and social institutions to supply in many of their needs, and the more life becomes complex and difficult, the more do they need to reach outside themselves for help. Although the state might therefore, in theory, be a contract among individuals, it gradually, because of practical considerations, becomes the most real institution in society. That which initially had no ontic status, is finally, because of pragmatic reasons, accorded priority. Finally the individual's freedom is threatened by a totalitarian, tyrannical state, just as is the case with communalism. This is why some people maintain that (individualist) Western countries begin to look more and more socialist - while the East Bloc countries are saying farewell to socialism in favour of a more individualist-capitalist philosophy of society!

It would therefore not really help simply to make changes to these systems, or to try finding a golden mean between atomistic individualism and totalitarian communalism. True reformation demands a much more fundamental critique.

#### 10.4 STRUCTURAL AND CONFSSIONAL PLURALISM

There is not enough room here to go into the different forms of social pluralism which history has already yielded. Roman Catholicism, for example, with its *principle of sphere subsidiarity* has also proposed a form of pluralism. In the Reformed tradition one usually speaks of *sphere sovereignty* in this regard. I am only going to deal with two dimensions of pluralism (structural and confessional) as well as their coherence. Seeing that a great deal has already been said about the former, the emphasis here will be on the latter.

■ *Structural pluralism* we have seen is rooted in the orderliness of God's creation. A societal relationship, as stated above, is not simply a human invention or contract. God, in his creational revelation, also sets norms for human society in all its diversity. Knowingly or unknowingly, the way in which man structures his society is a response to these transcendent norms.

Creation is a unity. The rich diversity of societal relationships which has come into being in the course of history should not, therefore, mean fragmentation. The different societal structures have to co-operate in a relation of partnership - otherwise the individual man's life disintegrates. (In the Reformed tradition this is called the principle of sphere universality.)

At the same time society is not a seamless fabric. There is a rich diversity of cultural callings and fields of social activity. These possibilities were given in creation and were deployed in the course of history. In each of these societal institutions God calls us to a very specific task. Each one has its own sphere of authority. Each is equal in value to the other. Each has its own, inalienable, non-transferable or exchangeable rights and duties. No societal structure may dominate another, and/or use its authority or power to the detriment of another.

■ The concept pluralism also, however, includes *confessional pluralism*. We do not only advocate the right of a diversity of *societal relationships*, but also advocate the rights and liberties of a diversity of *religious convictions*. One reaction (from the side of Christians) to this viewpoint could be that it would encourage religious syncretism and relativism. Exactly the opposite is, however, the case: *respect* for other people's religions does not imply the *acceptance* of their viewpoints. The link between the two forms of pluralism is that the confessional diversity can assume structural form in, for example, Christian schools and universities.

The standard response to this viewpoint that official recognition is given to the differences between religious groups in a society is usually that it is divisive, would affect unity and would therefore be a public threat. Because religion affects social harmony, it has to be kept out of the public sphere, and can only play a role within personal life (individualism!).

Confessional pluralism, however, does not plead for sectarianism or religious intolerance. The right that we would like to grant to Christians, for example, should also be given to other faiths. The whole community's interests have to be served. This principle also objects to established groups and interests being privileged. Pluralism is more broad-minded than both individualism and collectivism, because it

acknowledges both structural diversity and religious heterogeneity in society. It is also much better to acknowledge the diversity openly than to try and obscure it with the definite result that religious convictions and differences will be smuggled into the public arena in various disguised forms.

## 10.5 OFFICE, AUTHORITY, POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

It has already been indicated that a reformational-pluralist view of society acknowledges a variety of offices. This perspective has to be worked out in more detail now, also in its relation to authority, power and responsibility.

### 10.5.1 Traditional viewpoints

The traditional African - and to some extent also modern African - view of office and authority could be summarised in the following key words: (1) hierarchical, (2) centralised, (3) according to seniority and status. The structure of authority is constituted from the top down: ancestors, chief (today: political leader), father, eldest brother, etc. It is also not as specialised and differentiated as in the West, but mostly centralised in one group, political party or person. Seniority plays a very important role in everything, and paternalism rules supreme, because the authority of the father figure may not be doubted or contradicted, as he is the authority in practically every field.

Many Christians too still hold a hierarchical view of authority which functions vertically from the top down. In accordance with this God is the highest authority and all the lower authorities also emanate from Him. He delegates his authority to the highest human figures of authority for example, a king, a state president, a chief director or principal, who in turn then delegates his authority to other lower holders of office. All authority is therefore *derived* from a higher authority and *delegated* to a lower one.

The duty of responsibility is the opposite: from the bottom up. Lower office-bearers or carriers of authority have to account to the authority above them. This process often ends with somebody who is "infallible" and not accountable to a higher authority. Even among Christians there is sometimes little substance to the thought that, because "all authority

derives from God" the highest office-bearer should be accountable directly to Him. The higher the office, therefore, the greater the authority downwards and - in practice - the more limited the accountability upwards!

### 10.5.2 Making human authority divine

The basic error in this hierarchical view on authority is that no distinction is made between human and divine authority. According to it man does not merely have *human* authority, but it has been derived from God, and is therefore *divine* authority. The result is that human authority is idolised. Control of authority is practically excluded because criticism or opposition - even in the case of the abuse of authority - can be seen as rebellion against God Himself. In this way many Christians interpret Romans 13:2 as meaning that rebellion against government means rebellion against God, and is for this reason not permissible. If we do not do careful exegesis, it is very easy to come to such a conclusion.

What is meant by "for there is no power but of God"? (Romans 13:1). Does this not prove the theory of authority or power deputed by God or deduced from God? No, this simply means that God determined that in each societal relation - the state too - there will be office-bearers with authority. If we do not explain it thus we would have to accept as logical the conclusion that wrong and wilfully sinful exercise of power should also be written on God's account!

And what should our answer be to the clear statement in Romans 13 verse 2: "Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God"? Here it is stated explicitly, that resistance against government means resistance to God, is it not? The correct exegesis, however, is that Paul here prohibits rebellion against the state as *ordination* or *institution* of God. If one rejects the state as *such* (for example, by advocating anarchy), one resists God Himself, who ordained it. (The state is not simply a contract among individuals invented by people.) Scripture, however, does not prohibit resistance against a government that is corrupt and which no longer gives expression to its God-given injunction. Stated differently, the *fact* that governments exist, has been willed by God, but not *how* they fulfil their duties, in other words, their *de facto* power.



### **10.5.3 A Biblical look at authority**

The correct vision is that each person in accordance with his calling has a mandate from God to authority. His authority has not been *derived* from higher authority or *delegated* to him from the position of a higher authority.

Authority is therefore, like all things human, imperfect and fallible. Man can only lay claim to authority to the extent to which he has *insight into and shows obedience towards* the divine norms which hold for the relevant situation or societal relationship in which he finds himself.

In a family a believing child can often have more sensitivity for the norms which are valid for family life and point them out to his parents. A student might have a more accurate awareness of the true calling of a university and point this out to a lecturer, who might have forgotten this, or does not have such a clear vision. And a citizen has the duty, as a subject, to reprimand the government if it should forget the central calling of the state, which is justice for all.

### **10.5.4 Authority and office are not the same**

According to this more Biblical view of authority the automatic or straight connection between authority and office as the only institution of authority is therefore denied. Somebody who holds a certain office, for example, in government or management does not really have authority unless he complies with the cardinal requirement of authority, which is insight into divine norms. Those of you who have done military service will know how often it is said jokingly that some commanders have their authority by virtue of their rank (the pips on their shoulders) rather than by virtue of their insight (their brains).

Many such office-bearers without authority can of course have power. Power as such is not bad or wrong, for no societal relationship can function properly without the necessary power. The state even receives the power of the sword from God.

Correct use of power, however, presupposes the *responsible* use of authority, that is, with the correct insight into and obedience to the norms of the relevant societal relationship.

*Abused* power leads to violence. Violence is the unnecessary, illegal, excessive and even damaging abuse of power.

This does not mean, however, that violence in all cases is the same as the abuse of power. When a policeman, for example, has to arrest a robber or a murderer using violence, one could talk of *constructive* violence, as opposed to *destructive* violence where the policeman might kick open the front door of an innocent man or even shoot him. When a country is attacked, the government is also justified in defending itself against the aggressor using violence (war).

### 10.5.5 The task of the office-bearers

According to their insight into the norm for the relevant societal relationship, office-bearers have to see to it that the members of the relevant societal relationship is in a position of fulfilling their calling in that specific societal relationship and that their calling is protected and promoted. If members of a church want to turn their church into a political party or a social club, or if the top management of a university runs it purely like an industry, or the students try to turn it into a sports club, they have to be reminded anew of the aim of the specific institution. As a result of man's sinfulness office-bearers have to use the authority imparted to them to oppose evil and they have to maintain the necessary order with a view to allowing the members of the relevant societal relationship to fulfil their calling. Romans 13 explicitly states that government is there to punish evil.

The quality of life which is enjoyed within each societal relationship is directly dependent upon the extent of the response to the norm for each relationship. If the awareness of this normativity becomes dulled and blunted, the quality of life will also deteriorate. Marriage is then threatened by divorce; industry does not offer job satisfaction any longer; government declares war on its own citizens and citizens rebel against their own government.

### 10.5.6 Limits of authority

As a result of the sinfulness of man one of the greatest problems that office-bearers often have is that they do not know any longer what the *task* and the *calling* is of the relationship within which they hold authority. Thus they also do not know the *limits* of their authority. Or they simply ignore all these things. Spouses see marriage simply as a way to satisfy sexual needs, industry is aimed simply at profit and not service, and the environment is polluted. And government interferes in a totalitarian manner in other societal relationships.

Because of the fact that no office-bearer and therefore also no government is perfect, it is the duty of each government (for both its own sake and for that of its citizens) to keep open channels of communication. A government is not elected by the citizens so that it can simply carry on without consulting the electorate. A government (and this is true of all the societal relationships) which obstructs these channels is looking for rebellion. (Think what might happen if there were not the necessary openness and communication between parents and children.) Freedom of expression of opinion in interviews with representatives of government should be encouraged and not suppressed. Whoever makes change impossible makes rebellion inevitable!

### 10.5.7 Office is service to our fellow-men

Offices are therefore not simply there for the sake of the office-bearer's own interests, but for the sake of those entrusted to him. Office is synonymous with service. The Bible is full of instances to prove that leadership is not about status, position and domination, for it is heathen leaders who dominate, while Christian leaders are called to serve their fellow-men. (Cf. Luke 22:24-27.)

Romans 13:4 and 6 therefore say that government is a *servant* of God for the *best interests of the citizens*. Servant is not the same as substitute. Government may never assume for itself the place of God. Office, authority and power which are not borne by the service motif become a monster - but in the end a self-devouring monster. The irony is that a state which becomes too proud of its power (economic,

military, technological, etc.) is on the threshold of powerlessness and destruction.

### 10.5.8 Office is subject to control

Any office is therefore subject to control. This control can be exercised by another societal relationship or by members within the same relationship.

If an industry, for example, is careless with scarce resources or pollutes the environment, the state may intervene. The state does not then transgress into the sphere of industry, but has to remind industry anew of the norm which is applicable to it: careful stewardship over the resources of God's creation.

An example of control exercised by members within a relationship is the following. Office-bearers often rule for the sake of their *own personal position* (big salary, other benefits) or for the sake of their *own group*. Should a government consistently act out of self-preservation and for the sake of a group of people, and the justice towards others be trampled underfoot, the will of God is being opposed. Such a government has then in fact become a revolutionary one, for it commits revolution (rebellion) against God. A Christian citizen in such a case cannot any longer accept the exercise of power and authority from such a government. It would be a glorification of power - power for the sake of power - while we are only called to glorify God. Citizens who oppose such a government cannot simply be called revolutionaries, because they are in fact anti-revolutionary, they work against the revolution of which the government is guilty. And their positive intention is to call the government back to its real calling.

### 10.5.9 Authority, responsibility and service

To recapitulate, office consists of the following elements: (1) authority and power; (2) responsibility, and (3) service.

\* *Authority* presupposes two things: (a) In the first place, *insight* into the will of God for a specific situation (one cannot be a leader if one does not know what is right for the situation within which it has to be exercised), and (b) in the second place *action* in accordance with the

will of God for the specific case or sphere. Somebody with authority is therefore somebody who *knows* and *wants* to fulfil God's will. This can never happen without the Holy Spirit, who gives us insight into the Word of God and strength to act in accordance with it.

Authority gives a person the necessary *power* to be able to execute his authority. Just as authority is never to be seen outside the perspective of insight and correct action, so power can never be separated from authority. If it is not accompanied by true authority, it is illegitimate power which oppresses the members of the societal relationship instead of helping them to realise their godly calling. Such exercise of power - which might even become demonic - should not be obeyed, but should be opposed in the correct way.

Authority and power are therefore never unlimited or uncontrolled. Because man's insights are limited and concrete obedience is imperfect, we should always say: *to the extent* to which somebody has insight, *to the extent* that he acts in accordance with that, *to the extent* that he has authority, he is entitled to power.

In practice this has the following implications:

- Before Christians elect somebody to an office, they have to make certain that the person knows God's will for the specific sphere of life, and they should also know whether he is willing to obey it. (Friendship, politics or other considerations may never determine who is elected.) If we do not do this, we will be co-responsible later on for illegal exercise of power.
- The person who is elected should ensure that he complies with the requirements set for an office-bearer.
- Those who are already in office should see to it that they grow in insight and obedience on a daily basis. Otherwise they will be unworthy office-bearers without true authority and power. (For a more extensive outline of this Biblical concept of authority, see the valuable book by P.A. Schouls (1972). He offers many interesting examples from the Bible.)

\* *Responsibility* is always oriented, normative and structured responsibility.

■ In the *first place* responsibility presupposes an *orientation point*, an address. For the Christian this is God. Because we know that man is no real holder of power except through the grace of God, we know that man is no substitute for God but only a servant of God and his fellow men, no master, but only a steward of God over His creation.

God is the *Caller*. His *calling* goes out to us, the *called*. We have to be responsible, answering to His calling in every area of life. In the light of rampantly irresponsible conduct all over our continent in every sphere of life, I am of the opinion that we need to put special emphasis on personal responsibility in the presence of God.

Simultaneously officers are also responsible to the members of the societal relationship who appointed them in the specific office.

■ In the *second place* responsibility is always *normative*, subjected to norms and principles. God's norms are his "directions for use" according to which we have to fulfil our responsibility. They are his beacons which will enable us to set sail safely and not get stranded on the rocks. They are the tracks which will keep the train running safely.

■ In the *third place* responsibility is always *structured*. It has its own character in each societal relationship. In a pluralist societal vision this means that responsibility is spread. Even *within* each separate societal relationship responsibilities have to be spread and shared in accordance with the involvement and talents of each individual.

Responsibility may therefore not be fragmented as in liberalism where all the emphasis is simply on *self*-responsibility of the individual. On the other hand it may also not be collectivised, as in the case of communalism which overemphasises *community* responsibility and underemphasises or denigrates individual responsibility.

\* Finally, office also means *service*: authoritative and responsible service! The well-known Christian leader and writer, Gottfried Osei-Mensah, recently re-emphasised servanthood as the basic Biblical principle of leadership in a challenging booklet with the title: *Wanted*:

*servant leaders* (1990). With reference to many Biblical figures and texts, he illustrates the necessity that leadership in Africa - in all areas of life - should be transformed in order to be motivated again by humble service to God and our fellow human beings.

The same spirit is also reflected in the following prayer from the Nigerian Christian journal *Challenge* (no. 4, 1990, p. 7):

### Give us leaders

Lord, give us leaders,  
Leaders who will be strong enough  
To know when they are weak.  
And brave enough to face  
themselves when they are afraid.  
Leaders who will be proud and  
unbending  
In honest defeat  
But humble and gentle  
In victory.  
Leaders whose wishbone will be  
Where their backbone should be.  
Leaders who will know you  
And that to know and accept  
themselves  
Is the foundation of knowledge.  
Leaders who will be led  
Not in the path of ease and comfort  
But under the stress and spur  
Of difficulties and challenges  
Here let them learn compassion for  
those who fail.  
Leaders whose hearts will be clean  
Whose goal will be high  
Who will reach into the future  
Yet never forget the past  
Who will master themselves  
Before they seek to master other  
men.  
Give them a rare sense of humour

So that they may always be serious  
Yet never take themselves too  
seriously.  
Who will learn to laugh  
Yet never forget how to weep.  
Above all give them humility  
So that they may always remember  
The simplicity of greatness  
The openmindedness of true  
wisdom  
And the meekness of true strength.

*H. Khitwe Dabin.*

## 10.6 A SUMMARY IN THIRTEEN THESES

Let me summarise the preceding ideas in the following theses:

1. Office-bearers are never elected for the sake of their own interest (or that of the group represented) but for the sake of all those entrusted to their authority. In the light of Scripture position or office is synonymous with service to God and one's fellow men. The Bible is full of proof that office does not mean status, position and dominance.
2. The elitist concept of office, restricted to certain people in, for example, state and church with a combined, hierarchical concept of authority is not Biblically founded. Offices are not the exclusive right of some, limited to some positions of leadership together with status and power, as the Biblical idea is that *each* individual is the holder of an office which implies, among other things, service of God, protection of fellow men, and stewardship over creation. We therefore believe in a *universal* vocation for office, and thus for service.
3. Apart from this *general* divine calling to man to execute his office, there are also *specific* calls and therefore a *variety* of offices. Everybody is called to service, but not everybody to the same service, in the same way or in the same field. God's call to office-bearers comes within the context of a specific societal relationship. The universal calling to office is specified in a specific societal sphere or relationship.



4. Office-bearers have the following tasks: (a) to see to it that the fulfilment of the calling of the members of the relevant societal relationship is directed normatively at the specific aim of the relationship; (b) to protect and promote their calling; (c) to struggle against evil because all men are sinners, and (d) to maintain the necessary order with a view to fulfilment of the specific calling in a particular societal relationship e.g. family, school, church, state, business, etc.

5. Office and authority are not the same thing, as someone can fill an office unlawfully, without the necessary authority.

6. Authority is located in office in terms of God's creational ordination. It is a gift and a duty from God to man. Man, however, only has human (creaturely) authority. God does not transfer his (divine) authority to anybody. The idea that authority is *transferred* by God or *derived* from God is wrong. Whoever reasons in this way will easily fall into the trap of idolising of human authority. Then control over authority falls away, because criticism of or resistance against even abused power could easily be seen as rebellion against God Himself.

7. To exercise an office one also needs power. Power is the *ability* to do something. Power as such is therefore not wrong - if it is not abused. It is wrong if it is obtained through physical power or through some or other form of violence.

8. To exercise an office man therefore needs both power (the *ability* to serve) and authority (the *right* to render service in a specific relationship). Both power and authority aim at empowering people living in a specific societal relationship to fulfil their divine callings. Should they be prevented from doing so, then authority and power are being abused. Abuse of power leads to violence. Only one societal relationship, viz. the state, has the divine right to use violence, but then it has to be constructive and not destructive violence.

9. Power and authority in each societal relationship are unique. Government has the power of the sword, which is not permissible within any other societal relationship. In a family context one does not have the same kind of power and authority as, for example, the state

has, and it is also exerted in a different way. The power and authority of a church (council) are again totally different from that of the family, because the former is of a religious nature. Thus the power and authority within a university are also different, being academic in nature.

10. We should also distinguish between *personal* and *communal* authority. Personal authority (the personal right to serve) includes as already mentioned, among other things, the following: (a) *insight* into the normative calling and task of the relevant societal relationship, (b) willingness to *obey* the relevant social norm, (c) the necessary *ability/skills* to do this, and also (d) the willingness to *grow*, daily, in insight and obedience. (In our sinful world not many people in authority will be able to pass this acid test of the Bible!) Communal authority is the authority which the community (members of the societal relationship) "allocates" to the office, so that it can be effectively executed.

The personal conviction of somebody that he can be of service therefore needs the confirmation of the community within which he lives. *Confirmation*, however, does not mean the *transfer* of authority. The members of the community do not each individually transfer their authority to the office-bearer, to enable him to exert authority over them on their behalf. This concept of authority is rooted in an individualist and not in the reformational or pluralist philosophy of society. Nevertheless confirmation or appointment in an office by a community is preceded by their *recognition* of the abilities of the office-bearer.

The above-mentioned two facets of authority unfortunately do not always go hand in hand. On the one hand somebody might well have the personal capacities, but the community might not recognise and acknowledge them. On the other hand a person might not have the abilities, but might because of popularity and supposed competence, a presupposed "right" thereto (long service, seniority, or a position on the hierarchical list of promotion) be endowed with communal authority. This then will be a case of office without ability or insight.

11. The power with which an office-bearer is endowed should not be *too slight*, because then the office cannot be effectively exercised, and also not *too great*, as this can easily lead to an abuse of power.

12. Office bearers are responsible towards God and the members of the societal relationship who appointed them for the way in which they execute their authority and power.

13. This vision on office, authority and power prevents two dangers: both *tyranny* and *egalitarianism*, thus both absolutisation of the office and lack of respect for the office. The former is often the case with traditional hierarchical views of office, while the latter often happens with the so-called democratisation of a societal relationship (university, industry, whatever). The challenge is therefore to construct and to practically apply a third, reformational vision.

(Fowler (1993b:28-31) holds a similar view concerning office, authority and power. His article presents interesting new perspectives to the above summary. Unfortunately his article was received when I was already in the process of proofreading the final text of this book, and his valuable insights have thus not been included.)

\* \* \*

This chapter has spelled out the three basic worldview options for society. The third or Christian alternative to the two other dominant ones opens real liberating perspectives. Its view of office, authority, power and responsibility also contains the possibility of a total renewal of societal life.

The troubling question at the end of this chapter, however, is whether this Christian worldview is ever implemented in the contemporary world. Is it possible then for us to change the current situation in order to come closer to the ideal just outlined? In which way(s) can we work towards the renewal of our societies? To look for an answer to this urgent question will be our task in the next chapter.

## Chapter 11

# SOCIAL CHANGE AND RENEWAL ACCORDING TO THREE MODELS

At the end of the twentieth century the whole world is crying out for change. It seems as if our globe is showing signs of fatigue and a longing for renewal. This has already become evident in the case of Africa in chapter 2. Also my own country is at the moment in the midst of a transition. But it also applies to the Western world. Not only has Eastern Europe experienced dramatic changes during the last two years, but Western Europe is on its way to becoming a united region. Apart from most Southern regions (like South America) struggling against poverty, many Eastern countries are trying to "modernise".

To start with, two questions will have to be answered: (1) according to what model or social philosophy should this change take place? and (2) is Christianity really capable of changing a society?

### 11.1 INTRODUCTION: LOOKING FOR A MODEL

Mere change, adjustment or becoming is not yet renewal. Renewal is a special kind of change. Let us have a look at three types of change.

#### 11.1.1 Historical-deterministic views of renewal

Three examples of this viewpoint can be mentioned:

- According to the concept of *eternal repetition* which is already present in the Greeks and again in the previous century in Friedrich Nietzsche, similar circumstances and events recur unavoidably in the history of the cosmos and of man in a cyclical fashion. History is not a line but a spiral. This is also the traditional African view as indicated previously.
- Closely related to this concept there are the views of certain historians that each period in history, and also history as a whole (cf. for example O. Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes - The decline of the West*) consist of at least three phases which man cannot change at all, viz. growth, flowering and decline.

■ A third example of historical determinism, to my mind, is the *traditionalist or reprivatory* approach according to which renewal can only come about in the present by letting the past revive. The beautiful ideals of the past have to be "dreamed anew". The best tonic for the present is conversion to the past!

We agree with the idea that the past can never be totally eradicated. There are good things from previous periods which may not only be retained, but should be conserved as a precious heritage.

We differ from this view, however, because each tradition - however good, antique or orthodox - also has its share of evil, and cannot be retained unchanged for eternity. Human history is also not a cyclical matter. Therefore history may not be viewed in accordance with cosmological or biological concepts of growth - flowering - decline. And in the final instance a specific period from history cannot be repeated at will - the clock of history cannot be turned back.

### 11.1.2 Vitalist-anthropocentric visions of renewal

Here too three examples can be mentioned:

■ The first is the vision of the *Renaissance* (from *renasci* = to be reborn, to grow again). This period in the 15th and 16th centuries does not any longer need Christianity to act as midwife in the process of giving life to a new dispensation. Long before Christianity the Classical Greek and Roman period had proved what man was capable of. Renaissance man therefore rejects the intellectual compromise of the Middle Ages between pagan Ancient Greek philosophy and Christianity and reverts to the Classics (although not slavishly) as an injection by means of which man can renew himself through his own strength.

■ A second vision which could be categorised in this section is *revivalism* (from the Latin *revivare* = to revive). Note that I am not dealing here with the *Biblical* idea of true revival, but with the *false* concept of some Christians who think they can, as it were on order, produce revivals from their own power.

- A third theory of renewal which might fit in here is that of *challenge and response* of among others, pragmatism and the historian A. Toynbee.

It should be clear to you, however, that as Christians we cannot accept any one of these concepts of renewal. Man cannot renew himself and his environment purely from his own strength, and history, furthermore, is not simply a matter of challenge and response, because sin is more than a simple challenge.

### 11.1.3 Perfectionist-utopian renewal concepts

The ideas of progress, evolutionism, revolutionism and millennialism are examples:

- The concept of *progress* (strongly held in the previous century) is optimistic about an ongoing, comprehensive, unstoppable advancement, especially as a result of modern scientific-technological development. Man is approaching a wonderful new age!
- The original biological concept of *evolution* soon develops into a comprehensive evolutionist worldview. The new era of superman is coming! We simply have to be patient, seeing that it took so many million years to reach our present phase of development. Renewal cannot happen overnight. Development usually occurs through its own volition in the correct direction.
- *Revolutionary* thinkers are, in much more of a hurry. They strive for an immediate, total, radical, definite renewal of society - if necessary, with violence. The existing order is totally unacceptable, and should be eliminated without further ado. As against this, the new system will be perfect, without a flaw.
- Among Christians too we find *perfectionist ideas* at an early stage (for example, Joachim of Fiore, who died in 1202). These ideas include the millennium, a period during which a state approaching perfection will prevail on earth.

Our reaction to all these perfectionist-utopian visions is that we have to cling to both the indelible imperfection of this dispensation and the

radical renewal as a result of God's grace. In our view of history we have to cling to the fact that no person or system - no matter how old or new - can be 100% free from sin.

The concept of *progress* of the nineteenth century has proved in our century to have been a mirage. More schools have not simply obviated the need for prisons!

And as regards the *evolutionary mode of renewal* we agree that renewal has to occur within the context of historical continuity. We differ from the evolutionary thinkers, however (and in this regard we are closer to the revolutionary), because they have lead in their shoes, are not in a hurry to reform. Usually the time is not considered to be ripe for action - while the time is in fact always over-ripe for change of that which is wrong.

The *revolutionary* way of social change will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter.

To recapitulate: reformationally-oriented people are not *stagnant traditionalists*, also not *leaden-footed evolutionists*, still less *fire-starting revolutionists*, but they are *hopeful light-bearers*.

Our conclusion at the end of the comparison between the different concepts of renewal is the following: reformation does have similarities with, but finally no true equals among other concepts of renewal since pre-Christian times up to today. It is a unique, specifically Christian viewpoint, rooted in the only true religion of renewal, which is the Biblical one.

We, however, still have to answer the second question, and that is whether Christianity or religion in general is really capable of changing society.

#### 11.1.4 Three schools of thought

As far as I could determine, there have been mainly three schools of thought which maintain that no religion - not the Christian either - can effect positive social change. According to the first, religion is *archaic*, according to the second it is *oppressive* and according to the third it is

something *individual*. According to all three, religion is not capable of effecting social change. The reverse is rather true: religion is simply shaped and determined by social, political and economic forces. The only role which religion can play is of a negative kind and that is to help maintain the *status quo*.

■ The *first school of thought* has its origin in the philosophers of the Enlightenment, and is continued, for example, in the work of Sigmund Freud, while still being widely propagated today. Religion is in reality a neurotic phenomenon. Fortunately it is decaying and will soon disappear from the scene. The steamroller of modernisation will finally run over it and turn all religions into dust. No religion - and that includes the Christian - will be able to remain standing in the face of the relentless progress of secularisation.

■ The *second school of thought*, especially associated with Karl Marx, maintains that religion is simply an instrument of social control. Religion offers rewards in the hereafter to the oppressed, suffering proletariat in order to keep them under control in the here and now. It is simply an instrument in the hands of the powerful to maintain stability, order and the *status quo*. Religion on its own has no formative power - it is simply the product of economic relations in a society.

■ The *third school*, consisting of various American sociologists, differs from the first in that it does not accept that religion is disappearing. Religious awareness might even be on the increase. Religion, however, has become something private and individual. People limit it more and more to their private lives, for example private prayer, family and church. Religion is simply an oasis of tranquillity in a world gone mad. It enables individuals to survive the hardness and impersonality of everyday life. Religion is simply one of many experiences, a facet of personal life, which cannot give meaning to the whole of life any more.

What do we say about these three viewpoints?

I do not believe that we can maintain that religion is never static or never supports the *status quo*. Emile Durkheim correctly pointed out that religion promotes social stability, and practically all societies have "civil religions" that bind them and give their members a sense of unity



and a shared purpose. Religion has in fact been used by those in positions of power - my own country included - to ensure the *status quo* and to oppose social change. Complacent, selfish and materialistic people are not unknown within the ranks of Christianity!

On the other hand, religion can, apart from maintaining the *status quo*, also promote change and renewal. Apart from acceptance, it can also effect protest, and apart from proclaiming the present order to be sacrosanct, it can also create a new order. Religion need not be half-dead and somnolent. More and more researchers have in the past two decades questioned the accepted idea of the social impotence of religion, and have indicated how religion, especially Christian religion, has often played an important role in social improvement, and how this can be continued in future. It has also been found that "modernity" is not all that hostile towards religion, or religion towards modernity. And authoritative studies have been unable to indicate that there has been a significant decline in religious awareness. In fact, in many cases religious convictions are even stronger today and have a bigger influence on society than during Freud's time. The highly touted secularisation process does not seem to be that impenetrable, that unstoppable and that irreversible.

#### **11.1.5 A selection of three models**

From the preceding it is evident that a variety of ideas for renewal are available. From these we have selected three to be compared in more detail, namely the dualist-pietist, the revolutionary and the reformational. They are connected with the three models for society discussed in the previous chapter: the individualist, the communalist or socialist and the pluralist-reformational.

But before entering into the details, the following diagram which provides a summary of the three models may be helpful in obtaining an overview. It very briefly indicates the starting points, purposes, strategies, methods, character and results of the three models.

**SOCIETAL RENEWAL ACCORDING TO THREE MODELS**

	<b>Dualist-Pietist</b>	<b>Revolutionary</b>	<b>Reformatinal</b>
<b>1. Worldviewish starting point</b>	<i>Dualist</i> (Sacred-secular, church-world) <i>Above/Next to/even against</i> the world - actually accommodating to the world	<i>Secular</i> (only this world) <i>Against</i> the existing order	<i>Radical</i> (God transforms the world) <i>Positive</i> obedience to God - for the sake of His world.
<b>2. Purpose</b>	<i>Pietist</i> - Evangelise the world through the church	<i>Utopian</i> - Create a paradise on earth	<i>Realistic</i> - Renew and improve the world - but not utopian perfectionism
<b>3. Strategies</b>	<i>Conservative</i> - the existing order should be respected and, if necessary, changed in a slow, "evolutionary" way	<i>Aggressive</i> - rapid, abrupt change	<i>Transformational</i> - renewal is always necessary, but can be a difficult, arduous process
<b>4. Means</b>	<i>Defend</i> the status quo	<i>Destroy</i> the status quo	<i>Renew</i> the old which is wrong <i>Improve</i> the relatively good

<p><b>5. Methods</b></p>	<p><i>Non-violent</i> mainly emergency aid (charity, relief work, hospitals etc.)</p> <p><i>Leaden-footed</i></p>	<p><i>Violent</i> (Spirits of salt, fire) - even armed struggle</p> <p><i>Fire-starters</i></p>	<p><i>Non-violent</i> (like salt, yeast, light) - but not limited to emergency aid (symptoms only)</p> <p><i>Light-bearers</i></p>
<p><b>6. Character</b></p>	<p><i>Irresponsible</i>: merely a change of heart (reborn) leaving Christians in secular world without norms</p>	<p><i>Superficial</i>: overthrow of structures but no real change of individual attitudes (sinful hearts)</p>	<p><i>Radical and total</i>: conversion of the human heart in order to change sinful structures from within</p>
<p><b>7. Results</b></p>	<p><i>Only half the road</i> - Christians not really present in the world, also no resistance against eventual secularisation</p>	<p><i>Closed road</i> - Further decline, new revolutions</p>	<p><i>Open road</i> - What is reformed should continually be reformed - otherwise deformation</p>

## 11.2 THE DUALIST-PIETIST MODEL FOR SOCIAL RENEWAL

As indicated in chapter 5, there are a number of dualist Christian worldviews resulting in a variety of views concerning social change. We will use the pietist type, which is sometimes also indicated as the Evangelical viewpoint, as an example. Because of lack of a better term, it will be indicated as the dualist-pietist approach to social change. I do not intend a condemnation of all Evangelical viewpoints. There is much to be appreciated in Evangelicalism, for instance its efforts to be faithful to the Gospel. Everyone knows that "evangelical" is a very broad and even vague term that covers a great variety of viewpoints through the ages.

### 11.2.1 A dualism of evangelisation and social action

The Evangelical point of view is in general conservative. It tends to defend current norms and values, to strengthen the authority of ruling group(s) and even to legitimise the *status quo*. Since 1974 (Lausanne) and earlier too, a great deal has been said about the *two tasks* which the Evangelicals see for Christians, viz. that dissemination of the Gospel and socio-political involvement go hand in hand and that the former is not more important than the latter. But in spite of all the discussions since 1974 not much has changed. Although it seems that their intention is to make the *whole* of the Gospel relevant for the *whole* of man, they remain stuck in the dualism of evangelisation on the one hand (the primary) and social responsibility on the other hand (the secondary). At Manilla (Lausanne II, 1989) much emphasis was put on the dissemination of the Gospel, but less on the social dimensions of the same Gospel. According to reports there was not much discussion, for example, of unjust, repressive social structures. This was the case in spite of the excellently formulated article A4 (*The Gospel and social responsibility*) of the *Manilla Manifesto*, calling the whole church to take (*nota bene!*) the whole Gospel to the whole world. The Evangelical position remained ambiguous and the difficulty of relating and integrating evangelism and social responsibility could not be resolved.

In the early part of this century the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility was an *either/or* one. In recent years evangelism and social action have been viewed as constituting a

*both/and* relationship. The Evangelical tradition has sought to relate evangelism to social concern in this *both/and* relationship in three possible ways: (1) social activity is a *consequence* of evangelism; (2) social involvement can be a *bridge* to evangelism, and (3) social concern may be a *partner* which accompanies evangelism. However, in none of these approaches the inherent dichotomy is challenged at its root.

### 11.2.2 No real involvement in society

Evangelicals regard the proclamation of the message of redemption as their main responsibility towards society. Apart from having to obey the existing government, they are not allowed to play any role in politics. If the Gospel has a liberating role to play, it is not to liberate from a wrong and unjust social order, but at most from alcohol, tobacco, intellectualism and poor morality.

Their message of "hands off politics" does not mean that their interpretation of Christianity indicates no political role. They simply become a handy, passive support for the existing order. By directing the attention at the spiritual or the supernatural, they divert attention from the economic and political causes of the realities within which people live and therefore do not encourage any critical views of the economic system of a society. They do not encourage Christians to evaluate the existing social order, but only to draw advantages from it. With their emphasis on spiritual, personal salvation and rebirth, they also divert attention from social deficiencies and injustices which call for correction. By one-sidedly putting the emphasis on a personal moral life, they avoid the necessity of reforming institutionalised injustices. By spiritualising the whole of life, they leave no room for social involvement - apart from the influence which may emanate from a personally pious life. This type of Christianity therefore is more or less a voice in favour of the structural *status quo*.

They, for instance, do not look at development from a broad or comprehensive perspective. Development demands social analysis. For example: Who created the social structures? Who maintains them? To whose advantage? Development also presupposes a purposeful effort to effect social change and then not merely in the short term, and also not only for the sake of relieving a single kind of suffering.

For this reason this kind of Christianity limits itself to emergency aid which, according to them, is the correct kind of Christian action. Anything more would be unwarranted interference in the political sphere. The words of Camara illustrate this very clearly: "When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor do not have bread, I am called a communist."

### 11.2.3 The dualist background

Evangelical Christians have not been blind or insensitive to social problems. They have revealed a surprising amount of creativity and energy in an attempt to alleviate the problems, or rather the symptoms. Their approach, therefore, has been aimed at alleviation, rather than finding solutions for the problems. They do not realize that the misery which they try to relieve has to a large extent been caused by the same social order that they have been helping to establish or maintain. They have simply come to the aid of the victims of their own structural violence!

The worldvise background of the Evangelical viewpoint reveals a dualistic manner of thought, or a two-sphere vision of life and a dichotomous view of man. The world of faith, grace and religion is the higher world for which we need God's revelation. We have to concentrate on that. For the lower world, the natural world, human reason suffices. It is a non-religious, secular and neutral area. In this area there is no difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, because both here live according to the laws of nature and human reason.

Diagrammatically one can represent the two worlds in the following way:

higher	holy	grace	revelation	spiritual	soul	church	theology
lower	secular	nature	reason	material	body	world	philosophy

This dualism has led to the popular conception among Christians that their religious obligations can be separated from their scientific, political, economic and other activities. The only sphere over which God still has authority in man's life, apart from his religion and his faith, is his ethical life. Christians have to avoid unethical, immoral

behaviour. For this reason Evangelical Christians put all the emphasis on two matters, viz. the dissemination of the Gospel and a personally moral life (no smoking, drinking, whoring, etc.).

This dualism has never been officially acknowledged, but has always been unconsciously present. For this reason it has usually also been denied when attention has been attracted to it.

#### 11.2.4 Practical consequences

Evangelisation and medical as well as educational work are therefore often seen as *two* tasks of the church. This dualism has prevented Christians from establishing a Biblically-founded holistic view concerning the relationship between the dissemination of the Gospel and social action. Social projects (such as schools and hospitals) are often only undertaken to the extent that they could serve the primary function of evangelisation. Economic activities are only of secondary importance as long as they could support the task of evangelisation. The socio-economic guidelines which the Bible clearly offers are seen as *mere implications* and not as *real part* of its message.

Christians involve themselves to such a degree in "sacred" matters, that they never fully come to terms with an analysis of developments in the "profane" world. This is not only due to a lack of time, but is the result of the hierarchical dualism, which allocates matters such as economy to the lesser realm of nature. Because religion, which determines the whole of the social structure from the core outwards, is shifted and narrowed to a single little compartment of life, economic matters are allowed to take their own course and set profit as the highest criterion. Religion is reduced to the sphere of the individual's soul and his salvation, while economics organises commerce among men in an autonomous fashion.

This dualism has also hindered a fundamental analysis of politics among Christians. Missionaries, for example, were totally involved in colonial capitalist politics - while they denied with pious insistence that they were politically active. The issue here is not that they were hypocritical, but that they were blind, due to dualist styles of thought.

The missionary churches could therefore not equip the African Christians for their great political tasks after independence. By means of the dissemination of the Gospel they did evoke social sensitivity among the people of Africa, but without helping them to apply the Gospel *fully* and *concretely*. The Africans inherited their "politico-phobia" from Western missionaries. Christians could therefore not offer dynamic guidance in the midst of transitional phases and political struggles. Christian politicians of Africa complain that they have not yet come across a single book which really deals with the relationship between the Gospel and politics. And the churches continue to warn their members against participation in "secular politics" because they belong to the "party of Christ"!

Allow me to quote in conclusion from the back cover of a small booklet *As it was in the beginning; 31 social meditations* by J.H. Boer (published in 1992 by the Institute for Church and Society, Jos, Nigeria): "The time has come for Christians to be serious about their involvement in the different areas of society and culture. The Bible is much more concerned with business, politics and other social issues than you may think. So, while I hope that you will not lose interest in personal spirituality or family matters, these meditations will help you focus on matters you may not have connected with serving God.

Though it is fitting for us to thank God that the Gospel was brought to us, it must be admitted that sometimes it was not the FULL Word of God that was preached. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Northern Zone, published a booklet, *Leadership in Nigeria*, in which CAN complains that 'missionaries did not impart to us the technique of governance'. The booklet then proceeds to outline the traditional missionary approach:

'For anyone to be interested in the governance of a country was 'blasphemous'. A Christian should not be interested in politics ... We are often reminded that politics is a dirty game and true Christians should distance themselves from it.' The CAN writer then argues in very strong words that such an approach is not only unbiblical, but it has also pushed Christians to the edge of society, away from the centres where decisions are made, and has left them powerless."



Viewed from a radical Christian worldview perspective evangelisation without thorough knowledge of politico-social issues can be very superficial and irresponsible - especially on a continent such as Africa where socio-political issues have become so important.

### 11.2.5 A Biblical alternative

In response to the dualistic way of thinking, we advocate the holistic Biblical perspective of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God (as already indicated in previous chapters) is the *central concept* in Scripture. In contrast to the views of traditional Christianity, church structures are not all that important according to the Word of God. The Kingdom of God is also *all-encompassing*, it includes the whole of creation. In their worldview, however, Evangelical Christians have limited the kingdom and narrowed it down to spiritual issues and the church. However, according to the Bible the kingdom is all-encompassing. Christ says, for example, that all power in heaven and on earth has been granted Him (Matthew 28:18), and in His miracles He reveals His power over nature, death, Satan and his cohorts, over people and their possessions - over the whole of life.

At the beginning of creation man receives a mandate from God to work and to conserve creation (Genesis 1:26-28). We can call this the mandate of culture (cf. chapter 7, section 7.10). The first command of God to man is, remarkably, not to pray, to build a church or to engage in one or the other spiritual task, but to work in a garden, to rule over the world. And this was not simply a *secondary* task, but rather man's main task. It was his encompassing religious calling!

The fact that Evangelical Christians are not familiar with the concept "cultural mandate" is not simply innocent coincidence, but constitutes the core of the problem. Most of them just know the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28:19: "Go then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you". This is seen *in isolation* from the original cultural mandate. Therefore it cannot be clear what Christ meant with "Teach them to obey *everything* I have commanded you". For Christ, after all, taught the *all-encompassing kingdom!*

We should therefore understand the great missionary mandate in a far wider sense than is done by Evangelical Christians today. *Evangelical pietist believers tend to make the cultural mandate subservient to the missionary command.* Thus, for example, medical service and education are mere instruments for evangelisation. They are not seen to have their *own right* within the kingdom of God. This is exactly the opposite of what is propounded in Scripture. There the "missionary command" is given so that nations can again fully understand what their total calling as Christians, their cultural mandate, involves. It is therefore the missionary command which chronologically comes second and not the cultural mandate. Therefore these two mandates should holistically always go hand in hand and the one should not be regarded as being more important than the other.

It is not an *either/or* option (the older viewpoint). But neither is it a *both/and* option (the more recent viewpoint among Evangelicals). These two mandates should not be *added* to one another. Then we portray them as *separate things*, rather than *two facets* of one overall task.

P. Marshall (1984:36,37) draws attention to the fact that also the terms "evangelism" and "social action" are too vague and narrow: "Evangelism includes winning individual converts, but it also includes proclaiming the whole *evangel*, God's good news for all creation. It includes proclamation to the nations about obedience to God, to the prisoners about freedom, to the poor about release - in short it includes many of the things now labelled as 'social action'. Repentance and conversion themselves involve turning from one life to another in every aspect of human existence.

'Social action' also covers a wide range of things. Its core meaning seems to be helping those in need, particularly those in physical need. But the whole range of service implied in Christ's redemptive activity cannot properly be captured by this term. Making music does not seem to be 'social action', nor is it 'evangelism', but God tells us to do it, and do it well. Making clothes and shoes and chairs that are good for people to use does not seem necessarily to be 'social action', but is an essential part of the 'cultural mandate'. Similarly for composing, choreography, dance, plays, poems, growing crops and eating good food, teaching mathematics well, enjoying games, and writing this

book. 'Social action' is too cramped a term for such a wealth of goals, service and achievement".

Marshall's conclusion is therefore that true Christian evangelism is always social action as well as the converse: true Christian social action is always evangelistic work.

Whether man wants this or not, he is a religious being fulfilling a cultural mandate. He is never irreligious. He can only replace one religion (service to the true God) with another (idolisation of an aspect of creation). We are all believers. It is not true that some people are believers and others intellectuals. The rationalist is also a believer - he believes in his own reason.

Against dualist, pietist Christianity we should therefore again place the kingdom of God in the centre - as Scripture does - and see God's cultural mandate as the centre of all His commandments. In this way evangelisation is not despised, but seen in the right perspective. Evangelisation may never be an end in itself, but only a means aimed at enabling us to fulfil the original cultural mandate again. Naturally we should first bring the *Gospel* to people, so that they can once again see the kingdom and be willing to seek it in the first place. We bring, however, to people the Gospel of the *kingdom*, so that they can be equipped again to seek the kingdom of God and in doing so fulfil their cultural mandate.

If we replace dualistic Christendom with the holistic concept of the kingdom, then we can begin to reflect again on the Christian way of dealing with all spheres of life - including the political and the economic: How can we fulfil our cultural mandate in these spheres? One should not only superficially look for unethical things, but one has to look deeper.

Then we could see, for example, that God has been dethroned in the economic field, to be replaced by profit at all costs. This basic error has to be addressed. It does not help simply to try to relieve unethical practices, while the basic point of departure of a capitalist or socialist economy is not confronted. Instead of the "ambulance method" we need a far more radical approach. The primary purpose of business should

not be obtaining the most profit, but in the first place it should be service, human fulfilment and justice for all.

Because Christians in Africa have learnt little of a holistic kingdom-Christianity, their Christian political leaders have also largely failed. It is significant that most *coups d'états* in Africa have been committed against leaders who have called themselves Christians. Can we blame the people of Africa because all that their leaders could achieve was to make pious Christian statements or even confessions of guilt, without something more happening?

The task of African Christianity - and this is no less true for Western Christians - is to read the Bible *again*, this time without the blinkers of a dualist worldview or the double focus glasses of one or the other form of two-spheres doctrine, but with the correct glasses, given to us in the Bible, which are the glasses of God's all-encompassing kingdom.

### 11.3 THE REVOLUTIONARY MODEL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

In contrast to the Evangelicals, for the Ecumenical movement, social and political involvement is the overriding concern. During the twentieth century the Ecumenical tradition developed through the following four periods: (1) Mission and evangelism which were socially involved, concerned primarily with helping the poor: the *charity approach*. (2) Emphasis on the structural dimensions of sin, which resulted in the so-called *comprehensive approach* in the 1930's. (3) The comprehensive approach was broadened and revamped in the *developmental approach* in the 1960's. (4) From the middle of the 1970's gradual development was exchanged for the revolutionary *liberationist approach*. For the poor so-called Third World countries salvation was now translated into liberation and all kinds of liberation theologies became fashionable.

There are many insights of the various liberation theologies I can fully agree with. I can subscribe for instance to the following: (1) Their reaction against the attitude of many Christians to flee the world and isolate themselves. (2) Their rejection of pietist dualism and the emphasis they put on the fact that redemption affects the whole of life. (3) Their emphasis on the unbreakable bond between man's love of God and his neighbour and service to both. (4) Their critique of selfishness,

greed and injustice. (5) Their emphasis on the fact that unjust structures do exist and that sin is not limited to the hearts and lives of individuals.

The example used here is liberation theology as espoused by Gustavo Gutierrez in his well-known book *A theology of liberation* (first published in English in 1973). He explicitly rejects the reformist method of social change because, according to him, it is not radical enough, but only enhances the *status quo*.

As a starting point for a criticism of his ideas we can use his view of sin and redemption.

### 11.3.1 Sin and redemption

Gutierrez rejects the individualist concept of sin and guilt as espoused by the Evangelicals. According to him sin should be sought primarily in the sinful, repressive structures and not in the hearts of the individual members of society. For this reason redemption (liberation) also does not emanate from the reborn heart of individuals, but from changed social structures. It is not a new man who brings about a new society, but the inverse: politico-economic changes will result in new people - specifically when a selfish capitalist society is replaced by a socialist one. Gutierrez's viewpoint regarding redemption is ambiguous and unclear: at times he states that it is a gift of God, but this is mostly overruled by the emphasis which he puts on the fact that man has to create his own future, thus redeeming himself.

The great problem that I have with Gutierrez's viewpoint is that he starts from the premise of the basic goodness of man and thus does not accept the radical nature of the fall. He thus overestimates the abilities of man and underestimates the power of sin.

Should one deny that the source of evil is to be sought in every individual sinful person, then it has to be sought outside man. Gutierrez seeks it in the social conditions, and more specifically, in the politico-economic. Naturally evil also manifests itself in the politico-economic field, but to seek it there primarily means a reduction of reality. The source of evil is thus merely shifted, with the following consequences:

- The origin of sin is sought in *the wrong place* - apart from the fact that it is wrong to try and localise sin only in one field. Sin cannot be localised but permeates all of life. (Just as God's redemption is also not limited, but can be revealed anywhere.) A simplistic view of reality as either good or bad is not a true image of reality.
- The *radicality of evil* (the religious depth of it) is not seen. Sin, according to Scripture, is opposition to God and indicates disobedience to His Word and laws.
- This leads to the individual or the group being able to *justify itself or themselves easily* and evading responsibility for evil. Evil is always located in somebody else or in a different group - in Gutierrez's case it is located in the class of the oppressors.
- Gutierrez's *concept of redemption* is built on this conception of evil. Where the Bible teaches that good deeds are the *results* of redemption in Christ, Gutierrez views it as a *means* to effect redemption (liberation). Redemption can only be effected via the support of the (naturally good) class of the oppressed (the poor). This brings us to the Marxist idea of the class struggle, which Gutierrez accepts.

### 11.3.2 The class struggle

Gutierrez believes that Christianity has an ally in Marxism - or the other way round - because both are founded in love for the neighbour and care for the poor. The two visions of life can, according to his view, be reconciled by means of the dialectic method (thesis-antithesis-synthesis). According to him, in the class struggle one cannot stand neutrally between the oppressed and the oppressors. Should you not want to choose you are simply condoning the *status quo* and thus the oppression by the rich class of owners.

The question is whether a synthesis between Christianity and Marxism can so easily be achieved. Are these two views of life not diametrically opposed? Is Marxism not atheistic in its roots? Can the Marxist social analysis (the class struggle) really be separated from the Marxist *ideology* and simply be used as a neutral "tool" to analyse society?

In my opinion Gutierrez replaces the Biblical religious antithesis between faith in God and lack of faith (= faith in man) with a totally new secular antithesis, viz. that on the economic-social level between rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed. The deep religious opposition (which permeates all levels) is therefore superficialised to the antitheses on only one level of existence, viz. the economic. Furthermore human society is naturally far richer and should not be reduced to the areas of capital and labour.

The result of this bifurcation of society is that everyone who does not agree with the scheme is condemned as a collaborator of oppression, and therefore any discussion regarding this matter is precluded in advance. The issue here is whether Gutierrez as a Christian in his acceptance of the principle of class struggle is not propagating hatred instead of love. His response to this is that the final outcome of the liberation struggle will not only be the liberation of the oppressed but also of the oppressor!

The church is also restructured by Gutierrez to an instrument in favour of the class struggle. This new antithesis therefore also breaks down the unity of the church and the believers.

Scripture nowhere preaches a struggle (antithesis) between rich and poor. Wealth *per se* is not a sin or *necessarily* the result of injustice or unjust structures. In fact, the Bible often represents wealth as the result of obedience to God and his blessing. It is very clear from Scripture that God is very compassionate towards widows, orphans, strangers, the poor and the rejected, and *unjust* rich men are condemned. His attitude towards these, however, is not determined in terms of a class struggle model and therefore we may not conclude that He "is on their side". The poor never received a promise of redemption solely on the basis of their poverty - contrary to the fact that some people would like to interpret the Beatitudes (according to Luke) in this way.

The simple subtraction (if one has wealth, there must of necessity be poverty elsewhere) is not correct. There is, after all, the possibility that if one group has wealth another group could share in it. How could there ever be development if at least some people in a given society are not able to become richer?

The reasons for "underdevelopment" are also far more complex than Gutierrez would like to pretend. Climate, resources, geography, training, culture, religious convictions, corruption and many other factors do play a role in this. I doubt whether anybody who accepts only the class struggle as a cause can have any knowledge regarding economic problems and processes. Gutierrez's ignorance of this robs him of the authority to make statements in this regard. It is clear that the Marxist ideology has put blinkers on him.

### 11.3.3 The Kingdom of God

It is not only the church which is hitched to the liberation chariot of Gutierrez. His Marxist-tinted theology also determines his vision regarding the central Biblical message of the kingdom of God.

This is in the first place linked to the fact that the radical difference between God and man as well as human history has been relinquished. God is so immanent in creation that He can be linked to man's struggle for liberation. In one's love for one's oppressed fellow man and one's struggle for liberation, one discovers God. (Perhaps this should be written with a small "g"?) This means that culture and history cannot come under the judgment of the Gospel any longer, because culture itself is the elaboration of God's purpose within history. Christian faith therefore may not transform culture, but can only be accommodated within it.

Where the Evangelicals tend to *limit* the kingdom of God to the church, the personal life and faith of the individual and the hereafter, liberation theology runs the danger of *identifying* it with socio-political revolution. The realisation of the (secularised) kingdom is therefore within the reach of man here and now!

As against this Scripture clearly teaches the difference between earthly progress and the kingdom of God. We may never regard God's kingdom as equal to one or the other form of socio-political reformation or revolution. Scripture is also very clear about the fact that although the kingdom of God *has already come* (with the death of Christ, His resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit), it *will still come* with His second coming. We therefore have to *work* towards its advent, but also *await* it. And our work is then also the



*result* of the fact that it has already come, and not the *cause* for its coming.

Gutierrez correctly expresses the need to do away with the distinction between a sacred and a profane sphere. As indicated already in my critique of the Evangelical viewpoint, a reformational worldview also cannot accept the two-spheres doctrine. The reason for this is, however, totally different from that of Gutierrez. The reformational worldview has to break away from this because it does not try to make the Christian faith relevant to the rest of life *via the church*. Christian religion should have a *direct* meaning for the whole of society (school, industry, etc.). Each societal relation *itself* has to obey God's commandments for its specific field.

Gutierrez distances himself from the dualist worldview in order to detach man from ecclesiastical domination. And because only the church is traditionally linked to Christian religion, Gutierrez's rejection of the Church's authority over the rest of society also means the rejection of Christian religion *as such*. The world is not only liberated of the supervision of the *church*, but also of the authority of *God Himself*. Gutierrez states that faith in God alienates, while faith in man (in whom we meet God) liberates. Man, who has come of age declares himself not only to be freed from the church but also from God!

In my opinion, what Gutierrez tries to achieve is what I would call *bad* or *wrong* secularisation, because all that remains is a mere secular, unbiblical "gospel". There is also, however, a form of *good* or *correct* secularisation - perhaps a better term for it is "social differentiation". This occurs where non-ecclesiastical societal relations, such as marriage, family life, education, commerce and politics, are freed from ecclesiastical domination, in which case believers within these relations can act as independent, mature Christians. Such a kind of secularisation, however, does not imply that the links with God and his Word are severed. The believers in fact strive to obey Him *in a particular manner* in each of these relationships. This amounts to a pluralist philosophy of society (cf. chapter 10). They establish, for example, Christian schools, political parties and trade unions.

#### 11.3.4 Failure: the reasons

Our conclusion is therefore that Gutierrez has become the victim of an unbiblical, secular liberation ideology - that of Marxism. Idolisation of man has always failed, and even worse, such idolisation is directed against man like a boomerang. Is it possible to mention one example of a Marxist society that has been a success without cruel oppression - exactly what Marxism is supposed to combat?

The reason why liberation theology fails as a *Christian* theology is basically the same as in the case of Evangelicals: they are not composed of an integrally Christian worldview. Where the Evangelicals' vision of the Christian's presence in society is determined by the unscriptural two-spheres doctrine, Gutierrez's is determined by the equally unbiblical Marxism. In his effort to link Marxism to Christianity, he tries to supplement the "spiritual dimension" of Christianity with the "analytical instruments" of Marxism. Because, as he states, it is only with this borrowed equipment that Christianity can be relevant as a politico-social power for change. This Marxist "equipment", however, cannot be seen in isolation from a whole atheist ideology. Finally it is not a case of Christianity using Marxism, but of Christianity being overwhelmed by Marxist ideology!

#### 11.3.5 The need for a radical Christian social critique

Why do Christians then not develop their own Biblically inspired philosophy of society? At times they consider (as is seemingly the case with the Evangelicals) it to be *not necessary*. In such a case religious convictions are limited to the personal and the ecclesiastical spheres and are not broadened towards encompassing the whole of life so that man's religion has comprehensive meaning. In other cases (as is seemingly the case with the liberation theologians) they are of the opinion that it is *not possible*. Then Christianity becomes - consciously or unconsciously - the victim of one or the other worldview that is alien to the Bible.

The reason for the lack of a really Christian analysis of society may also be that many serious Christians are unable to find a model in the Scriptures. They do not realise, however, that a critique of society cannot be deduced *directly* from the Bible. To be able to arrive at a radical Christian analysis of society one first has to establish - in the

light of God's revelational perspectives - a Christian worldview and (on the more scientific level) a Christian philosophy. Without an integrally Christian worldview of which a critique of society is a constituent part, it is not possible to talk meaningfully about social change.

## **11.4 THE REFORMATIONAL MODEL FOR SOCIAL RENEWAL**

A model for societal renewal depends of course to a great extent on the specific situation that has to be changed. This chapter is not addressed to particular circumstances, but is of a more general nature. Furthermore I have to admit that I am still struggling with some basic problems and therefore do not have a clearly outlined model for social renewal - it is always easier to say how something should not be done than to say how it should be done! Therefore I am only able to offer the following: (1) A comparison between the revolutionary and reformational approaches that will highlight some of the characteristics of a reformational model. (2) A brief look at the Bible and the history of Christianity to ascertain the origin of the idea of reformation, how it developed and what its contents were. (3) Finally we will concentrate on the methods or strategies for reformational renewal. I do hope that this will inspire readers to contextualise the reformational idea of renewal for their own circumstances.

### **11.4.1 A comparison between revolution and reformation**

Reformationally oriented thinkers will agree with the revolutionaries that the obsolete, archaic and decadent should immediately be tackled. We differ, however, in terms of origin, aims, methods and results.

- Revolution has its *origin* within a secular, unbiblical mode of thought. The idea of reformation not only originated at least 2 000 years before the concept of revolution, but has its origin in the infallible revelation of God Himself.
- The *purpose* of revolution is through a strategy of renewal to create a paradise on this earth. Reformation is much more modest and realistic, because it knows from Scripture that paradise will not be regained through human efforts. The evil heart of man will also remain the same in a "new" dispensation brought about by human effort - even

through violence. Just as before it will never be able to be fully good or correct. A Christian does not think in terms of a utopia!

■ Regarding the *methods*, revolution aims at attaining its goal rapidly. It is precisely because of the acknowledgement of the fact that man has been corrupted by sin, that reformation is a slow and arduous process.

Because revolution and reformation have different views of the past and the present, their methods of change also differ. Revolutionaries tend to destroy the old and to totally replace it, because they believe that the existing reality is irretrievably bad. Reformational thinkers have a view of history that enables them to realize that it is impossible to cut the cord with the past irrevocably. For this reason they do not seek *destruction*, but try to attain a new future by means of *renewal*. Reformation never means something totally new - it is only God who can create something absolutely new.

Because reformation does not simply intend to *invert* but to *convert*, it goes much *deeper* than revolution. Reformation of the heart lies at the heart of reformation! And it is precisely because reformation begins with the deepest core of humanity - without ending there! - and knows that human hearts cannot be renewed by means of force, that it does not believe in violence as a method of renewal. The simple yet profound parables of Christ indicate the way for the reformer as against the methods used by the revolutionary: invisible like yeast - and not with "necklaces" or Alsatian dogs; quiet like light - and not with petrol bombs and armoured vehicles; seemingly powerless and tiny like a mustard seed - not with AK47 or R4 guns.

■ Finally, the *results* of revolution and reformation will also differ. Because revolution is primarily a negative reaction against the existing order, it cannot easily give life to the positive. It usually only leads to further decline or a subsequent revolution. This road of renewal becomes a *cul-de-sac*. Reformation, however, remains an open road, because in the first place it is not *against* something, but *in favour of* new obedience to God. Such a positive attitude is a road of hope leading to true renewal - in spite of all the trouble, the disappointments and failures, one will try again and again.

We should also not be blinded by evil and miss the good which has remained in God's creation. Apart from struggling against evil, reformation also has the task of bringing that which is not so bad closer to the ideal. Apart from our having to *counter* certain things, we also have the calling to *use* other things positively. Reformation therefore is, apart from *change* in the sense of *opposing*, also change in the sense of *improvement* of the existing imperfection.

#### **11.4.2 The idea of reformation in the history of Christianity - a few landmarks**

##### *\* New Testament perspectives*

Well-known Biblical concepts of renewal, such as, for example, *rebirth*, *conversion*, *confession of guilt*, and *sanctification* are closely related although not identical with the idea of reformation. They are the deep religious roots, the starting points or foundations of the Christian concept of reformation.

Reformation without *regeneration* is impossible. Rebirth means a new heart, which has the implication that people have to begin to live anew in a personal relationship to Christ and should also be involved in the needs of their fellow men, regardless of race or culture. Whoever hopes for socio-political renewal without a new, reborn heart, builds his reformational efforts on quicksands.

The same is true of *conversion*. One could call conversion and reformation the inside and the outside of the same issue. Reformation without an awareness of sin and confession of guilt (towards God and fellow human beings) is excluded. And sanctification one could simply call ongoing, daily conversion. Conversion will also include restitution towards those one has harmed in some way or another.

Reformation has the double connotation of newness and original goodness. In the Latin *reformare* the *forma* means that something has been newly shaped to form and firmness. And the prefix *re* (back/again) indicates the foregoing norm or model according to which the formation of the new occurs. Reformation presupposes brokenness or sinfulness, and therefore indicates the retrieval of an original perfection with a view to an improvement of even the original.

I would very much like to do an exegesis of the five best-known renewal texts. But due to the lack of space this will not be possible, therefore I only mention them: Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9, 10 and Titus 3:5. In all these texts we find the following basic idea: The believer has an ongoing task to break away from the old (sinful) person and to be renewed in the image of God. Christ sets the example to us (He is *the* Image of God), and this is made possible by way of our rebirth through the Holy Spirit. The essence of renewal is to get to know God's will again and to obey it.

This Biblical concept of reformation of man towards or according to the image of God became the inspiration of the early Christians' reformational idea which we are briefly going to examine. The Pauline doctrine of man's renewal in Christ made a strong impression on the Church Fathers of the first centuries after Christ. One could even say that the idea of *reformatio* or *renovatio ad imaginem Dei* was the central concept in Patristic thought. Reformation to them indicated renewal. And renewal, according to them, could not be detached from the basic idea of recreation in the image of God. They noted the core of the Christian faith: not a religion of the old, the *status quo*, but a marvellous faith in the new, an ongoing renewal of creation.

\* *The Greek (Eastern) Church Fathers*

G.B. Ladner (1967) states three basic concepts which outlined the Greek fathers' concept of reformation: the retrieval of man's being an image of God, the return to paradise, and the representation of the divine kingdom on earth. The man who has found his lost image again, and thus also the lost state of paradise, is also once again the representative of God's kingdom on earth. Only when he is *imago Dei* again, can man be a reformer!

Reformation therefore is for them a return to the high position which man had to relinquish in paradise. And this is not a purely archaeological or eschatological idea, because reformation has to be accomplished in this world. Although not yet so strongly developed, the idea of the Greek fathers concerning reformation is not purely individualistic. They had already seen something of the link between personal renewal and social reformation.

Yet in the Eastern Church there is still too much emphasis on the mystical concept of renewal towards the image of God as assimilation with God (making man divine), the vision of God by the individual purified soul, and the resultant regaining of paradise. The ascetic *vita contemplativa* is still far more important to them than the *vita activa*, for example care for the poor, the sick, strangers - something which emerges more strongly in the Western church.

\* *The Latin (Western) Church Fathers*

Two clear differences between the Western and the Eastern Church are therefore the following: (1) the social character of reformation emerges far more clearly in the West, and (2) the West does not remain stuck at the restorative or retrospective meaning of reformation, reformation does not have such a strong temporal meaning, but the prospective also emerges. In Tertullian, for example, the concept of *melius reformare* or *reformatio in melius* that is, reformation towards something better is found (because the criterion is not habit - truth is more important than tradition). From the various writings one clearly receives the impression that reformation is much more closely connected to the idea of progression than to that of regression.

Also for Augustine reformation was more than a mere return to the creational integrity of Adam and Eve in paradise and more than a mere individual spiritual event. The interesting fact about Augustine is that he reconciled the monastic life of monks and the clerical life of priests and bishops. The priests had to live like monks and own all things communally, and the monks in turn had to be willing and able, if necessary, to serve the church as priests and even as bishops. After Augustine the difference between monks and church officials became vaguer. The monastic ideal deteriorated and by the eleventh century this had led to terrible decadence among the officials of the church.

\* *Developments during the Middle Ages*

During the Patristic period the Biblical reformational concept of renewal towards the image of God was extended to the reformation of the individual Christian and the Christian communities in the monasteries. This was also the case with Gregory the Great (Pope from 590-604), who used the concept *reformare* to indicate the personal

reformation of the Christian through the work of the Holy Spirit as well as of Christian groups, such as monks, but not of the church as a whole.

Gregory VII (Pope from 1073-1085) used the same words to indicate the reformation of the church *itself*. According to him the deformation of the church assumed such proportions that the whole hierarchical structure of the church had to be reformed to protect personal renewal and to save Christian society.

A third step followed when Innocentius III (Pope from 1198-1216) stated the necessity of reformation not only for the individuals or the monastic communities and the church, but for the whole *Christianitas*, that is, for politico-socio-economic life as well.

From the Patristic period to the Middle Ages a clear line of development is therefore visible: from reformation of the individual Christian to the reformation of the whole *corpus Christianum*.

\* *Sixteenth century Reformation - Calvin*

Calvin strongly puts the emphasis on the deepest religious roots of reformation. (Reformation of the heart is the heart of reformation!) In the first place *repentance* is needed. And the two sides of true repentance are the dying of the old and the rebirth of the new. The beginning of *rebirth* (regeneration) is therefore situated in the self-crucifixion of sinful man.

And the purpose of repentance and rebirth is to restore in us the *image of God*, which had been affected and almost obliterated by Adam's transgression. In no fewer than four references in his *Institutes* Calvin states that reformation means the renewal or reinstatement of God's image in us (*in renovatone imaginis Dei*). Together with Paul he interprets being the image of God as true justice and holiness.

If one reads only his *Institutes* one could well conclude that Calvin believed only in personal reformation. This is however not the case. We know from history, and many careful studies during the past two decades have confirmed this, that this centrally religious renewal of man was a powerful dynamo which changed the whole society of the



Alpine city of Geneva. Calvin was not only the reformer of the individual and the church, but also of the socio-economic-political life of his time.

\* *Conclusion*

From this brief survey of the first 1500 years of the history of Christianity interesting facts have emerged:

■ In the first place, the exact *relationship between the old and the new* in the process of reformation. It has emerged that the change which reformation envisages is not only a temporal (of the present back to the past) but a qualitative change. Stated differently, the element of the "again"/"back" (*reformare*), the retrospective or restorative, is not the most important, but rather the new or prospective is more important.

■ In the second place we learn more about the *religious core of reformation*. It emerges that the first step on the road of reformation is not what you do to the world around you or for God, but what you do to yourself and what is done for you through God. Repentance and conversion are painful processes, but reformation cannot start without them. Reformation means that you first have to eliminate the sin within yourself before you can relive.

■ Thirdly there is a bright shaft of light shining through the whole history of the Christian concept of reformation. This is the idea of *reformation towards being the image of God* through the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, to be able to know the will of God (in creation and in Scripture) and to live accordingly. For the meaning of this Biblical concept, see again chapter 7 (section 7.7). In chapter 10 (section 10.1.1) we have already indicated that this concept does not have only *individual* but also *social* relevance: we create societies in our own image, which is in turn determined by the god/God whom we serve!

■ In the fourth place we learn from history something about the *strategies of reformation*. It seems that there is no fixed recipe. At times it is necessary to first concentrate on individual, personal reformation and then finally to come to a wider social context. (In the case of Luther, the reformer developed in the folds of a monk's habit. His reformation was born out of a lonely struggle in a monk's cell.) At

times exactly the opposite is needed: starting with terrible social injustice and working through to the individual. (In the case of Zwingli, the reformer was born in a humanist's toga and even in a soldier's uniform. His reformation took shape in the midst of demanding work in a congregation, in the politico-social unrest of the day and even on a battlefield.) At times it is essential for one to "withdraw", at times one has to move within society, and at times both actions are needed simultaneously. "Culture" and "society" are not monoliths. Perhaps some aspects of it should be accepted, others transformed, others rejected.

It would also seem that - because one can never pay attention to all matters at the same time - a reformer has to have a keen sense of those parts of the sinful world that offer the greatest seduction or threat, and then combat these or sometimes even flee from them.

We will soon return to the methods and strategies of reform. Let me first define in the light of the Bible and the history of Christianity what reformation should be.

*\* A brief definition of reformation*

Reformation is (1) the deliberate, fearless and positive willingness of (2) those who in genuine repentance, reconciliation, restitution and (3) in absolute dependence on God (4) according to the Biblical guidelines of renewal through the work of the Holy Spirit in God's image, (5) increasingly strive to improve the relatively good, (6) combat evil in all its manifestations (that is both individually and structurally) (7) in accordance with appropriate strategies (8) in order to effect the radical, total and integral renewal of individuals and society.

## **11.5 CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS AS A STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND RENEWAL**

Point 7 of the above definition draws attention to appropriate strategies without saying what kind of strategies will be appropriate. Therefore we will now elaborate on this important facet of reformation.

It is important to keep in mind that different ways or avenues of transformation are possible and have been applied in the history of

Christianity. There are, for example, the following possibilities: (1) By way of the *organised church itself* through its preaching, clergy activities, synodical decisions etc. This is usually the strategy of the so-called mainline churches. (2) The *church as an alternative community* - as for example emphasised by the Hutterites and Mennonites. (3) Through *individual Christians* - the Evangelical approach. (4) By establishing *Christian organisations and institutions* like Christian schools, colleges, hospitals, radio stations, publishers, political parties etc. This is the method usually advocated in the Reformed tradition. I am of the opinion that each one of these approaches has strong as well as weak points. We will, however, in the rest of this chapter concentrate mainly on the last method mentioned.

In a previous chapter (9.4.4) we emphasised that organisation can never replace real community. But at the same time we have to stress that without organisation little can really be achieved in the modern world. If Christians therefore want to exert any influence in society, they will have to organise themselves. This strategy is also in agreement with what was previously indicated (cf. chapter 10, section 10.4) as the principle of confessional pluralism, in other words the right and freedom of people from different religious convictions to organise themselves in different areas of life.

### **11.5.1 Christianity a sub- or counterculture?**

In the midst of rampant secularism in Africa - in spite of the growing number of Christians - we have two choices. Against secular culture we can consistently proclaim and live a radical Christian worldview. Then we will be a real countercultural movement. Or in the "public" sphere (politics, economics etc.) we can accommodate secularism and try to maintain our Christian identity only in the relatively unimportant "private" life (like personal faith, church and ethical behaviour.) Then we settle for Christianity as a mere subculture. Explained in the form of an image: We can either be the hammer or the anvil. Stated in another image: many Christians prefer to be thermometers - they merely *register* the "temperature" of the surrounding secular culture of the majority - instead of being thermostats which *regulate* the cultural "temperature" and "climate" around them.

Do we prefer to be a countercultural movement, challenging secular culture with Christian alternatives, or a subculture, capitulating to secularism and thereby opting for irrelevance? If we choose the first option, the next question will be: How exactly can Christians as a countercultural movement effect change and renewal in society?

### 11.5.2 Three options

We can in the *first place* try to do something individually, like maintaining high standards of personal integrity in business, adopting a modest personal lifestyle or writing letters to a local newspaper about matters in society that are wrong. Such individual efforts are indeed necessary, because their cumulative impact can be very significant. The presence of impeccably honest people on a company board of directors will, for instance, no doubt limit the possibilities for corruption. However, because of the highly organised and complex structure of modern society, it is sometimes very difficult and even impossible for individual Christians to bring about real change. Large and powerful companies, organisations and institutions today direct our lives. Because we live in an "age of organisation" (H. van Riessen), it is often only corporate action that will have an effect on major decisions.

In the *second place* the church, as the community of believers, has a task to fulfil. It should equip its members with the basic norms for life, it should be the conscience of all political parties and even make public statements if necessary. Most of human life, however, occurs outside the immediate context of the local church. It is in the workplace, the economic, political and other areas where the dominant direction of society and culture is determined. If we therefore confine our communal efforts as Christians to the church, then our cultural and social relevance will be seriously weakened. We also cannot fight the spiritual battle in isolation from Christians in other denominations. We have to act communally as Christians *outside* or *beyond* the church itself - the third possibility.

In the *third place* then, we need real communal Christian cultural action. Depending on circumstances we may, for instance, do the following:

- Establish *workplace groups*, where Christians in the same office, factory, school or university can meet on a regular basis to discuss issues arising from their work and to support each other. They may even organise to press for a certain decision or to redress an injustice.
- Establish *specialist study and action groups* to bring Christians from specific professions, like teachers, artists, doctors, politicians, trade unionists, lawyers, nurses, engineers, ministers, farmers etc. together in order to investigate what a Christian perspective would be in these areas. They can for instance help each other by way of mutual support.
- Establish *alternative Christian organisations* with the aim of equipping Christians to penetrate existing non-Christian organisations and institutions like political parties, companies etc. These alternative organisations can also go further and establish distinctively Christian institutions like Christian schools, colleges, political parties, trade unions etc. They emphasise a specifically Christian way of education, doing politics, business and conducting labour relations. A Christian newspaper, periodical or even publishing house may, for example, provide a channel for Christian writing that secular publishers would usually not accept.

### 11.5.3 The role of the church

My impression is that the people of Africa have not only been expecting too much from the state (see above), but that African Christians have been expecting too much from the church regarding change in society. This is clear in the case of the more conservative Evangelicals, but is also evident in the case of the more liberal Ecumenicals of Africa. Both try to "Christianise" life by "churchifying" it. The churches have to guide and dominate the political, economical, educational and all the other areas of life, otherwise we shall not be able to live a Christian life in society! (This is evident, for example, in the search for a "*theology* of economics, politics, education" etc. instead of a *Christian* economy, politics, education etc.)

According to our pluralist view of society (cf. chapter 10) the church, however, has a *specific* nature and a *limited* task which should be respected. It is the community of the believers and should faithfully proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom to its members. This vision of the

kingdom they should apply - as citizens of the kingdom and not as members of a church, or under supervision of the church - in the broad society with its different societal relationships, e.g. as employer/employee in a business, as governor/citizen in a state, as husband/wife in marriage. The church may have a word about our responsibility as voters or rulers, but it may never become a political party or advocate membership of a specific party. It may indicate our educational responsibility as parents, but never offer detailed prescriptions to schools. This will amount to "ecclesiastical imperialism". It is not the task and calling of the church to do so. The church is also not equipped to do so, because it simply does not have the expert political, educational or whatever kind of technical knowledge.

The appropriate way is therefore by means of Christian organisations and institutions, examples of which have already been given. Practical circumstances may, however, necessitate church involvement in non-ecclesiastical areas. In many largely undifferentiated societies, like many African countries, the church may be more or less the only Christian institution or voice of the people. Then it should not remain silent. Especially because governments and societies who would not listen to - and would even persecute - outspoken Christian individuals, may still listen to the church as a body. This should, however, be regarded as temporary and emergency tasks of the church. Such kinds of activities should as soon as possible be taken over by independent Christian organisations and institutions outside the church as an institution.

A pluralist view of society then agrees that Christians should, like salt and yeast, as individuals be involved in society. It also sees a task - although limited - for the church in the renewal of societal life. But these are not the *only* two channels for Christian action in society. If we regard them as the only means, we become the victims of an individualist and churchist worldview, which does not reflect the unity of all Christians outside the church and the all-encompassing nature of Christ's kingship.

### 11.5.4 Christian organisations criticised

Not all Christians, however, are in favour of separate Christian organisations. (Still less will it be the case among non-Christians!) We have to listen carefully to the reasons why they oppose this kind of Christian activity.

The idea of Christian organisations in, for example, the field of politics, work relations, the media and education, are disparaged by some because (1) Christians can then easily isolate themselves from the world; (2) they can easily cause Christians to assume the complacent attitude of being "holier-than-thou"; (3) they can promote group egoism; and (4) they can dim the difference between God's cause and our cause. Something which was a *means* to serve God better can then become an *end* in itself!

Christian organisations are indeed not immune against derailment. Christians should not withdraw themselves. Without being aware of it, Christian organisations and institutions can become a safe, comfortable ghetto - not much different from a cloister - into which Christians withdraw themselves. Then the salt remains in the pot!

People sceptical about the idea of separate Christian organisations and institutions may call this strategy of changing society *pillarised* faith - in contrast to, for instance, *privatised* or *politicised* faith. In constructing "pillars" or all kinds of concentrated networks of consistent Christian witness (referred to as "Yellow Pages Christianity"!), Christians rely solely on distinctively Christian groups, but lack the transforming quality of faith in the "public square". Christians can become so secure in their Christian organisations and other structures, that even those who speak in classic Reformed language (including talking about reformation) end up with what is indistinguishable from classic Anabaptism - set apart from the tough centres of modern thought and power.

The danger opposite to withdrawing in pessimism from the world is being too optimistic, thinking that one can conquer the world with one's Christian organisation. Or - even worse - thinking that Christian organisations will bring about God's kingdom. We should, however, be

realistic: our Christian activities will at most be able to erect a few signs of God's kingdom in different areas of life.

I am not saying that Christian organisations are always necessary or essential to fulfil our calling in God's kingdom. A careful analysis of the conditions is necessary. And they may be totally different in Europe than in Africa. Christians themselves will also differ about the desirability of separate Christian organisations. This is, for example, the case with some of my Christian friends in the Netherlands. The one still prefers to belong to a small Christian political party which forms a coalition with other Christian political parties and guarantees a certain balance of power in the Dutch government. A second one does not want to belong to an "irrelevant, small Christian party", but prefers to join a large secular party because he feels that his influence there could make a difference in decisions concerning the real issues at stake. A third friend provides convincing arguments why she does not believe in a separate Christian party and has therefore joined the (secular) party offering the greatest possibility that anarchy will not come about!

A Christian can - in all good conscience - prefer to join a "general" organisation. But then such a Christian has to know what he is doing: will he on his own be strong enough to voice his Christian convictions? Because a so-called general organisation is not neutral - the struggle of the spirits rage there too. Naturally one convinced, radical Christian is worth more than a dozen Christian-organised yes men, but then one needs strong legs to remain standing!

In times of great change in all fields - especially deep religious shifts - Christian organisations can do a great deal to indicate course and direction again. They can also help to make the Christian worldview relevant for specific spheres of life - and these are precisely the times we are going through on the African continent at the moment.

### **11.5.5 Christian organisations advocated**

The following are important motives for the establishment of Christian organisations:

- They can serve as instruments to advance the kingship and the glory of God in social spheres. Christian organisations in various spheres of



life are the logical result of our faith in the sovereignty of God over all things, and our calling to serve Him in all areas of life. Christian organisations are therefore the result of the desire of Christians to submit to God's will in a specific area of life. It rejects the idea that institutions can be neutral.

- It also emanates from the office of the believer outside the church in non-ecclesiastical spheres. The testimony which the church as institution can bear in the fields of, for example, politics and economics only amounts to an admonition or encouragement from *outside*. Christian organisations, however, are capable of changing the political, economic and other spheres of life from *inside*. This is not simply a difference in strategy, but the result of a different view of society, viz. the pluralist.

- Christian organisations embody the communal character of Christian life. Christians have not only a need for unity *within* the church, but also *outside* the church. As against the unhealthy tendency towards denominationalism, which gives rise to evils such as pride, indifference, exclusivism and negativism, Christian organisations offer the opportunity for Christians from various church denominations to work together towards a specific cause. True Christian ecumenicity can be revealed in such a way. In this way it can also be made clear that the Christian character of a society does not depend on the churches or church organisations alone.

Christian organisations are usually only possible in an open, free society in which a variety of religious convictions are acknowledged and respected.

### 11.5.6 Kinds of Christian organisations

In conclusion it is important to determine *what kind* of Christian organisation(s) one needs for a specific time. We can distinguish at least four kinds: (1) church organisations; (2) aid-rendering organisations; (3) special interest organisations; and (4) guiding organisations. A brief word concerning each of them:

- *Church organisations* or church-determined organisations such as mission organisations, monasteries, diaconal groups, youth and

women's organisations. I do not have problems with these - they can be means by which the church can do its work. As long as we keep in mind that it is a (limited) ecclesiastical task.

■ *Aid-rendering organisations.* As the name indicates, these are organisations which render aid in society for the sake of its own members or outside its own circle in a Christian attitude and climate. Examples of this would be Christian welfare organisations, clinics, hospitals and schools. Possibly the many para-church organisations could also be included here. As long as the motive of such organisations remains love for and service to God and fellow men, and they are not used solely as bait to "win souls for God", or later simply revolve around the prestige and the self-sufficiency of the organisation as such, one cannot say anything against this kind of organisation. They can do outstanding work. It is really a pity that many of them are finding it more and more difficult to survive financially, are taken over by the state, and finally lose their true Christian identity, becoming ordinary secular institutions.

■ *Christian special interest groups* are organisations which are aimed at a very limited internal objective. (They might therefore be called organisations of *Christians* rather than *Christian* organisations.) Examples of these would be Christian sports, theatrical, singing and music organisations. This kind of organisation can sometimes present a danger, especially with regard to their value for social change. They can become a rock of self-interest, or a kind of spiritual ghetto: a group of Christians who hold similar views, find each other's company congenial and in self-complacency withdraw from society with its needs. Of course this need not be the case, but examples of such derailment could be mentioned.

■ *Christian guiding organisations* seek to influence society with a Christian perspective and conviction. Examples of these would be Christian political parties, labour organisations and organisations for the advancement of Christian secondary and tertiary education. Such organisations attempt to guide and give direction to society in different ways: by scientific reflection (in the establishment of a Christian college or university), by political struggle (Christian parties), by social action (Christian trade unions), by opinion formation (Christian radio stations and the press), etc. In such organisations there should always,

to a greater or a lesser extent, be some kind of struggle from a worldview perspective. Positions have to be determined and priorities set.

Here too the situation has to be evaluated to determine whether such organisations are desirable or essential.

### 11.5.7 Conclusion

This has been an incomplete survey of the possible types of Christian organisations. It is also schematic: assorted combinations of the four types could occur and may in certain instances be desirable.

From my contacts in Africa it would seem as if Christians in Africa are also beginning to realise the value of Christian organisations. Should we as Christians not struggle together for our cause, and achieve much? A certain old man asked each of his ten children to meet him in his hut at an appointed time each with two sticks. They all turned up with their sticks at the right time.

"Sit down in a circle", he instructed, after he had welcomed them. "Raise up one of your two sticks and break it." That was very easy because each of them broke his stick without any difficulty. "Bring the remaining sticks and tie them together in a bundle," he instructed them again.

After he had made sure the bundle was well tied, he asked each of them to try and break the bundle of ten on their own. Each of them tried but failed to break the bundle.

It has often been said: "United we stand, but divided we fall" or "Unity is strength" - also when Christians come together in Christian organisations.

\* \* \*

These few flashes and fragments of a reformational perspective on the Christian's involvement in society will have to suffice. A great deal of thinking and especially prayer will be needed to work this out in more detail. As long as it has become clear that a Christian worldview and critique of society are *possible* as well as *necessary*, I will have

succeeded in my purpose. A radical Christian critique and renewal of society is a matter of urgency, because - as indicated already in different chapters - as Christians we today have to struggle against a great variety of ideologies. The ideology of secularism, for instance, is influencing the daily behaviour of millions all over the world and to an alarming degree also of Christians in Africa. It is therefore necessary to be able to recognise an ideology and also to know something more about ideologies like secularism. This will be our task in the next chapter.

## Chapter 12

# CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW VERSUS IDEOLOGY

Ideologies have a powerful - devastating - influence on society. Therefore, while we are busy with the broader societal issues, and before we start discussing specific societal relationships (the rest of this book), we must have an in-depth look at ideologies. As a result of the continuing influence of different ideologies during the past century, Africa today is a tattered and shattered continent. It is bleeding to death as a result of being torn apart by conflicting and warring ideologies.

As indicated in previous chapters (1) the colonialism of the Western imperialists was the first to break apart the traditional African worldviews. (2) In reaction to this nationalist ideologies came into being. (3) Following independence, African leaders applied the new ideologies they created (like African socialism in its different forms), at times by means of drastic measures. (4) When it became clear that these ideologies could not bring about peace and prosperity, indigenous African ideologies have in some of these countries increasingly been exchanged for radical Marxist ones. (5) And today the ideological systems (like capitalism) of the erstwhile Western overlords are accepted again in many African countries!

We should not forget these past failures of Africa because of an ideological obsession. On the contrary: we have to learn from the past. At Dachau, outside Munich, one of the camps where Hitler ordered the murder of thousands of Jews - because his ideology prescribed it - there is the following inscription which we may never forget: "He who forgets the past, will be doomed to relive it".

In order to gain a deeper insight - and in that way arm ourselves against the deceptive power of ideologies in the future - we intend, apart from a brief introduction, to do the following:

- Have a look at idolatry in the Bible, which will provide us with some critical perspectives on ideology as a contemporary form of idolatry.
- Explain what an ideology is.

- Discuss secularism as the mother of ideologies.
- Analyse the apartheid ideology which was applied for more than forty years in South Africa to the detriment of everybody.

## 12.1 INTRODUCTION: AN ACID TEST

The following are a few flashes to introduce you to the world of ideologies. Take any worldview - especially one you have first-hand knowledge of or even believe in - and have a careful look at it: can what is said here be applied to that specific worldview? If the answer is positive, be warned: that worldview is not an innocent worldview any longer, but it has deteriorated into a dangerous ideology!

- Ideas or thoughts can be deadly. It is not the idea as such that is lethal, but the results engendered by the idea. Behind the dagger, the assegai, the pistol, the machine gun and the atom bomb we find the convictions of people. The murder weapon is turned at others because the ideas of the other differ from one's own ideas and ideals.
- No fault can be found with ideas or ideals as such. Ideals can have a very powerful and positive influence on the lives of both individuals and the community. A red warning light, however, flickers when one becomes *obsessed* by a specific thought, when one *idolises* it and when one becomes ready to *sacrifice everything* for it. One then commits idolatry in the same way that man in antiquity worshipped idols. The idea is now no longer in service of man - man is now in service of the idea. The learned word for this phenomenon is ideology - a concept used freely in the newsmedia today. The word indicates that an idea has become so important that it has become an idol.
- An ideology can invade man like a virus and is able to change one's entire life. It deprives one of one's ability to see the world in terms other than through one's ideologically coloured glasses. An ideology has tremendous power: it seduces, blinds, confuses man, and strangles millions of people in its octopus-like grip. If one becomes the victim of an ideology one willingly does what the "god" orders - even commits murder. Ideologically inspired struggles have ruined countries, have caused the collapse of sub-continent and have turned the world in a blood-sodden morass ...

- No living soul - neither the writer of this book nor anybody else - can be entirely free from ideological infection. Even well-meaning Christians could stand squarely - but blissfully unaware of it - within the thrall of an ideology. As is the case with idols, ideologies are not willingly acknowledged!
- People who succumb to ideological seductions therefore need not be demonic in themselves - they are just ordinary sinful people. Each individual is daily faced with the temptation to set temporal security such as personal safety, survival, prosperity, liberty foremost in his consideration and in this way to barter true and final security to be found in God only for a dish of pottage.
- To turn the spotlight onto oneself is not easy, but it is essential. Ideological critique is not intended primarily to knock down other ideologies - in the very first place it is supposed to be self-criticism.
- We reject all ideologies, seeing that they represent systems of belief in which self-criticism is absent and convictions become closed off - without leaving a possibility of change - and are thus idolised.
- An ideology is the corruption of a true religion and worldview. Whereas the original form had been a guiding light in man's life, enriching it and widening man's horizons, the corrupted form has precisely the opposite effect: it seduces, blinds, narrows and enslaves. Ideologies generally have a demonic nature. A worldview does not need to necessarily be an ideology. It can become an ideology, however, when a worldview leads to a socio-economic programme of action which has to be enforced to a greater or a lesser extent.
- An ideological system means a closed worldview that cannot be questioned from within the worldview itself. The Christian, however, depends on transcendental norms which are derived from the revelation of God, therefore it enables him to raise questions concerning ideologies. This prophetically-critical responsibility is an important task of the Christian in society.
- Ideologies are parasites. Things that should be seen as gifts from the hand of God, are absolutised, elevated to final certainties. This is not only due to our secularist age, but also to the vacuums created by a

dualist Christianity that provides fruitful soil for these poisonous plants.

- The interesting fact is that one ideology also tends to be a parasite of another. One ideology does not only call up the other - its antipode - but they are also linked to each other by negative attraction. Although they are arch-enemies, the one cannot exist without the other.
- In the world of today everybody strives for freedom, peace, security, prosperity and survival. While one ideology might depend more strongly on one of the above five factors, and others might emphasise another aspect, the remarkable fact is that divergent, even opposing ideologies (such as, for example, capitalism and socialism) use precisely the same five words - but then of course with totally differing content. Each ideology is utterly convinced that it has the power to ensure salvation!

The tragedy, however, is that, in spite of the vociferous calls in the council halls of the world, freedom remains a chimera. More people than ever before are subjected to often inhuman suppression. Instead of prosperity, the larger part of the world population goes hungry. And peace always seems to be a mirage receding whenever one comes closer.

- Language and symbols are powerful instruments in the propagation of a particular viewpoint. Masses of people can be manipulated by this means. A small organ like the tongue can set fire to the world! Ideological language, furthermore, does not really offer much by way of nuance. It reduces everything to a simple good-bad, acceptable-unacceptable contrast. Language does not any more serve as a means of transmitting the truth. Ideological language contains misleading half-truths and is therefore much more dangerous than blatant lies.
- Through offering stereotypes, especially through generalisations and through the creation of in- and out-groups, ideological points of view are disseminated and reinforced. It happens on the one hand through "integration propaganda" through which the like-minded of a specific group are drawn together around a certain set of core values. On the other hand it happens through "agitation propaganda" through which those who differ are lumped together and an image of the enemy is



created. In this way the media contribute to the polarisation of groups in society. Today it seems more and more impossible to determine what is right ... nobody seems to know the truth. The tragedy of our time is that terrorists are called freedom fighters, that evil is regarded as good and that wrong is considered to be right.

- Ideologies contain visions of a future in which happiness, peace and prosperity reign. But this also reveals the great paradox an ideology contains: while it inspires to action aimed at a different and a better future, it also justifies the existing order, for in any ideology the concern is with the justification of power. The future held up by an ideology is in the final analysis one based on naked power. The happiness promised by an ideology is the cynical utopia of the perpetrator of power! As long as his power is not curtailed, all is well with the world. For this very reason everything has to be done to preserve that power. On the basis of this view, however, there is no future. The future becomes a chimera.

- Although violence is not a typical characteristic of all ideologies, it still remains a characteristic of most of them. Not only is violence used to call into existence a new order, but the *status quo* is also defended by means of violence. Democratic processes are excluded, reconciliation becomes impossible, only counter-violence brings liberation ...

- In conclusion: be wary of your seemingly innocent little pet ideology. At first it is like a sweet little puppy that goes where you lead. Soon, however, it grows too large and too strong, and simply drags you along, even where you may not particularly want to go. Your "soft" ideology can develop, without you knowing it, into a steely monster!

## 12.2 IDOLATRY IN THE BIBLE

The aim of this section is to investigate whether the Biblical idea of idolatry (worshipping of idols) can help us to understand ideolatry (worshipping of ideas) better. The main points are the following:

- In the first place it is indicated that in principle there is no difference between Biblical iconolatry (worshipping of images) to which Israel

succumbed often, and idolatry as such. And idolatry also includes ideolatry, the worshipping of ideas.

- Secondly, the Scriptures provide an answer to the question as to why man creates idols. The most fundamental answer to this is that we strive to be like God, and up to this day, man has not been cured of this madness.
- Subsequently, the question as to how idols are made and why the manufacturing of idols is such an attractive industry, is discussed.
- Finally, the question of what the idols can do emerges. On the one hand the Bible reveals that idols are paltry, transient like the wind. Therefore idolaters themselves are exposed with biting mockery and satire in the Bible. On the other hand it also becomes clear from the Scriptures that idols have tremendous power.

An ideological labyrinth without exception leads to death. But he who obeys the first two commandments of God is stronger than the strongest ideology. Idolatry means self-destruction. Theolatriy (service of the true God) means healing, salvation, peace for man and society.

About 1500 B.C. Moses brought down two stone tablets from Mount Sinai. The very first commandments inscribed on it by God Himself read: "Worship no god but me" and "Do not make for yourself images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the LORD your God and I tolerate no rival" (Exodus 20:3,4). The importance of these commandments emerges from what Moses encountered when he came down from the mountain: a golden calf, fashioned by his own brother, being worshipped by the nation. The calf was their god who had delivered them from Egypt! (Exodus 32:4). The immensity of this sin in the eyes of the Lord emerges from the fact that the Levites were commanded to eradicate the idolators at the point of the sword - even though they might be brothers or friends - and on that day 3 000 died!

### 12.2.1 From 1500 B.C. to 1992 A.D.

The rest of the history of Israel may be described in tandem with this essential conflict: either the true God or the idols should be worshipped.

In the country of the Nile it had been the Egyptian gods and images, and after the entry into Canaan it became the Canaanite gods and those of the surrounding nations which dominated the history of Israel. The temptations mostly had the result that the people of Israel linked their service of Jahweh to the pagan religion (syncretism), but at times it had the effect that they even substituted their own religion for the pagan religions.

Israel failed tragically in its calling: instead of evangelising the surrounding pagan nations through its knowledge and service of God, the influence of the pagan nations on Israel was unfortunately stronger than the other way round. Israel's greatest enemies therefore were not the nations surrounding it as such, but the idolatry which it allowed in its own midst.

The ten tribes were destroyed as an entity because of their idolatry, and the Judaic exile was the direct result of this. If they should give their loyalty, which was due to God only to somebody else - then that other god should save them! The warning that the sins of the fathers would be visited upon the children unto the third or the fourth generations then went into operation.

A striking characteristic of this period is that the nation of Israel repeatedly tried to serve both God and pagan idols. God, however, does not accept divided loyalties.

About 1500 years later Paul walked through the streets of Athens which were teeming with idols. We read (in Acts 17:16) that he was deeply offended when he saw the extent of the idolatry in the city. And in the course of his third journey he nearly lost his life because his sermons had the effect that Demetrius' idol factory had fallen off in profit (Acts 19:23 ff.).

We make another jump of 1500 years. John Calvin, the great Reformer, said of the people of his time that they were nothing other than factories of idols (*fabrica idolatorum*)!

Add another few hundred years, and we arrive in the twentieth century. Mankind heaves a sigh of relief: at last we have been released from all the stupid myths, foolish idolatry and all other nonsensical dreams of religious people. Hooray for the secular age which has dawned! Not only have all the gods disappeared into the gloom of the past, but the God of the Christians might as well be pensioned off. The first commandment is "radicalised" in the following way: Thou shalt have *no* god - including the only God - before me! At last we seem to be living in the freedom of a post-religious, post-Christian, scientific era!

Modern man until recently thought in these terms. This call of joy was either, however, unfounded or the scene has in the meantime radically changed, because the time in which we live is definitely not an a-religious time any more. The modern world is still as full - if not fuller - of all sorts of idols, myths, ideologies, religious cults and movements.

After the evil spirit had been driven from the house, and the house had been thoroughly cleaned - but still stood empty - no fewer than seven new demons, each of them worse than the preceding one, moved into the house. New religious movements spring up like mushrooms overnight and age-old ones are revived with fanatic strength. Jacques Ellul has written a book with the significant title *The new demons* (1975). Instead of idols made of stone or of gold, instead of the trees and animals worshipped in antiquity, we have today a long list of new idols: (still) worship of ancestors, of holy men or (demonic) leaders, of the own nation, of class or party or race, of money, of success - or even simply of one's own stomach (Romans 16:18). How do we not worship the powers which control our own era, such as science, technology and organisation!

Whoever should walk in our day through the great cities of the world or even on the dirt roads of Africa will note that there are not only factories manufacturing the usual things, but that the *fabrica idolatorum* are working day and night. They manufacture idolatrous images, sell these to the empty masses, and incite them to howl (like the Ephesians in days gone by): "Great is the ideology of ...!"

Are ideologies then also manifestations of idolatry? Undoubtedly. Between the first and the second commandment (idolatry and iconolatry) there is no real difference: iconolatry is a form of idolatry. And iconolatry also includes the worship of ideas. In the time of Israel already it was true that God condemned not only the visible idolatrous image but also the idea underlying it.

### **12.2.2 The light of the Bible on idolatry and iconolatry**

For the reasons outlined above it is necessary to listen again to what the Bible has to say about idolatry, including iconolatry. This will undoubtedly enable us to understand and to grasp our ideologically-insane world more fully. It will also enable us to see more clearly what the fruits are of service to the true God (theolatry) as against the terrible effects of the modern idolatry of ideas and ideals.

We would like to pose the following three questions:

- Why do people make and worship idols?
- From what, and how are these idols constructed?
- What are these idols capable of? Or: what are the effects of the worship of idols?

### **12.2.3 Why do people make and worship idols?**

The central message of the Bible, one could say, is the relationship between man and God, or (as a result of the fall) of man and his idols. It is already clear early on in the Bible that man-*with*-God lives in a world without idols or gods. Man-*against*-God, however, is vulnerable to a world full of powers and gods of an alien kind.

That man was originally meant to live in a world without gods is made clear in the story of the creation. Take for example the heavenly bodies: sun, moon and stars. It is clearly stated (in Genesis 1:14-19) that God created them. They can therefore not be gods. The Scriptures call them "lights", mere instruments in the hand of God in His dominion over the earth, over day and night. They also did not exist from the beginning, but were created on the fourth day.

The pagan nations, however, worshipped these heavenly bodies as gods. Why? This was because the sun and moon had such an immense influence on the lives of the people. The sun and the moon determined when man could work and when he should sleep. They also determined the seasons and thus had a decisive voice in the sowing and harvesting of crops.

Before we express amusement at these natural gods of primitive nations, we have to ask ourselves whether man has really changed. Do we not still have our cultural gods? In the same way that our ancestors worshipped their time indicators, our modern time indicators, like our watches, also rule our lives! "Time is money", and we have all been delivered into the mad rat race of modern life.

But let us return to the question as to why man creates idols. God has existed from all eternity. He need not be created. How then is it possible that the roles have been reversed: in the beginning God created man, but man has since decided to create his own god(s)?

God created man in His own image. This is the most profound mystery of man, and simply means that man has been set in a relationship of childlike love, obedience, service and worship towards God. To live in such a way as child and Father meant life in its fulness - it was paradise. Unfortunately there was one who could not stand this happiness ... As a result of the temptation by Satan man was not satisfied for long to be merely *imago Dei*, the image of God. Satan promised him that he could become *sicut Deus*, like God (Genesis 3:4). The only thing he had to do was to become disobedient.

This is the most profound reason for idolatry: the urge to become divine. Self-deification usually means worship of something relating to the self: the golden calf devised by oneself, or which has been devised according to one's instructions; the precious idea nurtured by one's intellect, or which others have thought up for one. The fall had therefore primarily been a transgression of the first two commandments.

Following the rebellion against God, Adam and Eve had their eyes opened as the serpent had promised. The irony, however, is that man, when his eyes were finally opened, did not see his own divinity, but

saw precisely the reverse: he was now painfully aware of his lack of divinity, of his weakness, of his temporality. This is what is meant by the Scriptures when it is said that man was ashamed of his nakedness. He was disillusioned, disappointed, guilty ... He now fully realised, following his alienation from God, that without God he was naked, alone, lonely ... The man who wishes not to obey God is always a disappointed human being. Satan is not called *the* deceiver for nothing!

What was to be done now? What they should have done, our first ancestors unfortunately did not do. Instead of returning to God, they fled from God - as if it were really possible to hide from the Allseeing and the Omnipresent!

They did not want to simply confess their guilt to God. Instead of that, Eve accused the serpent and Adam accused not only Eve but also God Himself: this woman that you have given me! Even God had to bear the guilt. And even today we have not rid ourselves of this kind of strategy ...

Adam and Eve pretended not to have heard God's call. Throughout the ages this has been happening. The book of Romans (1:20-23) also teaches that man wilfully refuses to hear the call of God, and wilfully suppresses knowledge about God.

However hard man might try, the need for a Father, a God, can never be totally suppressed: no man can live without God. But because man persists in his foolishness, he tries to create substitute gods which have to fill in the emptiness left by his denial of the true God.

#### **12.2.4 From what and how are idols made?**

The true God is not a God made by anyone, but rather One who Himself makes and creates. A fabricated god could only consist of that which God had already established within His creation. Man has no chance of doing more than "change(d) the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:23). "... (they) worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Romans 1:25).

God created all things to be good - man, birds, animals, even snakes. But when the creaturely is deified, it cannot be regarded as good any more. This is not only because they can never be divine, but because, if this happens, God is humanised, even bestialised.

The fact that the creation is so rich and varied has the inevitable result that the possibilities for idolatry are legion. In the place of, or next to God anything can be devised or worshipped that man can put his trust in (cf. the *Heidelberg Catechism*, answer 95). It is not without reason that the commandment against idolatry is so comprehensive: "... any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is on earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth ..."

At the same time, however, this also reveals the profound tragedy of idolatry: man never can attain rest. He is never certain that he has found the right god. For this reason the men of Athens - just to make quite sure! - erected an altar for the Unknown God (Acts 17:23). The world of unbelief is a never-ending nightmare of fear, a phantasm in which new gods are unendingly called up ...

This is also clear with respect to how idols are created. One's gods are a clear projection (as Feuerbach and Marx correctly taught) of one's deepest needs and desires. They will bring one happiness, peace, health, all that man can desire.

At creation God created man to serve Him. Now man creates gods to serve him! At times, however, one gets the impression that man is willing to do a great deal for his gods. Think for example of worshippers of idols of whom one reads in the Old Testament, who were willing to let their children burn on the sacrificial altars of the idols! This "service", however, is not quite so unselfish: the idolator believes in *do ut des*: I do give, but the most important thing is what I will receive in return for my gift. An idolator is a great pragmatist!

One also has no need ever to surrender oneself fully to an idol. God's great commandment, to serve Him with one's *whole* heart, one's *whole* mind, and *all* one's strength (Matthew 22:37) is, like the first commandment, something unique.



One also never has the need to confess guilt to any of these idols, as one would have to do in the case of God. Who would be so stupid as to create such a demanding idol! This is another piece of evidence that paganism is one great, massive denial of guilt.

### 12.2.5 What can idols do? What are the results of idolatry?

But now: if idols are merely a projection of the mind of man, a fragment of creation blown up to the stature of a god, then idols, surely, are simply wind? Why should the Word of God constantly warn against idols? Compare apart from many instances in the Old Testament the following in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 10:14: "Therefore my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry", and 1 John 5:21: "My children, be on the watch against false gods." And this is said even though the Bible itself maintains that idols are nothing! (Cf. 1 Corinthians 10 again, paying special attention to verses 19 and 20.)

It is remarkable that the Bible should on the one hand regard idols as non-identities, and on the other hand should graphically indicate them as dangerous, diabolic realities. Let us look more closely at this double-sided face of idolatry.

#### \* *Idols are nothing*

The word *idol* does not appear in the Scriptures. Yet this word is an accurate description of how the Bible evaluates this phenomenon. *Idol* literally means non-god. An idol is therefore something regarded by someone as a god, being revered while at the same time it has no right to reverence.

For this reason the Bible directs a great deal of mockery at the makers of idols, at the idols themselves and also at their worshippers. Let us look at some landmarks in the struggle against idolatry.

Things are not going well with Israel. For seven years now they have been struggling against the Midianites. The reason for this? God Himself has delivered them into the hands of the Midianites (Judges 6:1), because they have fallen for the gods of the Midianites, the Baal gods. Gideon's liberation of his nation had to begin with the eradication of the real problem. God gave him the command: "tear down your

father's altar to Baal, and cut down the symbol of the goddess Asherah ... beside it" (Judges 6:25). Reformation always begins at home!

When the men of the city saw what Gideon and his ten men had done the previous night to their holy altar, they were enraged and they wanted to kill him. It emerged, however, that his father, Joash, had not yet become a hardened worshipper of idols, because he felt that if Baal was truly a god, he could defend himself (verses 31, 32).

Another idol, Dagon, also came under fire. First the worshippers of Dagon suffered. When thousands of Philistines celebrated in honour of their god, because he had delivered Samson into their hands, the blind giant wrapped his arms about the two main pillars of the building and pulled them down, so that the building fell in upon the thousands of idolators and more Philistines died on that day than Samson had killed in his entire life (Judges 16:30).

1 Samuel 5:2-5 describes how Dagon could not even remain standing in front of the Ark of the Covenant for one night. The first morning when the Philistines found him, he was flat on his face in front of the Ark, in an attitude of worship! He was made to stand again, only to be found smashed to pieces in the face of the God of Israel the following morning!

Following a bitter drought of three and a half years, Elijah met with the Baal priests on Mount Carmel. According to the Baal cult, the fertility of the earth is the result of the mating of the male (baal) and female (baalath) powers. Man can have an influence on this divine process of fertility through "sanctified" intercourse between man and woman. These fertility rites were practised on "sanctified" heights and under "sanctified" trees. This Baal service was not practised instead of but in juxtaposition to the service of Jahweh. In this way, however, the true God was deistically moved into the background. He became merely another god to be called upon in moments of distress. Baal had to look after the everyday needs! The fact that he was, however, unable to cope emerged clearly from God's punishment by way of the terrible drought and famine. Elijah wanted to make it clear to the nation that the fertility of the country was not to be attributed to Baal but that it was a gift from the hand of the true God.

Is there any one among us who does not know the sarcasm of Elijah when he says to the priests of Baal on Carmel: "Pray louder! He is a god! Maybe he is day-dreaming or relieving himself, or perhaps he's gone on a journey! Or maybe he's sleeping, and you have got to wake him up!" (1 Kings 18:27.)

The fact that the Baal priests kept on calling and calling indicates a typical belief of obstinate idolatry: even though the idols are not helping now, they will still do so. Idolatry feeds on dreams of the future. Furthermore, it also stresses the fact that idolatry is in fact a monologue with the self.

Who does not remember Psalm 115:4-8, or Psalm 135:15-18 with their biting mockery of idols? They are merely the work of men. They can have a mouth without being able to speak, eyes which will not see, ears which cannot hear, helpless hands, feet which will not move ... (cf. also Deuteronomy 4:28 and Isaiah 44:18).

In spite of the fact that they have been meticulously supplied with all the necessary physical members of the body, the idols are worth nothing. Idols are helpless beings, dead. For this reason the contrast with the true God is so great. Idolatry remains a monologue, a vain call from the idolator to his deaf-mute god. God not only has a mouth, but He also talks, He reveals Himself. While idols see nothing at all, God is the All-seeing. While they cannot move at all, but have to remain immovably where they have been set down, God is the Omnipresent. And while the stone and metal hands of the idols cannot move, God is the Omnipotent. While the idols remain all day long in a sleep of death, the true God never slumbers or sleeps.

The most potent weapon of the prophets against the idols was the caricature, which was seldom used, but which was for that very reason so effective. Isaiah especially was a master at the art of fulfilling the unmasking of the gods in this way.

In Isaiah 40:20 already we have seen something of his satire of the idolators. The subjectivity of idolatry emerges from the fact that the idol is dependent upon the worshipper's wealth. If you cannot afford a molten image, you have to be satisfied with one carved from wood. You have to see to it, though, to find a good craftsman to fashion it for

you, because an idol that cannot stand firmly on its feet and tends to over-balance from time to time is a mighty embarrassment.

In Isaiah 44:6-23 more is told of these makers of idols. In the first place it is made clear how much labour is demanded to make (useless) gods. False religion is an exhausting business! Gods are hard taskmasters! The poor smith, who works with the fire, is hot, he becomes thirsty and ultimately he falls down in exhaustion. The carpenter, who had to make wooden idols for the less wealthy, did not have an easier task. He had to plant the right kinds of trees, had to water them for years before they could be cut down for the purpose of fashioning the gods. Then he had to begin with the wood, sawing, planing and carving it. (For interest's sake: the hierarchy of cedar, ilex, oak indicates that there had been a hierarchical order among the gods. A rich man could afford a fully grown cedar as a god, while a poor man had to be satisfied with a cheaper god!)

It is thus hard to make idols. The irony of the matter is that it is so unnecessary: God need not be made!

Also note the subtle jab in verse 13, viz. that an idol is shaped according to the image and beauty of man: idolatry is in the most profound sense self-idolisation.

In verses 15-19 the utter ridiculousness of idolatry is sketched devastatingly in Isaiah's caricature. From part of the wood the idolator first makes a fire, so that he can warm himself and also be able to cook some food in order to have the strength to make an idol - out of the rest of the wood. Can man be so utterly foolish? How can he fall down and kneel in front of the idol and ask of it to be delivered (verse 17)? The prophet quite rightly says (verse 20) that such people keep themselves busy with nothing.

We can also, however, deduce something else from these verses. First man has to have warmth and a full stomach, and then he can go on to fashion his gods. An idol is a by-product, made of remnants that are no good for anything else, that cannot be useful any more. This is not true only of the things that man cannot use materially but also of that which cannot be coped with spiritually.

In a descending range, then, the making of idols is portrayed as (1) playing at being creator (verses 9-11), (2) exhausting labour (verses 12-14) and (3) the processing of left-overs (verses 15-17). In this man acts as a pseudo-god, as a worker-artist and an actor. Self-deification, sanctification of work and decoration - all these are facets of idolatrous religion. In spite of the various levels there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous. The common factor is, however, (1) that men make themselves idols in their own image and likeness, and (2) that they take themselves and their idols very seriously, because the idols have to ensure deliverance for them.

In the ensuing verses of the relevant chapter in Isaiah the prophetic judgment follows: by means of eight negative statements (in the original) the insignificance of the gods is indicated, and at the same time also the obstinacy, the guilt, the confusion and the self-deceit of the idolators.

In Isaiah 46 the comic scene of a heap of idols on the back of a wagon is portrayed. Some stand crookedly, others have fallen down because they have been loaded in a hurry. The dead weight is so great that the poor draught animals have become bowed under it. The gods could not save their worshippers and also not themselves, so they are now going into exile!

Isaiah describes how the idols were carried around by their worshippers (verse 7). Both people and poor dumb animals have to carry heavy loads in trying to cope with the idols. The contrast with verses 3 and 4 is poignant. In these verses God says that it is not necessary to suffer like this under one's idols. Man does not need to carry God, because God carries man! God has always borne man, and will continue to do so in the future - if man should only convert himself from his incredible folly.

Apart from using the concept of insignificance for idols, the Bible also uses other names for the idols - names less than flattering, to say the least: abominations, atrocities, dung. Ezekiel especially is known to use the last word, of which the original meaning (according to Koehler's well-known *Lexicon*) is "dung pellets"!

If one studies what the Bible has to say about idols, one cannot help smiling with the prophets about people who are so foolish that they concern themselves with trivialities. It is not wise, however, to laugh too easily and to say that you are not afraid of idols.

\* *Idols have tremendous power*

The other side of the coin is that God does not only advise us to stay away from idols (there are too many texts to mention here) but He states it even more strongly: He hates every idolator, and for this reason no-one who serves an idol will inherit the kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:5).

We have to trust in God *only*, we have to submit to Him *only*, and we have to expect all that is good from Him *only*. We have to love, honour and fear *only* Him (*Heidelberg Catechism*, answer 94).

Why is the Bible so vehemently against idols if they are so trivial and insignificant? Is it because idolatry is such a brutal "No" to God, a direct, insolent slap in His face? It is this, but much more besides.

In 1 Corinthians 10:20 Paul creates a direct link between the service of idols and communion with the devils! And in the ensuing verse (21) the antithesis is clear: one either lives in communion with the Lord *or* with the devils.

Idols in themselves are nothing, but at the same time they are the work of Satan. As we have seen, it was Satan who seduced man in the Garden of Eden to idolatry in the sense of being a god oneself, of making one's own god.

But this is not all. Satan is a fallen angel who wants to be a god himself. This clearly emerges during the climax of Christ's temptation in the desert: "All this I will give you", the Devil said, "if you kneel down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9).

This brings us to the consequences of idolatry for man. Man does not merely want to be the image of God (Genesis 1:27). He would prefer to make himself an idol according to his own image or taste. He does not, however, succeed in evading the foundational law that man cannot do

other than look like the idols that he serves. In the Scriptures too, this is clearly the chastisement of God over the idolators: "They that make them (idols) are like unto them ..." (Psalm 115:8). Hosea 9:10 maintains that Israel, having served Baal-Peor, has become just such an abomination as the god himself. Romans 1:24 also makes the unequivocal point that God abandons the idolators to themselves, to the desires of their hearts.

What does man look like if he resembles an idol? This of course depends on what your god looks like. If you have lowered your god to the status of an animal, then you have lowered yourself, and you will live in a bestial fashion. A sexual god will have followers obsessed with sex. The reverse is also true: whoever thinks his God to be great and elevates Him, elevates also himself.

In spite of the differences occurring here and there, I do think that there are some basic traits which are typical of all idolators. They are spiritually blind - just as the idols do have eyes but cannot really see. They have become deafened, as they have no ears for any other voices but the demands of their idols. Their mouths too have become utterly useless, for they cannot make any sound other than that applicable to idolatry. Freedom of thought and of speech cannot exist anymore. They have been bound hand and foot like prisoners. They are slaves: instead of having dominion over things, they have become enslaved to idolised, absolutised creatures and ideas. Idolators are not free people. For this reason too they cannot bear responsibility any more.

### **12.2.6 Recapitulation**

In twelve brief theses the most important elements of the foregoing might be summed up. The careful reader will at once note that what is true of idols in general is just as true of ideology, which is a form of idolatry.

- Basic to all idolatry is the desire to be godly, that is, sovereign, legislator, one's own master and creator of one's own future.
- Idolatry thus means honouring one's own gods instead of the true God.

- The Bible teaches, however, that man can also have idols next to God - and that this is perhaps the most insidiously dangerous form of idolatry.
- Idols are created in the image of man. They are a projection of man's specific needs: the ideology of the oppressor will differ from the ideology of the oppressed. In both cases, however, it will posit an assurance of man's salvation - even if this should only come about in future.
- Man does not only make idols or devise idolatrous systems. The reverse also happens: the adherents of the idol or of the ideology begin to resemble their obsession more and more.
- In this way the cultural products of man, such as the various relationships in society, more and more resemble the god that he serves.
- Idolatry is an effort by man to deal with and explain things which he finds difficult to cope with.
- Something of creation - which God created well - is elevated, made independent, regarded as being the most important aspect of life, is thus deified. Because, however, this can never offer man final satisfaction, one thing after the other is absolutised.
- Each form of idolatry and ideology has its own scapegoat or arch-enemy. One's own guilt does not exist, self-examination is excluded. Idolatry and acknowledgement of guilt do not go hand in hand: it is always shifted onto something, someone, a group or a nation outside oneself.
- Idolatry is hard, demanding, full-time work, because man has to make the gods, maintain, and bear the burden of them. And the more one demands of one's idols, the more sacrifices one has to be willing to make.
- All forms of idolatry - also of ideologies - have a demonic character: Satan brings them into existence, and uses them in the service of the kingdom of darkness.



■ Idolatry as well as the modern idolatry of ideas turns man into a helpless, blinded and dehumanised slave.

### 12.2.7 Deliver us from evil!

I see no other way of how man can be released from idolatry in all its forms than obedience - through the grace of God - to the very first two commandments which God Himself gave to us.

These first commandments which are in reality one, are *fundamental*. All the commandments which follow presuppose them, are rooted in them, and are merely a further elaboration of them. They are *comprehensive*, they touch upon the entire existence of man. And they are *radical*, they touch the very core of our existence. In the Old Testament already (Deuteronomy 6:5) this is summarised as love for God: love with one's *whole* heart, one's *whole* soul and *all* one's strength (cf. also Matthew 22:36-40).

This commandment had to be taught to the children of Israel all the time (verse 7) and even more so: it had to be worn as an "amulet" on the forehead so that the eyes could not be directed at idols. It had to be written on the doorposts of the houses and the great portals of the city, so that the whole city should remember: only the Lord our God may be served and worshipped.

Whoever obeys this commandment will be stronger than the most powerful ideology - also the one you grew up with and for which you have felt reverence.

## 12.3 ANATOMY OF AN IDEOLOGY

One could say that the Western world in the course of 2 000 years has completed four phases of a complete circle: (old) paganism - Christianisation - dechristianisation - (modern) paganism.

It is, however, important to keep in mind that antique paganism differs from modern paganism. J. Ellul (1975:24) justly remarks: "The ... most important aspect of post-Christian society is the very fact that it has experienced Christianity and left it behind. Contemporary society cannot, therefore, be regarded as a simply pagan society. It does not

have the innocence and simplicity that come from the ignorance of Christianity and of all it entails. Post-Christian society is marked by its experience of Christianity and at the same time it thinks it knows what it is turning away from".

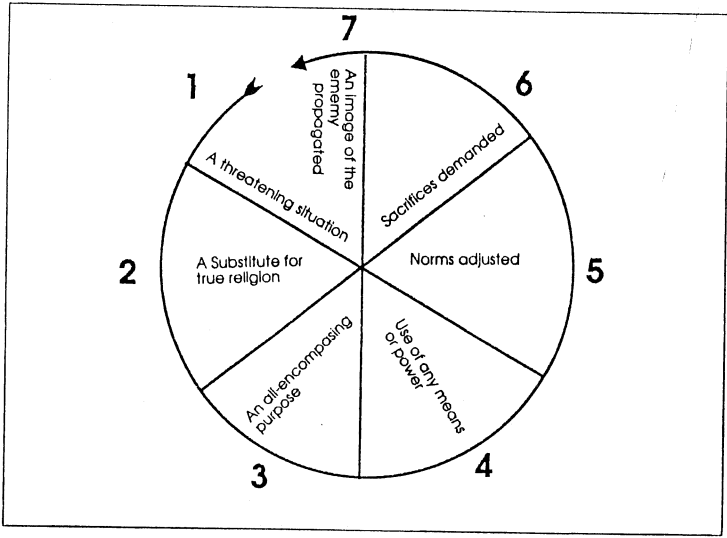
The modern idols and man's relationship with them will thus also be different. They are more impersonal gods, who are not (because the super-natural does not exist any more) enveloped any more in a sphere of mystery and magic. Man's relationship to them has also become more businesslike and sober.

Against this background we will now draw attention to how ideologies come into being in the modern secular world, what their characteristics are and how they work.

The following definition states very clearly what the basic elements of an ideology are: "... *an ideology is the conscious or unconscious self-justification mechanism of a social group*. The group will shrug off any blame and try to find the culprit outside its own fold. We call that '*scape-goating*'. The group will see only those aspects of reality which support its views. That is called '*selective perception*'. It will interpret the world in a way which is profitable for its own interests. We call that '*bias*'. It will build up a system of clever arguments with partial truths which seem to prove its views. We call that '*rationalisation*'. It may invent or detect indications of hidden undercurrents and sinister plots and sow suspicions which harm others and go to its own credit. We call that '*fabrication*'. It may in an advanced stage claim absolute validity and discredit any other point of view as both fallacious and vicious. We call that '*fanaticism*'" (Nürnberger 1979a:6).

My own simplified definition reads as follows: *Ideology, which usually comes into being in a threatening situation, is a substitute for true religion, with as its highest ideal an all-encompassing purpose, to the attainment of which any (power) means may be used, norms adapted, sacrifices demanded, and a specific image of the enemy propagated.*

In analysis, we find at least *seven* elements in this definition and they will subsequently be examined. The following diagram illustrates the seven (in reality six) stages:



### 12.3.1 Origin in a threatening situation

Apart from a secularist spiritual climate the most fertile breeding ground for the hatching of an ideology is to be found in situations of exploitation, oppression and injustice. If this is accompanied by the vacuum of impoverished, watered-down Christianity, then the circumstances are that much more favourable. In such a case the group or the nation can often give birth to ideas and ideals which have to liberate them. And ideas are not without "hands and feet". They work, they walk around, they influence the masses, they march through history ...

Such a view of life does not need necessarily to be bad or wrong. Ideals can play an important role. But ideals change into ideologies when man starts to strive for them in an obsessed, fanatical way. Then man is no longer master of the ideals, but he has been mastered, and is caught in the grip of an ideology which seduces, blinds and confuses him.

In South Africa we have many examples of ideologies born in this way. From the threat of the English the Afrikaner ideology (nationalism) was born. And from the threat of the white man the present black nationalism developed.

### 12.3.2 The substitute for true religion

In view of the fact that secularism is the father of contemporary ideologies (see next section 12.4), we can understand this trait of the child well. According to true religion (Deolatory), God decides for man the purpose of his life, that is to serve Him according to His laws. In ideology man sets his own goals and decides for himself about the guidelines that he will follow to attain the goals he has set.

Because man can do no other than live religiously - even if in apostasy - ideology imitates true religion and worldview in all fields. It provides a sense and meaning to life, such as for example striving for a higher purpose; it inspires man to change the world and mankind according to these principles - even if it should mean suffering and sacrifices; it has its own system of values concerning what is good, bad and wrong; it indicates a specific cause for the misery in which a specific group might find itself (source of sin) and it houses its own soteriology (concept of redemption).

We will return to various of these points. The most important thing at the moment is to clearly realise that ideology is lost, counterfeit and apostate religion. Religion - the Christian religion too - can thus be ideolised. It happens when religion is not primarily service to God any more, but a means simply to promote one's own interests and to satisfy one's own needs.

### 12.3.3 An all-encompassing purpose

This is an especially important characteristic of ideologies: a particular aim such as, for example, prosperity, security, survival, freedom is set in the foreground. The aim expresses in brief what man wants to attain with his ideology, what the eventual salvation will be that it will bring about after the particular group has been released from its threat or misery.

The highest purpose is closely linked with that entity in society which has to be served at all costs. The issue is not so much prosperity, security, survival and freedom *in general*, but rather the attainment of these for a *specific* tribe, group, party, nation or state.

\* *Good objectives are not immune either*

The aim or objective does not necessarily need to be evil or of doubtful quality. No, even an admirable objective can go off the tracks - perhaps a noble purpose can even more strongly grip people and so degenerate into an ideology. The Christian too is therefore not immune to ideological corruption. It is not only devils who adhere to ideologies ...

An ideology is born when one becomes obsessed with aims, when the aim becomes all-consuming.

\* *Temporal certainties absolutised*

In the Medieval world God was often called the First Cause and the Final Objective. In the secularist world some worldly entity has now become the highest purpose. One could say that ideologies parasite on God's creation because they set one aspect of it which might even be a good gift from God in the central position. Temporal certainties become absolute certainties. From this emerges clearly that ideology is a form of idolatry.

That such purposive thought leads to a purposive morality will soon emerge clearly. Our critical question now is whether this type of thought is not highly dangerous. Should the principle rather than the goal not be most important, decisive?

#### **12.3.4 The use of every means of power**

In order to make an ideology work, one needs power - spiritual power. But physical power or violence is not excluded. Man today disposes of unprecedented power when compared to previous ages. Why then are people surprised to find that we are actually living in an age of violence? Terror, murder, blackmail, war and even institutional violence, that is, institutions which prevent the fulfilment of the calling of individuals predominate. Even while men are sitting around the conference table to negotiate peace, shots reverberate! And the spiritual driving force behind all this are the clashing ideologies.

\* *The end justifies the means - any means*

For this reason the leaders of a specific ideology are always on the lookout for means to strengthen their ideological grip on the masses. The great danger of ideologies is this: any conceivable means are mobilised for the realisation of the final aim. The obsession with a specific goal has the result that the means are not tested against principles, norms or laws, but that the unbiblical motto "the end justifies or necessitates the means" prevails.

No end, no aim, no purpose, no goal in the entire world, however, can be so high, so holy, so elevated or so noble that *any* means can be justified. This is true of personal objectives as well as those of peoples and of nations or groups. Should one want to let the end justify the means, one would be acting in clear opposition to the Word and law of God. The Bible does not teach *purposive* thought but *principled* thought. In the Christian religion what is put in the forefront is not the reverence for a secular purpose, but the reverence, the honour of God. And only the central love commandment is the touchstone and guideline for this.

\* *Dictatorship is the end product*

There is even more at stake here. In order to attain the aim, man puts his trust in means such as military or economic power and depends on them. Here we find idolatry peering around the corner again, because often it is but one step from dependence to captivity. The ideologues become the prey of all the powers called up by themselves!

Does it still surprise you that in a period of highly extolled human freedom we are experiencing a variety of dictatorships? The beautiful future promised by ideologies (when the final objective will have been attained) is often one of naked might and power and violence, the cynical utopia of the holders of power. The postponed future becomes a put-off future, because the means used to attain the future have overwhelmed the people. The wonderful future promised by the ideologues is a *cul-de-sac*. Just as is the case with any form of idolatry, it means spiritual and often also physical death.

How can we expect to have a vision of the future if the vision of heaven has been closed off? Only if one has a clear line view of God can one have an open road to the future.

### 12.3.5 Norms are adjusted

Are ideologies then without principle? No! No man can live without principles. Neutrality is a figment of the imagination - a diabolical deceit. In the case of ideologies - you could already have guessed this - the norms, principles and values are, however, predetermined by the absolutised final aim.

#### \* *Norms of the Bible adjusted and twisted*

We have not, in our secular age, been able to abandon all the commandments of the Bible. It would be impossible, because they are the basic rules for being human! But these commandments are simply, in view of the specific aim of the ideology in question, reinterpreted, adjusted somewhat, twisted a little and finally relativised. Instead of our aim being determined by God's principles of justice, love for the neighbour and self-sacrifice, these have to be adjusted to our aim!

If one starts one's essentially sinful ideals and aims on this basis instead of beginning with the commandments of God, then one has chosen the wrong point of departure and - as we have pointed out - one will miss the final objective. It is a case of a decisive religious choice: either the one or the other.

We do not only live in an age of great power in the hands of man. What makes all this more dangerous and even more frightening is the fact that man's normless supposition is that he is allowed to do all which he is able to do. If you *can* make a hydrogen bomb, then you *may* also use it! Just as in the case of the means, the norms - now changed from being *guidelines* to being mere *means* - also have to be adjusted to the all-purposive ideological objective.

A double morality is not something new. Such is, for example, one with a natural and a super-natural ethics, of which the former is based on natural laws and the latter on Christian principles. What we are experiencing today has gone beyond this point. During the Middle

Ages the natural and the Christian morality could not oppose each other. Today we are experiencing what Nietzsche already predicted in the previous century: *die Umwertung aller Werte* (the revaluation of all values). Wrong has become right, the false has become the true and evil has become good. Killers have become freedom fighters and diabolical dictators have become saviours of mankind.

Do not be too quick to justify yourself. Have not for example, white South Africans - *nota bene* - justified apartheid and all that goes along with it on Biblical grounds, only to discover much later that it could not be sanctioned in the light of the Scriptures? We have all along interpreted God's principles in view of a nationalist ideology of survival at all costs, and in the process adjusted and twisted it ... Once again: Christians can also fall prey to ideologies!

The most fundamental reason for this twisting of norms which we find in all ideologies was very sharply perceived by Dostoevski: if God does not exist any more for contemporary man, then God's commandments are not valid for him any more either. And if God's law is not valid any more, then the frontiers between right and wrong, true and false, disappear and the person or the group can determine at will what they want to be true, right and good.

\* *Principled thought, not aim-directed thought*

Allow me one example to clarify the difference between thought based on principles rather than on aims. Modern man believes that peace, happiness and security have to be set in the forefront and be pursued with all the means at our disposal. In the Biblical order, obedience to the norms set by God predominates: if one loves one's neighbour and does what is right, one shall have life. First seek the kingdom of God and his justice and all the other things - peace, survival, prosperity and much more - will be given to you.

Ideology is a lie, a violation of *the* Truth for the sake of its own ends.

### **12.3.6 Sacrifices are demanded**

We gradually find the twelve traits of idolatry, outlined in the previous section on idolatry, emerging also in ideologies. We mentioned in that



respect that idolatry is exhausting work, demanding, at times, great sacrifices from its adherents. In this respect too ideologies are no different.

\* *A dangerous boomerang*

Idolatry sings the tune of the returning boomerang. In the first place man puts his trust in specific powers, means and "norms" in order to attain his so-called high objectives. Because the aim is not attained - following Adam and Eve's banishment from paradise no man, in spite of all his nostalgia for it, will ever attain it through his own strength - the means of power are forever being strengthened in order to keep on trying to attain it. And man does not realize that he is playing with fire. Because as soon as the powers have grown far enough beyond him, they turn to traitors. The returning revolving door hits one full in the face so that he is stricken dumb. An ideology refuses to remain a little puppy led around on a leash. At some stage it becomes a mature buffalo and if one would want to hang on to the leash one should be willing to be tossed around mercilessly. He who rides a tiger may never dismount!

Nobody can go on associating with idols and remain free. (For this reason the Biblical injunction is to flee from them.) At some point or the other the idol says: If you wish to make a god of me, then I also want to reign as a god - over you. A god, after all, is not a god if it does not have slaves! In this way the roles are neatly inverted. This exchange usually comes imperceptibly: first people make idols and then the idols make - and break! - them.

\* *A hard taskmaster*

Religion - also the ideological - does not only demand willing service, but even sacrifices. And it is not a case like true religion, where one receives everything out of pure grace. Oh no! An idol is a hard taskmaster, who rewards strictly according to deserts. In opposition to the Biblical concept of the covenant it says: the more you demand of me, the more you have to be willing to give. The poor ideologically enslaved and blinded individual, of course, does not realize that in all idolatry he has to do with the devil, the arch-liar, who never fulfils a single promise!

I do not believe that it is necessary to mention examples of how people today are willing to sacrifice all for the sake of their ideological ideals. They will sacrifice their possessions, their future, their children and ultimately also their own lives. Often this does not happen without opposition and protest, but it is accepted when the leaders say that it is essential. Do you, after all, wish to be a traitor? It is no wonder then that people eventually do not want to think any more or to accept personal responsibility. This too is a typical trait of idolatry: the idolised aim chooses and decides for me, and prescribes to me what I have to do.

### 12.3.7 An image of the enemy is propagated

In the previous section we mentioned that each form of idolatry has its own target sinner. Because ideology, as a form of idolatry, is false religion, one trait of true religion does not appear in it. This is examination of the self, acknowledgement of guilt and confession of sin. Ever since the history of paradise guilt has been shifted on to something or someone outside the self or the own ideological group. The ideological enemy is that which stands in the way of the all-encompassing purpose. It therefore has to be neutralised or eliminated at all costs.

With this point the circle is closed, as it were, if you keep in mind that our first point maintained that ideologies usually come into existence from a threatening situation. The great threat then is the enemy. (No. 1 and no. 7 in the above diagram are the same!)

#### \* *Mutual dependency*

I want to direct your attention to something else which we tend not to notice so easily. In our contemporary ideological madhouse the one ideology is dependent on the other, even though they might seem to be as far apart as the East is from the West. They are negatively bound to each other. Put more simply: if my enemy does not exist any more, then I do not need to continue my ideological struggle; then the bottom falls out of my ideology ... For this reason it is an important task for ideologies to maintain this image of the enemy - the basis for their existence. Christianity is the only positive religion. Fundamentally all ideologies are negative, being anti-this and anti-that.

It might thus even be possible, gradually and subtly, to substitute another enemy for one that might be completing its purpose. Just think of our White South Africans: first the Dutch East India Company, later the English and then the Blacks!

\* *Illusory enemies*

If the divine norms have already been so twisted and violated, is it then necessary for me to say that the image of the enemy created by ideologies need not be a true image, as long as it can serve the realisation of the aim and purpose set?

Have you not had the feeling that you do not know who or what should be regarded as our enemies? This is precisely where ideologies lead us. It is like a merry-go-round going faster and faster, so that later on one cannot determine one's direction any more.

In this dialectical tension between ideologies (the other ideology is my enemy, and yet I need it) the one ideology also calls the other into being. It is not inconceivable that ideologies which in public oppose each other violently should co-operate behind the scene for economic reasons.

\* *Methods of propaganda*

Allow me for a moment to return to the image of the enemy. The means by which it is maintained is unending propaganda. Brainwashing concepts which are used over and over again, stereotypes, generalisations, a lack of nuanced distinction, half-truths (more dangerous than lies) are all characteristics of ideological propaganda language and methods. Through integration propaganda an effort is made to win over the greater part of a community for a specific ideology, and through agitation propaganda those who hold other views are execrated as enemies.

In order to manipulate the masses ideologies have to rationalise. In our own day, where science is regarded so highly, it is obvious that ideologies will come up with "scientific" pretensions!

Ideologies have turned our time into a vortex in which man will irrevocably be sucked downwards. And many - millions - have disappeared into the abyss, because ideologies have hypnotic, demonic seductive power.

## 12.4 SECULARISM: MOTHER OF IDEOLOGIES

Secularism did not intrude into Christianity from the outside. No, the germinating seed could already be discerned in the dualist Christianity of two realms (the natural and the super-natural) during the Middle Ages.

### 12.4.1 It started at the same time as the Reformation

Neither the effort to *churchify* life, nor the effort to *spiritualise* natural life could stop the tide of secularism in the long run. During the sixteenth century, and since, natural life has refused either to be dominated any longer by grace, or to seek its true sense and destiny outside itself. Earthly life wanted to be completely autonomous, independent - and to strive to attain its own natural ends.

The idea of the *corpus Christianum* has landed within the range of the cannon fire of secularism. Popes could not any more speak *ex cathedra* the word of authority for a whole society ... The secular authorities did not allow the clergy any more to prescribe to them ... The age old marriage of church and state, faith and intellect, theology and philosophy foundered ...

Instead of the Christian conquering the world, the world has conquered the Christian. Where Medieval man chose for the church and against the world, it now became the direct opposite: for the world and against the church!

However, the process of secularisation was a gradual one. From about the sixteenth century (Renaissance and Humanism) it took another three centuries until today we can see the results. But although gradual, it has grown irresistibly.

### 12.4.2 Process, motive, result

F. Gogarten's distinction between secularisation as something positive and secularism as something negative is not satisfactory. Secularisation, after all, indicates a *process* of which the *result* is secularism. In the process of secularisation itself various motives can also play a role, which determines whether it should be judged positively or negatively.

Secularisation in the sense of liberation from primitive superstition, false concepts and idolatry can only be welcomed by us as Christians. The emancipation from church domination and the coming of age of various societal structures to become sovereign in their own spheres, should also be seen in a positive light - on condition, of course, that their independence should not mean autonomy from the will of God.

This brings us to a negative example of secularisation. Because religion was associated with the church in the Middle Ages, the conclusion was reached, with the emancipation of the natural sphere, that "natural" life was not bound to the service of God any more. (An example from my own country: if the "Christian" falls away from "Christian-national", we are left with an independent and secularised nationalism.)

Here we have the real meaning of secularism: an -ism, exaggeration, absolutisation of the secular, the worldly.

During the supranaturalistic Middle Ages man's highest striving was to be one with God. Today man thinks naturalistically, he wants to be like the world. Medieval man chose for God and against the world. Contemporary man chooses for the world and against God. And ... neither realises that it is a false dilemma and an unnecessary choice. One does not have to flee the world in order to serve God - God is served *in* this world. Therefore one also does not have to betray God to be present in the world.

### 12.4.3 God is dead!

F. Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a secular prophet, who clearly discerned which powers would control the twentieth century. In his *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The joyful science*) he causes a man to appear on the market square in broad daylight with a lantern.

"I am looking for God!" the man called repeatedly. Seeing that there were many people on the market square who did not believe in God, they made fun of the poor madman: "Why are you looking for Him? Has He got lost? Is He hiding?" the questions rained upon him. "Has He undertaken a voyage? Has He perhaps emigrated?"

The madman jumped into their midst and fixed them in his glare. "Where has God gone? We have killed Him - you and I. We are His murderers!"

"But how have we done it? How were we able to drink the sea dry? Who has given us the sponge to rub out the horizon? What did we do when we cut the earth adrift from the sun?"

"Has it not become colder? Has it not become darker and darker? Do we not have to start lighting our lanterns in the morning ...?"

"Is the scope of the deed not too great for us? Do we not have to become gods ourselves ... There never has been a greater event than this one ..."

The man grew quiet and glared at his listeners. They too had become quiet and looked at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground so that it shattered and died.

"I came too early," he said ... "These terrible events are still on the way, they have not yet reached people's ears. Thunder and lightning take time, the light of the stars take time. Deeds, even after they have been committed, take time to be seen and heard. This deed is still further from them than the furthest star - and yet they have done this!"

It is also told that the madman made the rounds of the churches and sang the *Requiem aeternam deo*. When he was called to order, he answered: "What are these churches now but tombs and monuments to God?"

From this gripping story it seems that Nietzsche realised that in the twentieth century we would be entering a completely new, atheistic world.

Man himself has committed the murder of God - without realising the consequences of the deed. By doing this, man has indeed obliterated his horizon, so that he will never be able to see eternity again; he has also wiped out the Sun of the world, so that it is becoming colder and darker. The only solution is that man has to become god himself now. The worst of it is, however, that man has not realized what he has done - just as the danger of secularism today has not fully penetrated to us yet.

In this way the slight breeze of atheism emanating from the seventeenth century has in the course of 300 years, in the autumn of Western culture, today developed into a tornado which attempts to uproot and destroy all faith in God.

#### 12.4.4 Atheism and secularism compared

Initially there had been a more reasoned, motivated denial of the existence of God. These *theoretical* atheists maintain that there is no God. Closer to our own day we find the *practical* atheists, who maintain that there used to be a God, but that He does not exist any more. Or, if He does still exist, He is of no more interest or meaning to us, we do not need Him any more. He can, in practice, be negated.

Secularism thus has its origin in atheism. Apart from this coherence, however, we have to keep in mind the difference too. Atheism is directed and *aggressive*. It postulates that God does not exist. Secularism, however, presents itself more factually and more *indifferently*. It subsists, rather, in the statement that only the visible world exists. More important is the difference that atheism is a *belief* and secularism is more a *condition* of the entire culture. Secularism is an opened-up atheism, projected into things. It is, as it were, the climate of our new era. The whole human situation has become secularised.

Should secularism (like atheism) have been simply the *faith* that God did not exist, one could easily have passed it by from the viewpoint that God does exist. But now that secularism has become the *condition* of Western culture - and to a large extent of the whole world - it has developed a tremendous absorptive strength. To live as if God does not exist is of course self-deception, illusion, because God does exist. But

in our day the illusion has become so strong that it controls life, and people do not recognise it as an illusion any more.

In the art of today (read a novel or visit an art gallery) God's absence is noticeable. In politics the issue is simply and purely the well-being of man. God has also disappeared from many so-called theologies. In the office or in the factory one simply finds people at work. The same is true of education: the only purpose that it has is to guide children towards maturity. Listen to the conversations of people, and the same things will strike you. We live in a worldly, secular world ...

#### **12.4.5 The relationship between human power and contemporary secularisation**

The modern secularist spiritual climate cannot be understood apart from the immense powers of modern man.

There are three important reasons for the special power of modern man: science (the power of knowledge), technology (the power of tools) and organisation (the power of planning, integrating, co-ordinating and controlling by various means human and other activities).

These powers of man stand in a special relationship with the secularisation process, and inversely secularism also has important consequences for these powers: power promotes secularism and secularism promotes idolisation of powers.

Modern man sets out from the supposition that the greater the power of man, the less he has need of God's help. In earlier times one has to pray for the sick - today the patient can be given an injection or a pill; in earlier times one had to ask for the blessing of God on the harvest - nowadays one uses fertiliser, weedkillers and irrigation. Human power thus culminates in secularism.

It is, however, a false, an illusory faith that man and God should stand against each other as competitors, as rivals. Man is not independent, autonomous with regard to God. It is thus also not true that the more man's power is extended over the earth, the further God may be pushed aside until finally He becomes utterly redundant. We are still fundamentally dependent upon Him.



The inverse influence of secularism on power is that man has transferred his autonomy, his seeming independence, onto the powers that he has created. He has to do this, seeing that he expects, as a secularised man, his salvation and his redemption from these powers. To do this, however, means that he has become dependent again! It means that the powers which man himself has created, have come to assume a position above criticism. In this way the modern idols of science, technology and organisation are created, with the scientists, the engineers and the managers as their priests, and ordinary men as their obedient slaves!

How ironic: the powerful master has become the servant, and his creation has become his master. Man, who wishes to become independent, becomes dependent upon the products that he has himself created!

In the same way that it is illusory to think that man is independent in the sight of God, so it is a deception that man's creations can have untouchable autonomy. We have already seen, however, that modern man has been so blinded by his achievements that he does not notice this any more, and has been so paralysed by the poison of secularism that he does not have the energy any more to unmask the illusion.

This provides a challenge for us as Christians. Those who have become the prey of secularism are held captive in a vicious spiral. Their closed worldview cannot be questioned from within or without. We as Christians, however, have something from outside creation enabling us to look at it critically. We have the Word of God.

We must not think, however, that this will be an easy task, because secularism is not only a condition, it is also a deeply-rooted faith. (The faith has established the condition, and the condition supports and promotes the faith.) To convince someone of the spuriousness, the falsity of his faith is a superhuman task - God alone can do it.

#### **12.4.6 The vicious circle of a closed worldview**

Nietzsche already, with trepidation, predicted that one cannot reject God without radical consequences. By declaring God dead, Western man has indeed rubbed out the Sun of creation, and lost his Anchor in

life. It is no wonder that G. Marcel - only fifty years after Nietzsche had solemnly certified God dead - declared that man now lives in a state of mortal fear.

As long as God's laws were still acknowledged there had been objective criteria for man to live by. Now that man has rejected all God's commandments and has become himself the criterion for all things, *subjectivism* has come to rule the roost. The "law" does not stand above man any more, but is to be sought in man himself.

The next step is *individualism*. Truth has become a personal matter and it is not necessarily applicable to everybody. Generally valid norms for goodness and justice are excluded.

Subjectivism and individualism irrevocably lead to the following step, which is *relativism*. Everything is relative, nothing can be absolutely true. The inverse is: anything can be true!

Because relativism cannot be maintained consistently, there is a fourth step, viz. utilitarianism (from the Latin *utilis*). In the labyrinth of relativism the only criterion is utility. Should it be useful to have gods, have them! Should violence be useful, by all means use it!

This vicious circle is completed by the addition of a final step, for one still has to answer the question as to utility for *what* or for *whom*. The answer? For myself, of course! Has the whole of life today not after all been directed at only *me*: *my* prosperity, *my* survival, *my* safety, peace and freedom? This we may call *hedonism*. Western man - and the African too - tends to look for idols in his own vicinity. In this way, however, we have ended up again at *subjectivism* - the point where we started: man is the criterion of everything!

From this you can clearly deduce what we meant when we called secularism a closed worldview. After the Sun of the world has been wiped off the horizon, man is walled in a spiral dungeon, in which he can circumambulate, but from which he can have no hope of escape. He himself has closed the Door and thrown away the Key!

### 12.4.7 Secularism: factory of ideologies

You should not, however, think that man gives up easily. If he realises that utilitarianism is not the key, then he creates other -isms: capitalism, nationalism, tribalism, racism, communalism ...

What I would like to clarify is that secularism does not mean that man believes in *nothing*, but that he can believe in *anything*. For this reason it is the fertile medium for the growth of any kind of ideology. As a chameleon changes its colour depending on its environment, so secularism does. And if one ideology has become obsolete, it is ready with the following one. Secularism, the many-headed Hydra!

In this respect too we have a circle: secularism inculcates ideologies, and the various ideologies in turn promote the process of secularisation.

### 12.4.8 Recapitulatory definition

Let us try to encompass the most important elements in simply one sentence: *Secularism, born of the atheistic ideas of three centuries, is a subjectivist, relativist and utilitarian ideology, as well as the condition resulting from it, according to which the so-called free, independent, autonomous man, because of the special powers which he possesses, has assumed the place of God who to his mind has become redundant, to enable him to live only out of, through and for this closed world.*

### 12.4.9 Most dangerous enemy of Christianity

After the preceding we can agree with what was written already in 1928: "No student of the deeper problems of life can fail to see that the greatest rival of Christianity in the world today is not Mohammedanism, or Buddhism, or Hinduism, or Confucianism, but a worldwide secular way of life and interpretation of the nature of things". These words from the World Mission Conference in Jerusalem speak of deep insight.

Why should this be the case? There are more reasons, but I shall mention only three.

- In the first place, secularism is *not an open enemy* attacking the Christian faith with physical weaponry. No, it works practically unnoticed. In a subtle way it infiltrates and undermines faith.
- In the second place it would seem to me as if it *works gradually from the outside to the inside*, so that the virus ultimately paralyses one in the heart. From the outside it might thus seem as if Christian life is still in order, while living communion with God has in reality ceased to exist. The process is so gradual that mostly we do not notice it any more. And when we ultimately realize that an institution or the whole of life has been secularised, it is already too late ...
- In the third place it is also *not a clearly discernible and definable phenomenon*. It is a sort of chameleon ideology, the medium for the growth of a variety of ideologies - ideologies which in turn further promote the process of secularisation.

Such a practically invisible, stealthy enemy, which also administers the poison in tiny doses, must be regarded as extremely dangerous!

#### **12.4.10 Are we to live forever in a post-Christian era?**

A brief word regarding the solution to the danger of secularism. We usually tend to underestimate this danger. We can also, however, overestimate its dangers if we think that there is no way to stop it or at least to counter it. Then we start to believe that the so-called post-Christian era has come to stay.

If we do this, we underestimate the conquering power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If His Spirit pervades the world, it can blow away the ashes of Christianity and enliven the smouldering coals again. I am convinced that only a radical, total, integral Christian worldview will be able to break the formidable power of secularism - not only in theory but concretely: in family life, in education, in politics, in the world of commerce and labour and even in the church.

### **12.5 APARTHEID: A MANY-HEADED MONSTER**

Apartheid has come to disintegrate very rapidly during the past three years (since 2 February 1990). This does not, however, imply that we

already know what the new order will be like. The reason is that apartheid's *day* has passed, but not apartheid *itself*. It has been *scaled down*, but has not yet been *obliterated*. This will only happen once a completely new dispensation dawns.

### 12.5.1 Introduction

For this reason we have to be careful of a euphoria which expresses itself in, for example, an expression such as "a *new* South Africa". Euphoria tends to blind people to reality.

The idea of a brand-new South Africa can be concomitant with or be a sign of the fact that one is unwilling to be confronted with the realities of the old (apartheid) South Africa, and unable to discuss them openly. "We now have to forget what is past, because it is unproductive to discuss it," is often said. The idea of a "new South Africa" is supposed to indicate a complete break with the past. We can now start anew - like Adam and Eve in Paradise! - and the past is erased as if it had never been.

This idea could further mask the fact that there are still fundamental differences present about what the "new" South Africa is going to look like. I can understand "a new South Africa" as rhetoric of political parties and even as advertising slogans for beer breweries, but this should not deceive us. We cannot obtain a *new* nation as one buys a new shirt, a dress, a car or a house. We can mostly expect *another* - hopefully *better* - South Africa. (In the last part of this section I will give a few outlines of the Biblical principles on which such a better South Africa should be built.)

Because apartheid is not yet dead and finally buried, it is still important to reflect on it - outside South Africa too. Should one wish to fully break away from apartheid one should know what exactly apartheid is, for one may wrongly assume that one has finally broken away from it. And I am convinced that many people have never fully plumbed the depths of apartheid. This is especially true of many of those who drove the apartheid vehicle.

In the course of the last ten years the Institute for Reformational Studies has made an attempt by way of conferences, both nationally and

internationally, to break down the Berlin wall of shame between white and coloured in South Africa. There were many days when I felt helpless and mired in doubt as to whether the day would ever dawn that one would no longer need only to *criticise and demolish* but would also be able to begin *building* a new future. The time for rebuilding has approached more closely. To be able to rebuild, however, one has to know what exactly apartheid was and recognise the width and depth and breadth of the damage done by it.

Apartheid is an ideology, and moreover a dangerous one. I could easily indicate that it is an ideology by way of general traits which one finds in practically all ideologies, but I do not intend to follow this way. I would rather start from the presupposition that it is an ideology and then try to typify this specific ideology. My own (preliminary) definition of what an ideology is (cf. 12.3 above) serves as background to the following analysis.

From my characterisation it will emerge that the ideology of apartheid reveals many different faces - it is like a many-headed monster. What will also emerge from my analysis is what this ideology's vision of human dignity and identity is. I would therefore also like to briefly indicate what I consider to be the Biblical vision of human dignity and identity. From this it will become clear that the two visions of human dignity and identity are diametrically opposed to each other.

My final introductory remark is important: I use South African apartheid simply as an *example* of how people should *not* relate to each other if human dignity and identity are to be realised. In many other countries in the world apartheid also occurs, or human dignity and identity are violated. I therefore do hope that people outside South Africa will also find something of value in this section. I especially hope that the universal Biblical message (the last section 12.5.5) - even if very elementary - will be of value to all my readers.

### 12.5.2 The ideology of apartheid

Apartheid is not simply a *political policy*. It is also not simply a collection of *segregational laws* so that, as soon as the laws have been repealed, apartheid will also disappear. It is a stubborn *ideology* which causes people to view reality in a certain way. It is the *foundation* of

the whole South African societal order. It has also led to a physical *condition* of unequal distribution of power and prosperity.

The religious explanation (a kind of Calvinism) or romantic definition (for example, Voortrekker history) given for apartheid is not the essential one. The "philosophy" behind it is more important. I do not here intend to give a detailed analysis of all the possible influences that led to the origin of this ideology. There are studies available which mention, among others, Mussolini and Salazar's fascism, late feudalism, German Romanticism, national socialism, racism, colonialism, etc. as possible influences.

At least the following six ideological characteristics can be discerned in apartheid:

\* *A nationalist ideology*

Nationalism had as aim breaking with the inequality of the feudal system and the hierarchical view of authority on which it was built. The important question, however, is how the diversity among people should be understood should they all be equal. The solution proposed by nationalism has been that people do not stand *beneath* each other (as, for example, in the hierarchical feudal system), but in clearly distinguishable groups *next to* each other. In other words, there is not a vertical but a horizontal distinction between people. It is not a distinction of non-equals but of equals. (Cf. the well-known apartheid credo of "separate but equal".) This separateness would at the same time imply the freedom of a nation ("volk").

Afrikaner nationalism should be understood against the background of the threats to the Afrikaner nation: first by British colonialism and imperialism; later on black people were regarded as a danger because they outnumbered the whites. There is nothing wrong with being proud of one's own national identity and to try to protect and to maintain it. (All over the world we today experience a revival of ethnic nations.) What is wrong, however, is to absolutise national identity and to uphold it to the disadvantage of other ethnic groups, as happened in the case of the apartheid ideology. National pride and identity are good, but *nationalism* is wrong.

\* *A communalist ideology*

There are, according to apartheid no ranks among human beings but rather categories, and each human being belongs to such a homogeneous category which encompasses the individuals. The individual is not, therefore, the basic building block of humanity. Individuality is totally subservient to collectivity. The group is a closed entity in itself. The diversity does not primarily lie in the individual, but in a number of homogeneous groups which exist *adjacent to* each other and which are called nations ("volke"). Each nation is unique, has a unique "national soul", its own language, culture and communal history.

The national group therefore demands primary ontological status, it exists prior to the individual. The nation does not come into being through free association - one cannot choose the group to which one wishes to belong, one cannot acquire the group character. One is born into it, inherits it.

Man can furthermore only live meaningfully if he has a place within the group. For this reason it is necessary for each group to have its own church, education, government, etc. In order to be fully human, each person has to be among his/her *own*. And in order to realise the *own* group, *others* should be excluded. The group may never be a *mixture*!

For the sake of the complete development of man, humanity therefore has to be sorted into purified nations. This should be done not only biologically, but with regard to the entirety of existence: politically, ecclesiastically, educationally and even geographically. From this it clearly emerges that apartheid is not merely an innocent theory but a restrictive, totalitarian ideology.

As soon as one has brought together "that which should be together" (D.F. Malan, first apartheid prime minister), with each nation having its own territory, without interference in each other's affairs, "separate equality", "peaceful co-existence" or "maintenance of diversity" has been achieved.

At first glance it seems to be something very positive. The idea of the maintenance of diversity contains, however, something of a dialectic or



tension. A nation can only exist if there are other nations from which it can be distinct! But at the same time these other nations constitute a threat to the own nation. (The existence of the own nation is therefore negatively bound to the other!) The own will therefore have to be defended continually. "Order" is in this framework, essentially a concept of hostility. Inherent in the concept of apartheid is the possibility that violence can - must - be evoked.

\* *A racist ideology*

In the early phase of the development of the ideology of apartheid the concept of "race" was rejected as part of its viewpoint. The primary idea was diversity of *national* groups and not *racial* groups. For this reason proponents of apartheid indignantly rejected suggestions that apartheid might be no other than Nazi philosophy. Nationalism (which apartheid stood for), after all, acknowledges the equality of all nations: nationalist collectivism or communalism is not a suppressive but a liberating policy. A shared democracy would, in accordance with this view, however, lead to the suppression of one or more group. Apartheid then seems to be the only way to effect real equality in a heterogeneous society.

Theologians and politicians advanced the idea that European cultural values in Africa should at all costs be protected, that the own cultures of Africa should not be destroyed and that gradual political and economic "enfranchisement" should be given to Black people to discourage them from entering into immediate competition with highly developed Europeans. In this way conflict would be avoided.

Proponents of apartheid did later acknowledge that racist elements intruded, but according to them it was not the intention to discriminate (or, in their jargon, differentiate) on the basis of skin colour. The *pure* theory of apartheid (nationalism) had to be distinguished from the *impure* (racism). In the eighties many of the measures of petty apartheid were repealed. (These were measures which determined *ad hoc* contact among people of different skin colour at the individual level, for example separate facilities, job reservation, marriages, etc.) In this way the perception has been created and disseminated that apartheid is dead.

Racism, however, is not only a superior or hostile *attitude* towards somebody with a different skin colour. Such attitudes of prejudice are the *results* of racism. Racism is also an ideology of a totalitarian nature. It influences the structures and not only the individuals of a society. And for this reason one does not simply get rid of it by a change of heart.

Just like nationalism, racism also emanates from people's group allegiances. There is a twofold difference, however:

- Racism views the cohering factor of a group as being biological. What binds people together or, conversely, distinguishes them is their genetic similarity. There is a biological determination (for example, skin colour) of who should be together. In this ideology therefore one has even less of a choice than in the case of nationalist communalism, which also considers among other things issues such as language, culture and religion.

- Racism does not accept the equality of people. The whole of mankind is seen to occupy different levels of development. Racism sees mankind as consisting of groups "by nature" higher and therefore better, and "by nature" lower and therefore inferior. In full-blown racism man is nothing more than manipulable matter. Those who are by nature "on top" have the right to subject those by nature "below".

Although the *theory* of apartheid concerned national groups, the *practice* never went further than division between black and white, that is, races. Racism was especially rampant and visible during the phase of petty apartheid (the fifties to the middle eighties) with all the infamous apartheid signs. Fortunately petty apartheid has been abolished by law - at least something to be grateful for.

Racism, however, still emerges from the tricameral system of Parliament: Whites (first-class citizens) have the power and rule with the "contribution" of Coloureds and Indians (second-class citizens) while the Blacks (third-class citizens) have been excluded. This is far removed from a theory of equal nations - one cannot here speak of either equality or of nations.

Racism is thus no coincidental adjunct to the apartheid ideology. It also does not only manifest itself in the form of petty apartheid. The *foundation* on which the whole of society has been organised is racist. Therefore it has to be changed *radically* and mere *adjustments* will not suffice.

The good intentions with which nationalism has been dished up, have blinded us to the fact that racism has been the controlling order in South African society. It will then not be of any help, in the establishment of a new South Africa, to simply choose between nationalism and racism - something which emerges today in "group" rhetoric. Nationalism and racism are twin brothers. A collectivist nationalism cannot function without racism. The vague group concept of nationalism does not enable apartheid ideologues to clearly divide people into nations, but the concept of race does offer the possibility of classifying people into groups, and is easier to administer.

\* *A security ideology*

Within the concept of diversity of the apartheid ideology one finds an awareness of insecurity locked up because the unity (the homogeneous nation) is continually threatened by the diversity of nations or races.

Maintenance of the own and defensibility (spiritual and physical) have become key concepts. Salvation is to be found in the own ideology. In a way that is typical of ideology, the image of the enemy (to which the own image is negatively linked) is blown up. The world outside the own nation is wrong and has to be recreated. Debate and compromise are also not possible.

Opposition only demands redoubled vigilance. Violence, however, is not viewed as violence as such, but is simply self-defence against the "criminals" who do not wish to comply with the reigning order.

What is also typical of an ideology is the fact that imaginary enemies are created. The slogan of the preservation of Christianity as against the totalitarian onslaught of godless communism or Marxism - or even the Illuminati and the New Age - offered a well-known way of convincing people to accept the apartheid ideology. Anyone who does not tread the

prescribed route, is dismissed by way of a cheap epithet such as "traitor to the nation".

It is understandable that a growing resistance to this security ideology came into being. During the eighties naked violence became the main political power ploy of the state security ideology. This extended to not only the government but also the ANC and the PAC. State violence incited counter-violence and the violent spiral went out of control. This finally culminated in the announcement of a state of emergency. South Africa's violence and destabilisation in even its neighbouring countries is well-known. I do not want to repeat its history here.

What is clear is that a security ideology such as apartheid cannot be realised without violence. In order to reconstruct the whole of society, to make a success of social engineering, an enormous input, equal to a war effort, was needed. Apartheid has been a total onslaught on South Africa! Stopping violence in principle, then, means stopping apartheid.

\* *An ideology of prosperity*

The architect of hyper-apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd, taught that apartheid was merely a political and not an economical issue. Apartheid is not economically neutral, however. In essence it is an economic policy. Why else does the present abyss between rich and poor coincide almost fully with the distinction in skin colour?

This began with the poor economic conditions whites found themselves in after the Anglo-Boer Wars and the Depression of the thirties. And today whites allege that they will be robbed of their possessions when a black government takes power. The mere thought of the division of prosperity is enough to evoke a hysterical reaction, while South Africa at present is one of the countries in the world with the greatest contrast between rich and poor.

Because the ideological propaganda positioned apartheid against Marxism, South Africa is regarded, in economic terms, as the model of a free-market economy. South Africa, however, is not at all an example of a free economy. Its economy is nearly as centrally planned, manipulated and orchestrated as that of any previously communist country. And how could this be otherwise? A programme of social

engineering, as has been the case with apartheid, cannot allow a free-market directed economy to prescribe to it!

The South African economy has clearly been a kind of "affirmative action" in favour of whites in general and Afrikaners specifically. Prosperity has been channeled consciously to be concentrated in certain places and to the advantage of certain groups. Apartheid could therefore also be described as an oligarchy, a government for the rich.

Such a bureaucracy, however, does not *create* prosperity but simply *consumes* it. All the control measures prevent creativity and in the end strangle the economy of a country. For too long there was total dependence on the export of gold and minerals, and the private and industrial sectors have not been developed adequately. Large sums of money later had to be borrowed from abroad. Add to this the astronomical defence expenditures demanded by the security ideology and inflation upon inflation, and it becomes clear why consumption has overtaken productivity. The ideology of prosperity has fallen into its own sword!

The irony is that (grand) apartheid was seen as a policy of liberation. The separation of whites from blacks in the homelands was seen as liberation from the yoke of white exploitation. Separate equality, after all, means political sovereignty, independence and the opportunity to take decisions without outside interference. The creation of black states was seen as monuments of equal rights and justice.

In practice, however, these states have become more and more dependent on economic aid from South Africa. In order to render these states viable, billions of rands have been spent on the establishment of unproductive so-called border industries and the purchasing of land. Today the inhabitants of these states live in the most poverty-stricken circumstances in the whole of Africa - within the borders of one of the richest countries in Africa. Even if we find a satisfactory political solution for South Africa, it will still take decades before the economic imbalance which came into being because of this policy can be eliminated.

\* *A revolutionary ideology*

By calling the apartheid ideology a revolutionary one, I might well be causing the architects and administrators of grand apartheid to turn in their graves. They were, after all, used to calling people such as myself and others who could not go along with their policy revolutionary traitors.

I do think, however, that any totalitarian ideology (and most ideologies are probably totalitarian) does have a revolutionary character, because it strives to change a whole societal order against the wishes of most of the members of that society.

As already previously indicated in this book, I intend "revolutionary" to carry a deeper meaning. Should a government consistently for its own gain act only for a specific group of citizens and suppress and reject with contempt and even violence the rights of others, then it is rejecting the will of God for the state - which is general, impartial justice. Such a government has then become revolutionary in the most profound sense of the word: it commits revolution (resistance) against God. A citizen can in such a case no longer accept the exercise of power and authority of the state. This would be glorification of power (power for the sake of power) - while we are only called to glorify God. Citizens who come to oppose such a government cannot simply be branded revolutionaries, as they are in fact anti-revolutionary, that is, against the revolution of which the government is guilty in the face of God. And their positive intention is to bring the government back to its real calling.

\* *The religious face*

Perhaps this is the aspect of apartheid which has caused the greatest indignation among Christians world-wide: how could all this be justified in the name of God?

In order to render such a terrible ideology acceptable to the whites of whom the majority were Christians, it had to be sanctified in the name of the Gospel. It was therefore derived from the Bible that the national group was the divinely-ordained way in which societies had to be ordered. The division of languages in Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), the

nation ("volk") of Israel in the Old Testament, the New Testament image of the church as the chosen people ("volk") of God and the group character of the covenant were interpreted in such a way that it could justify apartheid. Up to 1986 the Dutch Reformed Church (in *Church and Society*) only rejected specific *elements* in this theology, only the wrong *implementation* of it, and not the theology *itself*. The "problem" of South Africa is still seen in this document as residing in the diversity of nations! And even while I am writing this book, most whites will not accept - and openly confess and ask for forgiveness - that apartheid *as such* was wrong, because of its good *intention*!

I think I am not totally wrong if I conclude that very little - if any - human dignity was realised in apartheid. Only the people who suffered under this terrible ideology will be able to fully tell you how it dehumanised them.

### 12.5.3 The effects of the ideology of apartheid

In the preceding part I have described this ideology as if it were not linked to certain dates, and also as if it had not changed in the course of time. For this reason I now supply a few flashes to indicate briefly how it came into being and how its adherents were gradually forced to make adjustments.

- *The first phase* covered the period from the discovery of gold (towards the end of the previous century), Union (1910) and the period after that until 1948. From 1910 all was set in motion to counter the process of social integration which could not be stopped anymore after the discovery of gold. During the first fifty years, however, the policy of political segregation was only applied by means of measures which would later be known as petty apartheid.

- *The second phase* began in 1948 (the accession to power of the National Party) when a fanatic process began not only to counter social integration, but also to stop it. The existing segregational measures were extended. But apart from that, grand apartheid was also instituted. In this way the reconstruction of the total societal structure began. Soon after 1948 legislation was promulgated which juridically fixed separation of people on the basis of colour. According to the population registration act, each individual had to be forced into one or another

predetermined group and allocated (with the exception of whites) to a specific residential area in a city or homeland. This also meant geographic separation.

■ *The third phase* was the period from about the middle sixties to the end of the seventies. The process of achieving ultimately separate, independent national states progressed with agonising slowness. The government, however, pretended that this had already been realised. The millions of blacks in the "townships" adjacent to the white cities were made citizens, overnight, of other "countries" - countries where most of them had never set foot. People who had lived in certain areas for generations were suddenly declared "temporary" inhabitants of their place of birth. Because blacks from then on did not live "permanently" in townships any longer, the building of roads, houses, schools, shops, hospitals etc. ceased, and the provision of infrastructure such as water supply, sewerage, electricity and telephones was not extended - because these amenities now had to be supplied in the homelands. People who did want to work in the cities, had to apply for this privilege under a barrage of bureaucratic red tape, because they had become simple guest labourers. Where this process did not work of its own accord, it was helped along by forced removals. In this way an estimated 4 million people were forcibly uprooted.

■ *The fourth period* lasted from the late seventies to the end of the eighties.

By the end of the seventies it had emerged that hyper-apartheid could not succeed and a number of reforms were instituted. Petty apartheid was suspended, the rigid application of the homelands policy was watered down by the abolition of the pass system and influx control, the permanence of blacks in the cities was acknowledged and limited property rights were reinstated, and - although totally inadequate in scope - the provision of infrastructure and houses in the black townships was stepped up again. In 1989 job reservation was finally abolished and in 1990 also the law on separate amenities. This was a great relief to blacks in urban areas, but not to the homelands, which were now neglected. Incredible conditions prevailed there due to over-population, unemployment, inadequate education and disintegrated social structures. The result was that millions of people flocked into the



cities to find a livelihood. For many crime and theft, however, have proved to be the only recourse.

Apart from reforms in the socio-economic area, 1983 also saw an effort to achieve political reform through the creation of a tricameral parliament. "Democracy" was "extended" by offering Coloureds and Indians their own Chambers in Parliament. This was merely another cloak for white supremacy, however. The reaction from black circles was predictably violent. A volcano of frustration and anger has since 1984 erupted as a result of this insult. The dam wall broke and the only way to curb it was to announce a state of emergency - in other words, more force and violence, and another indication of the essentially violent nature of apartheid.

By 1986 the efforts towards reform had again begun to slacken. Factors which contributed to this included the moral repugnance about violence in the townships, the declining economy (as a result of disinvestment and international sanctions) as well as increasing militancy (especially the war in Angola and the former Southwest Africa). By 1987 the apartheid ideology had shed its *elan*.

The damage done by it over the course of decades, however, was clearly visible: the destruction of social structures in large parts of the black communities, the establishment of a culture of fear, suspicion and violence, the violation of the human dignity of all in this country, the practically total isolation of South Africa in the international community and the wasting of billions of rands.

■ *The fifth period* began in 1989. This might perhaps one day be regarded as *the* turning point in the history of South Africa. South African participation in the war in Angola ended, Namibia became independent, the anti-apartheid parties were unbanned and in February 1990 Nelson Mandela was released after 27 years in jail. The grip of the securocrats gradually eased and South Africa could begin to disarm.

All this cannot be viewed in isolation of world-shattering events elsewhere in the world. In a spiritual-historical sense the twentieth century culminated and ended in 1989. The time for ideological, absolutist policies and styles of government and command economies had passed.

The era of the cold war was something of the past. The world's economic problems had won the day! The wave of democratisation which started in South America earlier and extended to Eastern Europe, is now washing across the whole world. In one country after the other (in Africa too) all citizens are fighting for equal rights. All this made the need for change in South Africa that much more urgent. Here too the scope of the reforms will have to be great and comprehensive.

At the beginning of 1990 (cf. the opening speech to Parliament of the State President, Mr. F.W. de Klerk on 2 February 1990) a new era dawned in South African history. The *time* of apartheid has passed. The *results* of apartheid, however, are still with us, and apartheid can therefore only be regarded dead in an ambivalent sense. This is bound to create great problems for the future - our next point.

#### 12.5.4 Challenges for the future

As has been said at the outset, the struggle against apartheid (or any other sinful social system) may not only consist of the (negative) rejection of the system - especially not if it is clear that the system is breaking down. The real struggle against false ideologies lies in the fact that a committed effort has to be made to work on more humane alternatives for the future. In a future South Africa we have to start building a home for all in this country.

Perhaps I should mention a few problems *en route* to a new South Africa in order to eliminate the idea that a so-called new South Africa has already been born. The problems I will mention are of course not the only ones. The present state of violence in the country - not only of a political nature but also violence due to poverty and crime - as well as the dangers inherent in both white and black radicalism, are other examples. By pointing out these obstacles, however, I do not deny the great progress already made in achieving consensus between the National Party (NP) and the African National Congress (ANC). Two years ago, for example, it was totally unthinkable that the NP should accept the principle of universal franchise. In the meantime it has also been accepted by the NP that some or other form of economic reorganisation will have to take place.

*\* The conditions created by apartheid*

The apartheid ideology has had concrete effects. Among these are maldistribution of wealth and other backlogs, hatred, fear, suspicion, a decreasing level of respect for the law, a culture of violence etc. These results will not be cancelled out simply by abolishing the apartheid laws - or even by accepting a new constitution. The flood of apartheid may have washed past, but the damage done by the flood is still clearly visible!

*\* The continued existence of the concept of nationalist communalism among whites*

Not necessarily as a result of a conscious choice, but out of habit, most whites still maintain the old ideological points of departure. The more traditional rightists maintain it in a more or less unchanged fashion, while the more progressives do this in an adjusted form.

The erstwhile idea that the national groups of which mankind is constituted could only continue to exist if they were separated from each other geophysically, has been abandoned. The idea of intrinsically homogeneous groups as constructional units of a "new South Africa" has, however, remained intact. It is precisely on the basis of this theory that attempts were made to build the "old South Africa". The new formula for division is not according to land areas but according to power circles. If it is accepted that racism is not the principle for division any longer, what principle will be used for the distinction of "new groups"? And how will this help the triumph of equality and justice? Will the geographical - plus a veiled racist - principle perhaps be replaced by an economic one?

*\* The type of democracy which may possibly be practised by a black majority government*

I cannot speak on behalf of black people. They are more than capable of doing so themselves. And they are also very influential. The future of South Africa has long since ceased to be determined in Parliament! It is very clear that most blacks oppose a group model based on the principle of ethnicity or race. Although opinions might vary (cf. for example the Inkatha Freedom Party and the Zulu's), all agree on one

point: a new dispensation for South Africa that does not rest upon a fully non-ethnic democratic basis is totally unacceptable.

The million dollar question, however, is what form of democracy would be installed. The concept of democracy is vague and hard to define. What one person may regard as an example from the textbook of democracy may be rejected by another as totally undemocratic. It has become a catchword to describe one's own system of government as democratic - even though it may be very far from being democratic - and to use it to reject the case of one's opponents. (Cf. chapter 14, section 14.5 for more details about the idea of democracy.)

The National Party advocates a *representative* democracy. According to this model the political will of the community will be expressed in the programmes of the different political parties. Candidates for government are therefore elected on the basis of their affiliation to the various parties. Once they have been elected, they are to a large extent free with regard to their decisions concerning politics. It also seems as if the National Party still holds the view that power-sharing and self-determination (by minorities) can be reconciled.

The ANC, on the other hand, is strongly convinced that there should be a *participatory* democracy. According to such a model, the accountability of the elected representatives towards those who elected them is not merely *one* of the criteria, but rather *the* criterion. People are elected with the explicit presupposition that they are the direct representatives of the will of the people and that their power to make decisions is accordingly limited.

The fears of many whites are located in the fact that traditional African communalism (which closely approximates white nationalist communalism) plus the socialist trait prominent in the ANC and other black political groups, may have an important influence on the future democratic dispensation. And if its influence is too strong, this may nullify the best democratic intentions.

Totalitarianism - modernised tribalism - is indeed a great danger in a future South Africa. The whole of life (art, religion, economics, education, etc.) will then be *forcibly* organised into a single system. Totalitarian systems also further presuppose an elite, people who know

best. They believe that ordinary people do not understand their own interests. Whoever therefore refuses to tie in with the system should be forced to accept its "freedom".

When I say this, I do not mean that totalitarianism only occurs among blacks. The National Party apartheid policy strived to force everything - from sex and rugby to religion - into a single political system, and then to enforce this by legal means. Practically all political groups in South Africa have totalitarian tendencies. While each ideology is intolerant, a totalitarian ideology is really intolerance squared.

It is therefore important to state clearly and unequivocally in South Africa that no tribe, ethnic group, party or government is god, and that no single leader is the infallible pope of this god!

The pluralist reformational vision of society (cf. chapter 10) offers a way out, as opposed to totalitarianism (whether it be of individualist or socialist origin). According to this worldview no group (tribe, party or nation) or societal relationship (state or church) may, in totalitarian fashion, lord it over another. The unique (although not isolated) liberties of the different societal relationships have to be respected in order to establish a truly liberated society.

\* *Different views of the economy*

The National Party is in favour of minimal government involvement in a mainly "free enterprise" economy. Privatisation is important - with the result that the whites for some time will remain economically the strongest.

The ANC, representative of the poorer part of the population, proposes much more radical government involvement and a much more comprehensive restructuring of the economy. As against privatisation they speak of nationalisation in order to try and eliminate the present economic inequalities.

These two different visions for the economy are of course a concomitant of two different views of apartheid. For the government apartheid is simply the sum of apartheid legislation and a race-based constitution and the possibility that some people still cling to a racist

attitude. In order to establish a "new" South Africa, one then only has to abolish apartheid legislation, hold negotiations for a new constitution and make some propaganda aimed at changing people's racist attitudes. It is assumed that a future South Africa therefore needs limited economic restructuring and a high growth rate, but this is not viewed as either essential to make a new society work, or for the elimination of apartheid.

The ANC views radical economic change as indispensable for the phasing out of apartheid. Apartheid and economics cannot be divided. Economic dominance by whites has been the *reason* for apartheid and not merely a coincidental *result*.

A South Africa freed from apartheid therefore demands economic restructuring and the re-allocation of wealth as well as the means of creating wealth for those who had been impoverished by apartheid. The mere creation of a fund to help the poor is not adequate. Enormous amounts will be necessary to address the backlog in housing, education, health care, supply of jobs, etc. Whether this could be achieved is of course another question. Yet this remains an important part of the political programme of the ANC.

### **12.5.5 The Biblical view of man as a reply to apartheid**

Both apartheid and my own viewpoint rest on specific anthropologies or views of man. These anthropologies again determine what somebody's view of society will be like. I would therefore like to propose the following Scriptural anthropological viewpoints.

#### *\* Human equality and equal dignity*

Since the earliest days of Christianity the fact has been emphasised that all men were created by God in His image (Genesis 1:27). This underlies our conception of the equality of all human beings. Human existence is not an achievement of man, but is given to all by God and is therefore to be shared by all on an equal basis.

Through the fall into sin, which intervened, man - not God! - brought inequality to bear among men. Christ's redemptive work, however,

reaffirmed the equality. Obvious differences between people do not obviate this fundamental equality.

Because people owe their existence (and believers also their redemption) to God, they are not only equal in principle, but also equal in *dignity*. God grants this dignity to man by among other things having created him/her as the crown of creation and also by appointing mankind as stewards of creation, to control, nurture and preserve creation (Genesis 1:28). The dignity that man has is thus not his by virtue of himself, but by virtue of that which God grants him. This is the most profound basis of human dignity, and for this reason cannot be dissolved by other people.

To see to the welfare of oneself and one's neighbours is undoubtedly one of the central themes of Scripture. The purpose of the great love commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) is to protect and promote our humanity.

And we are not allowed to limit the scope or the breadth of love for one's neighbour. We are clearly warned against that by for example the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). God's love is unconditional and limitless and our love for each other should be the same. God loved us when we were still His enemies (Romans 5:6-10), and for this reason we have to love our enemies too. God's love, and therefore our own, is thus not even limited to believers. In this way He maintains the dignity of *all* people. We may therefore never interpret the concept "neighbour" in exclusive terms.

The necessity for protecting and maintaining human dignity is of course sin, which leads to theories, like that of the apartheid ideology, of pride, self-elevation and superiority. Against this we have to stress, in the light of Scripture, equality in existence and in dignity as a fundamental given of human existence. When this is not acknowledged, it is to the detriment of the individual - not only for those so-called inferior, but also for the so-called superior persons - and the whole of society.

When some persons for whatever reason choose to elevate themselves and to fix this in deeds and in structures, it is in direct contravention of the intention of God for human life.

\* *Human diversity and unity*

Equality does not mean similarity - just as diversity need not mean separation. There is definitely a rich diversity of people and of human groupings. God does not want uniform mass products produced by a factory!

Should we see this diversity not as a threat but as a positive attribute, we will realise that meaningful human life is not possible without this diversity.

Such a viewpoint is diametrically opposed to the exclusivity of the apartheid ideology which views meaningful human unity only as similarity of attitudes or uniformity within a group (the nation or "volk"), and diversity or difference as a threat to the own. People are then divided into opposing camps. Interaction between different cultures can then only be interpreted in terms of conflict, with the resultant victory or defeat. The tragic part of this is that the false idea is established that human diversity is the cause of human divisions. This is not the reason - the reason is to be sought in the sinfulness of man. To see this as the reason for conflict is to pile the guilt upon God - and so to deny man's guilt and sinfulness! - because He willed the diversity.

Unity and diversity are therefore not opposing concepts which (through one policy or another) have to be kept in balance. Rather (as has been said already), unity is created by the co-operation of a variety of people. Diversity is thus, apart from being a *gift* of God, also a *condition* for human unity.

The *unity* between God and man in the covenant, after all, does not mean that God and man become *similar* (God man, or man God). God remains totally different from man and man totally different from God, even in the deepest and most profound religious bondedness. Stated in different terms: only because God is God and man is man, is this bondedness possible. A relationship between different people also does not remove the own identity.

An example from the Bible to illustrate this is Paul's image of the church as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). To form a unity



as a body and to function effectively, there can not be only one member, but there should be a variety of limbs. Because of their diverse nature, each member can contribute to the one body. More importantly: exactly because each member retains its own character (the foot remains a foot, the eye an eye, etc.) can it contribute to the unity. The church is a unity *on the basis of the diversity* of its members. The church is an integrated diversity - think of the well-known verse from Galatians (3:28): "So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one union with Jesus Christ." (Cf. also Colossians 3:11.)

I am convinced that this vision with regard to the church can also be applied to other societal relationships.

According to the Bible people are therefore different not in order that they can come into *conflict* with each other, but precisely the reverse, viz. that they should be of *service* to each other, each with his own character, gifts and talents. In this way a true community can be attained and unity can be established among people.

\* *Human interdependence*

Closely linked to the foregoing is the idea that man is not simply an isolated individual. In a previous chapter I have already referred to the well-known proverb (in many African languages): "Man is only man through his fellow men". This is a prominent idea in the Bible as well. Adam attains fulfilment only in his relationship with Eve and *vice versa*. And this is not only true of the marital relationship, because there is human interdependence in each societal relationship. Man only comes to full humanity in and through other people. One has to complement the other.

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

\* *Human (individual) responsibility*

The preceding does not mean that man is only a social being and does not have any individual existence and responsibility. (Cf. chapter 9, section 9.4.3.)

God created people, individuals - and not groups. Christ came to redeem people - not nations. And when God judges one day, He will not do it on the basis of our membership of one group or another, but everybody will be judged according to personal actions. God's law, in accordance with which He will judge in the fullness of time, is in the first place individually directed.

Listen to what Paul has to say of himself in this regard: "I was circumcised when I was a week old. I am an Israelite by birth, of the tribe of Benjamin, a pure-blooded Hebrew. As far as keeping the Jewish law I was a Pharisee, and I was so zealous that I persecuted the church." But then he continues: "But all those things that I might count as profit I now count as loss for Christ's sake ..." (Philippians 3:5-7).

When the New Testament speaks about nations, then the concern is not with *ideologically* defined homogeneous social units, but simply *sociological* entities. In the New Testament the concept *nation* ("*volk*") is largely a geographical term. It indicates the region from where someone came, and the concept is not nearly as loaded as South African apartheid theologians would have liked!

Group formation as such is not wrong. What is wrong is to allocate too high a status to any group (tribe, nation, race, people), because it then happens that individual people's humanity is defined from within the parameters of the group.

\* *Human groups and societal relationships*

What is the purpose of groups? Groups and societal relationships (I distinguish between a nation which is a group and a state which is a societal relationship) are structures intended to promote certain interests, to render service, to provide rights and justice for all and to promote unity. Groups are bound by the same ethical laws as the individual, and can never be elevated above this.

The example of the government of a state can serve as an illustration. In the well-known Romans 13:4 it is said of the government that "he is God's servant working for your own good" (*Good News Bible*).

This Biblical concept of service in the final instance means that one's own freedom is always linked to the freedom and dignity of others. When we have been liberated from ourselves, we are also free unto others - so that they too can be free. True freedom is *inclusive* and not *exclusive*.

The apartheid ideology did not distinguish between *ethnic* nation (Afrikaans "volk") and *political* nation (the citizens of a state). The presupposition of apartheid was the nation state: each nation should have its own state (government and citizens). It is, however, not necessary for each ethnic nation to have its own territory and own government. Most political communities in the world are multi-nation states, sharing the same territory and government. In a future South Africa more than one ethnic nation will also have to live together in one country with one government.

### 12.5.6 Conclusion

A Christian vision of man and human society to my mind means openness and communality as against the exclusivity and emphasis on the own characteristic of the apartheid ideology. In accordance with this view cultural diversity is not an embarrassment but rather an opportunity, not a threat but rather the source for human unity. Relations with those outside the group do not destroy but rather enhances the own identity. In the interaction of diversity, communality is established - the basis for a stable society.

The openness towards others is at the same time the guarantee for freedom, peace and social justice, because it counters the greed and hunger for power which emanates from national exclusivity.

\* \* \*

This has been a long but very important chapter. As its title already indicates, its aim has been to argue that a Christian worldview is something totally different from an ideology. A Christian worldview

liberates, an ideology - even a "Christian" one - enslaves. We should therefore be continually on our guard to ensure that our worldview never deteriorates into a destructive ideology.

The next three chapters will present a Christian worldview perspective on specific societal relationships: In chapter 13 six of them will be discussed. The whole of chapter 14 will concentrate on the state as societal relationship - the most powerful of them all. And the last chapter (15) will as a whole be devoted to tertiary education - probably the most decisive societal sphere in the future of Africa.

## Chapter 13

# SIX IMPORTANT SOCIETAL RELATIONSHIPS IN A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

In previous chapters we have elaborated on a Christian view of society in general. In this chapter we will begin with a discussion of different societal relationships from the perspective of a Christian philosophy of society.

The first two societal relationships that will be discussed are relationships in which only two people are involved, viz. friendship and marriage. Some friendships develop into marriages. And most marriages develop into families - the third societal relationship to be analysed. Then we will draw attention to the school - the place where our children start their education. This will be followed by an analysis of the business enterprise - where many of us have to earn our livelihood. And we conclude with a discussion of our task in the church - an important societal relationship in the life of every Christian.

The aim of this as well as of the following two chapters will be to make Christians in Africa aware of their different responsibilities in society at large.

### 13.1 FRIENDSHIP: A NEGLECTED NEED\*

To have a friend means to have a treasure beyond compare. Friendship implies to have a tried and true companion, a fellow human being to whom one can give and with whom one can share one's deepest thoughts, desires and joys. Friendship used to be an important part of traditional African society, for instance the close bond between members of the same age group or warrior class.

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\* Acknowledgement to J.H. Olthuis, ICS, Toronto, whose insights I have used in this article.

### 13.1.1 Causes for a lack of true friendship

In spite of the fact that God created us to need and help each other, we are lonely people. Friendship, true friendship, has become very rare. Various causes can be identified for this situation.

- Friendship was idolised by pagan thinkers in Greek-Roman antiquity because they tended to regard it more highly than the bonds of marriage and family. During the Renaissance this pagan ideal of friendship re-emerged. The Reformers of the sixteenth century rejected it by maintaining that this was nothing other than camouflaged self-love, and that it thus undermined the love for God. Friendship was seen as merely being natural, and therefore sinful, love.

Many people still view friendship as a passing phase in man's life. It is suitable for adolescents, but not for adults. It is useful as a preparation for marriage, but after marriage it may just as well disappear.

- Acquaintances are many, but to call them friends is to cheapen the word. Many people, however, are afraid to enter into deeper, more intimate relationships.
- The modern obsession with regard to material possessions - not only in the West, but also in Africa - does not create much room for friendship. The attitude of "things first, people second" is a very effective exterminator of friendship. A society of people aimed at exploiting everything and everybody does not offer room to care for others or to share things. However, whoever treats his friends like pawns, will soon find his chessboard empty!
- Contemporary obsessiveness with sex also destroys friendship. We are brainwashed today to behave as if man is an animal in a sex jungle. In such a situation it becomes risky to render oneself open to others. The price to be paid for this enforced isolation, however, is loneliness.
- Our times are also characterised by a lack of personal identity. With individuals of the mass age, who all look the same and who act in the same way, friendship has no chance to develop.

■ Our contemporary world is also characterised by a terrible lack of commitment to others and compassion for others. Even in the presence of warmth, openness and understanding the concept of friendship is a delicate one. But without these it is simply not possible.

■ Totally wrong conceptions of what friendship really is, can also be a factor when it comes to the scarcity of true friendship. In their emotional need for acceptance many see friendship as a matter of possessing others or being possessed by them. As a result of their personalities some of them become possessors, and others their possessions. Because of deep emotional needs, people are in this way exploited by other people.

Such relationships, however, are not true friendships. The "possessors" are not capable of giving themselves. And those who are possessed by others, only give of themselves in return for what they can gain from the others, perhaps in terms of emotional security. Both parties are only linked because of their own needs, instead of creating a relationship to *give* to the other and to *share* in the true spirit of friendship.

■ Friendship is dangerous - as life itself is dangerous. If we do not open ourselves up to others, then the risk of getting hurt is so much smaller. But then we will also not be able to experience the love and loyalty of others. Many people today are not willing to open up to others and to take the leap in order to be able to share in the joy and pain of true friendship.

The joy attached to friendship, however, is far greater than the pain which might result from it, because friendship is one of the deepest, most human of all relationships. It is of a totally different nature than for example a relationship with an acquaintance, a partner, a compatriot or a blood relationship. The relationship between a man and his many fair-weather friends may be ruined, but where there is true friendship, the bond is stronger than with a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

Friendship can be manifested in many forms: between old and young, black and white, married and unmarried. The spirit of friendship, however, remains the same: a reciprocal commitment of trust based on a spiritual relationship.

This brings us to the question as to *what* friendship really is.

### 13.1.2 What precisely is friendship?

Loneliness makes people fall apart, do irresponsible things, commit suicide ... without communion with others and their understanding one cannot live. Friendship is one of the best means given by God to man to combat loneliness. For this reason it should be encouraged, cherished and reinstated in our times.

*Friendship is a relationship of trust based on the reciprocal spiritual kinship existing between two individuals*

Let us take this elementary definition apart and see what each part means.

#### \* *Friendship is mutual trust*

Here we have the core of true friendship. Friendship exists between two individuals who feel attracted to each other - not as a result of what the other does or possesses, but merely on the basis of what he/she is. Friendship is therefore mutual or reciprocal trust. Friends will accept anything from each other - except breach of trust. The only way in which one can abuse a friend is through lack of trust.

One can become angry with a friend. Do not be afraid - one can become reconciled with one another again. But betrayal of a friend will finally destroy the relationship. David mourns this fact in Psalm 55:13-15: "If it were an enemy that mocked me, I could endure it, if it were an opponent boasting over me, I would hide myself from him. But it is you, my companion, my colleague and close friend ..."

And when Jeremiah bemoans the sins of the nation, he mentions that people are betraying even their friends, so that one cannot trust a friend any more (Jeremiah 9:4,5). Micah too (in 7:5) has to warn his people in distress that they should not put their trust in any friend.



\* *Friendship rests on reciprocal spiritual kinship*

Friends resemble each other - not in outward appearances, but in terms of inner nature. They are spiritual kin. At times two people will "click" upon first acquaintance, at other times this relationship is something that is achieved in the course of many years. True friends often do not need to talk much to each other in order to help each other - one instinctively knows that one's friend understands.

This does not mean that we only have perfect beings as friends. One will never be able to have a friend if one should look for perfection in a person. In true friendship the weaknesses of the friend are accepted.

\* *Friendship means reciprocal commitment*

Friendship implies a promise to be with somebody and to be available to another. If one is overwhelmed by cares, and is sinking deeper into the morass, the mere presence of a friend could help to alleviate the condition. Job 6:14 says that "a despairing man should have the devotion of his friends". Commitment to another, however, is not easy. It demands that you shift to one side your secret fears, render yourself vulnerable - while you do not know whether you are going to be accepted. But once one knows that one is accepted, the joy is great. In the presence of each other people also grow. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

Friendship is not possible if we do not give of ourselves. But giving is not possible if we do not have a self to give. Self-surrender implies self-respect, integrity and identity.

\* *Friendship means reciprocal openness*

Friends do not play hide-and-seek with each other. They take off their masks - they do not pretend to be different from what they are. Being reticent can destroy trust. In opening up to a friend one strengthens oneself and becomes oneself more. One should not be afraid of a friend. One's friend does not automatically swallow everything that one says or does, and should he censure one will know that he does this out of love and caring. Solomon states it as follows: "A friend means well,

even when he hurts you. But when an enemy puts his hand around your shoulder, watch out" (Proverbs 27:6).

\* *Friendship is reciprocal caring and understanding*

"Friends always show their love. What are brothers for if not to share trouble?" (Proverbs 17:17).

Friends care for each other. They are sensitive to each other's needs, they try to understand each other. As with a sensitive plant, either too little or too much water can kill it - for the same reason friendship too should never be forced. It can only grow out of communal experiences of joy and of grief, of work and recreation, trust and fear ...

When one brings sunshine into the life of one's friend, one will find that one cannot keep it out of one's own life.

\* *Friendship takes time*

Immediate trust can be deceptive, just like one-sided openness. Trust and openness grow slowly between people whose feeling for and understanding of each other will gradually become more profound. To give oneself too soon to another without invitation is irresponsible. The other may not yet be able, willing or ready to respond, and one may be rejected as being intrusive. Possibly this is another reason why friendship in our times is so elusive: our lives are too busy, we do not have the time and the patience to put some effort into friendships.

\* *Friendship is enduring*

Once friendship is established, it becomes something fixed and durable. A true friend is a secure sanctuary. A friend is a special treasure: beyond price, and the value of friendship cannot be measured.

\* *Friendship is a supplement to marriage*

Friendship is often regarded as being in competition to marriage. The result of this is that many people expect that which should ideally be provided by friendship from their marriage partners. This puts a too

heavy burden on marriage. For unmarried people this is of course even more difficult.

Friendship and marriage, however, are two totally different societal relationships and are as such supplementary and should not compete. The idea that friendship may threaten marriage derives from the myth that closeness between people of necessity presupposes sexual relations. Nearness and love are, however, also possible without sexual intercourse, which belongs exclusively to marriage. Even when one is married, it is still possible, and in fact necessary to love others (friends, family, one's neighbour). It is extra-marital *sex* which is wrong, not extra-marital *affection and love!*

Reciprocal trust excludes negative exploitation of each other - also sexual exploitation! - and, on the positive side, it offers security.

Friendship between members of the different sexes is therefore permissible. It need not threaten a marriage. Because it is a different form of human love, it may precisely offer that which marriage cannot offer. In this way friendship and marriage can complement each other, support and strengthen each other.

\* *Friendship is a command from God*

Apart from being a special gift from God to man, friendship is also a command from God. The Biblical texts quoted above speak unequivocally. Should friendship have been unimportant in the eyes of God, then James 2:23 would not have said of Abraham that he was called a friend of God! In view of this it also cannot be maintained - as some people do - that friendship is purely *natural love*. This natural love is then rejected, because it is contrasted to the *spiritual love* of God. Such a distinction between natural and spiritual is of course unbiblical: no sphere in creation is *as such* bad or of less importance. *Spiritual love* does not mean loving in a higher, more "important" sphere outside everyday life. To love God (if you prefer, to live "spiritually") means that in all one's relationships, including friendship, one should be guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit. True friendship is thus also a way in which one can embody one's love for God.

And it is a very powerful form of love between people. Christ Himself said that "the greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them" (John 15:13).

### **13.2 LEAVE, CLEAVE UNTO AND BE ONE: THE THREEFOLD MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE**

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh ..." (Genesis 2 verse 24).

Everything has its own mystery or secret. This is as true of the simplest forms of vegetative life as it is of man. And this is also true of human society such as, for example, the family, the business enterprise, the state, the church, marriage and many more.

Everybody will naturally wish to know more about the mystery of marriage. Those who are still looking forward to it will want to know it, and for those who have been married for years it would be good to hear of it anew.

The Bible, God's Word to us, is the only Book which can reveal the deep secret of marriage to us. Many of the clever ideas expressed in magazine articles and books about the "ideal marriage" appear like so much straw in the wind of Biblical wisdom.

The remarkable thing is that the Word of God already gives the secret right at the outset - in its second chapter. And this is repeated throughout the Bible like a refrain. (Cf. for example Matthew 19:5; 1 Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 5:31.) And yet we often read the verse in question without noticing the profound secret contained in it.

The secret is summed up in the use of three simple words by the inspired writer of the Bible: leave, cleave unto, and be one. But before we are going to ask what the three concepts together mean, let us have a look at what gave rise to the revelation of this secret.

### 13.2.1 The prelude

God has given Adam a lovely *paradeisos*, a wonderful garden with streams, flowers, trees, birds and animals. Adam's happiness, however, is not perfect, because he has no-one with whom to share his thoughts, feelings, desires, his whole existence. He longs for something, even though he does not know what or whom. God in His wisdom first makes man realise the emptiness of his existence before showing him what he really desires!

This leads to the first successful costectomy in history - which does not mean that men have since had fewer ribs than women! But from this it clearly emerges that man and woman are made of the same "matter", are both people, and should be together.

Subsequently there follows the part that I find so beautiful, where God Himself brings the woman to Adam. This, as we confess in the marriage formulary, He still does today with every man and woman. That two people "find" each other is no coincidence.

When Adam woke from his "anaesthetic" there is something - no, somebody - next to him whom he has never seen before: somebody like him and yet different. Adam is surprised and entranced by this attractive being. Before this he simply named the animals, but now, on viewing this enchanting creature, he becomes a creative artist, a poet (verse 23 is poetry in the original Hebrew).

From this first love song in history it emerges how pleased Adam was to have found someone like him. (I assume that he had been just as pleased about the differences!) From the name he gave her (*wo-man* he called her, because she was made out of man) one can see that he saw her in the first place as a human being, albeit different from him. Also his *helper*, but not in the sense of weaker *servant* - rather in the Biblical sense of the word, viz. *supporter* (as God is also our Helper).

After this wonderfully romantic moment - the first meeting between man and woman in history - Adam becomes silent and the Bible leaves the rest to our imagination. The Biblical author, however, takes over and reminds us that this miracle of marriage contains a secret, a mystery. Whoever does not know it - and does not obey it - also will

not know the joy of marriage, will not keep singing Adam's song of joy.

The prelude (verses 20-23) is beautiful, but the core, the nucleus, lies in the closing, in the threefold mystery (verse 24) to which we must now turn. Seeing that in Old Testament times society was still patriarchally structured, the command to *leave, cleave unto* and *be one* is given to the man only, but this does not mean that it is not as fully applicable to the woman too.

The first keyword is:

### 13.2.2 Leave

Why do mothers cry and brides and grooms have radiant faces on their wedding day? It is precisely because mothers know that their children are now leaving the family home. And the bride and groom beam because they are pleased - finally - to be leaving the parental home!

This is right and normal, because marriage is different from the family. A new, independent societal relationship comes into being through two members of two different families. It is done in public, because the *leaving* also has a legal character. Other claimants on either of the spouses are excluded!

In the spatial sense the spouses are also leaving their parental homes by beginning their own home. Economically too they are going to provide for themselves - although I know from experience that a little financial help from the parents from time to time is not unwelcome!

The most difficult aspect of this leaving must be emotional. Parents tend still to advise their married children and even to prescribe to them - even without being asked. This creates unnecessary tension. Parents have to realise that their son/daughter, while still their child, has now primarily become the spouse of another.

For the married couple this leaving is easier, and yet it still happens that the bride clings too tightly to her father's hand. Or that the young husband - even though he might not say it - might think that his mother

could do many things better than his bride - such as cooking! He has not let go of his mother's apron strings.

The leaving, however difficult it is, is an inherent part of marriage. If the parents do not accept it, they will render their children very unhappy. Therefore they have to be willing to commit themselves to it even though their son or daughter might not, in their eyes, have chosen the perfect spouse.

### 13.2.3 Cleave unto

Our sex-obsessed times will probably cause us to interpret this "cleaving unto" ("uniting" in the Good News Bible) as jumping into bed together. For many people today marriage simply means obtaining the exclusive right to sleep with somebody. Then marriage becomes no more than legalised prostitution or bestial copulation.

What is really meant by the old-fashioned term "cleaving unto"?

In the first place I think that it points to the warm and intimate bondedness to each other. It is a matter of two people having to live very closely to each other. A double banana looks like two, but is in reality only one!

There is more to it, though. In the Bible "cleave unto" also indicates that a dependent takes refuge in a stronger one, as Israel does unto God. The husband and the wife are interdependent on each other.

There is, however, much more that can be said about this simple little word. In the original Hebrew it indicates strong love or committed, unbreachable troth. And troth is essentially different from sex. It means reliability, genuineness, honesty, integrity, fidelity.

If one is going to get married, it does not in the first place - as already said - mean that one now has legal rights to the other's body. Marriage means that troth is promised to each other in public.

And - however old-fashioned the marriage formulary might sound - this is a promise for a lifetime. Only death can bring an end to it.

Of the three words, *leave*, *cleave unto* and *being one*, the middle one (cleave unto) is the most important, as it uncovers the deepest mystery of marriage. The *leaving* might be imperfect, and the *unity*, *being one* can fail, but if one does not cling to each other in *truth*, one's marriage will inevitably be doomed.

It is wonderful to be in love with each other, and as you know it is not difficult, as it practically falls into your lap like a *gift*. However, to remain in love asks effort, it is a *duty*. At times the wife - for the sake of peace and love - must be willing to pick up her husband's clothes from the floor. At times the husband will have to have infinite patience with his wife when she is "crying for nothing" again - simply because he loves her.

#### 13.2.4 Being one

In a certain sense the cleaving unto already implies being one. If one cleaves unto the other, loves him/her, has truth and fidelity, then two become one. The cleaving unto has already made clear to us that marriage is a permanent union.

Yet a new element emerges here: the sexual. This is the playful, spontaneous, free, joyful and complete bodily *surrender* to somebody else and the equally joyful *receiving* of somebody else. The Old (Authorised) Translation refers to this as becoming one *flesh*.

The book Song of Songs does not hesitate to describe this physical attraction of man and woman in the minutest detail. We should not spiritualise marriage - God Himself created man to have sexual urges and wants mankind to enjoy it.

However, in the Biblical secret for a happy marriage the cleaving unto (fidelity) does not come before the physical union without reason. The order is of crucial importance here. Reciprocal truth leads to physical union - and not the other way round. Sex does not create truth. The inverse is true: sex reveals, confirms, reinforces, and deepens the truth to each other. First reciprocal truth and fidelity, and then it is sealed - the cherry on top - in becoming one flesh.



Sex and reciprocal troth may, therefore, according to God's commandment, never be separated. Sexual intercourse without troth is playing with satanic fire and can only bring seeming happiness, because it is nothing other than mutual exploitation and abuse.

The sexual union in marriage is very important. This is not the be-all and end-all, however. The "sex appeal", the physical attraction, will later begin to disappear, and then the marriage still has to go on. If there is not unity among husband and wife in many more respects, and if their unity does not grow, then the sexual bond will also lose its efficacy soon. Let me mention a few of these aspects:

Financially and economically there has to be unity. What was mine is now yours too. And what was yours is now mine too. Everything has to be shared - poverty and wealth!

There has to be emotional unity. Joys and sorrows have to be shared. Be serious about each other, accept each other, open up to each other, try to understand each other.

As is the case with cleave unto, so it is with being one: it is not only a gift but also a duty, not only a present, but also a command. Tensions will arise in one's marriage, but be consoled: it is only a dead or dying marriage that does not have conflicts!

The most important facet of this duty I mention last: unity of faith in God. It is this deepest unity in faith which will carry our marriages through every possible crisis. Even when marital troth collapses, it is the strength of God's grace in Christ which can carry one through. One might therefore neglect many things, but the mutual growth in faith has to be one's highest priority. Interaction with God in prayer and Scripture reading will give our marriages the dimension of the deepest and most indissoluble unity.

### **13.2.5 A threefold mystery**

This then is the threefold secret of a happy marriage: *leaving*, *cleaving unto* and *being one*. Without the leaving it is not possible to cleave unto each other, because then one remains bonded to ones parental home. And without the cleaving unto (reciprocal troth) the being one flesh

(sexual union) is empty and dangerous. These three together form the one great secret. We find the essence in the central one of the three: reciprocal, lifelong troth.

What a privilege that we do not have to enter marriage not knowing - like so many other couples today - the mystery of this way of sharing our lives. By opening up the secret to us, God Himself gives us the greatest wedding present that any couple could ever have hoped to receive!

May we never, never, forget or neglect it. Because if we should live according to this secret, God Himself will bless us together and our cup of happiness will always run over.

(For more Bible studies on married life, the interested reader is referred to my book *More precious than God; discovering the real wealth of Scripture* (1991), p. 2-33.)

### **13.3 A NEW VISION FOR BROKEN FAMILY LIFE IN AFRICA**

Broader society has a strong influence on the family life of a nation or a country. The obverse is, however, also true: family life to a large extent determines what society will look like in the cultural, political, economic, educational and religious spheres, as the family is the source or the origin of any society. Within the family babies, children and the youth are prepared for life in the broader society. Should this preparatory work not be done properly, or if it is totally neglected, the whole community will pick the rotten fruits.

The crisis in Africa to a great extent finds its focus in the crisis confronting family life on the continent. I am not going to waste words describing this tragic state of affairs - it is general knowledge. It would be more constructive to determine what can be done in order to improve the terrible situation. If something is not done urgently, we cannot hope for improvement in other spheres of life, in for example the fields of economy, labour, politics or any other.

Let us first briefly look at family life as it used to be.

### 13.3.1 Changes in family life

One could mention many differences between the traditional and the modern forms of family life in Africa.

In traditional agrarian communities the family was an extended relationship. The family consisted not only of the father, mother and children, but ranged wider to include grandfathers, aunts, uncles, etc. No distinction was drawn between household and extended family.

In the modern industrialised Western society - and increasingly in Africa too - the idea of an extended family has been stripped down to the so-called nuclear family consisting of the father, mother and the minimum number of children - to a single household.

This is accompanied by the fact that the earlier family had more tasks, as everything that was needed in the house, such as for example food, clothes, furniture and implements had to be made by the members of the family. Education and religious instruction were also responsibilities of the family.

Today many of the family tasks have been taken over by or delegated to other societal relationships such as, for example, the factory, business world, school, church and state. The family is therefore no longer such a comprehensive community with regard to its responsibilities. Its task is shrinking and becoming more and more limited to the upbringing, care and protection of the closest members.

What is tragic is not the fact that its tasks have become limited, but the fact that its remaining tasks are not even fulfilled in the way it should be. The fact that the head of the family or of the tribe has less authority is not a bad development. If we have a look at the history of Israel, we will see that the functions which had been concentrated in the head of the family or of the tribe had also gradually been delegated to *inter alia* prophets, priests and kings. God guides history in such a way that a variety of societal relationships came into being, each with its own field and its own tasks. (Cf. chapter 10, section 10.1.2.)

I do not, therefore, believe that we should have nostalgia for the past. The authoritarian, totalitarian power which the father used to have, for

example that he could execute his own children (Genesis 38:24) or could sell his daughter (Exodus 21:7), is surely not something which we should welcome back!

### 13.3.2 Family life is disintegrating

On the other hand, however, we can have nostalgia for the closeness and stability of the earlier family life in comparison with the family disintegration, decay and decline of today. In former times the family could be called the shock absorber of society, a stable refuge to which one could flee. Today this shock absorber has failed us. The well-known author, Alvin Toffler, already in 1970 discussed the fractured family in his book *Future shock*.

Although there are differences between the family lifestyles of Africa and of the West, there is this one unmistakable point of agreement, namely that in both cases family life is in crisis and needs urgent attention. Parents (especially fathers) often do not meet their responsibilities in the family apart from providing money. In other cases children become rebellious, because they grow up in homes where parents do not live in harmony or have already been divorced. In many cases the *house* is simply another *building* or a *bed* where people eat and sleep - it is not a *home* any longer. The family, instead of being a closely-knit unit, has become a loose conglomerate of individuals.

### 13.3.3 A need for a new vision

We could of course blame the disintegration of the family on factors outside the family such as, for example, modernisation, migrant labour, urbanisation, single-parent families etc., and that will not be completely incorrect. We would like, however, to mention another reason for the disintegration: the lack or loss of a vision concerning the task of the family. By formulating this task clearly once again, an important contribution can be made to the establishment of a healthier family life for Africa.

We will work out this vision by way of the following seven points:

- The family as a true community
- The family as a natural community

- The family as a distinctive community
- The family as a blood community
- The family as a community of authority
- The family as a community of love
- The family as a community of faith

### 13.3.4 The family as a true community

The family does not simply consist of casual relations of a fleeting nature - it is a lasting community. The increasing influence of Western individualism (already described in previous chapters) has had the result, however, that the family is also more and more being seen in Africa as a conglomerate of separate individuals - for a limited period, until such time as children can be responsible for their own survival.

In chapter 9 (section 9.4.4) we already outlined the characteristics of a true community, and these are also applicable to the family as a societal relationship: (1) The family is bound by a *shared interest* (mutual caring and love for each other). (2) It has to function as a *permanent unit*. (3) *Each member* - and not only an authoritarian father - *should share in giving shape* to the family community. (4) The *personal interests* of the members of the family should accord with those of the rest of the family. Family members should not use the house as merely a place to eat and sleep and strive only for personal objectives.

As against the present disintegration of the family the new vision for the restoration of the family should be one of unity and coherence.

### 13.3.5 The family as natural community

Many human communities or societal relationships, such as, for example, the school, business, political party or sports club, only came into being due to the development of culture. The family, however, like marriage, is a direct institution of God, or a natural community. God instituted marriage through His act of creating a wife for Adam and bringing her to him, as well as in terms of what is subsequently said in Genesis 2:24 (cf. 13.2 above). He also instituted the family through, among other things, his command to them in Genesis 1:28: "... be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth ..."

We cannot therefore go along with the idea that marriage is nothing more than a contract entered into between two people or an agreement that they will care for their children while necessary. Both marriage and the family are institutions of God Himself for which He has set clear guidelines. Whoever does not honour these guidelines for marriage, will also not be able to count on his blessings in family life: unhappy and broken marriages lead to unhappy and confused children.

### **13.3.6 The family is a distinctive community**

In our vision of family life, it is essential to clearly distinguish between marriage and the family as two different societal relationships.

Of course it is not possible to separate the two, as a family is not possible without marriage. The obverse (no marriage without a family) is not true, however. Even though a marriage might be childless, it is still a marriage, and can answer to the internal task which God has set for it.

This might cause some raised eyebrows in Africa where children are regarded very highly. Should a marriage in traditional African society not have yielded children, a man was allowed to have a second wife. This is tied, of course, to the fact that in Africa the woman is mostly seen as someone - at times even something! - to give a man pleasure and to give him children. It is for this very reason that we should, in our view of marriage and the family, emphasise the fact that marriage has a *distinctive* task, which is to support each other (be of help reciprocally) and to enrich each others' lives. This is a *separate* task of marriage which is *permanent* - whether children are born from the marriage or not.

A marriage is further deployed into a family when children are born into it, but the marriage itself remains in existence and is not suspended. The spouses remain husband and wife in spite of the fact that they also become father and mother.

### **13.3.7 The family is a blood community**

The difference between marriage and the family is situated in the fact that marriage is based on being one (sexual intercourse between

husband and wife), while the foundation for the family is a blood bond which ties father, mother and children together. In the case of marriage, however, a blood bond is not permissible (cf. Leviticus 20:17).

Although they might differ, marriage and family are the most intimate forms of societal relationships. It is for this very reason that they are so vulnerable too!

The sexual bond in marriage, however, is not the only or the most important element giving unity to a marriage. Without reciprocal marital troth it could not remain in existence for long. In the same way the blood bond in the family is also not all that can be said about family unity. It is also not an absolute prerequisite as can be seen from the fact that childless parents can adopt children and have a very happy family life. There are therefore more important bonds which bind people together in a family, which we will examine shortly.

Apart from the fact that a family is a blood community, there is still more to be said about the family as a community. In chapter 6 (section 6.5.1) we indicated that the family shares in all the aspects of reality. Family life reveals a distinctive emotional aspect manifested in nostalgia for the family home and love for each other. The logical aspect is manifested in family opinion, for example. Family education or family planning is an indication of the fact that man has historico-cultural power. And a typical family idiom or way of expression (pet names, for instance) are examples of typical family language. The way in which the family lives and relaxes is an example of the social aspect of family life. Parents also know all too well that a family cannot be sustained without money - which automatically leads us to the economic aspect. Each family also develops its own customs, styles, tastes and fashions - which are all reminders of the aesthetic facet of family life. Unfortunately we cannot examine all these facets, but will limit ourselves to the following traits of the family as a community.

### **13.3.8 The family as a community of authority**

The family also has a juridical facet. As is the case with any societal relationship, it consists of those holding authority and those subject to

authority. In this case it is the parents - and not only the father - who are the holders of authority.

The way in which authority is exerted in the family, however, differs from the way in which this is done, for example, in marriage or in the state. In marriage the partners have to submit to each other (Ephesians 5:21), but this is not the case between parents and children. The government of a state may use force or even, if necessary, violence (the power of the sword) in the exertion of its authority (Romans 13:4), but this may never happen between parents and their children. Parents should therefore not imitate other forms of authority in the family situation.

Of course there are similarities between the ways in which authority is expressed in other societal relationships and in the family. Just like other holders of authority, parents too have to act from an unselfish service motive. Parental authority also does not exclude punishment, but as in the case of other holders of authority, this should never happen out of a sense of vengeance, but should be done for the sake of the child. Should punishment only be a means to show our irritation or to cool off our tempers, we do not serve our children but only ourselves! In such a case we do not exert our authority *in love*.

Authority - and punishment as a concomitant of it - is intended to help develop a child's own sense of responsibility, and to help inculcate in a child certain virtues such as, for example, love of God and the fellow man, fidelity, reliability, humility, respect for other people, justice, and many others.

Too little or no authority - a *laissez-faire* attitude - can lead to confusion, uncertainty and a lack of discipline in a child. Too much authority, or coercion on the side of the parents, can lead to fearful anxiety on the one hand or rebellion on the other. It is therefore wrong to have either authoritarian coercion or no guidance at all.

Growth in personal responsibility in a child is also curtailed when parents simply give commands. Equally, a child will not know what responsibility entails if there are no rules whatsoever. The family rules should therefore not rest merely on tradition or contingency, but the parents have to be convinced that they act in the way in which God



wants them to fulfil their responsibilities towards their families - even if not in a perfect fashion. And children should not be expected to obey rules blindly - it has to be explained to them why obedience is to the benefit of the whole family.

Therefore the apostle Paul not only exhorts children in conjunction with the well-known commandment (Exodus 20:12) that they honour their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), but he also enjoins parents not to humiliate their children or deal with them cruelly so that they should become rebellious (verse 4). They should not *break* their children but *guide* them towards maturity in a tactful manner.

An important cause for the family crisis in Africa - and elsewhere in the world as well - is definitely the neglect of parents' function of authority, or the wrong way in which it is exerted. We tend far too often to blame our children for the crisis in family life. However, children who from their infancy have been guided in love, will develop into normal family members and adults.

Of course a child has a duty to be obedient. The Old Testament contains many injunctions to children to honour their parents. The Heidelberg Catechism even says that they have to be patient with their parents' failings. And in the New Testament Christ Himself sets the example by being obedient to his earthly parents (Luke 2:51).

But in all that has been said so far, we have not penetrated to the deeper secret of a stable and happy family life. This will emerge in the subsequent two points.

### **13.3.9 The family as a community of love**

In a nutshell one could define a family as being *a lifelong community of love based on blood relationships*. Mutual love qualifies and leads this societal relationship. Without love between parents, between children and parents, and between children mutually, one could hardly speak of a family.

We have already indicated in previous chapters that the central commandment of love has to be obeyed in each of the societal relationships - not only in marriage and in the family. Love, however,

has to be embodied, be positivised in a unique way in each relationship. Patriotic love is something different from love of nature, of animals, of art, love between friends and between spouses. What form should love then assume in the case of family life?

This is not so easy to answer, because upon further reflection we realize that love assumes a variety of forms in the family: paternal love differs from maternal love, parental love differs from the love of a child, and the mutual love of the children for each other is yet another variation. Parental love, for example, has a caring character, while the love of a child has a more trusting nature. If parents do not care for their children any longer, they have failed. And if children do not trust their parents any longer, and look up to them, the family disintegrates.

One could therefore generally state that family love is marked by fidelity and loyalty towards each other. In a healthy family life all the members of the family stand together through good times as well as bad times. Family love is therefore similar to - but not identical with - marital love, in which mutual trust is also the core element.

It is probably not necessary to repeat here that love is not merely a sense of attraction to each other. Love is also a *command*, which often demands of us self-denial and sacrifices. It is precisely because family members live in such close proximity to each other that the greatest lovelessness and discord are often found in families!

If everything which happens in the family and is done by the family could be marked by this kind of love, then one could have renewed hope for families in Africa - and every member of the family has an immense responsibility in this regard.

### **13.3.10 The family as a community of faith**

Faith plays an important role in every family - also in families holding a different faith from the Christian. This emerges, for example, from African families who still practise traditional African religion. Faith is therefore the final and deepest secret of family life. Is love then not that which is most important in the family, as we have just explained?

Luke 14:26 directs our attention to the following: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple." These words by Christ do not indicate that love of God *cancel*s family love, but means that love of God *transcends* it in importance. At times our service to the Lord may demand of us that the love we owe our family members cannot be fulfilled - it is a warning by the Lord Jesus not to idolise family bonds. Just as the bond of faith transcends tribal or national bonds, and should not be limited by it, it also transcends family bonds. One could therefore have a closer bond with a brother or a sister in faith than with a blood brother or sister.

The aspect of faith in family life is of the utmost importance for the solution of the crisis in family life. The family is not a mini-church, but religion plays a very important role in it. Through faith, family life is guided, deepened and fulfilled in perfection.

Parents as holders of authority have the important task of taking the lead in the life of faith of the family: they are responsible for the growth and development of their own as well as their children's life of faith. In the Old Testament one finds many examples of God's reminders of this important command (cf. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and Psalm 78:5-7). And even today, when we bring our children to be baptised, we promise God in front of the whole congregation that we will do this with devotion.

The important question is how many of us do fulfil this promise to God faithfully. How many families still regularly gather around the Bible to hear God's Word and to enter into communion with Him through prayer? It is about time we revise our priorities to give this the highest priority of all. Families who do this, need not have any doubt that they will experience a rich harvest of God's blessings.

Family devotions, however, should not be a mere formality - there should be a real struggle to obtain light and guidance from God and His Word. In this way children do not only learn a lot of facts about the Bible but - and this is more important - they learn what God's norms are for the whole of life. In this way they can obtain direction for their own lives.

The most important thing is that children should be able to see, from the examples set by their parents' lives, that they live in accordance with God's Word. Also in this case the old proverb holds that our example is more powerful than our words!

### 13.3.11 Hope for the future

Much more - a whole book - could be written about the family. In the limited space available only a few crucial aspects could be illuminated. From these, however, it is already clear that family life in Africa is in need of urgent attention and sustained work. To be part of a family is a great privilege, a special gift, but at the same time it is a great responsibility, a difficult duty.

Whoever accepts and fulfils this duty, however, does not need to fear for the future. The images which the Bible uses to describe a healthy, God-fearing family are hope-filled ones. Psalms, for example, speak of children who are like well-nurtured plants (144:12), green olive shoots (128:3), beautifully carved, strong pillars (144:12), or like sharp arrows in the hands of a warrior (127:4). The family is a place where one plants, builds, carves and cuts!

God gives us the wood. We as parents have to carve the arrows out of it. Balanced, sharp arrows which will fly true and hit evil - in Africa too - in the heart.

Let us then today promise, as Joshua did so many years ago: "But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord" (24:15b).

## 13.4 THE SCHOOL AS A SOCIETAL RELATIONSHIP\*

An *organisation* that brings people together for a common educational purpose does not constitute a school *community*. The modern Western school typically functions as a social organisation rather than as a community. It functions as an organisation administered by the state to provide an educational service to its citizens. Or it may function as a

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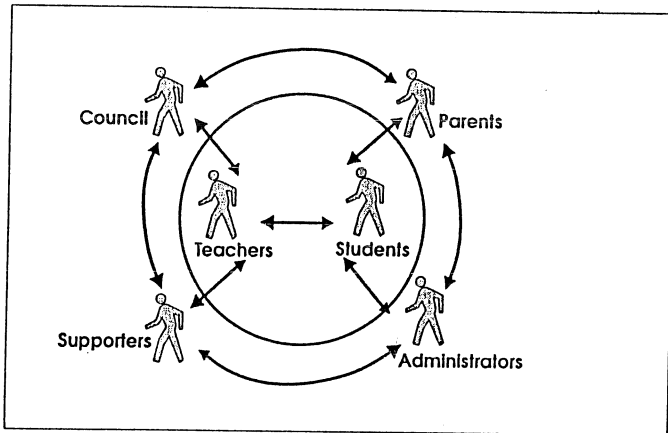
\* This is a brief summary of part of a lecture by S. Fowler: *The school as a community* (1988).

private corporation providing educational services to those who can afford it. Or it is organised by the parents who then have a governing role in the school.

However, if the school is to function as a real community, the organisation needs to be in the *service* of the community as an organic unity in which people are united by living relationships, not by organisational rules and procedures. An organisation is effective if it facilitates the functioning of these communal relations and is ineffective to the extent that it inhibits their functioning. To be effective a school has to be a model of community for its students. Otherwise it simply reinforces the distorting secularist and individualistic values of our age.

### 13.4.1 The members or offices

Those involved with a school share a common interest. To establish the school as a community we need to mobilise this shared interest in a communal relationship. Those with a shared interest in the life of the school community are the following:



This diagram represents the structure of a school community. It is not an organisational chart or a representation of the authority structure of the school. The members of the community are grouped in this diagram according to the kind of office they hold and therefore the ways they are called to serve the school as community. The double headed arrows pointing in all directions indicate the necessary free flow of mutual communication between these members.

### **13.4.2 Teachers and students**

Because the school is a teaching-learning societal relationship, the teacher-student relationship constitutes the living heart of this community - it is in the centre of the circle. It is the office of students to learn and of teachers to lead in that learning process. All the resources of the community should be directed towards enabling teachers to teach and students to learn effectively.

This does not mean that the teachers, as the leaders in the teacher-student relationship, have autonomous authority to do as they please. Mutual service is fundamental to a healthy school life. On the other hand, teachers are not mere employees paid to do an educational job.

A school therefore will be a failure if its organisation is a model of efficiency, but it does not enable teachers to teach effectively. It will be equally a failure if it can produce impressive statistics about student achievements, but does not give each student the opportunity to be fully equipped for service in the whole of his/her life. (See chapter 15, section 15.1 for a detailed elaboration of this point.) In order to attain this purpose there should be a healthy relationship of mutual interaction and trust between teachers and students, a relation that encourages the growth of each student in understanding and the ability to serve fruitfully according to her/his gifts. The office of student (learner) does not carry with it the requirement of passive submission to the shaping or moulding of the teacher. The teacher does not have the mandate to shape students according to his personal will. The reason for this is that students are human beings created in the image of God, and not objects to be shaped. They have to be educated in a way that nurtures their creativity and responsibility. Only a school community in which they are accepted as responsible partners in learning, participating in shaping their own learning, can really provide such a nurturing environment.

### **13.4.3 The council**

The school council has the office of government in the school community. It has the responsibility of ordering the affairs of the school for the sake of the teaching-learning process. The members of council are called upon to ensure that its distinctive educational

character is maintained and - in the case of a Christian school - to guard its Christian character.

Because the overriding consideration in the exercise of their authority is the facilitation of the teaching-learning process, the council members may not exercise an autocratic authority. Neither are they mere agents of the people, governing according to the will of the majority. Their authority should be *servant* authority (cf. chapter 10, especially sections 10.5.7 and 10.5.9) exercised in living interaction with the other members of the school community. As servant authority it facilitates and encourages effective participation in the life of the school as a societal relationship by every member of that community.

#### **13.4.4 The parents**

As those with ultimate responsibility for the nurturing of their children, they are indispensable members of the school community. They are not mere buyers of an educational service. But neither should they want to take control of the day to day functioning of the school. They should be respected by the other members of the school community in their office as parents with the insights they are capable of bringing to the educational process. In turn they should respect the distinctive offices of each of the other members of the school as community.

The school has a distinctive educational task. It will therefore not attempt to take over parental responsibilities. It will rather function in a way that strengthens, encourages and supports parents in their unique function.

#### **13.4.5 The administrator(s)**

Because they are not directly involved in the teaching-learning relationship (the heart of the school) it is easy to think administrators are mere servants employed by the community rather than being members of the school as a societal relationship. Yet a school cannot function in a healthy way if they are not included in the system.

The office of administration includes all the people concerned with the day to day organisation of school affairs in support of the teaching-

learning activity. It includes *inter alia* clerical roles, maintenance of buildings, finances etc.

### **13.4.6 The supporters**

They are neither students nor teachers, neither council members nor parents nor administrators. But they do also participate in the school community by contributing resources of time, experience, finances (e.g. the state and private sponsors) and expertise that strengthen the school. They fully share the school's interests and commit themselves to the school. Their office or way of serving is different from those of the offices already mentioned, but their participation is no less important than any other. Therefore a healthy school community will not treat them as individuals outside the boundaries of that community, but will encourage their participation to the maximum which they are able and willing to contribute.

As already indicated in chapter 10, section 10.2.3, the state and the church also have a *supportive* role towards the school. They are not allowed to *dominate* it. We are therefore rejecting a *state-school* or a *church-school*, advocating a *free* school.

Keeping in mind these broad guidelines, the challenge is to establish a healthy school community in our modern society pervaded by individualist and pragmatist values. It is an urgent task to have schools that provide human environments, nurturing young people for lives of service and not mere knowledge factories "processing" students.

## **13.5 A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE MODERN BUSINESS ENTERPRISE**

The economic sector plays a very important role in our modern world - also in the developing African continent. It is therefore of the utmost importance to have a Christian perspective on the world of business. In order to draw the attention to how great the need really is, we will first sketch the presuppositions and norms of current, secular economics. Then we will outline a Christian perspective, giving firstly some Biblical economic norms and secondly a Christian perspective on the business enterprise.



### 13.5.1 Presuppositions of current economic theory and practice

Faith, however small, has the strength to move mountains. What are the main traits of the faith behind the current economic and business world? Even if we have to generalise, we can still outline seven striking -isms which have for a long time controlled the scene.

#### \* *Deism*

Adam Smith, the founder of economics as a science, was a dedicated deist. This implies a specific concept of God, which leads to a specific kind of anthropology.

The deist God created the world like a watchmaker (may we still write the word *God* with a capital letter G here?) and it works as perfectly as a machine. Because the natural order is faultless, nothing has remained for God to do. He could simply stand back and let the "clock" of creation run by itself. The mechanism is so perfect that even people in the field of economics who are driven by their own interests would not stand in the way of community interests. The "invisible hand" of the natural order will see to that. This god, who only guarantees the natural order, stands back, however, to make room for the autonomous human being who now takes the initiative. The deistic god does not judge, and man no more needs to account for his deeds.

#### \* *Naturalism*

Only the natural reality or the natural order is real and it also determines the economic actions of man. Everything develops in a deterministic manner, according to cause and effect. This means that economics is regarded as a complex natural machine which runs according to its own laws. The only task of the economist is to find out how it works and to ensure that it is properly maintained (greased and oiled). The economist is not supposed to ask what *ought* to be the case, but should only determine what the case *is*. If the economy is characterised by competition and self-interest, then this is how it should be!

The business world could, in accordance with this view, be compared with a lorry which goes in a specific direction without somebody

behind the steering wheel. The economist has climbed out of the driver's cabin and is now merely a fatalistic spectator who throws his hands into the air, or washes his hands in innocence. Another example: this type of economics can be compared with a person who first builds a railway track and afterwards makes the decision where it should lead - while it is already pointing in a specific direction! A value-free economy is impossible, after all.

\* *Evolutionism*

According to the evolutionist dogma all that is left for man to do is to adjust to the economic process. Life is simply a struggle for survival, the protection of one's own life and prospects of profit. And nature also determines that the economically most viable will in the end survive. It is not norms such as justice and fairness which should direct economic life, but rather power and the personal urge for survival.

\* *Utilitarianism*

In accordance with this view, utility (from the Latin *utilis* = usefulness) is situated centrally in man's life. Jeremy Bentham, for example, reasons that because everyone *is* propelled by maximum utility, therefore everybody *ought* to be. It is again a case of the *is* becoming the *ought*, the *fact* becoming the *norm*. Human actions in the economy need therefore never be judged in terms of motives. The only "norm" that counts, is the useful result, the effect of a deed. If an action offers a useful outcome, then it is good, regardless of the motives which might have underlaid it. According to utilitarian ethics the economist is also not supposed to try to have a corrective effect on the economic processes. Such an economics views the purpose of business only as producing as much as possible for the market, and to accumulate prosperity at as low an expenditure of energy and cost as possible. "Efficiency" is the most important.

One tends to agree with Schumpeter who describes utilitarianism as the "shallowest of all conceivable philosophies of life".

### \* *Profitism*

This indicates what kind of utility is striven for, viz. profit and money. The business world is money-oriented. Everything which cannot be expressed in terms of money, is useless, without value. This is the gospel of money! Labour, resources, capital - everything in the production process has to do with money.

The mere fact, however, that profit is made, does not indicate that certain norms are complied with. More profit also does not necessarily mean a better business or industry. As Milton Friedman said, however, "the business of business is business"! The objective in this case has become the norm. Criticism of the way in which profit is maximalised has therefore per definition been excluded.

### \* *Autocentrism*

Should the norm for economic life be efficiency, then it is greatly narrowed down and limited to merely the creation of material and financial surplus, as has just emerged. But the norm is also twisted to become mere self-interest. The utility, the profit which is pursued, is a matter of profit for *me*, for *my* company.

We have two Greek words in the New Testament with which economic activity is indicated, viz. *oikonomia* and *chrematistike*. The latter indicates autocentric, egocentric self-enrichment. The former (from which our word *economy* has been derived) means stewardship, trusteeship. Man in the field of economics is God's steward, and this has the implication that he has to serve his neighbour too. If this is replaced by autocentric self-interest and self-enrichment, whether this is of an individual or a company, nothing remains of the responsibility towards God and the fellow man in business life.

### \* *Hedonism*

This is the ultimate result of the worldview which we have outlined so far. Man is nothing other than a "pleasure-pain calculating machine". He pursues the maximum of pleasure with the minimum of pain. In the preceding points we have already seen that it is material prosperity that is to offer man joy, pleasure and happiness.

The issue at stake, however, is whether man is such a one-dimensional being, merely a *homo oeconomicus*. Does man not in his deepest being look for the *meaning* in life rather than the *joy* of life?

Alexander Solzhenitsyn rightly stated in a lecture in 1978 that the purpose of man's life cannot be "unrestrained enjoyment of everyday life. It cannot be the search for the best ways to obtain material goods and then cheerfully get the most out of them ... How did the West decline from its triumphal march to its present sickness? The mistake must be at the root, at the very basis of human thinking in the past centuries ... and could be defined as humanistic autonomy - the proclaimed and enforced autonomy of man from a higher force above him. It based modern Western civilisation on the dangerous need to worship man and his material needs".

We might add to this that economic prosperity and human welfare are not necessarily identical. More income does not necessarily mean more happiness. Christ not without reason warns against the abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15). This quite apart from the fact that man cannot live by bread alone, but is dependent on the Word of God (Matthew 4:4). A full stomach and an empty heart will still not bring happiness. Happiness is also not an *end* to be striven for -it is a *gift* from God which He offers out of grace when we are obedient to His will.

### 13.5.2 Dealing with norms in current economic practice

From the preceding it should clearly emerge that the idea of "neutral" economic thought and practice - which is being propagated even today - is simply a matter of self-deception. Lionel Robbins (in 1935) offered a definition of economics that has become so renowned that many Western textbooks on economics still today in some way or another echo it. (The work in which it occurs has been reprinted up to 1984!) It reads as follows: "(Economics) is the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between (given) ends and scarce means which have alternative uses" (*The nature and significance of economic science*, 1984:16). We will not analyse this definition here, but what is striking is that it contains no reference to economic and other norms. The means and ends are therefore also not normatively directed.

\* *The order inverted*

What we do have here is the following: Profit and prosperity - good gifts from God, with which as such there is nothing wrong - are put in a central position. Something that is temporal becomes an absolute certainty, an idol. This all-determining *purpose* (instead of the determining *norm*) is striven for with a kind of obsession or madness. And from this absolutised end (for example, economic progress) the norms are also determined. Stated differently: the norms simply have to fit in with the dominant purposes. Seeing that the end is simply a fact, *that which is* (for example, that people strive for their own gain) determines *what ought to be* (people should strive for their own self-interest). Normality (in the sense of "all people do this") is elevated to normativity ("all people should therefore act in this way").

The correct order which God established, viz. that norms should determine ends, is simply inverted.

Naturally the end still contains something normative in this inverted order, because in reality it replaces the norm, but these remains of normativity no longer have the original force and binding validity of real norms. It is man himself, after all, who sets these ends for himself!

\* *The end justifies the means*

The further result of this type of purposive thought is that the means will also be determined by the end, and will not be tested against norms any longer. Such a viewpoint also cannot offer resistance against the popular (but unbiblical) idea of the end justifying - and necessitating! - the means. And once one means has been justified by the end, why not any means?

No end, however high, holy, elevated or noble, may sanction any means. This is true of both personal objectives and those of companies, groups and even nations. If we allow the end to sanctify the means, we are acting in direct contravention of the Word of God.

This obsessiveness about ends (think of the emphasis put on objectives and aims by business planners) inevitably results in a very narrow and impoverishing tunnel vision of life: everything is simply directed at the

single ray of light at the end of the suffocating, dark tunnel, where utility, abundance and happiness will be found.

\* *Great confusion*

Recapitulated: in the current economic vision the ends determine the means and finally also the norms, instead of the norms acting as criterions for the means and also for the ends. If a deep respect is not resuscitated for divine norms or principles, if we do not once again learn to listen to God's will, there is little hope that we will be able to emerge from the deep economic crisis.

There is not only confusion between objectives and norms, but also between objectives or ends and means. Viewed from a scriptural perspective I cannot, for example, approve of the fact that profit, prosperity, economic progress and power can be ends in themselves or have meaning of their own. To my mind these can only be means with as goal to serve God and our fellow man.

\* *Totalitarian power*

Businessmen more and more realise that the totalitarian demands made on them by the business world are wrong. The manager's *faith* is total commitment to the business enterprise; his *love* is unlimited loyalty and his *hope* is situated in the expectation that it will go well with the business.

Many of them are also forced to maintain double moral standards. On the one hand it is expected of them to live like robbers and frauds, while on the other hand, in their marital, church and family lives, they have to conduct a respectable life. Recently somebody in top management confessed to me: "I feel as though I have lost my soul. There is no real room for Christian service in my work. Apart from my daily job I am active in the church, evangelisation and in our Bible study group. But I do not see a way of how I can positively and purposefully serve God and my neighbour in my work."

An escape route which is often used is that the maintenance of norms should not be viewed as the task of business but as the task of other societal relationships. It is regarded as the duty of the state, the church and other social organisations to correct that which has been done wrongly in business!

This implies that norms are only allowed to play a role in business *after* economic production has been completed and not *during* the economic process. Thus it is taught today that the company, apart from its primary role of making money, also has a "social responsibility". This is a mere *afterthought*, however, and the normative corrections applied in this way are very limited.

\* *Simultaneous realisation of all norms by business itself*

Is it necessary to once again state that economism, according to which economics is the alpha and the omega, is wrong? For the business world not only economic norms are valid, but also other norms such as the ethical norm of reliability and the juridical norm of justice and fairness. These norms should be expressed fully by the business world *itself* and not through other institutions. Furthermore, in business all norms (economic, social, ethical, etc.) should be realised *simultaneously* and not only some of them by way of afterthought or as a little salve for the conscience - if at all. God's commandments form a unity and norms should therefore be obeyed within the framework of their reciprocal coherence.

It might therefore even happen that a non-economic norm such as, for example, the juridical one of justice should be of more importance at a specific point in time than the purely economic norms. Another example could be that ecological principles should enjoy a privilege above the economic when industrial development is disrupting the sensitive balance in nature (our source of life) and pollutes the earth, water and air.

### 13.5.3 On the way to a Christian paradigm

In the preceding section criticism from a Christian perspective has been directed against current economic practice. It was especially directed at the way in which norms are dealt with. We have not yet, however, arrived at what the positive content of true Christian norms should be for business.

Managers have a great influence on their whole enterprise. The quality of life in a business enterprise as a whole depends on the spiritual level of the managers. I do hope that the ten perspectives that will now follow will help you as a Christian to attain a higher level. This is merely an attempt to present some stimulatory perspectives and is not intended to offer detailed prescriptions. My intention is to provide the necessary inspiration to work it out and apply it more concretely.

We therefore return to the Biblical idea of stewardship which has already been mentioned in this book (cf. *inter alia* chapter 7, section 7.10.3). This is a basic Biblical concept. (Cf. Genesis 1:28 and also the many parables of Christ, such as for example Luke 12:15-21 and 42-48; 16:1-13 and 19-31; 18:18-30 and 19:11-27). Our stewardship does not only involve the economic field but the whole of life. Reformational thinkers such as H. Antonides, A. Cramp, B. Goudzwaard and A. Storkey have, however, used the idea to develop new perspectives on economic life. I will only offer some flashes:

- In the first place *the concept "steward" cuts off at the root the idea that we are owners of creation and all its wealth*. God is the Creator and He does not relinquish his ownership to us. He only appoints us as managers to act on His behalf.
- *The fact that we are not owners does not mean, as so many people reason, that we have less responsibility*. In reality it means that we have an even greater responsibility. We constantly have to offer God an account of how we act as trustees of His property. Our responsibility in the business world therefore does not cease with our report to top management or the board of directors. We also should not simply fatalistically say that the economic system is hard and merciless and that we can do nothing about it. We are co-creators of the system and we are responsible for it!



■ *Stewardship demands of us that we shall cultivate God's creation, so that it will come to fruition and flower in all fields, the economic as well.* The above-mentioned parables speak clearly here, and the rest of the Bible also teaches (cf. e.g. 2 Thessalonians 3:10) that if a person is not willing to work he will also not eat. Labour is not, as capitalism teaches, simply a means of production towards a consumption end. In such a case we underestimate labour. We may also not, as Marxist socialist ideology teaches, overestimate it by viewing it as man's liberation. Labour is not simply a commodity, but has its own value. In the Bible it is seen as a calling of God. And the purpose of the profession to which He calls us is service.

■ *Cultivation goes hand in hand with care of the creation of God.* We have to see to it that it is carefully used, that waste is prevented, that exploitation and pollution do not occur. Our care includes opposition to selfish economic ideas, which in the end will lead to the destruction of creation and of man himself.

■ *In addition to this stewardship entails that a careful distinction should be made between real needs and mere desires.* One is reminded of the prayer of Agur (Proverbs 30:8-9) that God should not give us poverty or wealth, but just enough to live by, because wealth can lead to pride in the face of God, while poverty can also seduce us to sin because we might steal. We tend so easily to think that more is the same as better!

■ *The limited use for own needs and the help to others in need should be emphasised.* Our stewardship to God implies that His commandment "... there shall be no poor among you" (Deuteronomy 15:4) should be obeyed. One may not close one's heart and one's hand to a poor man (15:7,8). This commandment is not only applicable to short-term personal relationships, but also to long-term structural provisions like employment.

■ *It has already become clear that our stewardship in the economic field is not only concerned with the gathering of possessions, but also with relationships among people.* Economics is for man, and not man for economics! Economic decisions have a fundamental influence on the lives of many people. It is widely acknowledged that the modern business of the past 200 years has been one of the most powerful

shapers of society and that today it plays a more influential role than practically any other societal relationship. As stewards we therefore not only have a responsibility towards God but also towards our neighbour. If the Lord enquires about the well-being of our neighbour, we may not, as Cain did, ask whether we are our brother's keepers (Genesis 4:9). *We are his keepers* - in the economic sense also!

The commandment that we should love our neighbour as we love ourselves or, negatively, that we should not do to him what we would not like him do to us, is not a mere ethical law that cannot be fully applied in the economic world. It is God's *central* and *encompassing* law which has to be applied *fully* and *comprehensively* in *all* spheres of life.

■ In conjunction with the previous point it should be stressed very strongly that *stewardship means service to the neighbour*. A current definition of a business enterprise could read: *It consists of a workplace where efficient means of production are forged together in order to make a profit in the marketplace*. The end (or the "norm" determined by the specific objective) is therefore profit, self-seeking enrichment and not service in the first place. The service motif can at most be realised *afterwards* in the form of community service or social responsibility, but does not typify the entire enterprise!

I am not saying that profit and interest are *per se* wrong. How can a business, company or bank otherwise exist? What I am (repeatedly) saying is that profit may never be an end in itself, especially not for personal gain, but may only be a means towards service to the neighbour.

The following would therefore be a more suitable definition of a business enterprise: *It is a community of workers and shareholders (employers) who serve each other and the public (consumers) through available means*. The service therefore occurs in the business or the company itself (for example, between employers and employees), but also between the business and the public (clients or consumers) to whom goods and services are rendered.

■ Because we live in a sinful world, *stewardship also implies that we should be willing to confess our failed responsibilities to God, to his*

*creation and to our fellow men.* Confession of guilt is not something that should be limited to our personal lives, to the church and to theology. The concept "sin" in the Bible means, among other things, to have missed the purpose which God had set for one. This is fully true of the current business world which has become so objective-centred that it does not realise that it is serving false gods.

Confession of guilt opens the way towards self-examination, the willingness to honestly ask what is wrong with our economic system and with economics as a science.

■ *The final perspective which flows from the crucial idea of stewardship is that of gift and grace.* If the preceding nine points make us realise that an absolute reorientation, a totally new paradigm should come into being in the economic field, provided that we are obedient to God's Word, then this last perspective is even more important. It implies nothing less than a radical reformation of our secular economic order.

God gave the wealth of creation as a gift to man. But this is not all. What we take from it, is also a gracious gift from Him. Economists will not like to hear this. They mostly tend to believe that the profit they make is due to their own hard work.

God reprimands us not to be so foolish: "It is useless to work so hard for a living, getting up early and going to bed late. For the Lord provides for those He loves while they are asleep" (Psalm 127:2). And: "It is the Lord's blessing that makes you wealthy. Hard work can make you no richer" (Proverbs 10:22).

These words of God reveal something deep and impenetrable, but at the same time something glorious: God's undeserved mercy and blessing!

This has to be viewed in conjunction with a basic "law" in the kingdom of God: "For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. Will a person gain anything if he wins the whole world but is himself lost? Of course not!" (Luke 9:24,25). The norm that God sets here contains a threat as well as a promise.

Whoever wishes out of selfish motives to preserve his life, will lose it. There are many rich businessmen who will confirm that what Christ says here is very true: one can possess the whole world but lose oneself. Is this not craziness, absolute stupidity?

Christ's words also contains a promise, however, for whoever lays down his life for the sake of the Lord will preserve it. Who among us is really willing to relinquish personal gain in the field of economics? The puzzling thing is, however, that the only way to retain it is to relinquish it. Are we prepared to take Christ at His word?

From the rest of the passage it emerges that Christ expects of us that we should not be ashamed of His words. And yet how unwilling are we not when it comes to applying His words (Scripture) to the economic field!

We basically find the same idea in the following well-known words of Christ directed at those who worry about food, drink and clothes: "Instead, be concerned above everything else with the kingdom of God and what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things" (Matthew 6:33). Although not stated explicitly, Christ's words do contain a serious warning: should we not put the will of God (His normative principles) first, then He will withhold from us those things which we are so feverishly pursuing - profit, progress, prosperity. Elsewhere in Scripture, in Luke 16:13, it is also explicitly stated that we should not only serve God first of all, but only God. A compromise, in which we try to serve both Him and Mammon, is excluded.

The promise of His blessing, however, is also clear: if we are willing - in economic life too - to set as our first and highest end and objective the kingdom of God, and to obey Him, then He will bless us even with those things we have not actively sought - enough to live by, joy and happiness.

All that is expected of us, is to put first that which should be first: the will of God (the norm). About the results (those objectives or ends which are so important to us) we need not worry. They are very safe in God's hands!

The most important things in life, like happiness, joy, peace - in one word: blessing - are (fortunately) not something which man can attain through his own power, through hard work, good management or whatever. God alone holds it in His hands and it is and remains a gift from Him.

How terribly stupid we are if we still try to *earn* the most glorious things in life, instead of *receiving* them with open arms!

#### 13.5.4 Some flashes about the business enterprise

What exactly, in the light of the foregoing, is a business enterprise, what should its objectives be and how should authority be structured within it?

\* *Business in the cross-fire*

In our modern society the business enterprise assumes a central position. According to some it is too central, with far too much influence. The power of business emerges from how it can affect family life (in the case of migrant labour, overtime work, shift work or workaholic parents who are never at home), how it can kill a whole town (by the withdrawal of job opportunities), or let it live (by creation of job opportunities), or even influence the whole of a country's politics. Thinkers such as George Goyder (in among other books *The responsible company* and *The responsible worker*) pleads for a reformation of the business enterprise, so that it does not gain a totalitarian, demonic hold on the whole of social life.

Critical questions include the following: What is enterprise for? Is it only a means for prosperity? Does it create happiness? Does profit for one not of necessity implies a shortfall for another? Is money (the capital providers) the basis for authority, or should all those with an interest in the business, apart from management (thus also the employees and the consumers) have a say in management? Is the business a private or a public institution, and would privatisation or nationalisation be a solution for the present world-wide economic recession? Should the business not also assume full responsibility for the non-economic effects of its activities - instead of simply ignoring these as peripheral issues?

\* *What a business is*

A business enterprise can be defined as: *An independent community of people (management and workers) who in reciprocal co-operation and with the aid of available means at reasonable remuneration provide meaningful labour as well as rendering goods and services to the community (consumers) at reasonable prices.*

In this definition the norm of stewardship towards God and service to the neighbour (both within the business and towards the clients) have been included.

\* *Freedom in bondage*

With "independent (community)" in our definition we want to indicate a third way. Capitalism views business as an *absolutely independent* project of individual providers of capital. Socialism sees business merely as an extension of the national community (the state) so that it becomes a *totally dependent* entity, which can never become a true community, because it is torn between the entities of capital and labour (the class struggle).

The Biblical idea of freedom, however, is something different from the capitalist one. Basically it means free from sin to be able to serve God and one's neighbour. And this service to God and the neighbour means obedience to norms. If a number of firms therefore collude to destroy a competitor, and the state interferes, the firms cannot see this as a limitation of their freedom, but rather as a restoration of it. Or if firms exploit their workers and a trade union complains, this is also not an attack on their freedom but support of it, because freedom is subjected to God's norms, which demand that one should have respect for the interests of one's fellow men. Because freedom is determined and limited by service to God and fellow men, there is no such thing as the "free enterprise" which mostly amounts to an abuse of freedom.

Our idea of freedom is also different from the socialist one, which views the business as a part of the state. The business enterprise is an independent societal relationship with its own norms, aims and own way in which authority is practised.

Both the independence of the enterprise and its relationship to the rest of society should therefore be maintained.

\* *A community of people*

A business is an economically qualified community in which people cooperate by using the means of production provided by capital providers (for example, shareholders). The conclusion may not be drawn from this, however, that the providers of capital are the owners of the business.

This would amount to the capital providers possessing *people* as property, because a business is a community of people! The Christian vision on property and possessions, however, forbids the owning of people. This would amount to slavery, which denies the equality of all people before God. Those who provide the money can therefore never be the owners of the business - a social relationship of *people*. They are at most the owners of *capital*, the means of production in the business. Their right of ownership is therefore limited and can never encompass the whole business and the activities of the people in the enterprise. Shareholders are therefore also not members of the business, they are only members of the corporation. Only the employer and the employees are members of the enterprise. It is therefore helpful to distinguish between the corporation as legal entity and the enterprise as a community of people. The latter cannot be owned by anyone.

\* *Authority in the enterprise*

The current ideas about right of ownership in the enterprise are closely linked to the views of authority in the enterprise, because authority is usually derived from the right of ownership of the (capital) investors. Keeping in mind that the providers of capital are not, in accordance with our vision, the owners of the enterprise, their authority only extends to the capital and not to the people in the business.

Management is therefore the authority, perhaps more accurately called the office-bearers in the business. What is their task? Is it to ensure that the enterprise renders as much profit as possible? Is this the norm for the exercise of their office or should Biblical concepts of stewardship to God and service to the fellowman rather be put in the forefront?

Management (as the office-bearers) therefore has to give such guidance in obedience to the norms for the enterprise that the business enterprise will be enabled to fulfill its calling of service. This is why we mentioned in our definition meaningful labour at reasonable remuneration and goods and services at fair prices.

\*. *Unhealthy tensions in business*

If there is a true striving towards a community of people in business, then the relationship between management (employers) and employees should also be very different from what it is at present. Usually management and employees are viewed as being opponents, even enemies. Management is keen to ensure as high a profit for the shareholders as possible, while the trade union leaders in their turn attempt to negotiate the highest possible salaries for their members. As soon as one party gains, the other loses. The two opponents try to get as much as possible from each other and their settlements are simply ceasefires in an ongoing battle. In this fight for monetary gain it often happens that many important aspects of labour in business never receive their due attention. Increased salaries - to ensure a good life outside work hours - will never truly compensate for the emptiness and meaninglessness of many types of work.

Apart from excessive wage demands, other symptoms of the deteriorating relationships between managements and employees include the following: increasing strikes with their related awful consequences, a monopolist control over job opportunities as a result of forced membership of trade unions, corruption, defiance of laws, contempt of courts of law and even violence.

How can a societal relationship still be healthy with such a deep and wide chasm between its members?

Would it not be far better if the workers - now practically excluded from responsibility in the enterprise and regarded as dangerous outsiders - could be acknowledged as *inherent* partners in the enterprise and be included in decision-making up to the highest level?



## 13.6 "NOT OF THE WORLD BUT IN THE WORLD": THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

I am deliberately inverting the expression that the church is *in* the world but not *of* the world: it should not be *of* the world but *in* the world. The idea behind this inversion is to emphasize the *in*. To my mind our churches, in spite of the age-old saying, have been *too little in the world* and *too much of the world*.

It is necessary to indicate how important this issue really is. Let us listen for example to a debate between an Evangelical and an Ecumenical Christian from Africa.

### 13.6.1 Excerpts from a conversation

*Ev.:* "I regard the vertical relationship, that is the relationship between God and man, as the most important one in the church. I am in the first place concerned about the worship and glorification of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. What is also important is the dissemination of the Gospel of salvation. I am fully in agreement with the statement on Christian social responsibility by the International Conference for World Evangelisation (Lausanne, 1974): 'Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty ... The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities'.

*Ec.:* This is precisely the reason why the church is at present so powerless and irrelevant. The horizontal dimension, the relationship between man and man, has traditionally been neglected too much and should now be accorded the highest priority. If I am interpreting the Bible correctly, the church does not exist only for God or for itself. The church can never be viewed in isolation from the world. God Himself wants the church to be directed at the world, to be a blessing for the world. The church is not in itself important. What does count, is its commitment, its involvement in the world.

*Ev.:* But the church is after all primarily concerned with spiritual issues: the salvation of man from his spiritual bondage, his fallenness into sin.

*Ec.:* That is merely one side of the coin. To my mind the concept of salvation has a much broader meaning. It should also include liberation from hunger, poverty, oppression and many more.

*Ev.:* I feel that that amounts to a secularisation of the Gospel to something merely for the here and now. Even though in principle our salvation is a fact, total salvation will only come to us in the hereafter. Remember that the coming of God's kingdom on earth is not the result of man's efforts - God will let it come in His own time and in His own way. You Ecumenicals are unbiblical in your activist radicalism which might easily degenerate into revolutionary thinking.

*Ec.:* If you accuse me of secularism, I may have the right to accuse you of spiritualism. You are only concerned with the salvation of the soul or the spirit - not the body - in the future. The church has a task to be relevant here and now, concretely, for the world. It does not help suffering humanity to promise them salvation in the hereafter. God's kingdom will also come through our works. Your quietist piety does not appeal to me. It is definitely not Biblical. The Bible does not teach us anywhere to sit around with folded hands.

*Ev.:* The spiritual salvation of the individual remains the most important thing to me. In his personal capacity the Christian has to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in politics, economics and society. The church as church (institution) does not, however, have a task in these areas. You are propagating a social Gospel. We believe that a rebirth of society can only start with the individual, with personal rebirth and conversion. New structures (family, state, industry) can only be established with new people.

*Ec.:* When you accuse me of socialism, I will retaliate by calling you guilty of individualism. The Bible is definitely not primarily concerned with the personal, eternal salvation of the individual. The Bible is insistent about the fact that God wills the salvation of the *whole* of man and the *whole* of society. Conversion is an encompassing concept. For this reason I am convinced that it is inadequate for individual members

of the church to witness in their personal capacity as Christians. The members of the church - but also the church as such - have to combat sin laden structures or institutionalised oppression in the name of Christ. For this reason I pray for a cessation of all the *talking* about vague generalities regarding the hereafter, and a start in *acting* concretely here and now.

*Ev.*: I am sorry but I cannot agree with you. The most important task of the church - towards its members and the outside world - is the dissemination of the *Word*. You emphasise the *deed* - to such an extent that you forget the *Word* completely. If the Gospel does not accompany the deed, I cannot honestly distinguish your deeds from humanist involvement in the needs of the world. Socially uplifting people and liberating them without the Gospel, is not the task of the church.

*Ec.*: It is exactly my contention that the church has lost its credibility in the world as a result of its non-commitment, its passivity, its lack of concern for the needs of the world. Man always trusts his eyes more than his ears. The church has only been talking long enough. It is about time that the church start doing something beyond its narrow Sunday activities.

*Ev.*: But are you not over-emphasising *life* at the cost of *doctrine*? I get the impression that the deed carries more weight with you than the purity of doctrine. You are too relativistic to my taste: action at the cost of the truth!

*Ec.*: Yes, you do perhaps have a purer doctrine. But that is all. You are so possessed with that idea that it has become a sterile orthodoxy: pure, correct, but ... dead. We are in the first place not looking for the correct doctrine (orthodoxy), but the correct way of life (orthopraxis).

*Ev.*: I'll leave aside for the moment the question as to whether man can live correctly if he does not have the correct doctrine to guide his life. It does not seem to me that you understand the unique nature of the church. How are you going to prevent the eradication of the border between church and state? The church of Christ may not be allowed to degenerate into a political party or a pressure group, a social organisation, a trade union or a terrorist gang. I see in your viewpoint no fundamental difference from modern Neo-Marxist or Social Gospel

ideas. I cannot discern any difference between your viewpoint and that of the World Council of Churches and the many other theologies of liberation.

*Ec.:* Does the church then have to hide in its safe bomb shelter? Is the church not after all supposed to be at the service of a world in need? Instead of always being decades behind, the church should strive to be in the vanguard of the struggle for social justice and the liberation of the oppressed. If the church does not commit itself fully to the world, it has no meaning or significance. Do you not realize that with your apolitical church, you are not politically uncommitted? Your silence in the matter of political and social issues means (for the world at least) that you accept the *status quo* docilely, even to the point of approving it ...

*Ev.:* And you? You accuse the church of approving of the establishment and of structural oppression, but with you being supportive of the terrorists you are approving terrorist violence and bloodshed. Is this really the task of the church?"

In these last two exchanges the Evangelical and the Ecumenical debaters really got down to brass tacks. It is indeed true that a theology of the *status quo* (call it *status quoism*) and a theology of revolution amount to being mirror reflections of each other. In both cases Christian religion is degraded to the level of an ideology which has to provide supernatural sanction for a particular political viewpoint or its alternative.

Of course this is by no means the end of the conversation. We have, however, listened long enough to get a good idea of what the issues at stake are. Which side would you choose? And you *have* to choose. You have to have an opinion regarding the highly topical issue of the commitment and involvement of the church in the world. This issue becomes a more burning one every day. We should remember, however, never to make a choice between two *false* options! (Compare again the exposition in chapter 11, sections 11.2 and 11.3 of the viewpoints of Evangelicalism and Liberation Theology respectively.)

### 13.6.2 "Not *of* but not *in* the world"

In view of the statement of "in but not of the world", one could typify the two opposing stands of the Evangelical and Ecumenical brothers in the following terms. One stand emphasises the aspect of not being *of* the world. The other stresses the fact that the church has to be *in* the world.

The first viewpoint is faced with the problem of the extent to which the church (which is not of the world) can still be *in* the world. The latter vision has to deal with the question of how the church (which stands in the world) can see to it that it does not become *identical to* the world. The first viewpoint is thus involved with the problem that the church should not *withdraw* from the world, and the second has to face the problem that the church may not allow itself to be *swallowed* by the world. From the first viewpoint the second position is regarded as *secularisation* (accommodation) while the second group accuses the first of *flight from the world* (isolation).

\* *The precarious balance - characteristic of a wrong worldview?*

It would thus seem as if the old saying (*in* but not *of*) is not that easy to keep in balance in practice: if the pendulum does not swing too far to one side, it swings too far to the other!

Have our Evangelical and Ecumenical friends perhaps each noticed part of the truth? Is the correct viewpoint situated somewhere in between these two extremes?

With our background of a radical Christian worldview we are in the position to unmask both viewpoints as well as a choice between them, or the search for a balance or compromise between them, as false. Why? Because the viewpoints of both the Evangelical and the Ecumenical are the result of a dualist Christian worldview.

Their dualist starting points is clearly revealed in the terminology they use. Take as an example the terms horizontal-vertical. We may not divide our lives like that. According to the Bible we cannot live horizontally without any reference to God. Neither can we live vertically without any relationship to God's created reality. No, *in* our

so-called horizontal relationships we have to serve God! If you again read chapter 5, and especially section 5.6.2, you will clearly see the worldvish background of the heated debate between the Evangelical and Ecumenical Christian. The little diagram in that particular section indicates how reality is divided into two spheres: that of grace above and nature below. In the upper sphere of grace you will find the church and in the lower sphere the world. The church is therefore *out of* (above) the world, a kind of supra-natural institution.

Dualist oriented Christians, however, also have problems with this position of the church: the church also ought to be involved *in* the world! But, be careful: if the church gets too deeply involved in the world, it will become "worldly" and lose its "churchly" (or divine) character! The only solution, therefore, lies in seesaw tactics: *in* the world but not *of* the world.

But what does this really mean? To say the least, this is a very vague point of view. We are not surprised by the vagueness, however, because we already know that a *dualist* Christian worldview cannot be clear and unambiguous. Only a *radical* Christian worldview can clearly and unambiguously show the way.

\* *Twin brothers*

If the starting point of both the Evangelical and the Ecumenical Christian is a dualist worldview, why then do they differ? The reason simply is that they adhere to *different* dualist worldviews. The diagram in section 5.6.2 of chapter 5 already explained the difference. The Evangelical puts more emphasis on the one pole (grace), while the Ecumenical does exactly the opposite. In the dialectic tension between nature and grace he emphasises nature more than grace. This is clear from the fact that the Evangelical brother is concerned with the (supra-natural) identity of the church, while the Ecumenical brother is concerned with the importance of the world. In a dualist worldview one is always confronted with an uneasy situation of divided loyalty. It is not possible for one to have only one loyalty as is the case with a radical and integral Christian worldview. Finally - because a "seesaw" policy is not very satisfactory - one has to give priority to one of the parts of the dualism. But at the same time it is not possible to totally ignore the other part. The dialectic tension inherent in the dualist

worldview does not permit it. The one pole cannot exist without the other! When the one side of the seesaw goes down, the other end swings upward. A horizontal checkmate position also does not satisfy!

\* *Also influenced by other worldviews*

The dualist character of their Christian worldviews is, however, not the only reason for the tension between the Evangelical and the Ecumenical. If one listens carefully at the above debate between them, one will also discern the influence of two other clashing worldviews. The Evangelical is influenced by an individualist and the Ecumenical by a communalist-socialist worldview. In view of previous chapters (cf. chapter 9 and 10) we must realise that also in this respect a choice between them will not bring about a solution. The church is neither a group of individuals nor a totalitarian community within which the whole of Christian life is included and to which it is confined. It is not at all surprising that the diagram in section 5.6.2 (chapter 5) only indicates the church. It does not indicate the kingdom of God, because it has been swallowed by the church!

Somebody once said: "Without true and sustained contact with God the church loses its transcendence. But without true solidarity with the world, it loses its relevance". On the surface this statement sounds like an excellent compromise. But one can once again clearly discern the dialectical tension (the seesaw) between transcendence and relevance (or immanence), grace and nature.

According to a reformational, pluralist view of society, the church is simply a societal relationship among other relationships. It is not elevated above them as a supernatural kind of institution above the world. We therefore do not have to bring it (down) into the world - it is part of God's creation!

Before we end this discussion allow me a last remark. I have studied the materials of both the Evangelicals and Ecumenicals in Africa and even paid a visit to their headquarters in Nairobi. (*The Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar* and the *All Africa Council of Churches*.) I am therefore not criticising from a position of hear-say. And I include in my critique also the church to which I belong - which I would describe as mainly evangelical.

\* *Three meanings of the word "world"*

Because the word "world" has both positive and negative connotations in the New Testament, it opens the door to the above two types of dualist Christian worldviews. If one only emphasises the positive meaning of the word "world", there is a real danger of accommodation to the world (the "Christian *of* the world" position). If, on the other hand, one views the word only negatively, it prompts Christians to retreat from the world (the "Christian *above/alongside/against* the world" position).

The third, correct, position is to clearly distinguish between the two meanings in which the word is used in the New Testament. What makes this so difficult, is that the two different meanings are sometimes used together even in the same section, for instance, in Christ's prayer (John 17:9-19) where He says that His disciples are not *of* the world (negative meaning), but He does not pray that they should be sent *out of* the world but rather *into* the world (positive meaning). Because of the two meanings Christians should maintain simultaneously a distance from (or anti-thesis to) and an involvement in (compassion for) the world. We have to be converted *from* the sinful world and converted *to* God's world!

A further careful study of the New Testament reveals that the word "world" is used in two positive and one negative way.

In the first positive sense "world" (Greek: *cosmos*) refers to God's creation, the place He has given us to work and live. A second positive connotation is indicated in the "world of people", all the relationships of the human world. We could also say that the two positive meanings denote the structures of the world created by God. Christians should not shun the world in this sense, because it is the handiwork of God Himself. They should be present *in* the world.

The third usage, in contrast, has a directional, religious meaning, indicating the anti-Christian, demonic forces of the kingdom of Satan, the whole of unredeemed life dominated by sin and awaiting God's judgment. It is with the "world" in this sense that Christians should not associate, they should not be *of* this kind of world (cf. for instance 1 John 2:15-17).



### 13.6.3 Church and kingdom of God

Because the kingdom of God is so often neglected in discussions about the church's task in the world, usually because the kingdom is not distinguished from, but merely subsumed under the church, we will have to look at their relationship briefly again, before continuing our exposition of the task of the church.

One cannot *separate* the church and its task in the world from the all-encompassing kingdom of God - but the church and the kingdom may also never be *confused*.

\* *The church: for the sake of the kingdom*

The church may never be viewed as existing for its own sake, but for the sake of the service it might render the kingdom of God. Its task is to proclaim the kingship of God in all spheres - not merely as regards so-called "spiritual life".

\* *The church: the arsenal of the kingdom*

The church is the recruiting office, the mobilisation field, the preparation centre for the training of the warriors of God, who have to fight for the good at all the frontiers of the world. The worship service held on Sunday is intended for the work to be done on Monday. The service on Sunday is not supposed to be a flight or a retreat from the world. Sunday is the first day of the coming week! In the worship service the faithful can gird themselves, so that their whole life may become a life of service to God, enabling them to fight for the good cause with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

\* *The church: the sign of the kingdom*

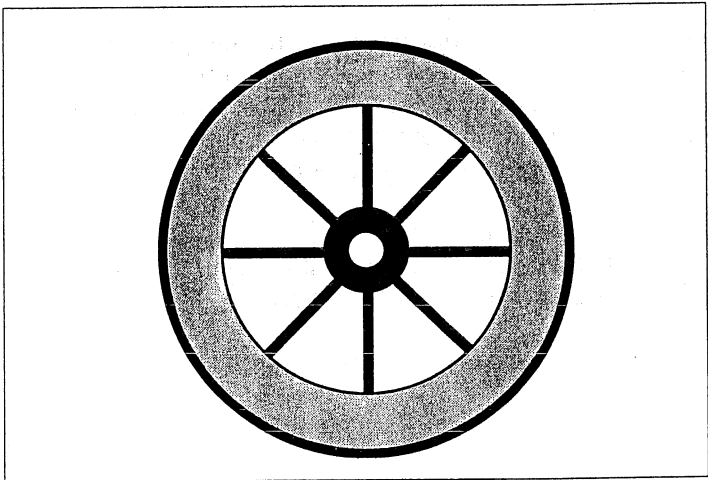
The church should be a visible, winking, hopeful sign of the kingdom of God in the world: a cheerful crocus appearing through the snow, a rare flower blooming on the garbage dump of the world. God's dominion should be visible in all of this. Something of the wonderful strength and the magnificent gifts of the kingdom should assume visible shape in the church. The church itself should, for example, be a dynamic demonstration of the liberating force of the Gospel of the

kingdom, which can serve as an open letter from Christ to be read by all in the world.

The task of the church in the world is thus a task closely linked with the kingdom.

\* *Illustrated in an image*

This relationship between church and kingdom could be explained with the image of a wheel, consisting of three basic elements: (1) an axle in the centre, (2) different spokes connected to the centre and pointing in all directions and (3) finally the rim at the outside.



The axle symbolises the church proclaiming the Word of God to its members. The different spokes are the Christians, members of the church and citizens of the kingdom applying the Word of God in all areas of life, for instance, the fields of politics, education, labour, economics, art etc. The outer rim, holding all the spokes together, indicates the all-encompassing kingdom of God. It is not possible to have a wheel without one of these three elements. In the same way church, Christians and kingdom cannot be separated.

What is crucial here is the fact that the church as it manifests itself in its offices, administration, service of the sacraments and preaching of

the Word, does not encompass the entire life of the faithful. Man's faith and the expression of his faith should not be regarded as being limited to the church. As subjects of God's kingdom we have a far wider and more encompassing calling. The church as church (institution) has a very particular, limited task and vocation. Should it interfere in all spheres of life, the whole of life would become subjected to the church and this would rob the faithful of their all-encompassing responsibilities to the kingdom.

The church therefore has to fulfil its responsibility in the world *in accordance with its particular nature*. It may never degenerate into a social, cultural, political or economical organisation, movement or party, or identify itself with any of these.

The task of the church does not lie in the design of all sorts of socio-political blueprints or programmes. Should this happen, it would mean that the church was trespassing. In such a case there is the very real danger that salvation is identified with political and social liberation from poverty, exploitation and oppression.

In the following sections of this chapter we will firstly draw attention to the task of the church as an institution and then at the task of the faithful Christian in the world, his kingdom calling.

#### **13.6.4 The prophetic calling of the church**

The most important task of the church is to disseminate the Word of God in the world: in the first instance to its own members, but also to the world at large. Does this indicate that the church has a purely "spiritual" task? No, not at all. Does it then imply that the church also has a political task? Yes - indirectly.

\* *Some examples*

■ *Should the church for example teach that Christ is the King and that only He has dominion over our lives, this is not merely a religious (or, if you will, spiritual) confession, but it also has very clear political implications. When the early church confessed Christ as the only King and Saviour, it was openly in conflict with the world (the Roman Empire): the emperor regarded himself as absolute ruler and saviour!*

■ *The prayers of the church also have political and social implications.* When it prays for the conversion of corrupt officials or for the elimination of social injustice, such prayers imply condemnation of malpractices.

■ *The same is true of the concept "liberation" as used in the Scriptures.* It does not have the *primary* political, social or economic meaning which liberation theology teaches, but a religious one. At the same time, however, we should not forget that the religious liberation of man in Christ has very real *consequences* for man's political, economic and social life. The kingdom of God is encompassing and renews one's whole life - not only as regards the church and religious spheres. Liberation of the self from sinful bondage has clear consequences for the whole of life - we cannot divide our lives into neat watertight little compartments. When Philemon and his slave Onesimus were liberated spiritually, they became brothers in Christ! (Philemon verse 16.)

Thus the primary task of the church is also not to become involved in all sorts of social, political and economic liberation programmes. It would, however, in its preaching, have to point out very clearly that "spiritual" liberation will have consequences in *all* spheres of life. In this way at least signs of God's *all-encompassing* liberation of the life of man are erected.

■ A clear example could also be found in the *interpretation by the church of the concept of the poor.*

In the past this concept has been spiritualised due to the influence of Greek dualism. It was quite in order that Matthew 5:3 should speak of the "poverty of *spirit*." But what should be done with the parallel beatitude, in Luke 6:20, which deals with the poor without any further qualification? Today many (among them all sorts of liberation theologies) have no problem with Luke, because they teach that Christ associates or identifies without qualification with the poor as poor.

The concept *the poor* does indeed have a double meaning in the Scriptures. It denotes the materially poor, the socially oppressed, but *at the same time* it denotes those people who have remained true to God and who have expected their salvation from His kingdom only.

Pagan (Greek) thought misled the Christians in earlier times to believe that religion and salvation were only "spiritual" matters and nowadays people believe that it is purely a physical, secular matter. It would not help to oppose either one of the extremes: one has to eliminate the root - and reject dualist thinking *as such*.

■ In order to illustrate this further one can *consider the way in which conversion is regarded*. Normally it is seen individualistically (the individual separated from others), spiritually (concerning only the relationship between God and the soul) and emotionally (a special experience).

The Biblical concept of *conversion*, however, is something totally different. Conversion indicates a new relationship to both God and one's fellow men. It is not merely an inward experience. It also implies public obedience, as well as service to others.

Conversion furthermore touches on not only the so-called spiritual part of our lives, but the totality of our humanity. Selective conversion or conversion regarding some points only - usually those things that are easiest to give up - is one of the deadliest dangers, because in doing this we are deluding not God but only ourselves.

Conversion and faith also do not mean the mere acceptance of a certain number of dogmas.

It is also not merely an emotional experience, but touches the deepest core of our humanity. Real conversion always has to do with those things we love dearest, that without which we think we cannot survive. Conversion is therefore nothing less than denial of the self.

The Bible insists, furthermore, on the daily, continual process of conversion - it is not something that happens once and is then inexorably over.

Finally, conversion is not demanded only of the world, the unconverted. It is especially, and in the first place, the task of the church, of every individual believer.

### 13.6.5 Preaching of the Scriptures aimed at the members of the church

In the prophetic task of the church, the Word has to open the eyes of its own members and to sensitise their consciences towards the sin and vices of the world. Biblical norms for men's thinking and deeds have to be revealed and should be applied to all situations.

The church has an awesome educative task as regards its own members, who are often neglected scandalously. The purpose of this should not only be personal edification in faith, or personal renewal but, because the members of the church should be as salt and as light in the world, there should be renewal of entire social structures and reformation of the wrong structures.

#### \* *Locally*

In his preaching the minister has to establish guidelines from the Bible which should guide the members of the church in their own decisions. He may, however, never misuse the pulpit to propagate his personal ideas regarding politics and social issues.

#### \* *Nationally*

When wider issues are at stake which touch the fabric of the entire church (such as abortion, war, secret organisations etc.), *larger church meetings* have to comment. Great care should be taken, however, especially when the Scriptures do not give very clear guidelines on a particular issue. The church has to be particularly careful not to make itself appear ridiculous in the eyes of the world by making amateurish statements on matters of which it has little knowledge.

#### \* *Internationally*

The church should also make its voice heard in matters of interest for the world in the *ecumenical context*. This should always be done in an ecclesiastical, Biblical, prophetic manner. To my mind the World Council of Churches sometimes overreaches itself when it becomes involved in a *political* manner.

### 13.6.6 Preaching of the Word to the world

The fact that we do not here deal with the missionary task of the church does not mean that it is not regarded as important. The missionary calling of the church has enormous and fundamental consequences for the world.

We limit ourselves to the question of *when* and *how* the church should direct itself at specific institutions and persons such as for example local authorities, ministers and other members of parliament. The church does not only have the right but also the duty to direct itself at these people and institutions.

#### \* *When*

The following guidelines may be considered:

- It should concern an issue of urgent, topical interest.
- It should be important enough for the church to have to raise its voice. The church should not make itself ridiculous by interfering with insignificant matters.
- The church has to be convinced that obedience to the will of God necessitates such a public reprimand or statement. The church has to be able to speak in the name of Christ. Should there be too much mutual division or uncertainty, the church should preferably talk to its own members first before making public statements.
- In all that it does the church should be concerned first of all not with its own interests but with the kingdom of God, and with justice beneficial for believer and unbeliever alike.

#### \* *How*

The church should always address the rest of society not in a spirit of superiority but in a continual spirit of humility. The church is not better or higher than society at large. There is an enormous difference between the criticaster and the prophet. The prophet identifies himself with sin, with the guilt and the need of the world, because he knows

that he is no better. The critic criticises from a superior position, from the outside, from a distance. The prophet weeps, the critic condemns. To criticise is easy and cheap. To speak prophetically is difficult and dear - because it happens out of solidarity, love and compassion. This does not mean that the church has to act like an inoffensive little man. Its witness should be clear and fearless!

### 13.6.7 The deeds of the church in the world

Thus far the emphasis has been on the written and spoken *word* of the church as directed to its own members and to society outside the church. What is of equal if not more significance are the *deeds*, the acts of the church.

#### \* *Biblical examples*

Christ's behaviour during his sojourn on earth testifies to an unbreakable bond between word and deed. He does not merely preach, but He also heals the sick, exorcises devils, feeds the masses. Luke stresses this aspect when (in Acts 1:1) he sums up Christ's behaviour by pointing out *firstly* what He did and *secondly* what He taught. The same balance can be found in the lives of the apostles and those of the early Christians. They testified to their faith through word and deed, through their preaching and their lives.

#### \* *The early church*

One of the reasons for the enormous appeal the early church had for the pagan world was the fact that they did not merely *hear*, but also *saw* things which stunned them. The early Christians cared for the poor, the widows, the orphans, prisoners, slaves in the mines, and they did unceasing good works in the event of famines, earthquakes, pestilences and wars. The pagans of those days would point to the Christians and remark of the love they had for everybody.

We can learn from these early Christians: words alone can become cheap, empty and ineffective. Deeds alone are not enough either. In some circles today the emphasis is entirely on the deed, the so-called Christian presence, and the Word is neglected. Christian deeds without the explanatory preaching of the Gospel are mute because the Source of



these deeds is then not explained. Even the deeds committed by Christ were accompanied by His Word of explanation.

\* *Deaconal work*

One field in which the deeds of the institutional church are of great interest is its deaconal work.

In the past the church has limited itself to charity in individual cases of poverty, family disintegration, alcohol abuse and so on. The vision of the church will have to become wider in this context, however, so that the church will pay attention not only to individual and personal cases but also to structural problems. For many centuries the Christian message was personally based. Today we are aware of the extent to which man can be shaped and manipulated by the structures of society. Good social institutions can improve people, but bad ones can make man rotten and misshapen. Because we are now aware of these institutional sins, our responsibility has become correspondingly larger.

From the various levels on which the office of the deacon functions, it will emerge how large the church's task is.

■ *Locally* not only the members of the particular church, but also the members of the poorer churches and those without a church, who are in need, should be cared for. The care of the church for the poor, the persecuted and the oppressed is an *essential and fundamental* task. This is not only something that the church might *also* do when there might be enough time and money and when enough people might be interested in charity!

■ *Nationally* there are even greater needs. Should all the offices of the deaconry co-operate and identify cases of real need, one would be able to do real good. There is much more suffering than merely within the walls of orphanages!

■ *Internationally*. If the situation is less than adequate on the national level, then it is much more acute on the international level. The eyes of the members of the local churches would have to be opened so that they can grow toward a compassionate understanding of the needs of the world. Often one feels compassion for the plight of people upon

learning about them through media such as the press or television, but the channels to help them often do not exist or cannot be discovered. In this field as well, serious reflection is necessary. Traditionally, material help has only been offered in the case of great natural or other disasters, such as famine, wars and earthquakes. Should we not pay more attention to the training of local people so that they can develop the necessary competence to deal with a crisis themselves?

These have been only a few flashes to suggest how a *vocal* church can also become a *doing* church.

A proclamation which is not able to urge man to renewal of his personal and social life is definitely to be regarded as a defective one as far as the Bible is concerned. Such a proclamation would be without the strength of the Spirit. On the other hand: actions which are not founded in the Word often lose their validity and become mere humanitarian deeds - and are then easily taken on board by revolutionary ideologies.

### 13.6.8 The Christian in the world

Thus far we have dealt with the church as an institution. The most important - and at the same time the most neglected - aspect has not been dealt with: the task of the faithful Christian (kingdom citizen) in society at large.

- *Personally*, each believer has to be a witness in every sphere through word and deed. His Christian worldview and his Christian attitude to life must guard against rot like salt and should pervade the whole of life like active yeast.

- *On the organised level* Christians have to pool their strengths and their resources in order to achieve particular aims. Sometimes it may be necessary to found separate Christian organisations. Under different circumstances it would be best to work within the framework of existing organisations, associations and parties and to try and reform these. (Cf. chapter 11, section 11.5).

Here too it is of paramount importance not to pay attention only to "casualties". Doctors do not only try to cure a disease but also to prevent it. In the same way it is not only the individual results of sinful

structures that have to be treated, but the causes themselves (institutional evils) have to be eliminated.

You will remember that the Evangelical brother accused the Ecumenical one of socialism, and in turn he was accused of individualism. Which vision is the one to accept in this context?

To my mind both viewpoints are one-sided. Christianity which does not begin with the individual does not really begin. But Christianity which ends with the individual really does end. For this reason the task of the Christian as regards structural or social injustice should be emphasised.

### 13.6.9 Combatting structural evil

In earlier times Christianity was exclusively concerned with personal vices, or the harm that one individual could cause another. Today there is a reverse obsession: an increasing pre-occupation with institutional violence.

This has gone so far that the older generation tends to think that, because they do not smoke, drink, swear, lie or fornicate, they are faultless - despite the fact that they participate in big companies which exploit the poor of this world. On the other hand, young activists argue that because they fight for the rights of minority groups and against economic exploitation of the poor, they are just - in spite of a personally sinful sexual life.

What is the Biblical reply? It is very clear that God condemns *all* sins: personal sins or vices (such as drunkenness, sexual vices, lying, deception, stealing, idolatry) as well as sins within the social system (oppression, violence, exploitation, social injustice). There are no *big* or *little* sins in His eyes. Were one to deprive one's labourers of a fair wage, one is as guilty as a bank robber.

It is very important to be aware of structural evil for the following three reasons:

- In the first place it is necessary because we have not yet been made conscious to a sufficient extent of this form of sin against God. This is probably because we still insist on interpreting the Gospel in an

individualistic fashion. (Only my personal salvation is at stake.) We have to realize that sinful structures are just as abhorrent to God. Read Isaiah and Amos in this context!

- In the second place social evil concerns many people. Many suffer, for example, when the state does not fulfil its task of impartial justice for everybody.
- In the third place structural evil often operates very subtly. One's eyes have to be opened to recognise this, as it might seem natural by virtue of having been legalised. Often there is no sign of direct oppression - the wielders of power and the rich simply neglect their duty to do something about the plight of the poor.

Here too we find extremes. On the one hand Ecumenicals twist the Biblical truth when they suggest that to know God means nothing more than to find justice for the oppressed. This is unbiblical humanism. On the other hand many Evangelical Christians prefer to forget that social justice has to prevail. They are quite happy to talk piously about eternal life. They forget that knowing God is linked indissolubly to a honest quest for social justice. Should we neglect to help those in need, we cannot have God's love - no matter what we say.

It will gain us nothing to have a pure doctrine regarding incarnation, resurrection, ascension and the advent of Christ while denying the other parts of the Bible where God does say that He wants nothing to do with our religion because we do not practice justice (cf. for example Amos 5:21-24). Such a one-sidedness in theology is just as heretical as having a wrong conception of the dual nature of Christ!

### **13.6.10 No more than preliminary signs**

In the conversation at the beginning of the chapter the Ecumenical speaker accused the Evangelical of pious resignation (quietism). In turn he was accused of activist radicalism. Both these extremes have to be avoided in the work of the church in the world. The kingdom of God is already in our midst, but still has to be perfected. We live in the interim period: between the first and second advent of Christ.

We may not underestimate the presence of Christ and His kingdom in the world. That would imply a retreat from the world, while we seek our comfort and consolation in the intimacy of our personal spiritual lives, our families and our church. We then accept the *status quo* too easily, forgetting that Christ sent us into the world to salt the insipid and to shine a light in the dark. Quietism is not Biblically defensible.

Activist radicalism, on the other hand, is also not Biblical. This group would, if necessary with violence, realise the coming age now. They do not realise that the church can at most establish signs of the kingdom of God on earth. They forget that Christ did not command us to *establish* His kingdom but to *await* it (Acts. 1:7). The consummation of the salvation of God cannot be accomplished by our own efforts - not even our best works - but only through his final intervention (Romans 8:18-25; Revelations 20-22).

\* \* \*

In this chapter we have had a look at the axle (the church) and five of the spokes of the diagram explained above: friendship, marriage, family, school and business. We have come to realise how great the responsibility is that we as members of the church and as citizens of God's kingdom have. However, our calling in God's kingdom includes even more. It also entails our responsibilities as citizens or members of the government of a state - the area of politics. The next chapter as a whole will deal with this powerful social relationship from a Christian worldview perspective.

## Chapter 14

# GOVERNMENT AND CITIZEN IN A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The winds of change are sweeping across our continent in this last decade of the 20th century. One of the areas where these winds often develop into hurricanes is the political. Therefore nobody escapes its effects. Politics influences the whole of African society: from the simple farmer in a remote rural area to the sophisticated businessman in the city, not only the political conscious but also the so-called a-political citizen, both members of government and subjects.

Because many people - even Christians - in Africa still doubt whether religion - also the Christian religion - should have any influence on politics, we will start this chapter with a brief discussion of this issue. And because we approach the issue from a Christian perspective, we will have to listen to what the Bible has to say about the state (both government and citizen). This will be followed by a more detailed study of the responsibility of the citizen when a government does not rule according to God's will: may he indicate his protest in the form of civil disobedience? May he use violence? Because new forms or types of government are under discussion or already implemented all over Africa, we will devote the last section of this chapter to the issue of democracy in Africa.

### 14.1 INTRODUCTION: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN AFRICA

A recent issue (nr. 9, July-December 1991) of the *Newsletter* of the Akrofi-Christaller Centre in Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana discusses the issue of politics and religion. It draws attention to two assumptions which are widely accepted in Africa today: (1) that the problem of political instability in modern Africa has nothing to do with traditional religion and (2) that the Christian faith has no business with politics. According to the (anonymous) writer these assumptions could not be further from the truth. It is worthwhile to hear what he has to say about both assumptions.

### 14.1.1 The religious roots of political instability

The author's argument develops as follows: "It is well known that African indigenous political organisations tended to sacralise human power, and strong centralised rule was embodied in a sacral ruler, who thus united religious and political power in his person. Perhaps there is no more potent symbol of this sacralisation of human power than the tradition of the ancestor cult, which in many African societies is also made the guarantor of the authority of reigning monarchs. By presuming the power of rulers to be that of ancestors, the tradition makes every challenge to political authority an attack upon the sacral authority of the ancestors, on whose goodwill and favour the community's continuance and prosperity are held to depend. Therefore, to challenge political authority in any radical way, appears to mean subverting tradition and customs; indeed, it amounts to undermining the very foundations of the identity and continuity of the community itself ... Much of the sacral prestige which attached to traditional rule has been shed, but sacralisation of political power has found its way into the new ideologies of states. The seemingly inexorable drift of African politics into instability may have less to do with the alleged non-workability of 'imported' constitutions and electoral systems, than with secular versions of the old sacral power structures. The ready justification in some quarters of the one party state, the uncertain fortunes of political dissent and the holding on to power by unpopular leaders, all suggest that we still encounter in modern African politics the 'old' royal ancestor who never ceases to rule from the realm of spirit power ... Therefore, if African politics is to manifest greater tolerance of dissent and to accept a wider pluralism, African societies are going to need new concepts of power" (p. 6).

I think the writer's honesty should be appreciated: he has not covered up or idealised traditional African culture and religion. He is right on target when he says that the African idea of power should be changed. In his rejection of the second wrong assumption (that Christianity has no business with politics) he also clearly indicates that the Bible can provide in this new concept of power. Let us therefore hear how he answers the second wrong assumption.

### 14.1.2 Christianity and politics

To counter this wrong assumption the author indicates the strong influence of Christianity on the political scene in Africa:

- Christian faith has been a desacralising force in the world, and Christianity in Africa has been no exception.
- Christianity had a great impact on political life through its introduction of formal education.
- It has brought a unique message of the inalienable rights and freedom of the human person.
- Christianity has played a key role in the emergence of freedom and democracy in the modern world and in Africa.
- He concludes by saying (p 7.) "... Christianity produced virtually the whole of the first crop of independent Africa's political leadership in the 1940's and 1950's. The fact that some of them later rejected Christianity, does not invalidate this assessment of the debt of that generation of African politicians to the values inherent in the Christian faith."

According to our writer politics has to do with people and the organisation of social life. It is therefore unthinkable that it will not be of deep concern to the God who created us. Politics *is* God's business and ultimately all of us are accountable to Him in the conduct of political life. Therefore the Scriptures give plenty of examples of leaders and prophetic figures like, for instance, Moses and Daniel who challenged and called to account the holders of political power - whether they be the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt, the Emperor of Babylon or the kings of Israel themselves.

As we will see in the next section (14.2), he also indicates that Christ did not align himself to any one of the political parties of His day. And when Christ tells Pontius Pilate "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), He does not mean that it has nothing to do with the world, but that his concept of kingship and power is *qualitatively* different from that of Pilate.

The author summarises the position of Christ as follows:



"... Jesus' way was one of engagement and involvement through a new way of overcoming, arising from a unique concept of power - the power of forgiveness over retaliation, of suffering over violence, of love over hostility, of humble service over domination - all supremely exemplified in His death on the Cross ..." (p. 5). "For the mind of Jesus, as related to the questions of politics and power, is *not* a dominating mind, *not* a self-pleasing or self-asserting mind, but rather a saving mind, a redemptive mind, a servant-mind. 'For Christ did not please himself' (Romans 15:3). Jesus' way of dealing with political power represents the perfect de-sacralisation of all worldly power ..." (p. 7). "This understanding of power will always remain a significant Christian contribution to politics in any society, particularly those which are feeling their way towards a true and genuine sharing in political power. For African societies with their own distinctive political and religious background, faith in Jesus Christ as alone Lord and Mediator of blessings and power, frees political leaders to become true human beings among fellow human beings, and ennoble politics itself into a service of God in the service of fellow human beings" (p. 6).

I fully agree with this Christian from Ghana when he stresses throughout his article that African societies and politics need a new concept of power and that the Word of God can provide in that need in the form of a non-dominating concept of power. What he advocates is in full agreement with and underlines what has already been said in Chapter 10 (sections 10.5 and 10.6) about office, authority and power in *service* of our fellowmen.

It is therefore not wrong to say that "politics is about power". There is nothing wrong with power as such. God even granted government the power of the sword! A state will not be able to function without some power. The question, however, is: *What kind* of power? In *which way* is the power to be executed?

Let us therefore have a more detailed look at what the Bible has to say about political issues.

## 14.2 CHRIST AND POLITICS

In the time of Christ's sojourn on earth it was impossible to remain above politics. Everyone was drawn into it, because Israel was under the yoke of foreign suppression, of the powerful Roman Empire. Political issues made out an important part of daily conversation. The involvement of the ordinary citizen, however, was not confined to inciting speeches, tomatoes and rotten eggs and a few fist fights - the situation was serious enough for blood to flow.

### 14.2.1 The political scene

The party political situation within Palestine of about 30 A.D. can be typified in the following terms:

The wilderness people (the Essenes and the people of Qumran) *retreated or fled* from the situation. Although some researchers feel that they did not withdraw completely from the struggle against the Roman suppressor, but instead incited the people to rebellion, and even participated themselves, this group still largely retreated in order to live in peaceful isolation in the desert.

The Herodians were supporters of the House of Herod. *Acceptance* of the Roman reign was thus their approach.

The publicans and the tax-gatherers (of whom we read so much in the New Testament) were not necessarily Herodians, but they did, perhaps in spite of deep personal reservations, go along with the Roman invader from a financial point of view. It is for that reason that their profession was so contemptible in the eyes of the Jews. Even today the taxman is not the most popular of personalities!

It would also seem as if another group, the Sadducees, were not only religious liberals but were also strongly pro-Roman as regards politics. This group had strong representation among the scribes and the high priests.

*Retreat* (Essenes) and *acceptance* (Herodians and Sadducees) - was there no rebellion among the ranks of the Jews against the invader? Yes - there very definitely were groups campaigning for *change*.

The Pharisees were the religious conservatives. For this very reason they were politically strongly anti-Roman. Their dissatisfaction with Roman rule was not revealed in any militant or aggressive manner, however. This is linked to the fact that they did not expect to be freed from Roman rule before the advent of the Messiah. They expected a secular, military Messiah who would throw off the yoke of Roman suppression. This party was also, like the Sadducees, strongly represented among the scribes of the day.

The Zealots were the activists, the revolutionary military movement of the day. This freedom movement could not accept the Roman yoke and resisted actively as well as passively.

What would be the attitude of Christ in the context of such a divided nation?

#### **14.2.2 The ranks of the disciples**

One could accept that Christ would choose his disciples, who would later become the apostles, with great care. It is most noticeable that the disciples were not drawn from the ranks of only one or the other of the above parties. Apart from Jewish fishermen there were disciples under Greek influence (as emerges from the names Phillip and Andrew), a former publican (Levi or Matthew) and possibly even two Zealot terrorists (Simon the Zealot or "the other Simon", meaning not Simon Peter, and Judas Iscariot). This is apart from the two "sons of the thunder", John and James, who wanted to have the Samaritans devoured with fire (Luke 9:54) and who wanted so much to flank Christ's (earthly?) throne. Of course one may not deduce from this that Christ tried to establish a compromise between the groups or even that he sympathised with one group in particular, such as the Zealots. The fact that He concerned Himself with fallen women and sinners does not mean that He approved of their sins! He was not interested in *approval* but in *conversion*.

The only valid conclusions that can be drawn from the fact of the diversity to be found in the ranks of the disciples is that Christ did not express a preference for any one party in making up the group.

### 14.2.3 Temptations to be a political Messiah

In the desert Satan already started this temptation. He wanted to obstruct Christ and to prevent Him from fulfilling the task for which He had come to earth, viz. the forgiveness of sin. For this very reason the temptation to accept the secular Messiahship offered by the Devil was so very strong (Matthew 4:8,9). Satan here suggests that Christ should fulfil the ideal of the Pharisees and the Zealots, but He refuses, telling Satan to get himself out of His way.

In the conversation with the disciples on the road to Cesarea Philippi Satan in the guise of Peter appeared to offer the same temptation. When Christ explained to His disciples that He would be rejected by the elders, the high priests and the scribes and that He would die, Peter rebelled against the idea. From this it appears that even Peter, with his sincere confession that Christ was the Messiah, still implicitly hoped that He would be a secular and political saviour, not a suffering saviour but a triumphant fighter. For this reason Christ rebukes him with the same words he used for Satan in the desert: "Get away from me, Satan. Your thoughts don't come from God but from man!" (Mark 8:33).

After the meal for the 5 000 the crowd wanted to crown Him king (John 6:15). When He noticed this, however, He went up the mountain alone to escape from their importunities.

At the triumphant entry of Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-44) they unrolled the red carpet (their clothing) and the excited crowd welcomed their king with song and jubilation. This induced Christ to weep for Jerusalem, because the people did not realize that He had come to save them in an entirely different fashion. He entered the city on an ass - a sign that He came in peace and had no military intentions. Should he have had Zealotic sympathies He would surely have entered the city on horseback, as became a fighter.

When it became clear that Christ was not about to fulfil their human hopes of being a militant Messiah, many of His earlier supporters turned their backs on Him and some even became His bitterest enemies. This disappointment is perhaps the reason why Judas Iscariot betrayed Him.

Christ was not after this exempt from this type of temptation. Up to the last moments of His life He was tortured with such temptations. The Roman soldiers mocked Him: "Save yourself if you are the King of the Jews" (Luke 23:37). Even one of the criminals crucified along with Him (most probably a Zealot rebel) taunted Him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39).

This temptation to be a secular, political Messiah is not limited to the cross and to outsiders. Just prior to his ascension, the disciples still came with the question: "Lord, will you at this time give the kingdom back to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Here too He terminated the discussion abruptly, as it did not fall within their province to know what God had ordained for the nation of Israel. The *but* in verse 8 clearly indicates that they would have a completely different task in future: they would not be political adjutants or freedom fighters, but rather disseminators of the Gospel.

#### 14.2.4 Christ and the sword

When Christ says, in Matthew 10:34: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world. No, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword", the use of the word *sword* does not indicate that He came as a sympathiser with the terrorism of the Zealots. From the following verses it becomes clear that He means that acceptance and rejection of the Gospel would bring division even within the same family. (In Luke 12:51 mention is made of *division* rather than *sword*.)

But what does Christ mean when He tells His disciples: "... and whoever has no sword, must sell his coat and buy one"? (Luke 22:36-38). Is this not a clear call to the weapon? I doubt it. The short sword that He meant in this context belonged to the outfit of any Jewish traveller as protection against robbers and wild animals. Even the Essenes wore these swords and some rabbis even approved the carrying of these on the Sabbath.

But why then does He encourage his disciples to buy swords? This links up with the idea expressed in Matthew 10:34, in which He cautions them not to think that they will necessarily always be able to carry out their calling in peace and quiet.

Apparently the disciples misconstrued his words in this context also. Perhaps they thought that He was inciting them to armed resistance. For this reason, when they produced two swords, He decided that it would suffice. He could not possibly have meant that two swords would supply adequate protection, but He ended the conversation with this response.

From what happened later in Gethsemane one can clearly deduce that Christ did not have armed resistance in mind. Only the impetuous Peter handled a sword. But the negligible damage (Malchus' ear) is repaired by Christ Himself and Peter is rebuked with the words: "Put your sword back in its place. All who take the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

It is a great truth which is spoken here: violent action only begets more violent action, revolution cannot bring peace - it only begets more revolution.

Finally, had Christ been a sympathiser with the Zealot cause, the Jews would not have been content to capture Him and to let His disciples go - they would have captured them all.

#### **14.2.5 Condemned as a rebel - without having been one**

Upon His capture by the high priests, elders and temple guard in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ inquired of them whether He was a dangerous robber to make them take out their swords. He challenged them to prove that He, who had mingled with them in the temple day after day, could be any other than a peaceful Man (Luke 22:52,53).

The fact that He was convicted by the Roman authorities, condemned by Pontius Pilate, and that He even had a superscription mounted on the cross, has made many people think that He died a dangerous terrorist, imperilling the safety of the state. Whoever reads the account in the Gospels carefully, however, cannot fail to notice the truth.

It was His own people, the Jews, who sought to remove Him. They could no longer endure His actions on religious-social matters. One would have to look at this carefully so that a clear understanding might emerge of why His own people harboured homicidal tendencies towards

Him. As regards religion, He clashed with the hypocrisy and pride of the Pharisees and the scribes. He also clashed with them about the laws governing the Sabbath. The fact that He claimed to be the Son of God and could thus forgive sins they regarded as a preposterous imposture. His association with publicans and sinners in social situations further galled them. Apart from that, of course, they were simply disappointed to have to accept that such a docile Man could be their Messiah - He would surely be unable to fulfil the rugged task required of Him.

Christ was tried by the Jewish Council first of all as regards His religious convictions. After a great deal of false evidence had been presented, they convicted Him of blasphemy - a crime meriting the death sentence in those days - because He claimed to be the Son of God, the Christ (Matthew 26:62-66). Seeing that the Jews could not exact the death penalty themselves - this was the prerogative of the Roman suppressor (John 18:31) - Pilate had to confirm this sentence. Because, they knew, however, that a religious charge would make no impression on the pagan Roman, they came with political charges. According to Luke 23:2 He was charged in Pilate's presence with being a danger to the state. They claimed that He incited the people (like Zealot terrorists), stopping them from paying their taxes to the emperor on the ground that He was the Christ and the King. In verse 5 the Jews repeated the charge that He was an inciter, a seditious against the authority of the Romans.

Upon Pilate's query as to whether He was the King of the Jews, He replied (according to Matthew, Mark and Luke): "It is as you say." One could also interpret it as meaning "You are saying so, not I". According to the Gospel of John, Christ also asked of Pilate whether he asked the question on his own behalf or on the behalf of others, meaning the Jews. He then reassured Pilate by explaining that even though He was a King, His kingdom was not of this world. Otherwise His subjects would surely have fought to prevent Him from being handed over to Pilate (John 18:36).

Pilate satisfied himself that Christ did not constitute a threat to the Roman empire. Pilate did not regard Him as a danger to the state. It is explicitly stated in the Bible that Pilate could find no guilt in Him. He knew that the Jews had charged Him out of vindictive motives. He tried everything to release Him from their claws. He offered to have Him

flogged and then released. They could also choose who they wanted to be released: Barabbas, a Zealot rebel who had committed a murder in the course of an insurrection and who was in prison in the company of other rebels, or Christ. All to no avail: the Jews even undertook to assume the responsibility for His crucifixion for themselves and for future generations.

In the sentence that Pilate imposes, the proud Roman bends to the will of the Jews, whom he really despises deeply. Out of fear for the displeasure of the Jews and the emperor (cf. John 19:12) and against his conscience and his judgment he hands the Innocent over to His tormentors to be executed.

On the way to Golgotha the women wept for Him. Jesus rebuked them gently: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children ... For if they do these things to a green tree, what shall be done to the dry?" (Luke 23:28,31).

With these words Christ attempts to warn the people. If the Romans could do this to Him, the green wood, who is not a Zealot yet is treated as one, what would they not do to the dry wood, the real Zealots who would actively resist the power of Rome? Prophetically Christ foresaw what would happen 40 years later, in 70 A.D., in Jerusalem. The city would be razed and not three, but hundreds of crosses would be erected for the Jewish rebels.

On the cross Pilate had a sign affixed that read in three languages that Christ was the King of the Jews. The Jews objected, however. They wanted it to read that He *claimed* to be the King of the Jews. They did not want to be associated with a Messiah who allowed Himself to be pinned to the cross without opposing the Romans ...

#### **14.2.6 Should we pay to Caesar that which is Caesar's?**

In order to point out just how falsely the Jews accused Him of inciting the people not to pay their taxes (Luke 23:2), we might look at this matter in more detail.

It would seem as if at this stage the various opposing parties descended upon Him in a concerted effort to have Him destroyed. The Parisees



and Herodians tackled Him first (Matthew 22:15-22). Then the Sadducees tried to trap Him (Matthew 22:23-33). When they were sufficiently countered, a scribe followed (Matthew 22:34-40). He had barely slunk away before the Pharisees started again (Matthew 22:41-46). It is no wonder that the following chapter contains the account of his terrible denunciation and condemnation of these people.

We limit ourselves here to Matthew 22:15-22. Here the Pharisees try to trap Him with a trick question. This time they do not come themselves but send as their emissaries apparently innocent and eager pupils. The question, as well as the anticipated answer, demands that the Herodians should accompany them, however, for Christ might reply that it would be unjustifiable to pay taxes to the emperor, and then the Herodians, collaborators of the Roman overlord, would be able to hear it with their own ears.

*Teacher* was the accustomed form of address in those days for an educated man, a rabbi. They approach Him as an expert and expect a professional answer. They use gross flattery: "Express your opinion", they say, "without considering persons. Be truthful." Christ is clearly being tempted not to conceal anything that He might think. They present Him with a dilemma that He cannot come out of were He to be truthful. He would have to choose one side or the other. Little do they know that He would not choose either of the possibilities they have prepared for Him so carefully.

Whoever reads this passage in the Bible today cannot begin to realise the extent of the expectation, the height of the tension, that prevailed on this occasion.

The question as phrased was one of the most dangerous questions anybody could be confronted with. In those days only the subjugated nations paid taxes. In this case it was a sign of Roman domination over Palestine. For any Jew with the least bit of national pride it was a sore insult, because the act of paying tax implied an acceptance of the reality of the dominion. In the name of the Roman Empire, Herod bled the Jews and enriched himself to a great extent. The emperor was satisfied, after all, with what reached him eventually. (Later on, however, matters tended to get out of hand so that the emperor decided to have a census taken so that a country could not be grossly over- or

undertaxed.) Judas the Galilean, leader of the Zealots, tried to incite the Jews not to pay taxes. This protest was justified on economic grounds (they were exploited if not looted), as well as politically (as it constituted a sign of subjugation), and on religious grounds (only God was their King, not any heathen monarch).

The fact that Jesus' inquisitors belonged to two of the most important Jewish parties further heightened the tension. The Pharisees, who were not completely uninvolved politically, as they were expecting a political Jewish saviour, would most certainly not be in favour of paying taxes. They would not say this in public, however. The Herodians, as we already know, accepted the matter resignedly. These two warring factions were for the moment united in their quest to destroy Christ.

This highly inflammatory question is aimed at Christ in a period pregnant with unrest (Lent) in a place (Jerusalem) where the tensions of the country as a whole are concentrated. This also happens at the time when the decisive moment in Christ's earthly sojourn is rapidly approaching. Thus it is a potentially explosive situation.

In this tense atmosphere the Pharisees ask the question with theological motives (as the Zealots have done), while the Herodians ask it with political motives. It seemed to be a foolproof trap. Should He answer *yes*, the Pharisees could attack Him on theological grounds because it would mean that He did not acknowledge God as the sole King of the Jews. Should He answer *no*, the Herodians would brand Him a rebel. And He would have to answer either *yes* or *no* - or so they reasoned ...

It is superfluous even to say that the inquisitors were not serious about receiving an answer. Their ostensible desire to have a professional verdict from a rabbi devoted to the truth did not deceive Him. Each of the groups knew in advance exactly what their own answer would be.

#### **14.2.7 The unmasking**

In spite of the fact that Christ recognises the spuriousness of their attitude and points it out to them, He still regards the question as worthy of an answer. He does not argue or discuss the matter, but with Socratic irony He asks to be handed a silver dinar, the coin used in those days to pay the taxes.

"Show Me the coin." He knew well enough what it looked like, but had an educational purpose with the request. In this way He demonstrated, without recourse to complicated theological argument, the concrete situation in which they found themselves. The truth of the matter is that they carry around the Roman coin in their pockets. Christ could have taken one of the coins out of His pocket or the pockets of any of His disciples. Instead He wanted them to take one out shamefacedly and thus acknowledge that they used the Roman coin to buy what they needed.

"Whose image, whose name, is on this coin?" This too He knew, but He had to fulfil the unmasking process.

According to scholars it was not a dinar of Augustus but of Tiberius, the ruler of those days. On the one side of the coin there was a head of Tiberius, decorated with a laurel wreath - the sign of his divinity. The complete inscription (without abbreviations) read: *Tiberius Caesar divi Augusti filius Augustus* (Emperor Tiberius, son of the divine Augustus, himself august). On the obverse side the inscription is completed with the Latin words *Pontifex Maximus* (High Priest). The inscription clearly spells out that Tiberius regarded himself as of divine descent, a god and at the same time the highest priest. On this side there was also an image of Julia Augusta (Livia), Tiberius' mother, sitting on the throne of the gods, holding in her right hand the Olympic sceptre and in her left hand an olive branch - a sign that she was the worldly incarnation of the heavenly. Tiberius' divinity is thus proclaimed from the side of both his father and his mother.

This coin - like all coins from antiquity - may not be compared with the meaningless coins of our day. A modern coin is no more than an instrument of barter. In antiquity it was much more. It was the newspaper, radio and television of the day, an instrument of political propaganda through which rulers introduced their ideas and their political programmes. A war of ideas was not an unknown concept to them. Through inscriptions and images their opponents were deliberately bombarded with propaganda.

This was also the case with the dinar, the leading coin of the day. What appears on this coin elevates it to a symbol of power as well as veneration.

It was a symbol of power, because it was a sign of imperial power, at that time spanning the whole of the known world. As the uniform coin for all the parts of the empire, serving as a standard for all the local currencies, it was also a symbol of the economic power of the Romans. (The *signum* of the emperor guaranteed its value). The fact that it was the prescribed coin for taxes also pointed to the absolute power of the *imperium Romanum*. To summarise, the dinar was a symbol of power in three senses: it symbolised the emperor's majesty, guarantee and right of possession.

Coin and power/authority were synonymous in those days. Each ruler then sealed his assumption of power by having his own coins made and putting on them the symbols (images and inscriptions) that would support his power and authority. It goes without saying then that the Jews knew the significance of what appeared on the dinar very well.

Tiberius's dinar in the second place constituted a symbol of veneration. It had cultic significance. The religious character was portrayed in the images and inscriptions mentioned above. Tiberius stresses with them that both his parents, and thus himself, were divine (*augustus* meaning divine or exalted). Tiberius was very strict: anyone who did not treat the imperial dinar with the necessary respect could be given a death sentence for committing criminal sacrilege.

#### **14.2.8 The attitude of the Jews**

Naturally the Jews were extremely sensitive as regards this aspect of the Roman coin. We read that Nahum of Tiberias never looked at the image engraved on a coin in his life. The revolutionary messiah, Bar Kochba, had all the imperial dinars collected, the images and the inscriptions removed and everything replaced with the images of things from the temple and with Hebrew inscriptions.

It should be clear now that the coin produced shamefacedly by Christ's inquisitors was not merely a simple little coin. It was a combination in symbolic form of Roman political and religious power.

Christ knew that the Jewish moneychangers wore the dinar in their ears on weekdays as a sign of their profession. He had also seen these coins lying piled on tables in the temple. He knew the ambiguous position

that the people occupied: on the one hand they had sincere contempt for the coin of the oppressor, on the other hand they had to accept it resignedly, for who could live without using money?

In this simple little coin the entire dilemma of the Jewish nation is symbolised. The shining bit of silver on the outstretched palm reflects the question right back to the inquisitors themselves. In masterly fashion Christ exposes their duplicity and their hypocrisy. If they still had any conscience the coin would have scorched the hand of whoever had taken it out.

It is no wonder that they reluctantly have to concede that the head of the emperor appears on the coin. They deliberately refer only to the most harmless description, choosing still to avoid talking about the religious and political power with which the emperor was invested.

Their integrity was gone, however. The mere fact that they had imperial coins in their pockets was enough to unmask them as hypocrites. Their acceptance of the imperial dinar as coin meant an implicit acceptance of the need to pay the taxes.

It also meant an acceptance of the power of the man who stood behind the issue of this coin. They had no right, therefore, to ask the question with which they had confronted Christ.

Christ merely underlined the full meaning by telling them to grant the emperor that which he was entitled to. The Jews had no foundation for not paying the tax, they used the Roman coinage themselves. It brought security into the monetary system, something which had not always been the case. Were they, however, to continue to enjoy the monetary benefits of the Roman occupation, they had no right to be parasites. They also had to be prepared to do something in return - in the sense of paying taxes. (The technical term used for *paying taxes* literally meant *to give back*.)

They had no political grounds for refusing to pay taxes, for they used the imperial coin in spite of the fact that it carried images of the emperor.

They also had no religious grounds for refusing, because they allowed the coin into the temple while they knew that the images and inscriptions engraved on it symbolised and propagated pagan beliefs.

#### 14.2.9 Emperor and God

Christ is thus no dangerous rebel. He acknowledged the rights of the emperor. He thus warns the anti-imperialists, the Pharisees.

Does this mean that He sided with the pro-imperialists, the Herodians? No, He admonished them too. He does not join either of the parties. Were Christ to stop short at saying that they had to give the emperor his due, the Herodians might have been justified in thinking that He supported their view and then the Pharisees could have accused Him of not regarding God's power as the only real power. Thus He continues by saying that they have to give God what is due to God.

"And (but) to God what is due to Him ..." Were one to translate the *and* by *but* (the Greek word *kai* can be translated copulatively as well as in opposition) the contrast is even stronger. Christ means in reality to say to the Herodians that they have to remember that the emperor is not the only power, as God is also to be kept in mind. This reply does not end with the emperor's power as the one thing around which the whole of life revolves. It ends with what is most important: the claim that God has on man.

Christ thus answers neither *yes* nor *no*. His reply transcends the false dilemma with which the Jews sought to trap Him. He accepts the *symbol of authority*. He rejects, however, using the short epigrammatic style so beloved by the Jews, the *symbol of veneration*. He does this not negatively but positively. He does not see it as a dilemma in the sense of paying to either God or the emperor. He also does not try to effect a diplomatic compromise.

Much more is locked up in the pregnant words of Christ than is evident at first glance. One is not justified, for example, in deducing from these words that He regards the emperor and God as being on the same level. When He orders them to pay back to the emperor that to which he is entitled, it also means that it would be *no more* than his due. If more were to be demanded, it should be refused. Christ *defends* the emperor

but He also *limits* his authority. He may not demand anything which will clash with the absolute demand of God. Subjects may not go overboard with the rights of the emperor any more than the emperor is allowed to presume the rights of God.

As He often does, Christ uses irony in this situation. What should one give to the emperor? His own coin. But to God we give what is his rightful possession - our *whole* lives. *Everything* belongs to God. We are merely lessees. He therefore has the right to ask us to give *ourselves* to Him.

Man has to be loyal to the emperor, but the state has no right to stand in the way of one's loyalty to God. The *but* used by Christ in His epigrammatic answer relativises man's obligations to secular power, for state absolutism is against the will of God.

What Christ is trying to teach us is that both God and secular authority have to be obeyed. Secular authority is also ordained by God. The two are not mutually exclusive. I can call Christ my King and still be obedient to the reigning government. The kingdom of heaven is not a political power in concurrence with earthly regimes. It is something totally different from all the kingdoms of the world.

Earthly kings may not interfere in divine matters in the sense that they obstruct subjects wishing to serve God. In the same sense the church of Christ may not degenerate into a bunch of rebels against the secular authority. Man's task is to respect legal authority and to pray for those in authority.

Could the Pharisees and the Herodians have been anything other than stunned and not have left as quickly as possible? (Matthew 22:22). Christ knew that the *imperium Dei* (the coming of the kingdom of God) was the whole purpose underlying the history of Israel. The *imperium Caesaris* (the empire of the Roman emperor) was the road along which they had to move to achieve this end, however painful and humiliating the proud Jews found this.

But the Pharisees and the Herodians *did not want* to accept this truth. They decided in advance what the true answer had to be, but this would in both cases be a biased and therefore a false answer. They went away

to follow the way they themselves had chosen: a way either of obedience to the emperor (and disobedience to God) or of obedience to God (and disobedience to the emperor) which also meant disobedience to their historical calling - a way which culminated in a terrible catastrophe in 70 A.D.

Christ already knew this when he entered Jerusalem, and it filled Him with great grief, so that He wept (Luke 19:41). Because the people chose not to listen to Him, Jerusalem would be destroyed, not one stone left on the other.

#### **14.2.10 Christ's true stature**

From the foregoing parts of the Scriptures, it is very clear that Christ consistently rejected violence and rebellion. It was not a sign of weakness but rather of strength, because He did not need to use violence in the kingdom in which He reigned. The world is never improved by hatred, terror, torture and murder.

One could thus not infer from Christ's attitude towards the political issues of His day that He was an activist Zealot. This does not mean that He automatically had to be a Herodian. (He did not hesitate to refer to Herod as a cunning fox - Luke 13:32.) It does not mean that He kept his distance from all political matters, as did the people of the Wilderness. (When the Jews confronted Him with the tax question He did not evade the issue.) Christ was neither Pharisee nor Herodian, Zealot nor Sadducee. He could not be classified with any of these groups. He teaches something totally new and different.

In recapitulation we could say that two points are very clear from the life of Christ: (1) one should be obedient to the government, but (2) one sometimes has to be more obedient to God than to the earthly authorities. This is not only clear in Christ's teaching, but also from the rest of the new Testament. In 57 A.D. Paul wrote to a congregation suffering under the yoke of Nero in Rome: "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Romans 13:7. See also 1 Timothy 2:1,2; 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Titus 3:1). But in Acts 4:19 Peter replied to the Jewish Council which wanted to forbid him from preaching the Gospel: "You yourselves judge which is right in God's



sight - to obey you or to obey God". Similarly in Acts 5:29 he insists that "We ought to obey God rather than men".

It is not always easy to know *when* one should rather disobey a government. In section 14.3 we will first have a look at *obedience* to a government and then (section 14.4) we will discuss the issue of when one has the right to be *disobedient*.

### **14.3 ROMANS 13:1-7 ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND CITIZENS**

Each one of us is a citizen of a state on the basis of birth. We have to deal with the government of our country every single day of our lives. The political policies of other countries also have an influence on the policies of our own countries.

#### **14.3.1 Introduction**

It is therefore important that we should ask ourselves the question: why such a thing as a state? Keeping in mind the terrible crimes which governments all over the world - also in Africa - committed in the past, should we not rather try to live without the state? Does the Bible regard the state as necessary? Let us hear the answer of Romans 13:1-7 to this question.

Naturally it would be preferable to check the entire Bible when dealing with our question of "Why the state?" That would be impossible, however, in the space at our disposal. We have to limit ourselves to the New Testament, and to one crucial section, viz. Romans 13:1-7. Other relevant texts in the New Testament include Matthew 22:15-22 (discussed in the previous section); Luke 22:36-38; John 19:11; Acts 4:19 and 5:29; I Corinthians 6:1-11; I Timothy 2:1,2; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13-17 and Revelation 13.

Before we discuss the contents of Romans 13, first something about the background, audience and context.

#### **14.3.2 Background**

From Acts 18:2 we can deduce that the Emperor Claudius persecuted the Jews in Rome. This could also have been the case with Christians

from other national groups. It could equally be true that among the Christians in the capital of the mighty Roman Empire there could have been rebellious elements. They could have argued that, after their acceptance of Christ as their King they did not need to be subjugated to a secular king - albeit the mighty emperor of Rome. In this the revolutionary Jewish groups in Palestine, who refused to pay taxes to the heathen emperor (cf. previous section) set them an example.

### 14.3.3 Audience

When Paul deals with the state, he turns to the subjects first of all. In Romans 13 he does not deal directly with the other facet of political life, viz. the government. One should, by the way, be careful not to regard state and government as the same thing. Just as the parents are not the whole family and the church council is not the congregation, the state government is not the complete state, but only the office-bearers. Historically this focus on the subjects primarily is understandable because few Christians then filled positions in government. From the Bible we know of one case only, viz. Theophilus, addressed by Luke in 1:1 as "Excellency" (*kratiste*).

If these and other texts in the New Testament then deal only with the duties of the subjects, does Scripture say nothing about the responsibilities of governments? Implicitly, it does. Paul could not deal with the duties of the citizen without saying something about the task of the rulers and the purpose of state authority.

It is important, however, to keep in mind that Paul writes about the Roman Empire with its pagan cult of the emperor, and that he strives to indicate to his readers specifically what their attitude as Christian subjects should be in such a situation. For this reason, all the more, one is struck by the positive attitude that the apostle is here assuming towards the state.

His quite positive vision of the state is often contrasted with the dark portrayal of the bestial power of the state in Revelations 13. Paul's clear appreciation then would be directly in opposition to the somber pessimism and clear disqualification of John. The remarkable fact is that both men wrote against the background of the Roman Empire. Could it perhaps be because Paul as a Roman citizen was still enjoying

the protection of the Roman government (various events from his life could be mentioned to substantiate this statement) while John was exposed to all the cruelties of emperors such as Nero, Caligula and Domitian? (The book Romans was written circa 60 AD, while the book Revelations was written much later, between 90 and 100 AD.)

Whatever the reasons were, however, in Romans 13 and Revelations 13 the Bible teaches two sides of the coin regarding the state. It is a good, essential institution of God, a sign of His love and patience with man to ensure that everything does not disintegrate into chaos. On the other hand the state, more than any other social institution, has the tendency to fall into decadence. It is typical of governments, for example, to want to appropriate more power and to want to extend their power to fields other than the political.

They want to become permanent, indispensable and irresistible. The unmistakable trend was - discernible throughout the history of mankind - to establish world empires. This power concentration started with Babel. Then came the empires of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Medes and Persians, Greek-Macedonians and Romans. In our own time we have known of "Britannia rules the waves" and "Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles in der Welt". Today the USA is such a super-power.

Next to Romans 13 we then have Revelations 13 as a warning. There will also be governments who will do the opposite of what is advocated in Romans 13:3: instead of punishing the criminals and praising the virtuous, the evil among men will be praised and the followers of Christ will be persecuted!

#### **14.3.4 Context**

As regards the context or the structural place of Romans 13, it is good to keep in mind the theme of this book is justice through faith. For Paul, however, justice through faith and politics cannot be separated from each other. In this sphere of life too the newness of the Christian has to assume meaningful shape. For us it might seem strange that Paul, while he is dealing with matters of doctrine, should suddenly also begin to deal with matters of a political nature. He, however, finds it

the most natural thing to do, because according to him the faithful need not feel lost in the political jungle!

This becomes even more surprising when one looks at the direct or immediate context of Romans 13:1-7 more closely. In the preceding section of Romans 12 Paul deals with love. Verses like 14, 19 and 20 clearly remind us of the Sermon on the Mount. What he says in closing about love for one's enemies is also a gripping expression of the commandment of Christ. In verse 21 Paul gives a résumé of this in an all-encompassing rule of life: "Do not let evil conquer you, but use good to defeat evil."

And then, without a transitional phrase, almost startlingly, the first words of chapter 13 follow: "Every person must submit to the supreme authorities". What does self-denying love have to do, after all, with hard, even dirty political realities?

It becomes even more surprising if we note that the "political" argument of Romans 13:1-7 in verse 8 once again - without any warning - flows into "Leave no claim outstanding against you, except that of mutual love." (Also read the rest of the passage up to verse 10.)

Romans 13:1-7 therefore is not simply a free-standing *locus classicus* for the Christian's attitude and actions towards the state. Paul puts the Christian's attitude to the government within the framework of love: it is grounded in love and it culminates in love.

This is *the* central point of departure from which one should understand the apostle's ideas about the Christian's attitude towards the state. Christians should owe nobody - not even the state - anything other than love. The submission in obedience to government should spring from love - love for God and one's neighbour.

Generally, in dealing with government, one speaks of justice in contrast to love. Whoever does this, however, does not have Paul on his side. Our attitude towards government authority is not a question merely of justice but in the first place of love. In this sphere too the central commandment of love (cf. verses 9 and 10) should be positivised in a unique manner. (Cf. our previous explanation of diversified love in chapter 10, section 10.1.3.)

This unique approach by the apostle is not merely something that we should remember. It was also quite exceptional for his own time. The attitude in those days towards governing authorities amounted to an idolisation of fear. (Cf. also what he says in verse 3: that one need not have fear.) No, Paul says, one's attitude towards governing authorities should not be negative through fear but should be positively inspired by love. (Cf. also 1 John 4:18a: "There is no room for fear in love; perfect love banishes fear.")

#### 14.3.5 Some flashes from the contents

\* *"Every man has to submit to the authorities set over him".*

The stress is definitely on *every (pasa)* man. Also - yes, especially - the Christian, who might think that it is not necessary for him to honour a secular ruler anymore when he believes in the King of heaven.

\* *"Must subject himself" (hupotassestho).*

This "subject" (or "submit") is a keyword. Does this mean blind, unconditional subjection? According to trustworthy exegetes the stress here should not fall on the *hupo* (meaning *under*), but on the *tassestho*, which means something like "joining in/under the order of", "put oneself in line with". Paul therefore does not issue a command of blind, uncritical subjection, enthrallment to all that government might do.

This does not weaken the demand for obedience, but stresses instead the responsibility of the subject - and government - towards the Source of authority, God. The subject may not dodge his responsibility, but neither may government use Romans 13 to justify state absolutism. The subjects may never (in order to evade their own responsibility) identify themselves with the authorities. Conversely - and this is even more dangerous - the authorities may not identify themselves with the subjects in the sense of "we are only executing their will". It once again underlines the importance of distinguishing clearly. State is not government, but encompasses both subjects and authority. It would therefore be wrong of government to imply "The state, that is me" (a statement made by Louis XIV). In the same way those who obey authority are not the state.

\* *"Authorities (exousias) set over him"*

These do not indicate only political authorities but all institutions of power.

\* *"No authority which does not emanate from God."*

This is not valid only for political life, but also for all social relationships. It does not mean, of course, that the wrong, sinful and wilful execution of authority may now simply be ascribed to God. It does not in the least strive to sanctify the so-called "divine right" with which governments in past eras often strove to justify their claims for infallibility and their craze for power. It also does not mean that government is given power through the majority vote and should therefore only serve the interests of the majority. God ordains the authority, and the state is there for everybody, for the welfare of each and everyone, and this includes minorities.

\* *"Authority ... through the disposal of God ... Whoever sets himself up against authority, also sets himself up against the ordinance of God ..."*

God ordains all authority, all government, as a sign of His love and patience with man. The problem here of course resides in the word "ordination" or "ordinance" (*diatage*). The fact *that* authorities exist was ordained by God, but not *how* they execute their power, in other words their de facto power and authority. Here the emphasis is on the Source of the ordination, viz. God, who appoints authoritatively. This ordination of God thus does not indicate a permanent, divinely sanctioned, static institution, but something dynamic. God uses it to curb sin, but never allows it to leave his hands and ultimately subjects all power and authority to Himself (cf. I Corinthians 15:24).

Would it therefore be wrong to say, in the simplest terms, that we have to obey the authorities, not because they are always *good*, but because they are *indispensable*? If God had not ordained governmental authority, the chaos might have been so great already that man would have killed off his species long ago!

Would Paul in the words "that he who rebels against authority, rebels against God", exclude the right to resistance categorically? Would he want to deny here that it might at times be necessary to obey God before one obeys man? (Acts 4:19 and 5:29). Not at all! What Paul says here is that one should not reject government *as such* by, for instance, advocating anarchy, because the state (with its government) is an institution of God Himself. Paul therefore does not advocate docile acceptance of *bad* government. (See section 14.4 below.)

\* *"One need not fear the authorities if one does good, but if one commits evil deeds, then one would have to fear."*

We have already looked at the fear on which the erstwhile Roman rule was based. Paul says in this context that something as negative as fear should not rule one's relationship with the authorities. Love here has to show itself in the form of positive obedience and respectful submission (cf. the ending of verse 7).

A great deal of speculation has taken place on what exactly is meant by "good" and "evil" in this context. One should perhaps keep in mind that in this instance good and evil would be the type of good or evil which falls under the judgment of the authorities. Therefore the emphasis is on the *wrong deed*, the visible action, and not the deepest *underlying motives*.

How important it is to know what exactly is meant here appears from the experience of the sixteenth century. Then the attitude was that "Christian religion is good, therefore it has to be promoted by the state. False religion and heresy are bad, therefore the government has to obliterate it" (cf. also the problems surrounding Article 36 of the Belgian Confession of Faith).

Once again the context might bring us closer to a solution. In the preceding chapter (12) "evil" is mentioned a few times (verses 17, 19 and 21): never pay back evil for evil, do not seek revenge, but leave a place for divine retribution. How does God judge those who have committed evil against you? Through natural disasters? On Judgment Day only? Perhaps in these ways too. But He does it already now through His servants, viz. the governmental authorities.

I therefore think that the "evil" that is meant here is *public* evil, the injustice that one man can do to another in public. For this reason Paul speaks in the Greek version of *the* evil and *the* good. It is therefore a specific evil deed for which the authorities have to exact retribution on behalf of God, or a specific good deed which has to be praised. The state is an arbiter of *public* justice, it is a *public* legal community.

To my mind then the state does not have the task of combating religious coldness, or to struggle against moral decadence, or (positively) to promote (a specific) religion or to formulate moral standards. This does not mean of course that the state has nothing whatsoever to do with these matters, because reality is much more complex than that. (Cf. our previous discussion of this issue in chapter 10, closing of section 10.1.2.)

The criterion for public justice is - as already indicated - love for one's neighbour, which can only grow out of love for God. Love, the framework within which Romans 13 stands, is thus the final touchstone to determine whether something is good or bad.

\* *"Should you want to live without fear of the authorities, do what is good, and the authorities will praise you"*

The last part of this sentence of course does not always correspond with reality! I would like, however, to direct your attention to the fact that one can derive from this verse not only the attitude of the subject towards the authorities, but also the responsibility of the authorities towards their subjects: the authorities have to rule in such a way that the subjects would not need to fear them! They should not be merely negative in punishing the evil, but they should also positively notice the good.

\* *"Because the authorities are God's agents working for your good."*

The word agent, servant (*diakonos*) is important here. It is repeated twice later - although in the final instance the word *leiturgos* (servant) is used. One can put the emphasis on either: *servant* and servant of *God*.



Servant is not the same as *representative* or, more strongly, *substitute*. The authorities may not presume to fill the place of God. They are only servants, instruments. The power exercised by the authorities is vested in them only in order to enable them to render this service. Power which is not motivated by the idea of service becomes a monster - although ultimately a self-devouring monster. A state which prides itself on its absolute power is on the threshold of powerlessness!

Above all authority should be seen as a servant of *God*. It exists in the first place to serve God - not for personal gain, nor for group interests. A servant owes his master some form of accounting ...

Later on in the verse we read that "it is not for nothing that they hold the power of the sword, for they are God's agents of punishment". Exacting retribution is the prerogative of God alone (Romans 12:19). He imparts this power to nobody but the state. The positive aim of this is of course to enable people to live in peace.

From this I would like to deduce that clear limits have been imposed on the authorities. These are all rooted in the fact that all authorities rule only by and through the grace of God. Different facets of the limitation include the following:

- The authorities are only servants.
- They should not be objects of fear but of respect.
- They are compelled to punish the evil and to praise the good.
- Because it is the wrath of *God* that is evoked, the punishment measured out must always be tested against the touchstone of *God's* norms for good and evil.

Calvin sums this up beautifully in his *Commentary on Romans*: "Magistrates may learn from the nature of their calling. They are not to rule on their own account, but for the public good. Nor do they have unbridled power, but power that is restricted to the welfare of their subjects. In short they are responsible to God and to men in the exercise of their rule. Since they are chosen by God and to do His business, they are answerable to Him. But the ministry which God has committed to them has reference to their subjects. They have also therefore an obligation to them."

\* *"It is not for nothing that they hold the power of the sword ..."*

The authorities have been vested with the sword, as the symbol of their right to dispose of life and death. This indicates the power of the authorities to act even with violence, and would therefore also include lesser punishments. In this too lies an indication of the task of the state: it has not only the *right* but also the *duty* to punish by means of the sword in some cases. Capital punishment and war are examples of this. The state is the only societal relationship which has received the right from God to impose its authority by this means. A gang of highwaymen will wield the sword unlawfully.

At the end of verse 5 Paul says that the reason why one has to subject oneself to the authorities need not be purely negative, because one is afraid of punishment, but positively, because it is a matter of conscience. The Greek word for *conscience* makes one realize that conscience is not something which has remained untouched in man after the fall - it literally means "to know with". If, of course, one "knows with" the devil, then it becomes dangerous. The conscience of the Christian, to whom Paul turns here, is honed and directed by the Holy Spirit (Romans 9:1b). His conscience will thus let him "know with" God that it is right to go along with this ordination of God.

\* *"This is also why you have to pay taxes."*

Did Paul perhaps write this with a smile on his lips? The tax man has never in history been popular in any nation! No, in this too the authorities are only the servants of God who are enacting *His* command - however unpleasant it might have been for the Jews to pay tax to a foreign oppressor, or for the Christians to handle coins on which the pagan Roman Emperor proclaimed his own godlike qualities. The duty to pay taxes is also not just a little addition to other duties. It is an inherent part of our duty towards the authorities.

What is true of the other commitments of the authorities is also true of taxes. They have to be gathered for the ultimate good of the subjects and should not be gathered in a way which will induce fear because people feel that they are exploited and that they will never see their money again. In this too the authorities owe an account to their highest Commander.

\* *"Discharge your obligations to all men; pay tax and toll, reverence and respect, to those to whom they are due..."*

With respect to *reverence* and *respect* it has already been remarked that they indicate the positive as opposed to the negative *fear*. In this specific way the following commandment of - "Leave no claim outstanding against you, except that of mutual love" - is complied with within the sphere of political life.

It is as if in the closing section the words of Christ recorded in Matthew 22:21 resound: "Then pay Caesar what is due to Caesar ..." Because of Christ's addition to these words of "... and (but) pay to God what is due to God" one can deduce from Paul's words that one need not give the authorities *more* than is due to them. Paul definitely does not teach absolute, uncritical, slavish submission to the state and its authority.

We owe the state *something*. To God we owe *everything*, yes, our very lives!

#### **14.4 THE RIGHT OF PROTEST, RESISTANCE AND DISOBEDIENCE AGAINST A BAD GOVERNMENT**

"Every person must submit to the supreme authorities. There is no authority but by act of God, and the existing authorities are instituted by Him" (Romans 13:1).

"Peter replied for himself and for the apostles: We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29; cf. also 1 Peter 2:13-14).

##### **14.4.1 The issue**

These two Scriptural passages more or less summarise the dilemma in which Christians have often found themselves in the course of history:

■ How can we adhere to Christ's command to pay Caesar what is due to Caesar, *as well as* God what is due to God (Matthew 22:21), or Peter's terse command to have reverence for God *and* to honour the sovereign (1 Peter 2:17b)?

- Exactly when do we reach the boundary where the Christian does not only have the right but even the duty to say that we should be more obedient to God than the government, that is, when we will be forced to be disobedient to the government?
- What form should this disobedience take? Should it remain passive resistance? Or should it start as passive resistance but later, if nothing is achieved, turn into violent resistance?
- How should we determine that the point has been reached where nothing remains but to fight government violence with violence?
- Once we are certain that we have in fact reached this point, where should we draw the line in the use of violence - only hard (military) targets, or soft targets too, women, children, other civilians?
- And if we use violent means in order to be more obedient to God than to government, are we really still obedient to God, Who in Christ teaches us to love our enemies and not to redress violence with violence (cf. *inter alia* Romans 12:19-21)?

#### **14.4.2 What does the Bible say about resistance and violence?**

The Bible is full of violence. In the first pages already we read of fratricide (Genesis 4:8) and Lamech sings his song of violence (Genesis 4:23,24). The world was so corrupted and filled with violence (Genesis 6:11) that God had to send the flood to wash it away. The books of the prophets such as Jeremiah, Amos, Micah and Malachi are full of evidence of structural (politico-economic) violence.

The first pages of the New Testament too are drenched in blood. Think of the horrendous infanticide of Herod (Matthew 2:16). Israel was occupied by a foreign power, the Roman Empire, which was known for the cruelties it perpetrated. In vain did the Jewish Zealot terrorist bands try to throw off the foreign yoke. It is only in the last chapter of the Bible (Revelation 22:15) that we read that murderers will be excluded from the new earth.

We find the following types of violence in the Bible: in the Old Testament violence from the outside (foreign nations) and violence

from inside (Jews oppressing Jews), and in the New Testament oppression from the side of the Jewish Council and synagogue, the Roman Empire and the pagan nations.

It is important for us to know what the reactions of believers were in Biblical times. We find basically two reactions: a passive one and an active one.

Christ Himself speaks the well-known words (Matthew 26:52) that everyone who depends on the sword will perish by the sword, and in John 18 verse 11 He says to Peter: "Put your sword back into its place! Do you think that I will not drink the cup of suffering which my Father has given me?" As opposed to *destructive* violence He opts for *constructive* suffering, because the only victory *over* suffering is the victory *through* suffering. His cup of *suffering* at the same time becomes a cup of *victory*!

Paul (Romans 2:1-11) and Peter (1 Peter 4:12-19), in conjunction with Christ, advocate a passive reaction in the case of suffering and oppression. The word *passive* is possibly a misnomer, because suffering in this way is one of the most difficult *activities*. A Christian has to know what it means to *suffer* injustice, but he may not *commit* any injustice.

Two examples should be sufficient to illustrate this "active" reaction. The first is found in 2 Kings 6:8-23 where we are told how the Aramaic army wanted to capture Elisha and kill him. In the end they are captured by Elisha! But when the king of Israel wants to kill them, Elisha says: "as for these men, give them food and water, let them eat and drink, and then let them go back to their master". Violence in this instance is not answered with violence, or passively endured, but answered with love (cf. also Romans 12:20).

We find something similar in Acts 4:18-31. Herod, Pontius Pilate and the heathens conspired against the first Christians. The Jewish Council even forbade them to disseminate the Gospel. Peter and John, however, tell them that they have to decide for themselves what is right: to obey them or God. And the disciples do not take recourse to violence, but all the believers unite in prayer to God (verses 24-30). The response of the Church to violence is prayer. And God's response to their prayer is that

He fills them with the power of His Spirit, so that without fear they can continue to preach the Word of God (verse 31). This is in keeping with the well-known words by Zechariah: "Neither by force of arms nor by brute strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts" (4:6).

You can study the rest of the Bible by yourselves. Cases where believers refused to obey the authorities whose instructions they considered against the will of God can be found in Exodus 1:15-17, Daniel 3:16-18 and 6:11, Acts 5:29, but you won't find anywhere in Scripture that this was accompanied by violent resistance.

I have in the recent past read a number of books in which people try by means of Biblical texts to prove that Christ had been a terrorist or a freedom fighter. These people, however, try to make of the Bible a ventriloquist's dummy to succeed in this. Some even claim that because Christ did not say anything *against* the Jewish Zealots, He *approved* of their violence. This is weak logic, the well-known *argumentum e silentium*. In this way one could equally say that Christ approved of polygamy because He did not explicitly say anything against it!

#### **14.4.3 What does the Christian tradition say about resistance and violence?**

I would like to mention very briefly four different viewpoints from the history of Christianity.

- In the first place we find the *radical passivists* in the early Christian church and in later movements such as the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and the Jehovah's Witnesses today, who reject any resistance. The Anabaptists (today's Mennonites) even taught that Christians should not occupy government office, be a judge, take an oath or resist if one should be attacked by robbers or looters. This, however, is clearly not a Biblical viewpoint.
- A next approach would be the *partial passivists*. They do not reject all resistance, but only violent resistance. Examples of this were Mahatma Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King in the USA. This group, to my mind, comes nearest to what we are taught in Scripture.

■ The *partial militarists*, while approving of violence and war as means to effect resistance, set the following conditions: (1) it should be the last resort (after all peaceful means have been exhausted); (2) it should be justified, that is, take place as self-defence (only a defensive war, not an offensive one, is a just war); (3) the counter-violence should be limited as far as possible so that tyranny is not simply replaced by anarchy; (4) if the government should oppose the freedom to obey God, and (5) the rebellion/resistance against the government may not be run by the mob, but should be led in efficient and orderly manner by responsible leaders, once again to prevent, as far as possible, anarchy.

One could call this the dominant trend within Christianity from Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, the sixteenth-century reformers up to today. It is clear, however, that this viewpoint can no longer be fully justified by the Bible.

■ Even further away from Biblical guidelines are the *radical militarists* who approve of unlimited violence, even nuclear war.

Which one of the four viewpoints, from a passive lack of resistance to absolute militarism should we choose?

Before we respond to this question, we have to digress first to gain more clarity about certain concepts and to reflect specifically on the task of the state.

#### **14.4.4 What do authority, power and violence mean in the case of governments?**

\* *General Christian perspectives*

To a certain degree we will have to repeat here what has already been said in Chapter 10 (section 10.5 and 10.6) concerning office, authority, power and responsibility *in general*. All these perspectives are, however, focussed here on a specific societal relationship, viz. the state.

In each societal relationship there are two components: those invested with authority and those guided by authority. In an industry there are

employers and employees, in a family parents and children, and in a sports club the committee and the members.

The purpose of authority is twofold. In the first place it should coordinate, guide and help the members of the societal relationship so that they can fulfil their specific task and calling (as determined by God) in this specific societal relationship. As a result of the sinfulness of man, authority, in the second place, should also struggle against evil and corruption and, with a view to the fulfilment of the calling of the members in that societal relation, maintain the necessary order.

In Romans 13 we saw already that the government should punish the bad and reward the good. Furthermore Paul also says that the subjects should not *fear* their government. If the government governs correctly, there should be no reason for fear - you need fear only if you have done wrong. Subjects do, however, have to have *respect* for their government.

We have to remember very well, however, that authority exists not for the sake of the office-bearer, but for the sake of service. A servant is not the same as a representative or, to put it more strongly, a substitute. Government may not assume for itself the place of God. It is only a servant, an instrument. Authority and power which are not characterised by this service motif (cf. Christ's statements on leaders) ultimately become self-devouring monsters. A state proud of its omnipotence is already on the threshold of helplessness and destruction.

Office-bearers are therefore not higher or more important than those who have to obey them. They are also not elevated above the rules and laws of the specific societal relationship. They are subject to the laws just like any other person - even if they have made these laws themselves.

Office-bearers also have to know God's norm for the societal relation in which they have to provide guidance. For the state the norm is the maintenance of public justice. The government receives authority for that purpose, and not for the purpose of furthering its own interests and for oppressing its subjects.



The quality of life which is enjoyed in each societal relation is directly linked to the extent to which office-bearers and subjects obey the norms for the specific relationship. If the realisation of vocation has become blurred as a result of an imperfect understanding of the norm, the quality of life also deteriorates within that specific relational sphere: the government declares war against its own citizens and the subjects revolt.

It speaks for itself that authority within any relation is maintained in a unique manner. The state is the only societal circle to which God has granted the right to enforce authority with the sword: police, courts of justice, even the death sentence.

It is also important to remember that the office-bearers of each societal relation can only exert limited authority - only within the sphere in which they have been appointed. No man or societal relation has absolute power over another. Only God has power over all and everybody.

The word *power* in the light of the foregoing implies the responsible exercise of authority. No societal relation is possible without the proper exercise of power. There is nothing wrong with power as such. In the case of the state the police force is necessary to maintain the laws and the defence force is necessary for peace and security.

Violence is the illegal, unnecessary, excessive and even harmful abuse of power. This does not mean, however, that violence in all instances is an abuse of power. When a policeman, for example, has to capture a murderer by violent means, we could call this constructive violence - as against destructive violence when he should assault or shoot an innocent person. When one country is attacked by another, the government has the duty to defend its territory and its citizens against the aggressor by means of violence (war).

As a result of the corruption of sin office-bearers do not know any longer how to distinguish the boundaries of authority, and they do not know any longer what their calling is within the societal relationship in which they have been appointed. Or they do know, but neglect it, and simply fail to comply with it. Should a government, for example, consistently and out of self-preservation and own advantage only act on

behalf of a certain group of its subjects and deny privileges to others, it does not fulfil its God-given calling of general justice. Such a government can then be regarded as having become revolutionary in the profoundest sense of the word: it inverts God's order and rebels against Him.

Such a government should be called back to its real task by its citizens because no human authority is sacrosanct. The glorification of authority (power for the sake of power, order for the sake of order, instead of for the sake of justice) is wrong. We should *respect* our governments, but show *reverence* only to God.

\* *Civil protest and disobedience*

As indicated above, we have already discussed these general perspectives previously (in chapter 10). They have been summarised here again to serve as a necessary background in order to provide a fundamental answer to the question of civil protest.

The important question is of course the form that this civil protest may assume. In the light of what has already been said, I am personally of the opinion that if nothing is achieved by means of legal channels (appeals to the government) something has to be done along the lines of civil disobedience. It is very difficult, however, to decide *who* has to judge *when* the time has come to take such a step.

Civil disobedience means ignoring the laws of the country, being disobedient to them. The following could serve as a definition: *Civil disobedience is a demonstrative action which deliberately breaks the law in order to try and bring about change in the attitude and policy of a government in a forcible, yet non-violent way.*

It is important to note that civil disobedience is *demonstrative action*, in other words, it should not take place in secret as in the case of tax evasion. The action further has a *forcible character*, it instigates actions which the government finds irritating - such as sit-in strikes, hunger strikes, boycotts against shopkeepers, disruption of traffic - and not only peaceful protest marches of which government does not take a blind bit of notice. In the third place civil disobedience envisages *non-violent action*. I explicitly say envisages, because in practice intended

non-violent actions often culminate in violence. Precisely because it is an act of *disobedience*, the dividing line between non-violence and violence is often very vague. Whoever disrupts traffic should not be surprised if it causes emotions to boil over, so that in the end cars are set on fire and shops are looted. Those who carry out civil disobedience are naturally not simply devils, but at the same time they are not exactly angels either.

Added to this we have to say that civil disobedience is only possible under governments where an awareness of freedom and democracy has been retained. Under a dictatorship, a totalitarian government, it is impossible to disobey the laws of the country and remain alive! This is confirmed by the history of three of the greatest proponents of non-violent civil disobedience, viz., Mahatma Gandhi (in India, against British colonialism), Martin Luther King (in the USA against discrimination to blacks) and Kenneth David Kaunda (in the Rhodesian independence struggle following UDI).

As a result of the fact that no man nor government is perfect, it is thus very important that each government for the sake of its subjects, but also for its own sake, should leave open as many channels of peaceful protest as possible. Such channels provide an escape valve. A government which resolutely closes down these channels is looking for violent resistance against its rule, as this becomes the only recourse the citizens have.

\* *Responsibilities of government*

I would like to recapitulate what I have said so far with regard to the government:

- God appoints people as office-bearers. In the case of the state, He appoints a government which has to serve the citizens according to His will and, apart from the citizens, also owe Him an accounting.
- The service of the government consists of its guiding the citizens in such a way that their calling as citizens can be fulfilled, and that that which is wrong and which stands in the way of fulfilment can be opposed.

- The norm for the fulfilment of the calling in the case of the state is public justice towards all the citizens.
- The government may not unnecessarily intrude in the spheres of other societal relations and so assume for itself totalitarian authority.
- A government also may not suppress basic rights of citizens such as public expression of opinion. It can be to the advantage of the government itself if ways are always left open for the citizens to express their dissatisfaction with government in a peaceful way.
- For the exercise of authority, the government has received a special power from God - the might of the sword. If forced to exercise its power in a violent manner, it should, however, always be a matter of constructive or positive and not destructive or negative power. Stated differently: it should promote and not destroy public justice.
- Should a government neglect its calling, or even forget it altogether, it should be reminded of its calling by other societal relationships (such as, for example, the church) or by its subjects. For the Christian this protest (or even rebellion) against the abuse of the office of government will be carried out in a peaceful way. All legal ways of protest should be tried first. Should this not succeed, nothing will remain but non-violent civil disobedience.
- The big question now remains as to what might happen if the government should remain blind and deaf to entreaties, if it keeps making empty promises which again and again culminate in nothing, if it is paralysed by a cowardly fear of restrictive influences in its own ranks, if it continually keeps ascribing the cause of the unrest to "agitators", even from outside the country, and if civil disobedience is suppressed because it endangers "law and order". Such a government should not be surprised if law and order finally evade it altogether because it has been deaf to pleas and entreaties for justice.

#### **14.4.5 What is the calling of the subject or the citizen?**

It is not only the government that has duties towards its subjects, but the subjects clearly also have duties towards the government. I am not going to repeat well-known points such as that the subject should bow

to the government (not uncritically), that he should respect (even though it may be unjust) the government and pay, in direct obedience to God's command, the taxes of the government.

- The Christian citizen may never be involved with violence. He should be involved with peace: God is a God of peace (2 Corinthians 13:11), Christ is the Lord of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) and His Gospel is a Gospel of peace (Ephesians 2:17). Peace, however, does not simply mean the maintaining of the existing *status quo*, but the upholding of God's peace.
- The believer has to be an example of love and conciliation: "Call down blessings on your persecutors, blessings, not curses" (Romans 12:14). Even though it may be very difficult, we may never tire of doing good (2 Thessalonians 3:13).
- We have to help all people, but special care has to be given to the poor, the dispossessed and the suffering. And structures, which in many cases are the causes of the suffering and poverty, should be examined critically. I have no doubt that the believer's first responsibility is to be on the side of the poor, the little, the widows, the orphans, the oppressed, the exploited, the rejected of society - and to help them.
- The believing citizen may never stop praying: "First of all then I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be offered for all men; for sovereigns, and all in high office, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in full observance of religion and high standards of morality" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Have we tried to imagine how difficult it must be to sit in high office? Do we still realize the strength of prayer in effecting change? (James 5:16b).
- The believer may also never neglect his prophetic calling as a citizen. He has this calling not only in his capacity as subject or citizen in relation to government, but also to other subjects: poor and rich, weak and strong, believers and non-believers. The Old Testament prophets can be an example to us in this. They made audible their stringent criticism not only to other nations, but also did not spare their own nation and rulers. A government is simply a reflection of the nation, and a nation sometimes "deserves" the government that it has!

■ I am of the opinion that we should also gain clarity about the relationship between the church (or let us say Christianity, which is more than the church) and the state (or politics). We may certainly not *mix* the two or *identify* them. Then it is all too easy to get to the point where support for Christendom means support for the political establishment - and *vice versa*. Or, if you don't support the political *status quo*, it becomes a matter of betraying the Christian faith! We are, however, also not allowed to *separate* them or to view them in *opposition* to each other, which would result in no influence emanating from the church towards the state, or in anything that has to do with politics automatically being regarded as bad. Church and state are independent entities, but they are not isolated from each other and may exhort each other to reform.

■ All possible (permissible) means should be used to change an unjust situation to a just and peaceful society. Both the oppressors and the privileged should be addressed. An *oppressor* is somebody who actively uses existing structures to commit injustices to his own or his group's advantage, and to the detriment of others. A *privileged person* is not necessarily somebody who has had a hand in the creation of an unjust structure, and he does not use the structure consciously to his own advantage. But, it is still the duty of *both the privileged and the exploiter* to end the injustice. Injustice should not be ended only when the exploited, as a last resort, turns to violence.

■ In the final instance it is the duty of especially Christians to keep on talking, trying their best to convince the government that it has to change.

#### **14.4.6 A brief application to the South African situation**

We find ourselves presently in a society full of violence. First, there was the oppressive, structural violence on the side of the apartheid government. Second, the freedom movements responded to this by means of self-defensive, liberating violence.

We have now finally reached a stage of consultation about a new democratic political dispensation. But still the terrible violence has not abated. On the contrary, it has increased to include large-scale violence of black against black and between blacks and whites. The reason for

this horrible situation is also no longer only political in nature. Violence because of large-scale poverty and unemployment, and even criminal violence, is the order of the day. We have created a whole culture of violence!

We are doing exactly what God forbade us to do: we are repaying violence with violence. For Christians this is indeed a tragic hour, because we know that Christ spoke a true word when He said that all those who live by the sword will die by the sword (Matthew 26:52).

We all share in the guilt. And yet as believers we feel that we cannot choose between the two extremes of governmental violence and counter-violence (violence by the ANC, the PAC and the IFP), because all are forms of violence, the one is no *better*, in Scriptural terms, than the other.

Christians are people of the Way (cf. Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4 & 24:14) - the Third Way. We should therefore let ourselves be heard on all sides - even though this is very difficult, because every party might regard us as traitors of their cause. We have to say to *everybody* perpetrating violence that violence is wrong, and that it is never a solution.

No statesman after Gandhi has been such a passionate subscriber to non-violence as the former president of Zambia, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda. He was an admirer of Gandhi and he is a true Christian. He also saw to it that Zambia obtained its independence practically without bloodshed. In his book *Kaunda on Violence* (1980) he describes, however, how he was torn between his passion for justice in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and his faith in non-violence. He was finally forced to relinquish his lifelong views and to accept the inevitability of armed struggle in Zimbabwe. I quote only one passage from his book: "I ended up supporting armed struggle in Zimbabwe because I could no longer believe that *anything* is preferable to the use of force. I have been much taken with some words of a Victorian writer, Douglas Jerrold: 'We love peace as we abhor pusillanimity; but not peace at any price. There is a peace more destructive of the manhood of living man than war is destructive of his body. Chains are worse than bayonets.' Yes, if one must make the terrible choice, I do believe that chains are worse than bayonets. We never had the luxury of choosing between the strategies

of perfection and those of harsh realism. We never had any option but to weigh up one form of evil against another and ask for God's forgiveness as we undertook to do what had to be done."

I can *understand* why Kaunda should have made this decision. I can also *understand* why many people of my beloved country resorted to violence. And still, as a Christian I may never *approve* of it. We have to *do* something about it. And the secret of a solution will be the secret of the whole universe: *love* and *justice* towards each other - even our greatest enemies.

President Kaunda inscribed the following in one of his books he gave me (4/8/1987): "The march to one South Africa and one nation is on, and the outcome will depend on what every one of us *does*." In another inscription in another book he offers a key to a better South Africa: "There is an inner voice that defies all forms of description in all those who share genuine *love* with others." Have we forgotten that love is the *strongest* of all things: much stronger than the greatest fear and the profoundest hatred?

On the same occasion the old Zambian statesman, when I asked how he perceived our task as Christian academics in South Africa, answered as follows: "You must return to South Africa. Do not become terrorists. Open the eyes of your students so that they can see." This is perhaps the profoundest calling that we have yet had as Christians in South Africa: to open our own eyes and the eyes of others (1) to the terrible realities in which we find ourselves, and (2) to the clear norms which God gives us in his Word, according to which we have to act in such situations.

When we left Dr. Kaunda in Lusaka in 1987 he would not let us go before playing us a melody on his electric organ and singing a hymn in his vernacular (Bemba). Upon inquiry, it appeared that the content of the song had been a prayer that the Holy Spirit should fill us with strength for our task ahead in South Africa.

Christian songs - especially songs in the form of prayer - can be powerful means in encouraging God's children in difficult times when it is not always easy to know what to choose and what to do. I can not think of a more suitable hymn than *Nkosi sikele Afrika*. It is a song



which speaks from the heart of not only South Africa but the whole of Africa. In spite of the fact that it is often politicised by black South Africans and misunderstood by whites, we should sing this prayerful hymn with its moving melody more often. I repeat its well-known words in English to enable all the readers of this book to follow:

God save Africa  
Let her glory be raised  
Hear our Prayers  
O Lord, do bless us,  
her children.

God save Africa  
Let her glory be raised  
Hear our prayers  
O Lord, do bless us,  
her children.

Come Spirit, come, come  
Come Spirit, come, come  
Come Spirit, most Holy one,  
O Lord, do bless us,  
her children.

God save our nation  
Bring an end to fights and  
sufferings.  
Save her,  
Save her,  
Save her, O Lord  
Our nation,  
Nation of Africa.

So let it be  
So let it be  
For ever and ever,  
For ever and ever,  
Up to eternity.

## 14.5 TOWARDS GENUINE DEMOCRACY FOR AFRICA

One of the greatest problems of African governments was how to unite the people of a country which mostly consisted of a variety of ethnic groups and religions. The following were considered as requirements for political unity and a strong state:

- The *nation-state* where one (dominant) racial or ethnic group comprises the citizenry.
- *The common language-state*
- *The common religion-state*
- The *power-state* where the possession of power makes right whatever a government wants to do.

- *The welfare-state* where the state is viewed primarily as the father-provider in the needs of its citizens, for instance food, clothing, housing, work etc.

To a certain degree all these views about the state were tried out on the African continent. The unity of the state, however, is not centred in any sphere (ethnicity, language, religion or economics) other than that of *public justice*.

The true nature of political unity is that of a public legal order. For the same reason the power-state must be rejected, because it is not the *possession of power* (in such a case a government is no more than a bunch of criminals), but the *enforcement of justice* which justifies the use of power. No government is legitimate without this guidance of might by justice.

Today winds of democratisation are sweeping all over Africa. Most of the African countries which adhered to a one-party government adopted multi-party systems over the past two to three years (1990-1992). Only a handful of countries are still one-party states at the moment.

#### **14.5.1 A brief political history of Africa**

At independence (round about 1960) African countries were left with (Western) colonial forms of government. They, however, did not debate the issues, but simply rejected multiparty democracy because it was considered a foreign type of rule as opposed to self-rule, white type of government versus black government. "What they (the colonists) want, we do not want. What they do not want, we want." Or another statement, clearly indicating this reactionary mentality: "It is better to misgovern ourselves than to be governed well by foreigners". The more the colonialists warned against communist "democratic" centralism (one-party government), the more the indigenous people wanted it! Country after country - except for a few home-grown forms of "African socialism" - accepted the one-party idea inspired by the Soviet model and a variety of models in Eastern Europe and other "socialist" countries.

It was a kind of "follow the leader" policy. The leaders' struggle for independence had made them infallible. The leader and the party had a

certain kind of mystique around them. Immediately after independence there was uncritical acceptance of whatever the leader said. The interest of the party and that of the people were viewed as being the same. Africa was very uncritical about its heroes at this stage of post-independence euphoria. (Cf. also 14.1.1 about the sacralisation of power.)

The result was the development of the African "strong men", the tyrants who started to rule brutally with an iron fist. The mystique of the heroic leader and his party therefore soon disappeared. It was replaced by a fear-of-the-party syndrome which lasted longer. This fear first attacked non-members of the ruling party (arrest, detention and even disappearance). Then the fear spread to members of the party. Finally the fear virus infected the party leaders themselves. And today in nearly every African country the masses are demanding democracy.

What are the reasons for this new pressure to democratise? In the first place the African governments could not deliver the goods promised. Neither unity nor development was achieved. Secondly, the above-mentioned authoritarian and oppressive rule became unbearable. In the third place the educational gap between the first leaders and their followers was very wide, but because of general education this gap has become much smaller. Today we have a large literate and discerning public. A culture of "critical discourse" developed in most African countries over the last 30 years. (This more critical attitude has resulted in Frederick Chiluba, the president of Zambia, being given only 27 days - instead of the 27 years given to Kenneth Kaunda, the previous president - before open criticism of his regime!) It is amazing that Africa's "age of absolutism" lasted only thirty years - compared with the many centuries it took Europe to become interested in democratic government! In the fourth place, at the beginning of the 1990's the Soviet Union and the Eastern Europeans turned their backs on communism and the one-party state idea and ended their military involvement in Africa.

Multi-party democracy is a positive development. As long as it is not another kind of euphoria and people do not see it as a magic solution for all the problems of our continent. For this reason we should have a closer look at (multi-party) democracy: What is its essence and what are the conditions for its successful implementation?

### 14.5.2 The essence of democracy

The word *democracy* is derived from the Greek *demos* (= people/nation) and *kratos* (= rule) meaning "government by the people". As a form of government, democracy denotes a system "in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised directly by them (as in the small republics of antiquity) or by officers elected by them" (*The compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*).

In the most basic sense, democracy presupposes the idea of popular sovereignty: the power of the government stems *from* the people and must be exercised *by* the people *for* the people. Elaborated, it contains the following principles (1) representation of the people in the legislative and executive organs of state; (2) free and fair elections to elect these representatives; (3) equality in respect of voting rights; (4) (in the case of multi-party democracy) proportionality in the composition of the legislative organ of the state; (5) majoritarian support is usually the rule, but other possibilities (like consensus) are not excluded.

It is, however, very important to remember that there is no country in the world where democracy as such guarantees good government. Democracy is only a *means* toward good government! There are some important conditions which must be met from the side of the citizens for the proper functioning of democracy. J.D. van der Vyver (1993) mentions the following:

- A certain level of education and intellectual sophistication among the greater part of the people.
- A free flow of information and a politically alert and informed public.
- A public ethos (morality) cherished in the hearts and minds of a cross section of the community.
- A measure of material prosperity and economic development.
- A sense of national pride and loyalty to collective aspirations that transcend self-interest in order to promote the general weal.
- A situation of political stability and peace to permit effective functioning of government.

Apart from these conditions applying to the citizens it is also necessary to check the powers of government. "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Lord Acton). Or in the words of Emile Brunner: "To possess power is a constant temptation to abuse power". In order to restrict the abuse of state authority, J.D. van der Vyver recommends the following strategies:

- Decentralisation of the instruments of government in a federal structure with autonomous local and regional governments.
- Distribution of state authority through the separation of powers.
- Limiting the jurisdiction of the political authority to the state's appropriate sphere of competence (public justice).
- Surveillance of administrative acts of the government by an ombudsman to ensure that the interests of the public are properly considered and duly protected.
- Confining the powers of the persons in authority in accordance with the rule of law.
- Shielding through a bill of rights of fundamental freedoms of the citizen against legislative and executive interference.
- The institution of representative government.

Many people regard democracy as the ultimate ideal for political arrangements. Some even suggest that a despotic government may be overthrown by armed force in order to uphold democratic values. Others regard democracy in itself as a Christian position. This is not true. Democracy may serve Christian ideals. To the extent that representative democracy constrains the exercise of political power according to the norms of justice and human dignity, it could be said to serve the realisation of Christian principles. Because democracy as such is not Christian or a guarantee against totalitarianism, it is important to have a more in-depth critical look at modern Western democracy. Africa should in its process of democratisation be very critical in order to avoid the mistakes of the West!

In spite of the upsurge of democratic enthusiasm around the world at the end of this century, in almost every country where it has been well established, it has not delivered in practice what the rhetoric promised. It promises liberty, but it does not bring liberty for all. It offers some freedom to the majority, but at the expense of minority groups. The majoritarian model of democracy is incapable of dealing justly with a

situation where more than one national group shares the same country and the same government, as is the case not only in South Africa but in practically all African countries.

### **14.5.3 The idea of a nation-state**

This is the idea that a normal political order is one in which the nation and state coalesce, so that nationality coincides with citizenship. It is exactly because of this idea that we have unrest all over the world today because minorities, living within the borders of a state that is dominated by a majority nation, are fighting for their rights and even for their (ethnic) independence as a nation.

Of course there can be no objection to a society in which nation and state coincide - where the citizens of the state are all members of the one (political) nation. In reality, however, this is more often than not the exception rather than the rule. The problem occurs when the subjugation and domination of a minority group/s by the traditions and culture of a majority group is justified simply on the basis of majority rule. It is also possible to have several ethnic nations within a state with no clear candidate for a dominant nation.

After independence attempts were made in Africa to create a new national identity based on the political order of the state, to replace the old identities represented by the tribes that lived within the state border. The aim was to ensure that the emergent national (political) identity will in time unite a whole country and displace the old national (ethnic) diversity.

Experience has revealed, however, that ethnic nations are not that easily assimilated or displaced. Such mergers cannot be engineered or guaranteed by state planning. It can only result from forces at work within the nations themselves. Coercion by the state is more likely to strengthen national identities than to remove them! And if the state does succeed to a certain extent, this may happen at the cost of a serious weakening of communal life, because ethnic identity is fundamental to a normal, healthy human life. The communal identities founded in ethnic kinship are usually very strong, so that they cannot simply be replaced by one national identity based on the political community of the state.

To try and do so results in the tension, conflict and political instability which has seriously impaired the commonweal of African states.

We therefore have to find another solution. It is obvious that the idea of the nation-state as a political norm should be abandoned and that the former idea of majoritarian democracy should be replaced with a new one.

#### **14.5.4 The identity of a nation**

S. Fowler (1991b) defines a nation as follows: "A nation is a community of people founded in kinship and united in bonds of comradeship characterised by a common history and tradition, a common language and a common culture, including a common social order."

He adds that a nation is not identified by applying each of these characteristics separately but by taking them together. Furthermore national identity cannot be imposed on people - just as no act of persuasion or coercion can dissolve a nation. The reason is that a nation is not an organisation but an organic social unity. For this same reason the idea of "nation-building" does not seem appropriate, because it suggests something mechanical instead of something organic. A nation grows, flourishes, decays and dies. As living organic communities, nations are also not static entities but constantly changing entities. They can be merged, absorbed, pass away, and new nations can emerge, as becomes clear from the history of mankind. None of these phenomena as such is either good or bad. The way or manner in which a nation lives or dies is good or bad, for example when a national group is suppressed or it is compelled to merge or be absorbed.

It is not possible to analyse in this limited space the above definition of an (ethnic) nation by Fowler. It includes the following elements: kinship, comradeship, common history, tradition, culture, language and social order. Should we also add to these a common homeland or defined territory? Fowler's viewpoint is that, while an own homeland is not unimportant for a national consciousness, it is not necessary for national identity.

If each ethnic nation (Afrikaans "volk") cannot have its *own* country and *own* government, in which way then should the various ethnic communities be included in a fair and just way into *one* political community or nation ("staat" in Afrikaans)? What new kind of democracy is required in such a case?

To enable us to answer this question, we should firstly have another look at modern Western democracy.

#### **14.5.5 Modern (majoritarian) democracy weighed**

S. Fowler (1991b) provides us with an excellent study (already referred to above) entitled: *National identity and the renewal of democracy* to guide us in our critical evaluation.

The idea of the nation-state is a direct product of the modern idea of democracy. Should we therefore reject the idea of the (one) nation state, we should also have to reconsider the current form of democracy. Fowler discusses in detail (p. 21-27) the contribution of Hobbes (1588-1679), Locke (1632-1704) and Rousseau (1712-1778) to the development of the modern idea of democracy. It is not possible to go here into such detail as well as into the differences among these three modern founders of democracy.

Despite their differences, they do share substantial common ground. They agree regarding the following five key ideas which together constitute the modern idea of democracy:

- They share an *individualist idea of human society*. The individual is the one, basic social unit and all social categories (marriage, family, church, state) merely consist of groups of individuals.
- They share a *populist idea of sovereignty*. They agree that sovereignty rests with the people.
- They share an *egalitarian idea of the human person*. Every human individual is the equal of every other in the social order.



- They share an *absolutist idea of social authority*. Any social authority that exists is subordinate to the authority of the people, organised as the state.
- They share a *conventionalist idea of the social order*. The social order is a convention agreed upon by individuals.

Together these five ideas of modern democracy have the following important consequences:

- They lead to the *politicisation of society* as the social order is equated with the political order of the all-encompassing state.
- They lead to the *idea of the nation-state*, because the politicisation of society inevitably means the politicisation of the nation. The nation as a community must coalesce with the state, because there can only be one public community in a given territory.

Both of these tendencies are unacceptable (see below). In the modern world democracy first became an ideology and then a myth. Democracies *as such* are good and everything else is bad! When people have the right to vote, it automatically implies democracy! The right to vote is certainly an element of democracy, but it is no guarantee of democracy whatsoever. Sovereignty in today's democracies lies not with the people, but with organised private interests. Because the ideology of the free market with its promise of a consumer paradise has taken over, the real masters are organised private *commercial* interests.

#### 14.5.6 Towards real democracy

We therefore need a new model of democracy that will (1) question the ideological base that shaped modern thought and put democracy back on the agenda of practical politics, and (2) will answer the question of national identity. In order to attain this Fowler (*op cit.*:39) recommends the following six basic principles:

- The depoliticisation of society.
- A political order based on a differentiated social order.
- Negotiated consensus politics.
- Qualified social authority.

- A covenanted mandate as the basis of governmental authority.
- Effective mechanisms for safeguarding popular sovereignty.

\* *A radical depoliticisation of society*

Today's world has to an alarming extent become politicised. Like a giant octopus the states in most countries reach their tentacles into every corner of life. We, however, need to cease thinking of society as a unitary political organisation under a supreme government, with the smaller social units (marriage, family, school, industry etc.) seen as mere sub-units of the encompassing state. We have to think of society as a complex of diverse kinds of communities, each having its own internal sovereignty. The state should be a societal relationship for *public justice*. It should provide an environment in which a diversity of societal relationships can flourish harmoniously independent of the state (cf. chapter 10, section 10.2.3).

The political order is only *one* component of the much larger social order and the social order can therefore not be identified with the political order. The political order arises from the broader social order which is prior to the political order and not *vice versa*.

A sharp distinction between social and political order is a necessary condition for the growth of all kinds of societal relationships from below. Such structures are necessary if society is to be depoliticised, because it gives people power over their own lives, individually and communally. Popular sovereignty - the heart of democracy - can never be a practical reality within a structure imposed from above - even if imposed by those viewed as the representatives of the people. This radical depoliticisation of society will be no easy task after at least two centuries of radical politicising of Western thought and practice and at least thirty years in Africa.

This, however, is the key to genuine democratisation. State control of society inevitably leads away from the practice of democracy by concentrating power in a bureaucratic elite. Democracy can only be achieved by empowering people at the grassroots to take control of their own lives. Democracy - as the original word indicates - requires power to be exercised by the people. And this can only be achieved in a society in which the social order, the network of societal relationships,

is acknowledged as having priority over the political order - a society in which the political order of the state is viewed merely as an empowering servant of the whole social order.

R. Clouser (1991:255) emphasises the same point when he says: "... if state authority is elevated above all others on the excuse that it is needed for the state to ensure justice to all individuals and communities, totalitarian consequences cannot be avoided - not even by making the state a democracy. Once the state is believed to have an unlimited and overriding authority, it will matter little whether its authority is vested in one person, a governing group, or all the citizens.

The last point is worth dwelling on for a moment because so often democracy is spoken of as though that *form* of government alone is sufficient to guarantee the freedoms we enjoy. It is not. Simply giving everyone a vote does not ensure a single right or freedom. Unless the authority of government is limited in principle, democracy will only guarantee a tyranny of the majority worse than that of a single dictator. (Even with modern surveillance methods it is hard for a dictator to keep track of what everyone is doing, but we are always surrounded by the majority.) What is needed to ensure liberty is the idea of a *limited* state: a state restricted as to what it may make laws about so that there are bounds to its legal competency ... it is not too much to say that more rights and freedoms can be preserved where the sphere sovereignty idea prevails even if the state is governed by a king, than where the government is a democracy which operates without any idea of its being restricted to a distinct sphere of authority."

\* *A political order based on a differentiated social order*

Apart from the democratic principle of the equality of individual persons, the effective practice of democracy also requires the recognition of the equality of social communities or social relationships. We do not simply have individual persons, but individual people living in a variety of differentiated communities which are not sub-units of the political order. They are of different kinds, each with its own internal organisation and sovereignty. At the same time these diverse differentiated societal relationships are mutually interdependent. Their communal life can only be sustained in a symbiotic relationship.

We therefore need a basic shift from a conventionalist to a constructivist account of society, which recognises the social order as a human construction within the constraints of a law-governed reality. The state is not a mere contract or convention. Furthermore the social order is not, as the social contract theory assumes, a product of the political order. And social unity is not the product of unified political organisation. As already said, the social order is prior to the political order.

\* *Communal politics by negotiated consensus*

The dominant pattern of Western democracies clearly is the conflict politics of majority rule. Decisionmaking accordingly is a battle between opposing interests where the winner gains all and the loser loses all. Political life is organised around opposing interests which battle for control of government. The party that wins the vote of the majority of citizens is regarded as having a mandate to govern for a specific period. The other party can only oppose what the government does, hoping that it will win the next election.

This practice, which is regarded as essential to democracy, actually seriously inhibits the practice of democracy. In the first place polarised *private* interest displaces *public* interest - the real task of government. Secondly people are in reality disenfranchised. Those who have lost the election, have no say until the next round. Even those citizens who have won, have little effective voice as citizens in the exercise of power, because the government is deemed to be invested with the absolute authority of the people!

We therefore need a shift from the conflict politics of majority rule to the communal politics of negotiated consensus. The winner-take-all-battle for political power should be replaced by give-and-take-negotiation. This will result in a public political consensus in which no-one wins all and no-one loses all, but the interests of *all* communities have been taken into account. The only requirements are (1) that parties - even parties with no initial consensus - have a common will to proceed by negotiated consensus, and (2) that the political equality of communities (also the numerically smaller ones) is recognised.

Collaboration, not conflict, should be the norm for social and political interaction and therefore consensus, not conflict, the norm for decision-making!

\* *Qualified social authority*

A major flaw in the modern idea of democracy is that it rejects the absolute authority of the *ruler* but not the idea of the absolute authority of the *people* or society. It simply transfers the authority! In practice this implies that absolute authority is vested in the government of the state - provided that it is elected by the people. In reality then, sovereignty remains with the ruler(s)! The only difference is that the citizens have some say in the choice of the ruler(s).

The idea of *absolute* social authority, however, leaves no room for real democracy. It should be replaced by the idea of *limited* and *qualified* social authority. Social authority in a differentiated society is divided among the different societal relationships of the society. Each of them is an internal sovereign community with its own specific kind of authority (see again chapter 10 above). The usual question "How much authority should a societal relationship (like the state) have?" is wrong. The correct question should be: "What kind of authority should it have?"

As already indicated above, the state is not the supreme authority in society, but only one kind of societal relationship vested with its own kind of authority. It is true that the state is the *most comprehensive* of all human societal relationships and therefore its authority is also the most comprehensive. However, this comprehensiveness does not legitimise a claim that its authority is *absolute* or *superior*. As in the case with all other societal relationships, its authority is also *qualified*.

The state has the exclusive right of public physical power. This "power of the sword" (Romans 13) should be used, however, for a specific purpose: the commonweal (common good or public interest). If acts of state power are directed in ways that favour sectional private interests, it is not serving the public community.

This commonweal is qualified, however. The state is not responsible for *all* social good. In that case it should have had *absolute* authority -

something which we have already rejected. The government only serves the commonweal in as far as it is directed to the end of *public justice*. The ideas of justice and commonweal qualify each other. Public justice should be understood as a balancing of the private interests of the public political community so that all may have a share in the resources available and also share in the costs of maintaining the public order. The state is the "balancing wheel" in society. It should use its coercive power to restrict the activities of the more powerful communal interests in order to protect the weaker ones. All its activities should be directed solely towards the end of public justice for the sake of the commonweal.

Unlike anarchism we therefore do not regard it as wrong that people should exercise power over other people. On the contrary, it is only through exercising power that we can empower others! It is therefore not the exercise of power *as such* but the *way* in which the power is exercised that may be abusive. The power of the state is not intrinsically oppressive or by nature evil. The contrary is true: a strong state is necessary to ensure the commonweal.

\* *A covenanted mandate for the government*

The government is neither the people (citizens) nor the representatives of the people, holding the delegated powers of the people. It is the *servant* of the people. And as a servant it has a qualified mandate.

It is therefore important that the terms and conditions of this mandate under which the government of the state is to function as a servant of the political community be made explicit. Such a constitutional covenant should be the result of a community-wide negotiated consensus. This covenant both authorises and limits government action. A government cannot claim a mandate to implement whatever it sees fit simply on the basis of popular election!

\* *Mechanisms to safeguard popular sovereignty*

The state has the role of restraining abuse of power by others, but who restrains abuse of power by the state?

Popular sovereignty should be safeguarded by ensuring that the constitutional covenant is observed in the practice of government. Regular elections, a balancing of powers within the government, an independent judiciary, an ombudsman (or even a panel of ombudsmen) may be some of the means to achieve this aim.

The exact nature of the countervailing power which is to act as guardian of the constitution needs to be worked out to suit local situations. What is, however, important is that the authority entrusted with this power should be:

- *independent* of the government;
- have *adequate power* to act in defense of the constitution;
- be *impartial* with respect to private communal interests; and
- must be able to *act effectively* especially in defence of weaker communal interests.

#### 14.5.7 One-party or multi-party government?

Should multi-party government really be the ultimate model of true democracy? There is no evidence to support the notion that multi-party systems lead to greater democracy or that they are less open to corruption and abuse in practice.

A multi-party system operating within the framework of majoritarian conflict-politics harbours the danger that the process of government is dominated by the more powerful private interests to the exclusion and disadvantage of the weaker. This *can* also happen in a one-party system, but *usually* happens in a multi-party system.

Against the restriction on the organisation of private political interest, room can be made in a well run one-party system for private interests to operate *within* the party and the government. At the same time, however, a *de jure* one-party system puts an unacceptable restriction on the freedom of private political organisations.

It could also be argued that a one-party model with its strong communal emphasis is more akin to the social values of the African tradition than the dominant individualistic, majoritarian model of Western democracies.

In view of this it seems as if the whole issue regarding the *number* of parties is of less importance in the achievement of real democracy than one would deduce from the present debate in Africa.

#### 14.5.8 The multi-nation state

One of the more serious problems indicated previously is that the current forms of democracy can offer freedom to the majority group but not to minority groups (ethnic nations) sharing the same country and the same government. In the new kind of democracy outlined in the foregoing pages, however, a multi-nation state, in which two or more nations coexist within one state, becomes a practical possibility. The majority of African states (but also most other states in the world today) are *de facto* multi-nation states in which the political nation is composed of two or more ethnic nations. The challenge now is to give *de jure* recognition to this factual situation. This will avoid many social conflicts, as well as instability and even violence.

To ensure a successful multi-nation state, there are two requirements: (1) the equal partnership of all nations in the political community of a single, sovereign state and (2) effective safeguards for the internal sovereignty of the communal life of the member nations.

##### \* *The state as a partnership of nations*

If there is a dominant ethnic nation, this would imply the end to its privileged status. In the case of a state with no clear candidate for a dominant role it would not be necessary to replace all the nations with a new, common political nation. The ethnic nations would no longer be *rivals* but *partners*. By way of mutual cooperation, they would strengthen and enrich the political community.

This requires a negotiated consensus. And in order to attain consensus all the options have to be open. A state organisation already established by one nation cannot simply be considered the basis for any new arrangement. Not only organised political interests should have a say in such a negotiation process.

Some form of federalism will usually best serve as the political order for a multi-nation state. It could be territorial federalism, but in the



case where nations mingle in the same territory shared-territory federalism is also possible. In the last case structures should be developed in the state that enable the distinctive interests of the ethnic nations to be dealt with by representatives of these nations without regard to where they may live.

\* *Safeguarding the internal sovereignty of member nations*

On the one hand it is essential for a stable, democratic political order that the partner nations of a multi-nation state recognise the political sovereignty of the one, common political nation in which they participate as equal partners, and in doing so, renounce all claims to political sovereignty for themselves separately as ethnic nations. On the other hand they need guarantees that the internal sovereignty of their own communal life as a social order will be respected and that the power of the state will be used to protect it and not infringe on the internal sovereignty of the member ethnic nations.

An important distinction is therefore made between *political* sovereignty and *internal* sovereignty. In one (multi-nation) state there can only be *one* political sovereignty, but *every* ethnic nation in a multi-nation state retains its internal sovereignty. Internal sovereignty indicates the differentiated sovereignty in the various societal relationships, like for example marriage, family, school, college, church, business etc. of the different ethnic nations, because in a differentiated society the nation ceases to be identified with a single, all-encompassing social organisation.

This brings us back to the depoliticisation of society. According to this viewpoint the state cannot be seen as the manager and administrator of welfare, cultural life etc. It has only one specific task: the advancement of the commonweal by ensuring justice in the public political community. Empowering the people through a radical depoliticisation of society lies at the heart of real democracy. The administration of communal life should be in the hands of the societal relationships rooted in the everyday life of the people. The state should not organise it from the top down, but only has the responsibility to ensure equity and justice for all.

The idea of society as a symbiotic community is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of Africa. Also the politics of negotiated consensus is much more closely attuned to the African tradition than majoritarian conflict politics. Therefore Africa could in the future make an important contribution to genuine democracy.

\* *Disguised apartheid?*

Is Fowler (an Australian) not simply propagating another form of apartheid with his ideas summarised in the previous pages?

Fowler (*op cit.*:75-79) advances six important reasons why this is not the case at all. The idea of democracy that he offers depends, for instance, on a decisive rejection of at least two important premises of the apartheid ideology: (1) a rigid, racial definition of a nation and (2) the idea of the nation-state. He wants to replace these with (1) a unified multi-nation political order in which (2) distinct nations (understood as flexible, open social entities) live together in full and equal partnership in a free democracy.

\* \* \*

At the end of this chapter we should realise what an awesome responsibility we as Christians have to bear in the societal relationship of the state. This is not only the case when we serve in one or other government office, but also in our capacity as citizens. Life and death - not only physically, but also spiritually - may be at stake.

Spiritual life or death is determined to an even greater degree by the kind of education the young people of Africa receive, because they will become the future political and other leaders of our continent. In the next chapter we will therefore advocate *Christian* higher education. Without any doubt it can play a decisive role in the future of Africa.

## Chapter 15

# CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR AFRICA

We have already discovered new, liberating perspectives in seven areas of our daily lives: friendship, marriage, family, school, business, church and state. The list is of course far from complete. The eighth and last area to be focussed upon is higher or tertiary education.

As is to be expected, in accordance with the principle of confessional pluralism explained earlier (cf. chapter 10, section 10.4), the author of this book prefers education to be Christian without denying people of other faiths to have an education according to their own belief.

This topic has deliberately been left for the last chapter (it could have been included directly after the one on the school), because not all Christians are involved in scientific work. And also because it is more difficult to indicate a Christian approach in scholarship than, for instance, in marriage and family life.

Depending on the worldview a person adheres to (cf. chapter 5, section 5.5), he may propagate one or the other of the following positions:

- The Christian should be *against* scientific endeavour. Faith needs no rational explanation. One is either a Christian or a scholar!
- The Christian holds a position *alongside* scholarship: on Sundays he is a Christian, but from Monday to Saturday he is a scientist. One can be both a Christian and a scholar, but should never try to practise a Christian scholarship.
- The Christian has a position *above* secular scholarship. From the *outside* he will try to influence, guide and even dominate developments in the sciences. This is done especially by way of looking for a Christian theological perspective in every science. It is impossible, however, to affect an integral change from *within* every scientific discipline.
- The Christian can simply *baptise* ordinary, secular scholarship, because if it is scholarship of a high standard, it is identical to Christian

scholarship. There is nothing special about a Christian approach to scientific endeavour!

- Because scholarly work is neither inherently bad (viewpoint 1) nor inherently good (viewpoint 4) the Christian cannot simply reject or accept it, but can and also should *reform and renew* it. He can therefore never be satisfied being both a *Christian and a scholar* (viewpoints 2 and 3), but should strive toward being a *Christian scholar*, practising integrally Christian scholarship.

We will start with an introduction on Christian education in general (applicable also to primary and secondary education) before we embark on the more difficult area of Christian tertiary education. Then we will have a look at how scientific knowledge differs from ordinary, everyday knowledge. This will be followed by a survey of the situation of Christian higher education in Africa explaining *inter alia* what a Christian college/university should be. The next section compares a radical Christian approach to scholarship with a Christian dualist, a secular neutralist and a secular pluralist approach. We will also have a look at the relationship between philosophy and theology and will conclude with a brief credo for an institution of Christian higher education.

## 15.1 INTRODUCTION: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATION

There are many misconceptions concerning Christian education, for instance:

- *That it is education dominated by a church.* We are, however, not propagating *church* education, but *Christian* education in which a variety of denominations could cooperate.
- *That it is something like teaching Bible lessons.* Of course the Bible will play an important role in Christian education, but it is not limited to Bible knowledge. All the regular subjects should be taught, but from a Christian worldvewish perspective.
- *That it is Christian education because the teachers/lecturers are Christians.* Without Christians to teach, Christian education will not be

possible, but at the same time this is not an automatic guarantee for education to be Christian: the teachers also have to teach in a Christian way!

▪ *That it is a very narrow-minded, dogmatic kind of education, etc.*

In the course of the chapter it will become clear what Christian education really entails. Allow me as an introduction a closer look at what education in general entails.

### 15.1.1 Moulding, nurture and education

In all human relationships there is, consciously or unconsciously, *moulding* of one person by another. The writer of Proverbs (27:17) already taught that as iron sharpens iron, so one person shapes another. All moulding, however, is not educative or nurturing moulding - people can also influence each other in a negative and even evil way.

Nurture too, however, is still too wide a concept. Nurture as such does not exist, as it is an abstract concept. There are *specific kinds* of nurturing. The nurture by parents of their own children differs, for example, from the nurture by means of education, which implies teaching, instruction and training. In the case of education one is also able to distinguish between primary, secondary and tertiary education. There are also different kinds of secondary schools, such as academic, technical, agricultural, domestic, etc. of which each provides a specific kind of education. It is furthermore important that we should keep in mind that it is not only schools, education colleges and universities which offer education. This also occurs within the home, the army, industry, the political party, farming and the sports club. Each of these institutions offers its own typical kind of education which complies with its special needs.

Our word *pedagogue* is derived from the Greek *paidos* = child + *agoo* = lead or guide, that is, someone guiding a child. The word *educate* is derived from the Latin *educare*, which literally means to cultivate and to grow crops like an agriculturist. The Latin verb *instruere*, again, means to build, to make capable.

Education as a human activity can only be *formative*, it cannot change or transform man in any *decisive* way. This is only possible for the Holy Spirit.

Many facets of a young person's life are shaped in the course of the educative process: his religious life, his ethical relations, his linguistic and intellectual skills, the emotional and physical facets of his being and many more. It is important that he should not enjoy merely one-dimensional moulding, but rather multi-dimensional forming.

If we summarise all this, we find that nurturing (and education as a special kind of nurturing) means (a) to *guide* somebody (b) to enable such a person to *develop* with (c) the purpose of him becoming *competent*.

### 15.1.2 Point of departure, direction and destination

If we should use the image of a journey, we could say that education has three stages: the point of departure is the lecturer who offers purposeful guidance to the student. Because this guidance occurs in terms of a specific direction, norms and criteria are inherent in the educational process. And the destination is that the student should, via this process, become competent to fulfil his life's calling. Education is the purposeful effort of the educator to guide the educand, according to specific norms, towards maturity and equipment for his life's task.

It goes without saying that an institution cannot offer guidance to its students if what lecturer A teaches is questioned by B and openly opposed by C. Such a difference of worldviews does not promote critical thought, as some would like to maintain. Criticism, after all, presupposes criteria according to which things have to be judged. It therefore does not render the students critical, but either makes them sceptical or causes them to cling frantically to one point of view and reject the others. A clash of worldviews among lecturers in the end means spiritual disintegration among students!

### 15.1.3 Conscious guidance

The serious question which we have to ask here is whether we as lecturers always realise our great responsibility. Are we always aware

of the fact that we are the guides of young people who have been entrusted to us? Do we lead them on the right paths? Are we good models according to which they could with a good conscience model their own lives?

As has emerged from our description, education is guidance, via unfolding to making competent. One cannot separate the three elements (guidance, unfolding and equipping) from each other.

By unfolding we mean that the lecturer opens up for the student the entire reality in which he finds himself, so that he/she can know and understand it. From the known he is guided to an understanding of the unknown. And gradually, as the world in front of him is opened up, the student begins to open up matters for himself, and he himself opens up like a flower in bloom.

Our concern here is not simply with facts about reality. The danger of a mere factual unfolding of creation is that the student will remember the facts until the examination and never really feel that he/she is involved.

The Christian lecturer also does not merely teach facts *as such*. He could, for example, offer the material within the following three perspectives: creation, fall and redemption. Under the first perspective he could indicate how good God's creation was; under the second he could indicate the concrete results of sin, and under the third he should indicate what the redemptive possibilities of faith in Christ are.

In this way the third facet of education, viz. equipping, is realised. The young person is made capable of his calling and task in the world.

#### **15.1.4 Making competent**

Making competent means providing young people with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to live as disciples of Christ. Discipleship embraces all fields of life and not just church membership. This equipping of disciples should not only be achieved in one subject like Biblical Studies or Religious Instruction classes, but in all subjects. It is not only in Bible schools and theological schools where this happens, but also at training colleges and universities which practice and teach true Christian scholarship.

For this reason it is very important to keep in mind that Christian education should be a *team effort*. Lecturers should support each other and not contradict each other in the perspective from which they offer their subjects. Furthermore an *integrated curriculum* is also important in order to see the unity in God's creation. (Themes which are looked at from different perspectives offer a possibility of effecting this.)

The process of becoming competent should not be directed only at the future (we so often say that students are being taught so that *one day* ...), but also at the present. The students should become competent to be disciples of Christ *today*. Christianity is not something which only begins once a person leaves the university or seminary!

The concept of *making competent* also determines how teachers and lecturers will view their classrooms, themselves and their students.

Their classroom should become a workshop for training in discipleship.

Their students are not simply a number of empty heads which have to be filled with knowledge, or a crowd of criminals to be taught, but trainee disciples. And the lecturer is not simply a dictator or symbol of power, but merely a servant of the Lord, one who has to teach other younger servants of the Lord how to serve Him. In this way the classroom is really opened up for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Christian lecturers could apply the following criteria to themselves: a devoted Christian; a good knowledge of God's Word; somebody who views creation as revelation of God; a living, personal relationship with God; loving respect for his students as people; somebody with a sense of calling (does not simply work for money); somebody who is himself involved in the broader society, within which the educational institution is situated; a person with a prophetic spirit, who can call the students to discipleship; somebody who through his Christian worldview and scientific knowledge is able to offer his subject from a Christian perspective.

Should the lecturer himself not truly be a disciple he cannot serve as a model of discipleship for the younger person. The educator's whole exemplary life should encourage the educand and invite him/her to walk on the route of discipleship.



### 15.1.5 According to specific norms

Each lecturer who exerts a formative influence on the development of the lives of students has to know what the direction of his teaching is. One does not simply nurture or offer education, but one always does this according to specific norms. Are we always clearly aware of what norms determine our educational acts and give direction to them? If this is not the case, we can never succeed in the essential purpose of education, which is to give direction to the lives of developing individuals.

I cannot here go into all the norms which are relevant. As an example I simply mention that a lecturer has to see a student as a human being, created in the image of God. A student is not simply a "thing" of which one has to create a human being. For this reason the educand should never be treated as an object, but should have his freedom and responsibility (even if not fully developed) acknowledged and respected. A young person is not simply a piece of unshaped clay which is moulded at will in the hands of the potter. The educator may also not set himself the purpose of making students mere replicas of himself.

To drill or train a young person like an animal is antinormative "education". Dominating power, manipulation and mechanical training do not amount to education, but to mental engineering, or blatant brainwashing.

The opposite, viz. a *laissez-faire* attitude, is also antinormative. Both *forced* guidance and *no* guidance are misdirected. The results in the student will then be either rebelliousness, aggression or fearful subjection (in the case of force), or confusion, uncertainty and lack of discipline (in the case of a *laissez-faire* attitude in the educator). Instead of maturity the result will be immaturity. Neurotic tendencies and even permanent damage are not excluded.

### 15.1.6 Towards a specific purpose

I have firstly dealt with norms and now come to educational aims and ideals. Many people confuse the two. Ideals, however, are not norms, but norms determine ideals.

It is a pity that Christian educators have in the past taken over Graeco-Roman educational ideals so uncritically. Today humanist ideals such as maturity, self-realisation, self-assertion and emancipation are top priorities, also for Christians, while true Biblical aims such as faith, hope, love, self-denial, self-sacrifice and willingness to serve are lost sight of. People after all should not only develop fully for their own sake; rather love of God and of the neighbour should be seen as the highest good and destiny of mankind.

As the final purpose of education for many today we find: a morally strong personality, a psychologically strong individual, a socially well-adjusted or independent person, an individual trained for a specific job, a citizen obedient to the state, or a pious church member.

These are all wonderful ideals, as long as we keep in mind that they can degenerate into purely humanistic ideals of personality, only for the sake of the self-glorification of man. In addition education should not one-sidedly involve only one of these facets. Man is a far richer and more complex being. And finally the most profound and highest ideal of education should never be lost sight of.

The highest ideal is to teach students to submit to God and his laws willingly. In Biblical language, it means to guide them to wisdom. Stated in different terms: Is the most important goal of nurturing and education not to teach young people to accept responsibility? I mean here responsibility in the deeply religious sense of response in each facet of being human to God. Does our nurturing not often fail at precisely this cardinal point? Nurturing, guidance towards responsibility does not mean that we simply teach our children a multitude of *facts*. We have to give them clear *norms* for every facet of their lives. It is only when we know God's norms that we can respond to them.

The task of the lecturer is to guide his students in such a way that they are ready to fulfil their calling in life. And what is this highest calling? It is to be of service to God and His kingdom, to be His disciples.

This simply means that we have to guide our students in such a way that they will be able to know and honour God with the *whole* of their lives in *all* spheres of life. In order to be able to do this, we have to

instruct our children as to what God's will is for each sphere of life and how to subject their will to the will of God. The great commandment (love towards God and neighbour) should be concretised and positivised in a contemporary way to be relevant for the different areas of life.

The main objective of Christian education is therefore not merely to pass a particular syllabus (the well-known curriculum enslavement), memorise a certain number of facts (mere parroting), to pass an examination or to prepare for a specific office or job.

The most important objective of Christian education is to guide people towards discipleship. Discipleship involves two things: to *learn* and to *do*. To learn means to know God's will for all things. To do is to respond to God's will. Doing is the response of the disciple or servant to his Master. This response has two sides: (1) caring (taking responsibility) for the self, the neighbour and God's creation; and (2) healing (reconciliation), because everything and everybody is subjected to the corruption of this dispensation.

The highest purpose of Christian education is to guide our students concretely to be disciples of Christ. If this does not happen, our education as Christians has been a failure - as in the case of the student who said: "I have learned so much about God that, even if I have never met Him, I hate Him." (This theology student had merely been inundated by his lecturers with rational facts about the Bible and God.)

### **15.1.7 Typical characteristics of tertiary education**

In primary school children learn the basic techniques of reading, writing and arithmetic. In secondary education the attention is on the inculcation of knowledge without specific attention to the structure of knowledge. At tertiary level there are two possibilities. The young person is either trained for a specific profession in for example, a college of education, a nursing college, technical college, agricultural college, art school, commercial school or theological school. Or he receives scientific training at a university. Tertiary education at university level is not simply for the sake of accumulating knowledge, but especially for the purpose of obtaining an understanding of the structure of this knowledge. We can also call this the critical, creative or philosophical phase. Worldview plays an important role here.

For the first group of the above-mentioned tertiary institutions the concern is primarily with practical professional training to which scientific knowledge can make a contribution. For the university, conversely, the concern is primarily with scientific apprenticeship, a theoretical intensification of insight in reality, which should also help the student in the fulfilment of his calling within a specific profession.

We could also say that tertiary institutions for professional training focus on the *how*-question (how do I do this work?), whereas the universities mainly pose the critical *what*-question (what am I busy with?). One should not, however, turn this distinction into an antithesis, because the dichotomy between theory/science and profession/practice is a false dichotomy. If one works with such a dichotomy, one ends up with visionless professional training on the one hand and/or impractical scientific training on the other hand!

European universities are usually strictly scientific institutions with a theoretical orientation. Against this, universities in developing countries, such as those in Africa, are mostly directed to the training of schooled manpower. Practically all publications about universities in Africa direct attention to the fact that university training has to be relevant to the concrete needs of the developing countries. The priority is training that is immediately applicable, practicable and professionally to the point. A third type of university, situated between the European and African model, is the American one which tries to offer both scholarly education and professional training.

## **15.2 THE CHARACTER OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN COMPARISON WITH PRE-SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE**

As indicated above, the aim of tertiary education (especially university education) is acquiring scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge is not the same as the kind of knowledge we are used to in our everyday life, for instance one's knowledge of oneself, one's husband/wife, children, brothers/sisters, house, garden, pets and other animals, job etc. What then is the difference? Because it is not easy to explain the exact difference, I would like to employ the following story. I do not know whether the story will be fully understood by all African students, as the romantic courting culture is something typically Western. I do hope, however, that the essence of what I want to explain

(the differences between two types of knowledge) will become clearer by way of this story.

### 15.2.1 A student's experience

Imagine a lovesick student pair one autumn evening strolling down Tom Street (one of the most beautiful streets in Potchefstroom, being the longest oak lane in the southern hemisphere), on their way to the *Insleep* Restaurant. Judging from the way in which the couple have their arms entwined, one can infer that this is a serious "case".

Tonight the young man seems intent upon popping the question. In the shadow of a giant old oak tree he plucks up sufficient courage to propose. But the old tree that has so often borne witness to similar scenes has decided to put the young man's courage to the test, for from one of its highest branches it drops a well-aimed acorn bang onto the head of the lover, startling and confounding him to such an extent that he loses the flow of his thought and can no longer say what he has intended.

This student's acquaintance with the acorn has been a disagreeable one. Perhaps his first reaction on being struck on the head may have been the use of bad language. Perhaps he is a more sanguine type who, when his girlfriend cannot fathom what is wrong, can simply tell her what has happened.

If we study the account of the student's reaction to his encounter with the acorn we can make the following observations:

- In the first instance it is a *unique* experience that happens once in a lifetime: this *specific* acorn falling onto *his* head at exactly this *precise* moment in his life.
- In the second place such an occurrence is *variable* - it does not occur to any other couple this night.
- In the third instance it is *incidental* or *fortuitous*.

- Furthermore it is a *subjective* or *personal* experience. Why does this huge acorn fall on this particular person's head when he wishes to propose to his beloved?
- Finally his account to his girlfriend, or perhaps later in the evening to his roommate, is of a *descriptive* nature.

This is one kind of knowledge that our student has derived from the acorn. We could call this common or pre-scientific knowledge. Back in his room that night, however, this natural science student might have started wondering. He did not just accept that the oak tree had played him a dirty trick. He started wondering *why* the acorn had really fallen, what had made it fall. His surprise is the beginning of another form of knowledge that we call scientific knowledge.

The answer to this question is that in autumn acorns, as a result of all sorts of changes that oak trees undergo, loosen and drop off. All oak trees are subject to processes like this at this time of the year. Our student here has made a discovery as a botanist: the growth of oak trees takes place in accordance with certain laws. With his knowledge of physics he is already cognizant of the simple law of gravity, viz. that everything that does move freely of its own accord falls back to earth at a certain rate of acceleration.

If we now describe our student's scientific knowledge of the same acorn (in contrast with the characteristics of common knowledge already mentioned) we find the following characteristics of scientific knowledge:

- It is *universal*. (Botany: *all* acorns; Physics: *all* heavy objects fall.)
- It is *constant*. (Botany: acorns will *always* fall in the autumn; Physics: heavy objects will *always* be attracted to the earth in the same way and at the same speed.)
- Furthermore, it is a matter of *necessity* since definite biological and physical laws apply.
- In the fourth place, it is not subjective, but *objective*. (Botany: why do *acorns* fall at this time of year? Physics: Why do acorns *drop*?)

- In the last instance, this knowledge is not descriptive, as is the case with pre-scientific knowledge, but *prescriptive* (Botany: acorns *will* drop in autumn; Physics: heavy objects free of motion *will* fall back to the earth.)

One could thus assert that in science one tries to gain knowledge not only of one specific case, but of all cases of the same kind which are applicable e.g. all acorns. One tries to determine the laws according to which different phenomena take place in nature. In this way one can, for instance, determine in advance what will take place in certain situations.

Scientific knowledge has been termed abstract knowledge. The *idea* of an acorn is not a *real* acorn.

Scientific knowledge thus dissociates itself from actual concrete reality. *Universal, general* scientific knowledge is different from *unique, particular* and *individual* things. The *abstract, limited* and *reduced* knowledge of science differs from the *complex, interlaced* cohesion of everything in reality. The *stability* and *general validity* of the knowledge scientists are in search of is different from the *dynamic, everchanging* reality.

The B.Sc.-student of our story has experienced two forms of knowledge (pre-scientific and scientific) about the same acorn. If we compare the two forms, we see that the pre-scientific knowledge is closer to reality. It is not as "abstract" as scientific knowledge - which, however, does not mean (as some people tend to think) that pre-scientific knowledge is less important or of less value than scientific knowledge. They are only two different ways of getting to know things.

I often corner most of my students by asking the following question: Who knows most about a sick baby: the mother of the child or the medical doctor? The answer is of course that neither knows more: the mother and the doctor have *different forms of knowledge* of the sick baby. Intuitively and pre-scientifically the mother suspects that the baby has chickenpox. The doctor's scientific training, however, enables him to diagnose it definitely as chickenpox.

Another example could be the difference between a refreshing glass of water and  $H_2O$ , the chemical formula of water.

Quite possibly, in spite of our discussion of the subject so far, you have not yet gained clarity as to what science really is. Do not let this worry you: great thinkers have spent their lives struggling with the problem.

Let me, however, make another attempt to explain by using another image.

### 15.2.2 The image of a map

One can draw a map of a certain region, but everyone will realise that such a map is not identical with the landscape. We could say that the map is the scientific replica of the landscape. The scientist has studied the region concerned and in his map he has tried to reproduce whatever he came across in the landscape.

Because a certain stretch of land offers numerous aspects many scientists may have busied themselves with it. Each scientist will emphasise other factors concerning the land in his map. The one's map will concentrate on road, rail, sea and air links; the other, the botanist, will indicate where certain grasses, plants and trees are to be found. The zoologist will indicate in what regions certain types of animals thrive best. The geographer will indicate mountains, rivers, lakes, etc. In his turn the geologist will supply data in his map about the incidence of various precious metals and minerals.

You will realise that a map is not the actual landscape, however involved we make the map and even if, in the end, we compile the data of all the maps. One can most certainly not undertake a tour, climb mountains, swim and camp on a map! Our intention, in using this image, is only to stress once more that the map and the actual landscape cannot be identified with each other. On the other hand, one cannot tour an unknown region in comfort and satisfaction unless one has a good road map or map that provides particulars about all the sights worth seeing in the country.



### 15.2.3 Student and lecturer

When one enrolls as a student, one actually decides to undertake a long journey. For some students the journey of discovery will last for three or four years, and for those who wish to undertake post-graduate studies after completing a first degree course, even longer. On this journey one will reconnoitre a certain aspect or a certain area of reality. Not unlike any tour through unknown territory, scientific work is interesting and fascinating work, but just as a long tour can become exhausting, so also can the scientific tour of discovery. If, however, one has a good guide to help one and draw one's attention to all that is beautiful and interesting, such a journey can become a feast for the mind.

In this case the guide is the lecturer. Some lecturers are experienced, others still have much more to learn, but at any rate they know the ground better than the student does. Although they have a good fund of knowledge available, however, they all realise that they still have much to learn and they do not mind traversing the same ground repeatedly from the start with their students. Of course it remains a condition that the student must also show his interest. It is bad for a guide to realise that his group is not interested in what he is saying.

A good guide also leaves something to the initiative of the group. He cannot and will not tell them everything. It remains more interesting if a person can discover something on his own and does not allow himself to be spoon-fed only. The genuine traveller is curious, he wants to reconnoitre on his own. Such is the case too with the lecturer and student. The lecturer does not regard his student as a regurgitating parrot. The student appreciates this attitude in his lecturer and he does not disappoint him. He applies his own critical faculties to what he gathers from his lecturer.

A university is a *community* of lecturers and students practising science. They are engaged in a *joint* journey of discovery. Scientific practice does not constitute the professor having to do all the talking and the student passively taking it down in a notebook, the content of which he will reproduce a few times a year (during tests and examinations) in another book - the examination script.

The genuine student asks questions and gladly discusses problems with his lecturer. The genuine lecturer will not in his turn try to pump a number of facts into the student's head and in a question paper extract these self-same facts from the student's head bursting with a conglomeration of facts. The lecturer desires his young fellow traveller to obtain an overview of and especially an insight into his subject.

The lecturer's responsibility to his student is to help him grow and develop into an adult scientist. At first he is taken by the hand and conducted on a guided tour, but later he should be sufficiently responsible to reconnoitre the field himself.

At the outset the student will have to bring himself up to date with the existing so-called "maps". Imagine that this is the theoretical part of the subject. If he is familiar with this, he begins with a little practical work. On a small scale he can undertake a journey into unknown country and chart his findings. In this fashion the junior member of the academic community (the student) gradually becomes a senior member who will be able to find his way without getting lost.

### **15.3 CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA TODAY**

Apart from in the North and South, Christianity in Africa is still in its infancy - in most countries only a century old. The present growth, however, is phenomenal. While at the beginning of this century there were, according to estimates, only about 3 million Christians, this has today grown to about 200 million from a total population of about 450 to 480 million. Christianity in Africa at present grows at the rate of about 4 000 per day (25% as a result of conversions from other faiths, and the rest as a result of births). If this increase is maintained, Africa could by the year 2 000 (a mere 8 years away) have 393 million Christians (48% of its total population). This means that by the turn of the century there will be more Christians in Africa than on any other continent - more than in Europe, even more than in the USA and Canada together. Africa will then be *the* Christian continent of the world - the erstwhile dark Africa is becoming Christian Africa!

One would therefore expect Christian higher education to play a prominent role in Africa, but unfortunately this is not the case. It is a dangerous situation, because Christian education could give the rapidly

expanding Christendom the necessary muscle so that it does not die away as rapidly as it has come into being. Education in general and Christian education specifically is, to my mind, an issue of life and death for Africa. It is one of the most important medicines to help heal a struggling continent.

This section will deal with the following points:

- A brief analysis of the present situation in Africa - the backdrop against which we should see the possibilities for Christian education.
- A general overview of the situation in higher education.
- Christian higher education (in colleges and theological seminaries) in Africa.
- A hopeful sign for the future as conclusion.

### **15.3.1 The present situation in Africa and the position of Christianity**

In view of the fact that this section will only present background and an overview in order to help you understand the problems and the challenges linked to Christian higher education better, this will be done very briefly and cursorily.

#### *\* The present politico-economic context*

- Power politics and civil wars continuing in spite of democratisation.
- Tribalism, class struggle, discrimination.
- As a result of the above and also because of religious persecution and severe droughts millions of refugees all across Africa.
- International (external) debts that cannot be repaid.
- Corruption, nepotism, a small but wealthy elite and landowners as against a mass of impoverished people.
- Large-scale urbanisation as a result of rural impoverishment, unemployment, inflation, little development of human and natural resources.
- Famine, malnutrition, a lack of clean drinking water and medical services, high population increases. (In 1983 already Africa's total

population was estimated to be 482 million, and it was then predicted that within 25 years (by 2008) it could be 1,1 billion, which means that Africa will by then have to feed no fewer than 600 million *extra* mouths.)

■ It also appears that the so-called new world order we are entering into is not going to mean a great deal for Africa. The USA and the newly united Europe have their own priorities in a time of worldwide economic recession. And Africa, the "lost" continent, is not high - if at all - on their priority list.

\* *Problems and threats to Christianity*

Apart from the fact that these politico-economic factors make life hard for everybody in Africa, there are also specific dangers which threaten Christianity.

I will only make a list of competitors for the soul of Africa, without going into detail on any of them.

■ In the field of religion there is, apart from the *traditional religions*, also *Islam*. Since 1934 Islam has grown by about 500% worldwide (even in Western Europe), as against the 47% growth in Christianity. Christianity and Islam are at present the two world religions with the largest number of adherents: one billion each. Researchers estimate that, although there will soon be about 370 million Christians in Africa, there will also be about 322 million Moslems. Islam is today the dominant religion in 44 countries in the world - of which quite a number are African countries. In some of these countries it is even illegal to spread the Gospel.

■ All sorts of *Eastern cults* such as Hara Krishna and Transcendental Meditation today also have their adherents in Africa.

■ Unbiblical attitudes to life such as *pragmatism* and *secularism* are increasing, especially among young people and the higher classes. While many are still hesitating on the bridge and looking backwards, a large part of the population of Africa has already exchanged their traditional African religions for the - in no way better - secularised Western culture. Dr. K.D. Kaunda, former president of Zambia, said at an international conference of Christian scholars in 1987: "We in

Africa fear that our people, particularly the youth, will be swept away by a gale of ideologies blowing through the continent. We are especially apprehensive about the impact of the materialism of the secularised West and its fascination with money, fashion, fast cars and a superficial lifestyle devoid of any personal commitment to the cause or concern for the development of man - the most important unit in the whole of God's creation".

■ In the final instance there are all sorts of *alien ideologies* which are competing for the hearts of the people of Africa. Until very recently different forms of African socialism were very popular in various countries - not to mention hard-line Marxism!

Against this background Christianity has often been seen as only another possibility, not essentially different from the other religions. Many still regard it - even thirty years after independence - as the religion of the Western colonial oppressors!

This confusion in worldview emerges most poignantly at most institutions for higher education in Africa, where a large number of foreigners from West and East are teaching. Apart from adherents of traditional religions and Islam, there are also Western atheists, secularists and idolators of science. There are lecturers who adhere to Eastern philosophies and cults, Marxists and Christians from a variety of churches. They all compete, subtly or openly, for the hearts and minds of their students.

In such a worldviewish confusion there is not, of course, the opportunity for the formation of a clear worldviewish perspective in students. Because lecturers contradict each other, the students, many of whom are already confused as a result of the transition from African to Western culture, became more confused. Many either become sceptical or grab frantically for any of the variety of worldviews on the academic marketplace. Some Christian students narrow down their Christian faith to pietistic prayer and song meetings organised by a variety of para-church organisations on campus.

\* *Strong points of African Christianity*

I would first like to mention a few points which should fill us with joy, and then will concentrate on some prominent weak points of African Christianity.

- I have already pointed out the *spectacular growth* in the number of Christians. Between 300 and 400 million Christians by the year 2 000 means that Africa could claim to be called a Christian continent, in fact *the* Christian continent.
- On the African soil too it has already been proved that *persecution* (in countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique and Angola) has not let the church go under, but has rather led to unprecedented growth. This also indicates that Christianity in Africa is not necessarily superficial. One's faith has to be worth something when one is willing to suffer and even to die for it! And there is no country in Africa which has not yielded its quota of blood witnesses for Christ.
- Another sign of the sincerity of African Christianity is the *awakening of a zeal for global evangelism*. Fifteen years ago already African Christians sent out as many missionaries as the Western world did - even to the erstwhile Christian Europe!
- There have also been various *spiritual awakenings or revivals* (for example, in various East African countries) with wonderful results, such as, for example, care for the poor, widows and orphans, refugees and the oppressed.
- There are also clear signs that African Christianity is moving away from an imported Western to a more *authentically African experience of faith* in, for example, liturgy and theology. The alien Western mantle is being exchanged for genuine African clothes.
- A large percentage of Christians in Africa are *young and although still questioning, enthusiastic about their faith*. 60% of the population of Africa are under 20 years of age!

\* *Weak points in African Christianity*

- It is a rather *weak faith* when it comes to professional and economic persecution. In many countries Christians in business, politics and the civil service generally give in to the pressures of the world, for they do not firmly believe that God will provide when the squeeze is on. This is a major reason for rampant corruption all over Africa.
- *Divisions in Christianity*, especially as a result of denominational differences, weakens the power of the churches. The tragedy is that it is often Western disputes of centuries ago that have been transplanted to the African churches!
- The shadowy side of the unequalled increase in numbers is of course that one can have masses of *nominal Christians* who are still at heart pagans. *Larger* then simply means *fatter* and not *stronger*. The growth in numbers should be accompanied by spiritual growth to maturity in faith. David Barrett warns, for example, that if nothing substantial is done to improve the situation, 40% of Christians in Africa will only be Christians in name by the year 2 000. It is, however, not only Western outsiders but also African Christians who have already directed attention to this grave problem.
- Most spiritual leaders therefore direct attention to the *immense need among Christians to obtain more knowledge of Scripture* and to be better equipped with a view to the quality of their faith.
- Together with this there is the need that Christians, who are often perceived to stand outside day to day issues, should *become more relevant and involved* in the socio-economic and political life of their environment. There is a complaint that Christians, in spite of their numbers, do not have enough immediate influence in their communities.
- Closely related to this is the *lack of trained Christian leaders* not only in the church, but in fields such as agriculture, the judiciary, economy and business. Africa is not looking for technocrats and bureaucrats, but does have a great need for Christian leaders with vision.

■ The next point that I would like to mention is the *great need for direction-giving Christian literature*. There is some ecclesiastical literature, such as hymn books and catechism material, evangelistic literature for use in mission work, a little literature for the nurturing of personal faith, simple Bible study guides and courses and some publications aimed at the youth, marriage and family life. Publications, however, which clarify the meaning of Christian faith for the "larger" problems of Africa are few and far between or do not exist at all. I here have in mind literature providing a Christian perspective on the already mentioned socio-economic, political and cultural problems.

Listen to the following statement in a lecture by P. Kumah of Ghana at the Christian Literature Conference for Africa (20-22 October 1987) at Potchefstroom: "The wrong mentality of regarding anything 'secular' as evil is one of the greatest tricks the devil has played on the Christian community in Africa. The doctrine of 'striving to get in heaven at last' has caused many capable authors to shy away from books that will not only transform our society, but make us better servants of God."

■ This remark by Kumah brings me to what I consider the most important weakness, viz. *the type of Christianity which has predominantly been established in Africa* (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3.2.2 above). Unfortunately for African Christianity, it has not been spared the age-old, most dangerous disease of dualist thought. Christian faith is something "spiritual" which does not really have meaning for life outside the narrow confines of the individual, church, marriage and family. The life-encompassing liberating power of the Gospel of Christ is individualised and spiritualised to personal conversion and eternal salvation. The truly Biblical kingdom perspective is lacking, and it is precisely this which is so urgently needed, because Africa has to deal with so many economic, political, social and other problems.

Should African Christianity not succeed in replacing this narrow type of vision of life with a far wider and richer Christian worldview, Christianity will not be able to make its contribution to the salvation of this bleeding continent. It might even happen that instead of ongoing growth, large-scale apostasy might occur among believers, because initially enthusiastic converts will not be able to discern any relevance in the Christian message in terms of the harsh African realities. Against the all-encompassing traditional African worldviews, totalitarian Islam



and all kinds of secular ideologies which do offer Africa a politico-economic worldview, Christianity only has a chance if it should propose and practice a total, radical and integral worldview and way of life.

Fortunately one also encounters jewels like the following two. James Mageria (a Christian businessman from Kenya) says (*In: Cassidy & Verlinden, 1978:142*): "It is impossible to divide one's life into the spiritual and the non-spiritual. Many people are coming to realise that it is also unscriptural". And Dr. Godfrey Nguru, of Daystar University College, Nairobi says: "At independence, many of the African countries secularised the Christian educational institutions at all levels. They now produce graduates who may have academic knowledge but who are grossly lacking in solid Christian training that gives purpose to an individual's life ... Hence the societal decay and the political, social, economic problems that have plagued many countries of Africa since independence ... We believe that the redeeming and renewing power of Christ affects not only the individual, but also the social, economic, cultural and political spheres in which one moves ... We aim at Christian scholarship and academic excellence as we help our students to formulate a biblical worldview that is relevant to the changing circumstances in Africa". (*Daystar Calender for 1987*).

### **15.3.2 A general overview of the higher education situation**

I will only provide some flashes about university education in general and then something about Christian tertiary education. For this I make use of two recent papers delivered at an IRS conference (27 April to 1 May 1992). The first paper is the one by Dr. John N. Orkar of Nigeria about *The plight of African universities and scholarship* and the other one by Dr. Victor B. Cole of Kenya, entitled *A critical evaluation of Christian higher education in Africa - past and present*.

#### *\* Higher education in general*

The condition of university education throughout Africa is terrible, to say the least. Curricula are old-fashioned and irrelevant, the lecturers incompetent, the standards hopeless and the students who ultimately obtain degrees are not at all qualified in their fields or able to make a contribution to society.

The most important causes for this woeful situation are, according to Dr. Orkar, the following:

- Universities in Africa are state institutions and the governments themselves are in a critical situation, so that they cannot adequately finance their universities. (Most universities receive no funds from tuition or donations.)
- As a result of a lack of funds there is no money to buy books. Libraries have lots of old books but recent publications are simply not available.
- As a result of a lack of foreign currency scientific journals cannot be obtained any longer.
- There is a desperate lack of infrastructure and equipment.
- All the above lead to students being totally unequipped when they complete their studies. Students in the natural sciences, for example, have no laboratories and students complete courses in computer science without having set eyes on a computer!
- There are some curricula which are totally irrelevant for the African situation, for example, studies in computer science, while students will never work with a computer.
- The brain drain of graduates: they prefer, as a result of the poor employment conditions and salaries, to work abroad (Europe and the USA). Lecturers from outside Africa also do not want to assume posts in African universities any longer.
- The exodus of academic and administrative university personnel to the private sector.
- Promotion, discharge and transfer of personnel are done on the basis of political convictions, tribal or personal connections. Universities do not have the freedom to arrange their own affairs.
- Many of the professors are involved in politics and do not pay enough attention to their academic work.

- Academic plagiarism is rife and is allowed openly.
- Instability in academic policy and programmes.
- The population explosion increases the number of people wanting a university education, while there are very limited facilities. For example, Canada, with 26 million inhabitants, has twice as many universities as Nigeria, with about 100 million.
- The entire "climate" at universities is therefore not conducive to study, with the result that students are very poorly equipped at the end of their study period.
- Malpractices in the admission of students. Children of people with a high profile, or children who have other contacts, are admitted even though they do not qualify or have the potential to become good students, while others who may have the potential are unfortunately not admitted.
- Ongoing unrest on campuses: strikes, boycotts, protest marches, arson, violence and resultant closure for long periods.
- Increasing use of drugs among students and staff.
- The increase in all sorts of mystical cults and organisations which protect their members' interest at all costs.
- Malpractices during examinations.
- An increase in immorality, dishonesty and corruption among students - the future leaders of a country!
- Because of governments' control and interference in the private affairs of universities, the broader society does not pay attention to the precarious situation in which universities find themselves.

What an unhealthy state of affairs!

\* *Christian higher education in particular*

The main problem in Africa is the fact that after the independence of the various African states, the governments took over the control of primary, secondary and tertiary education. This was also applicable to the institutions established by the missionaries and Christian organisations, with the result that they are now secularised institutions.

Victor Cole here distinguishes among three different kinds of Christian higher education. *Type one* is theological schools, which usually do not offer "liberal arts" courses. *Type two* is Christian colleges and universities established and maintained by Christian churches. *Type three* is "liberal arts" colleges which truly practise scholarship from the perspective of Christian faith, because they have succeeded in "integrating" faith and science.

Type one (theological schools) are practically the only ones that finally survived. The problem with them, however, is that they have a very narrow view of Christian education. They distinguish between "secular" and "Christian" education and only involve themselves in the latter. They do not have a truly Christian educational philosophy which would clarify the fact that this dualism between secular and sacred is totally wrong.

Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone is the only one of the second type of college that Cole has knowledge of. The danger with this type is that they are usually Christian in name only because they might simply have a chapel on campus.

Among type three (truly Christian liberal arts colleges) Cole also has knowledge of only one, viz. Daystar University College in Nairobi. From the late seventies to the eighties efforts were made in this direction in Nigeria but no government approval could be obtained. (The Institute for Christian Studies at Mkar in Nigeria, which was established in 1990, has thus far not succeeded in obtaining government recognition.)

Cole is also not optimistic that such Christian colleges will easily be established in Africa. His reasons are the following: (1) the churches do not at all see the need for these, or are not fully cognisant of the great

need; (2) higher education is not affordable; (3) the trained manpower is simply non-existent; (4) approval and acknowledgement of Christian colleges (for example, to confer degrees) by the various governments either cannot be obtained or are time-consuming and extremely difficult to obtain; and (5) a Christian philosophy of education which makes clear that *all* subjects *can be* practised within a Christian framework and thus *should be* done in this fashion still does not exist.

Seen in a nutshell, then, there are only two types of Christian higher education in Africa: many theological schools and only a few liberal arts colleges. Following this general introduction, in the subsequent section I would like to say something more about each of them.

### **15.3.3 Christian higher education in Africa**

I will in this section concentrate on Christian *institutions* for tertiary (post-school) education. In this way I am not denying that there are also *individuals* at secular institutions who teach and practise scholarship as Christians. A separate Christian institution is not the only way in which science can be practised in a Christian manner. There are Christian lecturers at secular institutions who practise their science to the glory of God. Apart from these individuals there are also other models available such as conferences, forums, institutes, correspondence courses etc.

#### **15.3.3.1 Bible schools and theological institutions**

Here we face four great problems:

- Limited training opportunities for large numbers.
- Mutual division among churches.
- The lack of a contextualised, specifically African theology.
- The idea that theological training is sufficient to offer adequate "equipment" for the whole of life of the Christian.

*\* Immense growth in the number of Christians, with very limited opportunities*

If we look into the *ACTEA Directory of Theological Schools in Africa* (1985) we see how few opportunities for training there really are in relation to the growing numbers of Christians. The *Directory* offers details of 742 institutions (Bible schools, theological schools and

departments of religion at universities) in 41 African countries. If we add the details of those countries whose information could not, for reasons of security, be added to the *Directory*, then the total reaches about 800. According to estimates this would be only two-thirds of the actual number, which should then be about 1 200. For about 200 million Christians this is a very small number - especially if one keeps in mind that the average number of students per institution is only 45. Of the total there are not even 100 evangelical institutions for theological training. And of this handful only some offer training of a quality for which degrees can be awarded. Few churches send their students to the Departments of Religious Studies at the universities, because they are usually fairly liberal, do not have direct contact with the churches, and also cannot serve the specific interests of the various churches.

As already stated above, so much depends on whether the church in Africa is simply going to increase in *size* (getting *fatter*), or whether it is also going to be *stronger*. The danger of there being millions of "Christians in name" can not be excluded. Growth in numbers without a concomitant growth in spiritual strength and depth is very dangerous. An African Christian recently said the problem of Christianity in Africa is that it looks like a river which is 2 km wide, but of which the water is only 1 cm deep! Another Christian from Africa recently warned that Africa should be careful of not only holding the record for the most rapid growth of Christianity - it might well also quickly gain the record for the most rapid demise of Christianity.

We have to embrace the freshness of African Christianity (in most countries not more than 100 years old, in contrast to the almost 2 000 years in Europe) and the hunger to learn more about the Gospel. Good, relevant theological training can play a crucial role here. It can provide the essential capable church leaders who can guide the many "babies" in faith to maturity in their Christian belief. Church leaders in Africa are often more charismatic leaders than really trained leaders with a sound theological education.

\* *Division among the churches and their theological training*

A second factor which renders the situation even more critical is the tragic reality of denominationalism. The ecclesiastical divisions of the

West have been transferred to Africa. We still find people who say *Amen* and others who prefer to shout *Hallelujah*, and yet other who reject this as unreformed. There are charismatic and non-charismatic churches; high churches and low churches; churches governed by bishops and others governed by elders; churches which go in for baptism through total immersion and others through the sprinkling of water; and even some Christians who smoke and chew chewing gum, while others do not indulge in these habits. The fundamentalists, the sacramentalists and the sentimentalists are all in Africa!

Denominationalism or churchism has disastrous consequences. This leads to *indifference* - you are not interested in what is happening outside your own small circle. It leads to *pride* - you regard your church's members as the only true disciples of Christ. (As if Christ had been a Baptist, a Calvinist, a Methodist, an Anglican, a Roman Catholic or a member of one or the other Independent Church.) Apart from this danger of *exclusivism* there is also the effect of *negativism*. We do tend to be negative, reactive, defensive. We tend to make enemies out of potential friends because of insignificant things, and we turn true believers into heretics. We do not realise that other believers can, in the richly shaded tapestry of faith, place their accents differently from us. Uncritical condemnation (they can not do anything right) is just as bad as uncritical acceptance (they surely can not do anything wrong!). We seem not to have heard the Biblical injunction to judge the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

And in this way we remain locked up within our own churches - and remain captives of our own church history and tradition. If there is one thing that Africa needs very badly it is a *positive theology*!

Of course there are already ecumenical movements in Africa. The Ecumenicals (about 155 member churches from 33 African countries) belong to the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). The Evangelicals in turn are united in the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM). The latter has already constructed two graduate theological schools. The one is for French-speaking Africa, the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology, and the other one, for English-speaking Africa, is the Nairobi Graduate School of Theology. Among the third large group, the so-called indigenous or Independent Churches (thousands of groups and millions of members),

there have been movements towards ecumenical union as, for example, among the Shona Independent Churches in Zimbabwe. There is still, however, a long and hard road ahead - especially in terms of effecting ecumenical co-operation among these three main groups.

\* *Still according to the Western model*

In the literature that I have studied, there is a consistent complaint that theological education in Africa is simply a carbon copy of Western theological education. It might have been warmed up a little or watered down to make it easier to swallow but in essence it is still Western. Africans still feel that their theology is being practised "through the brain of the Western missionary". And the problem is that the Western seedling in spite of all the water and fertiliser still cannot take root properly in African soil. The people of Africa cannot any longer be satisfied with a theology with the trademark "Made in Europe/USA". They are looking for a theology born *in* Africa, *through* the African and *for* the people of Africa.

J.S. Mbiti has said that "Christianity has christianised Africa, but Africa has not africanised Christianity". This is also true of theological training in Africa.

What Africa needs is a theology which is at one and the same time true to the Scriptures and relevant for Africa. It should be one hundred percent Biblical and yet address the needs and problems of the African. It should be founded in God's revelation, but in such a way that one should be able to hear clearly how Christ talks to one directly and within one's specific circumstances.

Only when we have taken traditional religion and worldview seriously and have studied them fundamentally, and indicated for the African how the Gospel can answer his deep religious and worldview questions, will we be able to have a truly authentic African Christianity which addresses the whole of man. One does not avoid syncretism (a religious cocktail) if one *ignores* traditional religion and worldview, but when one *takes them very seriously* and when it is made clear how the Gospel can reform or transform them. Relevant theological education in Africa (and in any other part of the world for that matter) therefore is



education which enables the Christian to serve God *within* and not *outside* his own culture.

*\* The idea that theological training alone provides adequate equipment for the whole of the life of the Christian*

We should not make the mistake of expecting that our theological schools, apart from serving the church, should also christianise the whole of life outside the church. It is not their *task* to do this, and they are also *not capable* of it. For that we need Christian tertiary educational institutions such as teachers' training colleges and universities.

Theological training has for understandable reasons always played a prominent role in the Christian community, and in Africa, as already indicated, it is the most important effort of churches towards Christian (higher) education. We should not, however, deduce from this that it is the only or even the most important form of Christian education.

At the same time we should not underestimate the possibilities offered by the theological institutions of Africa. They can be the starting points for the vision that the Kingship of Christ applies across the entire spectrum of scientific practice and the whole of life. Should such a broader worldview be accepted, theological schools can grow and extend towards becoming liberal arts colleges or even universities. Examples of this process exist in history - my own university was born in this way in 1869.

The fact is that many theological schools in Africa already feel the need for theological training with a wider scope. Sciences which can be mentioned include, among others, the social sciences, psychology, anthropology, economics, political and cultural sciences - all subjects which are important in the context of Africa.

One of the first and most appropriate steps in the direction of a broader theological curriculum (with a view to gradually developing liberal arts colleges out of theological institutions) would, to my mind, be a compulsory course for all theological students on a Christian worldview.

### 15.3.3.2 Christian colleges and universities

Seeing that nearly all universities in Africa are secularised state institutions, I would like to mention a few institutions that came into being through the private initiative of Christians. Southern and Central Africa are especially privileged. This region already has the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (in South Africa), the Christian College of Southern Africa (Harare, with a new branch in Mutare) and the New African University (Mutare), both in Zimbabwe. In East Africa, as already mentioned, there is the Daystar University College in Nairobi, Kenya, and in West Africa an Institute for Christian Studies has been established in Mkar, near Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria. All these institutions are in various stages of development.

As far as I know there is not yet a Christian college/university in the whole of the North African region. Furthermore, the institutions in Anglophone Southern, Central, East and West Africa cannot serve the French and Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa.

There are, however, encouraging signs. At the end of chapter 2 I already mentioned the possibility of a number of Christian colleges in Kenya. During the last month I received no fewer than two letters from people in other parts of Africa, indicating that they have plans to establish Christian tertiary institutions. The one person from Zambia intends to start with a liberal arts college in Kaoma. The other person wrote from Butare in Rwanda indicating that a group of churches are planning a Protestant University for Central Africa in Kigali.

The main problem is that practically all the mentioned institutions have not yet attained the ideal of an *integral* Christian scholarship. To some degree most of them hold to at least one or more of five misconceptions (see below) with regard to what a Christian institution for higher education should be like. All of them are inadequate criteria for a Christian higher educational institution.

In spite of the fact that none of the above-mentioned institutions want to be neutral, the idea of neutral scholarship is still so powerful that - as an introduction - we should state clearly why it cannot be an option.

\* *It is not a neutral institution*

The neutrality concept is unacceptable for the following four reasons:

■ In the first place this is a *negative* concept. The word *neutral* is derived from the Latin *neuter* which can be translated as "neither one nor the other". Somebody is neutral if he does not belong to either of two parties. It therefore indicates what somebody is *not*.

It is thus not a positive concept which clearly states what somebody *is*, e.g. Christian. Christians should be positive people, who live *for* Christ, and would therefore not like to regard their institution as neutral!

■ In the second place it is an *illusory* concept, because *neutralism* is also a belief, the neutralist viewpoint is itself a viewpoint, it is not impartial. Even "lack of principle" is a principle!

■ In the third place the concept of neutrality is *unclear*, because it determines its position with regard to the two poles between which it finds itself. And once the poles shift, the viewpoint of the neutralist also has to change. It can therefore happen that the neutralist assumes exactly that viewpoint which had earlier been assumed by the left or the right pole. The neutralist is therefore *forced* to change position because of a shift on either the right hand side or the left hand side.

■ In the fourth place neutralism is in fact *impossible*, because man is not a neutral being, and cannot but choose. The Bible teaches us explicitly that it is impossible not to choose, and to try and serve two lords at the same time. Neutralism is therefore nothing other than a hidden betrayal of our King, Jesus Christ. This is also true in the field of scholarship.

Most misconceptions, as indicated by the following five, result from the fact that a clear distinction has not been made between two different societal relationships, viz. the church and a (Christian) university /college.

The problem is the all-pervading church, putting on each endeavour a clerical stamp, church leaders "occupying" every field. In this way the

university suffers from "clericalitis". As is true for so many other projects and societal relationships, the church smothers the university to such a degree that it thereby hides the light of the kingdom of God!

\* *"Christian" should not have a merely historical meaning*

The fact that a university developed from a missionary endeavour, a specific church or a theological school (as was the case with Potchefstroom University) is not in itself wrong, but it is not enough to guarantee the Christian character of the institution. History offers many examples of such institutions which are today merely secular.

The reason for this is that an origin in a church, and the control or influence of a Christian theology, do not guarantee the Christian character of an institution for Christian higher education. A *Christian* university is different from an *ecclesiastical* university or a university which is under the rod of *Theology*, however true it might be to the Bible.

Even a solid Biblical foundation, striking aims, an inspiring mission or a carefully formulated private act does not offer any guarantee that an institution will act in a Christian manner in its daily activities.

\* *"Christian" should not be interpreted in terms of church activities on campus*

Many institutions for tertiary education in the USA and especially the East (South Korea, Taiwan and Japan) call themselves "Christian", because they have a chapel on campus or a minister on their staff. This is not wrong in itself, but the same argument as before is applicable: *church* work does not guarantee the Christian character of another societal relation, viz. a *university*.

\* *"Christian" does not indicate that Christian evangelisation or missionary work is being done on campus*

This work can be done by churches or by a whole range of para-church organisations (such as Campus Crusade). They are often also very successful - students are converted to the Christian faith. However, the mere fact that this type of work can be done on *any* campus - also those

of the so-called outspokenly "neutral" or secular universities - indicates that this kind of work and the number of converts do not have anything to do with the Christian character of a university *per se*. Of course it would be hard to call a University Christian if the majority of its students were not of the Christian faith, but it is the task of the church and its confessing members to bring people to faith - and not that of the university. The task of the Christian university is to *build* on this faith and to indicate to students what the *implications* of their faith are for their calling at university, viz. to engage in Christian scholarship.

\* *"Christian" is not located in specific or additional subjects taught at an institution*

Institutions often call themselves "Christian" merely because they offer a (compulsory or optional) course in, for example, Biblical Studies or Systematic Theology (Dogmatics) - something which other institutions regard as the task of a theological school or a Department of Religious Studies.

Of course a study course which can improve the knowledge of the Bible of students and staff can make a valuable contribution to the Christian practice of other disciplines. The Christian character of an institution, however, does not lie in something which one can *add* (or subtract), but in the (worldviewish and philosophical) *perspective* from which one engages in all the scholarly disciplines.

\* *"Christian" does not only refer to the religious convictions of students and staff*

It goes without saying that it is an impossibility to have a Christian university which does not have devoted Christian staff and at least a majority of students (not necessarily all) who are willing to listen to the staff. But even this does not guarantee the Christian character of an institution. Why? For the simple reason that one could well be a devoted Christian (in the church, at home, and even in one's interaction with students) without revealing one's Christian commitment *in one's scholarly practice*. A lecturer can, for example, practice his discipline and teach it as prescribed by the current secularist belief - no science is neutral - without being bothered by this. His students could accept this in the same uncritical spirit, instead of both lecturer and student being

aware of the schizophrenic dichotomy that they are indulging in: they serve God on Sundays and in their personal lives, but in their academic work they are the victims of scientism, of the god of science.

Now that we have indicated what does not necessarily constitute a Christian institution, it is important to know what then are the essential conditions for its Christian character.

Allow me to use the image of a table which needs four legs to stand solidly. Then the four "legs" needed by a Christian university in order not to "wobble" are the following:

\* *It has to be a free university/college*

In the section above, concerning what a Christian university is *not*, we have already implicitly indicated that a Christian university has to be free from domination by the church. It is not an *ecclesiastical* institution. The same is true with regard to the state: it should not be a *state* institution.

This does not mean that a Christian university should have no links with church or state. All societal relationships are mutually linked. A marriage, for example, is not only something personal between two people, but the family, the church (in the case of Christians) and the state are also involved. Because a university is such an expensive institution, and because it trains essential high-level manpower for a country, the state should support it financially and also exert supervision over standards. This does not mean, however, that the state may dominate the university and impose prescriptions with regard to the internal affairs of universities. The principle of sphere sovereignty applying to every societal relationship (cf. chapter 10, sections 10.2.3 and 10.4) prohibits this. For this reason a state should not prescribe to a university what its character (be it Christian or neutral) should be. A university should be free from the state and be able to determine its identity itself.

\* *The lecturers and the (majority of) students* should not only be (a) *devoted Christians*, but (b) should also have the *necessary insight* into what true Christian scholarship means, and (c) *be willing* to devote themselves to the task. All three these elements are important. We

cannot succeed without a *desire* to serve the Lord in this area too. But if we do not know exactly *how*, we will not achieve anything. And all the insight of what should be done without the *will* to persevere in obedience would also be useless, because a Christian practice of scholarship is not something which merely drops into one's lap - it demands painstaking research, years of hard reflection, originality, struggle and prayer.

\* *All the fields of study should be studied in the light of God's revelation in creation, in Scripture and in Christ*

This revelatory light should be used to develop a Christian worldview, a Christian philosophy, and a specific Christian subject theory in for example History or Physics.

An academic who wishes to practice Christian scholarship and who thinks that he can limit himself to the "facts" relating to his field of study is in a *cul-de-sac*. A Christian scholar (a) has to have a Christian worldview, (b) has to know how this worldview can be developed into a Christian philosophy, and (c) be able, in the light of these worldviewish and philosophical perspectives, to construct a theory for his own subject.

\* *The Christian approach to science* should, in the final analysis, not be limited to the heart or intellect, but - the proof of the pudding! - it *should become visible in its results*. A tree is, after all, known by its fruit!

Of course it will not emerge equally prominently in all subjects. As one's Christian convictions are more visible in prayer than for example when one is gardening or driving (which does not mean that they do not play a role in the latter activities), so too in the field of scientific endeavour: we will more easily be able to pinpoint it in Sociology than, for example, in Mathematics. One also has to remember that difference from a non-Christian scholarly practice is not the *condition* for a Christian practice of science, but the *result* of it.

From the results of Christian scientific practice - the way in which one teaches, researches, the contents of one's publications, etc. - it should

clearly emerge that one's work stands in the service of God and his kingdom.

In brief: A Christian university or college demands the following: (a) a free institution where (b) people redeemed in Christ (c) study reality or a field of study illuminated through God's revelation and (d) in this way arrive at redemptive, liberating results which will be in the service of God and mankind.

### **15.3.4 An example of new hope for the future**

With the end of the ideological and hopefully also the military struggle in Africa in sight, new possibilities for co-operation are opening up. In other regions of the world there is already national, continental and international co-operation in the field of Christian higher education. Examples of this include the Coalition of Christian Colleges and the American Scientific Affiliation in the USA, the Association for Christian Scholarship in Australia and New Zealand, the Association of Christian Universities and Colleges of Asia and the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education.

As regards this type of co-operation, a new ray of light recently dawned on the horizon of this continent. To realise this ideal was, however, not the work of one day or one month, but of at least a decade.

It is with great gratitude that I can mention that very recently (on 1 May 1992) an Interim Committee for the establishment of an African branch of the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education was appointed at Potchefstroom in South Africa. For me personally this was the realization of an ideal of which I had dreamt since 1975 and towards which I had given a great deal of time and effort especially since 1983.

*Education* is important. *Higher* education is even more crucial. And *Christian* higher education is of the utmost importance. Not only for Africa but for the whole world. We may perhaps not see the harvest we are now planting with such difficulty, but it will bear fruit - perhaps more than we can even dream of. We may never stop dreaming! More importantly, we may never stop believing, because then we have



contempt for what starts out humbly. Everything in God's kingdom begins in a small way, but by the grace of God it grows to an extent and power beyond what we could ever have hoped for (cf. Matthew 13:31,32).

The motto of one of our universities in Nigeria is most appropriate:

"If you plan for one year you plant corn - which matures in one year. If you plan for a decade you plant trees - which require one decade to mature. If you plan for a generation, you train and educate people - this creates permanent change and its impact is passed on from generation to generation."

#### **15.4 CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP IN CONFRONTATION WITH CHRISTIAN DUALISM, SECULAR NEUTRALISM AND SECULAR PLURALISM**

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4,5; New International Version, 1988).

This text explains the dual purpose of this section: firstly (negatively) to destroy certain arrogant argumentations against God in the field of science, and secondly (positively) to capture all our own thoughts in obedience to Christ.

Please note that I do not use the word *science* in a narrow sense, indicating only the so-called natural sciences like Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Engineering etc, but in the broader sense of including *all* scholarly or academic activities and therefore also including the humanities.

##### **15.4.1 Synthesis**

Many Christians today (as during the time of the Church Fathers and the Middle Ages) still hold a synthetic vision with regard to Christian science.

The *essential nature* of this viewpoint is that current science and Christian faith should merely be reconciled or integrated. Stated in terms of an image: the steel of the Gospel has to be accommodated in the clay of the current practice of science.

The *content* of such an approach emerges from the following erroneous problems:

- How can I retain my integrity as both a Christian *and* a scientist?
- How can I do justice to both the Bible *and* science? How can I *integrate* Biblical truths into my practice of science?
- How is a marriage possible between my subject of study (Economics/Physics/Education/History etc.) *and* Theology?
- How can I use science to bring people to faith? Do inexplicable riddles or mysteries in science perhaps indicate the existence of a Great Architect?

In other words, according to this view, I am not only a Christian and not only a scholar, but both Christian *and* scholar. And it is not easy to bring these two together and keep them together. The following troublesome questions have to be answered:

- Is science not perhaps redundant - could I not simply be a Christian?
- Is my faith not an obstacle in my scholarly practice, should I not rather limit it to my private life and Sunday activities?
- Can both faith and science be true - even when they clash?
- Does Christian faith not enter the picture only where science can offer no further explanations?

According to this synthetic approach some Christian academics will emphasise our *academic commitment*, our task of building bridges between academic research and Biblical revelation. This group seeks to establish the legitimacy of Christian assumptions in practising science

and in interpreting findings for their students. In other words, this position calls us to an *intellectual stance*.

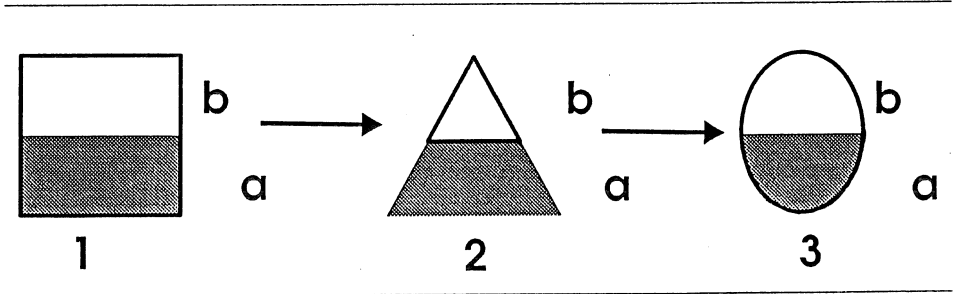
Another group sees the main task as Christians to *promote spirituality* among scientists. For example: they are less concerned with doing Christian economics than with doing Christianity among economists! They advocate meetings in which prayer and Bible reading are central. For them, our task is less that of building bridges between the sciences and Biblical revelation than it is of seeing people walk across those bridges - or even leap across the crevice - to meet Christ. In the final analysis, this position calls us to *do evangelism* and to take a *spiritual stance*.

The one group tries to emphasise *scientific* integrity, while the other stresses *Christian* integrity. From different starting points each one of them tries to bring together clay (science) and steel (the Gospel).

The most pernicious effect of this mixing of steel and clay is that it *accepts* rather than *reforms* current scientific practice. The steel of the Gospel is therefore not lost, but it is weakened.

The basic *error* of this synthetic vision is to be found in the *dualistic* point of departure: steel and clay each has the right to exist. This leads us to an erroneous problem: How can I unite, integrate or reconcile faith and scientific practice?

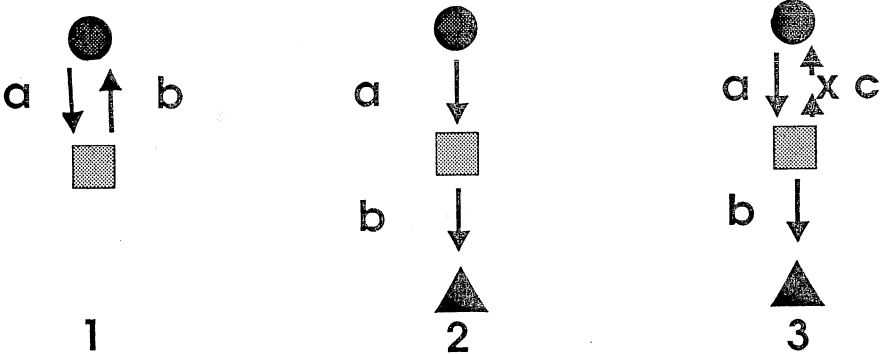
Represented diagrammatically:



1	= The one who knows:	a = scientist b = Christian
2	= Field of study:	a = reality b = Scriptural revelation as additive
3	= Result:	a = science b = Christian additive (icing)

The fact of the matter is that it is not necessary to bring the two (faith and science) together. Each scientist is led knowingly or unknowingly by a faith, and his scholarship, his scientific practice, is guided by his religious commitment. The correct question therefore would be: *what* kind of faith is it that determines my scientific practice? Is it faith in the Word of God - and the God of the Word - or is it faith in science itself?

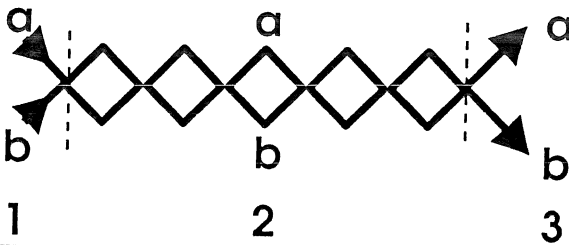
As the following diagram indicates, only two possibilities remain after the fall: either service to God (in science too) or service to a surrogate god (which might well be science itself).



1 = Creation	a: God enters into a covenant with man (Adam)
	b: Man (Adam) responds in faith, love and obedience to God's covenant and his law (= true religion)

2 = Fall	a: God remains true to his covenant b: Man's heart in disobedience turns away from God and towards idols, in the most profound sense Satan (= false religion)
3 = Redemption	a: God remains true to his covenant and sends his Son as covenantal Mediator b: Some people reject the Mediator and persist in a life of disobedience to God, serving surrogate gods c: Other people respond (through grace in Christ) positively in obedience to God's covenant and His central love commandment

If we look at the history of Western thought in the penetrating X-ray light of the Word, we can represent it as follows in a diagram. This will not only help us understand better the already mentioned synthetic thought, but also the anti-synthetic thought (which follows after this).



1 =	<i>Pre-synthetic thought: ± 600 B.C. - ± 100 A.D.</i>
a:	Israel and the Old Testament (Biblical direction) and
b:	Greek and Roman intellectual world (extra-Biblical direction) still divided from each other.
2 =	<i>Synthetic thought : ± 100 A.D. - ± 1600 A.D.</i>
a:	Christian element and
b:	secular element intermixed

- 3 = *Anti-synthetic thought: ± 1600 A.D. - today*  
a: The correct anti-synthesis (Reformational line) and  
b: the erroneous anti-synthesis (secularism since the Renaissance) separate from each other and each follows its own way

### 15.4.2 Secular anti-synthesis

Many of today's Christians are the prey of either earlier anti-synthetic thought (neutralism) or contemporary anti-synthetic thought (pluralism).

By the sixteenth century it emerged that the Medieval ideals of the mixing of steel (the Gospel) and clay (current scientific practice) could not succeed. This was the beginning of anti-synthetic thought.

There were two clear trends, though. The one broke with synthetic thought, seeing that it was discontented with the secular element contained in it, as it wanted the Word of God to be recognised in obedience fully again. We call this the correct form of anti-synthetic thought. An example of this trend is the sixteenth century Reformation. This was a very significant direction in Western Christianity, but never attracted the great masses (cf. chapter 5, section 5.7 on the origins of a radical Christian worldview).

The other dominant trend broke with synthetic thought because it did not like the Christian element contained in it. From our perspective we can call this the erroneous and secular kind of anti-synthetic thought. Various movements during the Renaissance could be cited as examples of the beginning of this movement. This became the dominant trend in Western science.

Within this secular direction we can broadly distinguish between an earlier and a later trend with regard to scientific or academic practice. The first is characterised by *neutralism* and the second, more recent one, by *pluralism*. Because of their powerful influence in the Western world - also on Christian scholars - an explanation of their viewpoints is compulsory.

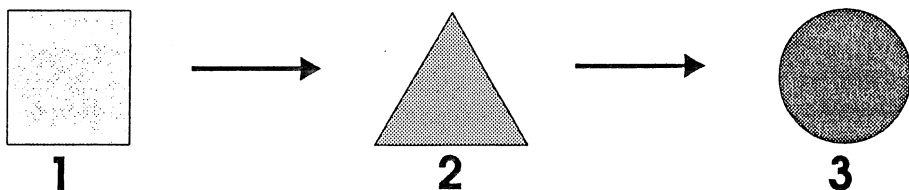
\* *Secular neutralism*

In the course of more than three centuries ( $\pm 1600 - \pm 1950$ ) the ideal of a neutral, objective, religion-free science held sway. (The steel of the Gospel was not welcome at all!) Many Christian scholars were caught in this trap in the past and some are still fascinated by the neutrality dogma.

Whereas the synthetic vision spoke of "Christian *and* scholar", this direction could be typified as "Christian *or* scholar". According to this viewpoint, it is impossible to be both a Christian and a scholar and retain integrity at the same time. For the sake of both, religion and science have to be kept apart as far as possible! Religion is regarded as something backward or embarrassing. Science which, if we look carefully, takes the place of religion (resulting in scientism, a blind faith in science) is the leader of progress. With reason (an absolutised intellect) the scientist will be able to uncover the laws of reality and in this way gain control over the universe. Everything is scientifically predictable!

Where synthetic Christian thought *accepts* current scientific practice, anti-synthetic secularist thought *rejects* the Gospel of Christ. A Christian scholar subscribing to this viewpoint of neutrality therefore also cannot *reform* current scientific practice from the perspective of his Christian faith.

Represented diagrammatically:



1 =	The one who knows:	scientist (neutral)
2 =	Field of study:	reality (can be weighed, measured, counted)
3 =	Result:	science (objective, generally valid)

It is usually postulated that science is a neutral issue because it only studies as facts what can be seen, measured, weighed and counted.

In contrast to this the Christian scholar postulates that this is a very one-sided (and therefore prejudiced!) concept of science which *believes* that science only has to do with the visible, measurable and countable. It is furthermore true that facts, even a mass of facts, in themselves do not constitute science. Facts are selected and interpreted *in accordance with a specific worldview, philosophy and scientific theory* before true science can come into being. Even a hypothesis (for example, that of Evolutionism) first has to be believed - otherwise it would be senseless to try and collect facts in order to substantiate it.

It is also postulated that science is neutral, seeing that it has nothing to do with norms, values, principles, presuppositions, etc. Science has to be objective, unprejudiced, presuppositionless and to the point. According to this stance Christian science would rest on biased presuppositioning and not on independent investigation and argumentation, so that it would have to be described as dishonest and one-sided.

Our response to this is that the proponents of the concept of neutrality fall into their own swords. They are not honest, seeing that they *believe* in certain presuppositions which they cannot prove by means of "facts". They cannot, for example, prove that reality is merely a measurable, countable, weighable entity. They cannot prove - not even with their so-called facts - their position that science *has to be* neutral! If they maintain that science should not be practised from certain presuppositions, they cannot also *demand* that it should be practised neutrally! Neutrality is also a principle - the "principle of unprincipledness". It is very easy to indicate that the concept of



neutrality is a dogma, and then a dogma which maintains one's own viewpoint (viz. neutrality) as the absolute, while all other viewpoints (among them the Christian) are rejected. The advocates of a neutral scientific endeavour are not as liberal and generous as is mostly pretended, but often very rigorous and intolerant towards all those not sharing their own viewpoint.

The whole concept of neutrality is unacceptable, not only because it is people who are involved in scientific practice (a person can never be neutral), but also because neutrality would mean a denial of the Word of God and the God of the Bible. A neutral in-between position is an impossibility. Did Christ not say (Matthew 12:30a): "He who is not with me is against me"? This is also true of scientific work. (Compare also my four points of critique on the idea of neutrality earlier in this chapter.)

The Christian scholar makes a clear distinction between objectivity and neutrality in scientific activity: the former is essential, but the latter is impossible.

\* *Secular pluralism*

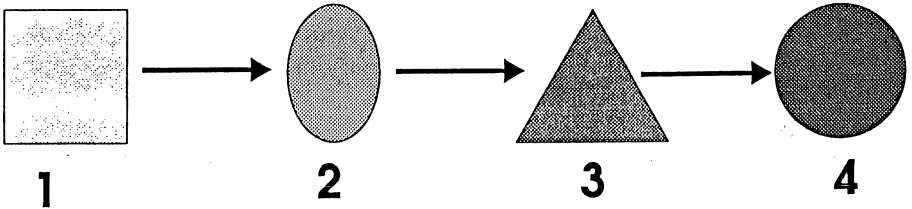
Where in the past (up to about the Second World War) the enemy of Christian scientific practice had been neutralism, it has today shifted to pluralism. Many Christians think that this new trend offers an opening for a Christian approach to scientific endeavour, but I doubt it - as will emerge shortly.

Where the old paradigm had been characterised by a striving for rationality, objectivity and neutrality, this new paradigm could be typified as being irrationalistic and relativistic. Where the former tried to banish cultural and religious differences from scientific practice, the latter has fallen into the opposite extreme: this plurality of convictions becomes an inherent part of the context, from which scientific practice cannot be detached.

The old ideal of a presuppositionless scientific practice failed. It is acknowledged today that the scholar always studies reality through specific "filters" of a religious, worldviewish, philosophical, cultural and scientific-theoretical nature.

Together with this the older concept of the scientific predictability of reality has also fallen away. More and more scientists are falling into the other extreme, viz. that reality is in principle unpredictable. The older rationalistic view that science can know the laws of the universe perfectly has been replaced by the concept that they are not amenable to knowledge or might not even exist. The earlier optimism has been replaced by agnosticism, and the older certainties by a deep uncertainty.

Represented diagrammatically:



1	=	The one who knows:	Scientist (Muslim, traditional African or Christian)
2	=	Filter:	Context (of a specific religion or culture)
3	=	Field of study:	Reality (contextually coloured)
4	=	Result:	Science (subjectively determined and thus not universally valid)

A consequence of this pluralist concept of science has been (in positive terms) that the blind faith in the infallibility and general validity of science has been justly rejected, but (in negative terms) this has resulted in the viewpoint that there is no final "horizon", "everything goes." Each viewpoint claims to be true. In the final analysis, however, not one viewpoint can now claim the final truth! This is what I mean when I say that modern pluralism has culminated in relativism. This relativism also has a strong agnostic character. In an extreme form it implies the meaninglessness of any scientific discussion! (Cf. chapter 3, section 3.3 where the issue of absolutism/dogmatism versus relativism/pluralism was discussed.)

New forms of reductionism are also emerging. It is, for example, very popular today to reduce and explain the whole of reality from the perspective of language. Philosophy, for example, has been reduced to a language game!

I have already mentioned that this latest trend in the field of science has not been an unmitigated blessing for a Christian approach. It might offer an opportunity, but perhaps even a great embarrassment.

The opportunity that is possibly offered is that a Christian scientific practice should also be acknowledged. The embarrassment is that the Christian approach is now merely one of many viewpoints!

I am therefore quite sceptical regarding the opportunity. Paul (in Acts 17) joins in with the polytheism of the Athenians - who have even built an altar to the "unknown God" - in order to preach the true God to them. This strategy, however, fails as the majority of the audience simply dismissed him as one of the many religious teachers.

If present-day pluralism is only understood in a *complementary* fashion, that is, as a means to indicate that one can also be enriched through perspectives from different cultures, religions and worldviews, I would like to evaluate it positively. If, however, the emphasis should be on the *equality* in principle of different faiths, worldviews and philosophies, it is dangerous, because then it means radical relativism. By the way: the relativist either has to be consistent and admit that his dogma, viz. that all truth is relative, is also relative - and so become the victim of his own doctrine - or, as is usually the case, be inconsistent and proclaim that all dogmas *except his own* have relative value.

I do not in any way wish to maintain that a Christian scientific practice can claim to be the final answer and aspire to absolute truth. *All* scientific endeavour is fallible, time-bound human activity. I refuse, however, to sacrifice the Word of God and my Christian faith on the altar of contemporary subjectivist relativism.

To my mind Christianity therefore has to do with a subtle, and therefore far more dangerous enemy in contemporary pluralist concepts of science - far more dangerous than the earlier concept of neutrality.

(Please note that *pluralist/pluralism* is used here in a different meaning than *structural and confessional pluralism* in chapter 10, section 10.2.3 and 10.4.)

### 15.4.3 Thesis

I stated above that a different anti-synthetical view had already come into existence in the sixteenth century Reformation - a direction which could be described as that of correct anti-synthetic thought.

Seeing that this approach wishes to grant the Word of God and the God of the Word his rightful place in scientific practice, I would like us to continue working in this direction.

This vision does not seek to *unite* steel and clay (synthesis), or to *reject* the steel of the Gospel for the sake of science (anti-synthesis), but seeks to *transform*, through the steely power of the Gospel, the practice of science (thesis).

In this approach the *central, encompassing* role of Christian faith in *all* human activity - thus in science too - is emphasised. Christian religion, Christian worldview and Christian philosophy are not simply *stuck onto* or *integrated with* current views of science, but like salt or yeast it *permeates* every science. Each thought is taken captive and made to serve God (2 Corinthians 10:5).

In contrast to the viewpoint of "Christian *and* scholar" (synthesis) and "Christian *or* scholar" (anti-synthesis) our thesis is simply: "Christian scholar". Furthermore: we do not merely stand for a *Christian* who also practises scholarship; we propose a Christian *scholarship*. The scientific *results* should also reveal a Christian character.

For the sake of clarity this could be stated in yet another way: Christian science does not mean something Christian *attached to* and *apart from* ordinary scientific practice. The "Christian" of Christian science thus does not simply imply a static confessional basis or a supernatural "cherry on top". No, right from the very beginning, from the root, every science has to be practised "In Thy Light" (Psalm 39:9b).

In order to make clear that the idea of a radically Christian science (*radical* because it emanates from the root of Christian religion) is not a vague ideal, I would like to provide the following explanation.

I would firstly like to explain how any scientific process (also that of a "neutral" or secular approach) runs its course. Following that I would like to indicate what is special about Christian scholarship.

As was already indicated in some of the above diagrams the process or activity of knowing mainly consists of four elements: (1) the one who knows, (2) the filter, (3) the field of study and (4) the knowledge itself (the final result).

1. The *one who knows* is the scholar (the theologian, philosopher or other scientist). He is a human being with a specific faith directed to God or an idol. He also holds a particular worldview, philosophy and scientific theory.

2. The *filter* or perspective is the (prescientific) worldview of the scholar. In the way that one can use different kinds of filters for a camera, his worldview also "filters" the work of the scholar. This prescientific worldview can be worked out systematically and scientifically into a philosophy. For this reason, in the field of science, the worldvewish filter is usually developed into a philosophic filter and the filter of a scientific theory.

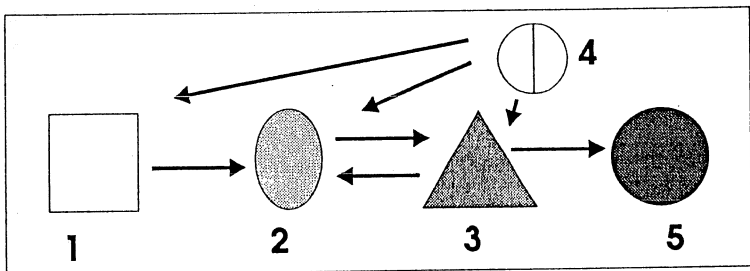
I am aware of the fact that many (especially so-called neutral) scientists claim that they direct their attention *directly* to the empirical field of study, for example to a biological, economical, political phenomenon or problem. I do not believe that this will yield good science, quite apart from the fact that it does not accord with reality. Such scholars are simply not sufficiently aware of the worldvewish-philosophic points of departure which determine in advance how they see their field of study. Other scientists maintain that the only filter between themselves and their field of study are their specific scientific theories. This model is already a little better. The third model is the correct one: the scientist directs his attention to the empirical phenomena *via* scientific, philosophical and worldvewish points of departure or presuppositions.

3. The *field of enquiry* is created reality in all its rich diversity. Note: only *created* reality. Science, for example, cannot study God scientifically - even though formerly theologians spoke of their discipline as sacred study of God (*theologia sacra*).

The rich diversity of creation has resulted in a large number of sciences and the number is still growing. Their fields of study are becoming smaller and smaller and the scientific specialisation more intense and precise.

4. The specific science then is the *result* of the whole process of knowing as outlined thus far. Apart from the two encompassing sciences (Theology and Philosophy) we also find a large diversity of subject sciences: legal sciences, political sciences, arts, economical, social, linguistic, historical, psychological, biological, physical and mathematical sciences as well as many inter-disciplinary sciences such as, for example, education and engineering sciences.

Up to here I have described the scientific process which every scientist has to follow in order to arrive at scientific results. The unique character of Christian science emerges in the following diagram.



(1) The one who knows is a *Christian*, (2) the filter is a *Christian* worldview, philosophy and scientific theory, (3) reality is studied (4) *in the light of the threefold revelation of the triune God* and (5) the result (the article or the book which you write, the class which you teach or the scientific application that you make) should also reveal a *Christian* character.

A Christian scientist thus - in contrast to a secular thinker - has light *within* him (as a result of an illuminated intellect, worldview and philosophy), light *on* his field of study (as a result of the revelation of

God) and can also radiate light *around* him (as a result of the fact that his scientific results and their application bear testimony to his obedience to the true God).

Like any diagram the one above also has its limitations. I only mention there that the aspect of reality which is studied (3) is illuminated by God's revelation (4). Actually God's revelation (in creation, Scripture and Christ) illumines not only 3 but also 1 (the mind of the scientist) and it also determines the character of 2 (the three filters). For this reason the diagram shows arrows from 4 (revelation) to 1, 2 and 3. If one removes the light of revelation - the key to Christian scholarly work - everything is darkened and a Christian scientific activity is not possible any longer.

We should, however, not think that Christian and non-Christian scholarly activity should always and everywhere be different apart from a few unimportant similarities. The obverse is often the case: large similarities and perhaps just tiny differences in the results. Why should we not be grateful for the similarities instead of always being suspicious? This does not imply, of course, that we should not often be very critical of the results of non-Christian scholarship. We should, however, always balance our criticism about what is wrong with gratitude for what non-Christian scholars do see correctly. We can learn a great deal from them, because even though the perspectives from which we work differ, we all have to do with the same reality.

Furthermore, it is also quite a generalisation - and therefore unfair - to distinguish only *two* kinds of scholarship, viz. the Christian and the non-Christian. All sciences which do not work from a Christian point of departure cannot (because of confessional pluralism) simply be dumped on one heap. There are *many* kinds of sciences because of a variety of religious and worldviewish presuppositions.

Christian scholarship should therefore in the first place be marked by fidelity to God's revelation. The difference or distinction with non-Christian sciences is therefore not *the condition* for a science to be Christian, but rather the *result* of faithful (Christian) scholarship.

This, however, should not give the impression that reformational Christian scholarship is taking an easy route. Reformational scholarship

does not simply choose the best among existing theories and ideas. Rather it tries to bring the Gospel to bear on its thinking in such a way that new approaches, genuine Christian alternatives, begin to take shape. Reformational scholars don't simply choose the best among current books. They often *rewrite* the books on philosophy of education, ethics, political sciences, etc. Their work really aims to transform learning, to shake the existing foundations, and rebuild it from the ground. Faithful Christian scholarship cannot be other than *distinctive or special!* But this should always be done in modesty and without an over-estimation of the extent to which we can free our scholarship from secular influences. And without thinking that we can in this way usher in God's kingdom.

#### 15.4.4 Conclusion

I do hope that two things have emerged clearly:

- Christian science means an ongoing struggle against the seduction of erroneous views such as synthetic and secularistic ideas, but it also implies
- the positive construction of one's own vision.

This was the dual purpose that we set at the beginning in the light of 2 Corinthians 10:4,5. This task also emerges clearly from other passages in the Bible.

Colossians 2:8, for example, warns: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ" (*New International Version*).

In some cases we find, in the same Scriptural passage, both a warning and an instruction. For example, in Romans 12:2: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will" (*New International Version*).



Similarly in Ephesians 4:17,18: "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding, and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts". Verse 23 gives the positive side: "Put off ... your old self ... to be made new in the attitude of your minds" (*New International Version*).

Together these injunctions from God's Word present a formidable challenge to the Christian scholar - here on our African continent as well.

## **15.5 THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY**

These two sciences could be described with regard to their fields of study in the following way:

Philosophy studies the totality of creation in its diversity and coherence in the light of Scriptural revelation. One could therefore say that Philosophy studies God's creation(al revelation) in the light of His Scriptural revelation.

Theology follows the opposite way: it studies God's Scriptural revelation in the light of His creation(al revelation). And it concentrates on a specific field or area of creation, viz. the life of faith, cultic life or (in the case of the Christian) the church life of man. One could therefore say that the field of study of Christian Theology has two crucial points: Scripture and the church (or apostate cultic life).

Christian Theology studies not only Scripture through the glasses of its worldview, but its worldview is also given shape by Scripture. And the Christian philosopher does not only study the coherent diversity of reality through his worldview, but his worldview is conversely also shaped by reality viewed in the light of Scripture.

It is clear that both these sciences play an important role in the edifice of Christian scholarship - not in the sense of king and queen, but in the sense of rendering service. Theology's scientific knowledge of Scripture is very important for other scientists wanting to work "in Thy light" (Psalm 36:9b). And because one cannot understand one part of

creation properly without a perspective on its place in the whole, Philosophy with its totality perspective can offer a valuable ancillary service to the different disciplines.

This does not imply a one-way traffic. In their turn, again, the theologian and philosopher can gain in terms of the insights of the different scientists.

Christian Theology and Philosophy should therefore support each other mutually. The philosopher can profit from the theologian's knowledge of Scripture, while the theologian can learn a great deal about what the philosopher has to say about reality in its diversity of facets and mutual coherence.

Should it be asked, however, which of these two is the most fundamental, Philosophy has pride of place. Theology is always coloured by certain philosophical points of departure. (We will return to this statement in section 15.5.2).

### **15.5.1 Theology as ordinary scientific discipline with limited authority**

It is important to know something more about the nature and authority of Theology, because (1) it plays such an important role in Africa (1 000+ theological institutions) and (2) Theology's place and role in the edifice of Christian scholarship is often incorrectly understood and at times totally overemphasised.

*As a science* Theology reveals the general characteristics of every other science:

- it has relevance only in terms of some facets of life;
- it is limited, tentative and sometimes even deficient knowledge;
- it is abstract knowledge, abstracted from reality and therefore always more impoverished than the richly textured reality;
- it is determined by one's point of departure in faith, one's worldview, one's philosophy and one's culture.

If we keep this in mind, we will be protected from an over-estimation of Theology - something which has often happened in the past and is still happening. I would like to correct just three such faulty visions of Theology:

\* *Theology is not a special kind of scientific discipline, but a perfectly ordinary one*

■ Many people think that Theology *offers more certainty* than other disciplines. The reason for this apparently lies in the fact that Theology studies the Scriptures and that no clear distinction is made between the certainty and reliability of the Bible and the science or discipline dealing with it. Theological science, however, is no more reliable than any other scientific discipline. And all these disciplines are fallible human enterprises.

■ Some people think that Theology is *elevated above criticism*. The reason for this is apparently the *special dignity* of its subject. According to some people Theology studies that which is indicated in its name, *viz. God*. Once again it should be stressed that we have confusion here between science and its field of investigation. Furthermore I would hesitate to say that Theology studies God. God lies outside our cognitively apprehendable world (creation) and we can only get to know Him through revelation, that is, to the extent that He has revealed or made Himself known.

■ Others think that Theology strives after a *higher goal* than the so-called secular sciences. Theology has to do with one's salvation! We, however, have to be very careful not to believe in a scientific discipline instead of in God. If we do, we would be expecting too much of Theology (such as our salvation) - something which no science can offer.

■ A last example of the over-estimation of Theology is when it is maintained that it has *special authority*. Theology, however, does not have *confessional* authority, it has merely *scientific* authority. It can at most *serve* the believer's life of faith, and should never *dominate* it. Yet theologians do tend to prescribe to the church!

\* *Theology cannot offer guidance for the whole of Christian life*

As already indicated above (section 15.3.3.1), we cannot expect Theology to "christianise" the whole of life outside the church. Theology can only offer guidance in a specific area, viz. the life of the church. The field of investigation of theology to my mind looks like an ellipse with two focal points: the first and most important is the Scriptures, and the second the church. While all sciences which want to be Christian have to *listen to* the Word of God, theology has the additional responsibility, apart from listening, also to *study* the Scriptures scientifically.

There is an intimate link between these two foci of Theology: the church is really a church only if the Word of God is adhered to. The bibliological subjects concentrate on knowledge of the Scriptures, and the ecclesiological subjects concentrate on the cultic (church) life. Other theological disciplines lie between these two groups, that is, between the two focal points.

Because Theology is limited in this way, we also need other scientific disciplines which look at reality from a Christian perspective. To my mind, we should therefore (to mention just two examples), rather work out a *Christian Economics* than a "*Theological Economics*", rather a *Christian Ethics*, than a "*Theological Ethics*".

\* *Theology is therefore not self-evidently Christian, nor even the only Christian scientific discipline*

This misunderstanding can also occur because of the field of investigation of Theology. Because it is a "Christian" field (Scripture and the church) the science which studies this field is deemed to be automatically Christian. It is not, however, the *field* in itself but the *spirit* or *perspective* in which it is studied which renders a science Christian. One could have a Christian theology about Marxism, and conversely the Marxists can uphold a very un-Christian Theology about Christ! Because Theology is not automatically Christian, it has to be tested in the light of God's revelation like every other science.

It goes without saying that Theology is not the only science that can be practised in a Christian way, or that other disciplines should first pass the scrutiny of Theology to be sanctified as truly glorifying God.

I regard the preceding remarks as important in preventing Christians in Africa from expecting too much of Theology.

### **15.5.2 Faulty viewpoints relating to the relationship between Theology and Philosophy**

I would like to return to a statement that I made earlier, viz. that Philosophy is *more fundamental* than Theology, and that any theology is therefore always *directed and determined* by certain philosophical points of departure.

In this respect Theology is no exception. It applies to all sciences. Philosophy is one of the filters between the scientist and his/her field of study (cf. section 15.4.3 above). I am using Theology as an example here because, apart from Philosophy, I have also done theological study and can therefore speak with some authority on this field. M.D. Stafleu (1987) and R.A. Clouser (1991:111-116) have clearly indicated the role of religious and philosophical presuppositions in the case of other sciences like Mathematics, Physics and Psychology.

This does not mean that I am now simply inverting the age-old view that Theology is the queen and Philosophy the handmaiden, so that Philosophy now gets the chance to be on top! My vision of the relationship between Philosophy and Theology is not one of the following: Philosophy subjected to Theology (in, for example, Roman Catholic and Protestant Scholasticism). Nor the inverse: Theology subjected to Philosophy (for example in Hegel). Even less do I want to maintain (as does, among others, Barth) that Philosophy has to be eliminated in favour of Theology. Or the inverse (in, for example, Rationalistic philosophy): Theology totally eliminated in favour of Philosophy.

There is especially one viewpoint about the relationship Theology-Philosophy which is very popular still among many Protestant Christians: Theology is the queen and Philosophy is the handmaiden - or not necessary at all.

I speak here from harsh experience. When in 1968 (in my M.A. dissertation) I indicated how all theologies are determined by philosophical presuppositions and that Theology therefore could not be the queen (in reality Theology *does not use* a philosophy, but it is *influenced by* a specific philosophy), I suffered under the wrath of the theologians.

Something similar happened later when I transmitted the same ideas to my students in Philosophy. Students who intend studying Theology have to obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree before doing the Bachelor's in Theology. A compulsory part of the B.A. curriculum is one year's study in (NB!) *Christian* philosophy. I explained to my students that Theology does not have a choice as to whether or not it starts from philosophical presuppositions. For this reason it is better to use a *Christian* philosophy as a point of departure rather than some or other secular philosophy.

And what do you suppose was the reaction of some of the theological professors when the students started their theological training following the B.A. degree? "Remember, you are now involved with theological studies. If you really want to get the maximum benefit from it, forget everything that Philosophy has stuffed into your heads."

Such a statement is really a *testimonium paupertatis*, a proof of one's own poverty, of the fact that one has not yet plumbed Theology to its depths, that one does not know how this discipline, and all other disciplines, are structured. Such a viewpoint is also misleading - and for that reason dangerous - because it creates the impression that the *regina* (queen) is elevated high above the *ancilla* (handmaiden) and does not undergo any influence from the "handmaiden", while Philosophy in reality determines the content and direction of Theology in a decisive manner.

Such a viewpoint also reveals no knowledge of developments within Western secular thought since the Medieval period. Philosophy, which was seen as a handmaiden during the Middle Ages, became the liberator during the Enlightenment (or *Aufklärung*). In the nineteenth century Philosophy would become the mistress, and at present, when not an enemy, a dangerous neighbour of which Theology has to be

wary. (Philosophy here is meant to indicate *secular* Western philosophy and not *Christian* philosophy.)

### 15.5.3 The true state of affairs

We could indicate the true state of affairs both systematically and historically.

In systematic terms it is logical and obvious that Philosophy is more basic and therefore underlies Theology. In our worldview the concern is with the pre-scientific total image of what constitutes reality. This total vision also determines our view of the parts or aspects of reality and of life. Scientific Philosophy develops out of a pre-scientific lifeview. Philosophy, in a scientific way, therefore occupies itself with reality as coherent diversity.

The various other academic disciplines (including Theology), however, in the first place study different sides of the rich *diversity or variety* of God's creation. They cannot, however, stop there. Each scientist or academic has to ask himself what the place of his specific field of study is within the totality. Stated simply: where the stress in Philosophy is on the *coherence* of the diversity of creation, the subject disciplines focus on the *diversity/variety* in its coherence. A mathematician, for example, is primarily concerned with figures. But if he is worth his salt as a scientist, he will also have to ask the question as to what figures are and what place they have in the rich variety of the rest of creation. Should he not do this, he could easily fall into *mathematism* - instead of *mathematics* - and tend to think that figures are the most important and that everything else in reality could be reduced to figures.

*The rich diversity or variety* (parts) of creation on which the subject sciences concentrate their attention can therefore never be separated from the *coherence* (whole) of creation. It is at this point that the subject sciences are influenced by Philosophy, which formulates a vision on the reciprocal coherence in the rich diversity of God's creation. Furthermore, Philosophy studies the relationship of the whole of creation to its Creator and His laws for creation.

#### 15.5.4 Historical confirmation

Apart from this systematic explanation of why Philosophy is basic or fundamental, it can also be indicated as historical fact. In my own study, for example, I did this with regard to specific theologians. I will mention only some examples from the course of history.

To understand the Christian Apologetic Fathers from the second and third centuries A.D., it is essential to understand the Greek Philosophy in which they had been schooled. Without Plato and the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus the Theology of the great Augustine cannot be plumbed fully. And without knowledge of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, one should not try to follow the theological thought of a Medieval giant like Thomas Aquinas. Without thorough knowledge of late Medieval philosophy our knowledge of a sixteenth-century reformer like Luther will remain deficient, as Calvin and Zwingli can only be properly understood against the background of the Renaissance and Humanist thought of their time. How can one understand the various theological conceptions and trends of their time without Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and the English empiricists? Those to whom the names of Kant or Hegel do not mean anything, will not be able to say anything of value about nineteenth century theology. A study of Kierkegaard is the first prerequisite to understand something of the problematics of dialectical theology - without this knowledge it would be most difficult to read Barth. For an understanding of Bultmann's theology it is necessary to know the existentialism of Heidegger, and one can easily follow Brunner if one is *au fait* with the Marburgian and modern "I-thou" philosophy. The philosophical umbilical cord of modern liberation theologians is obviously Marxism or Neo-Marxism, and the racist apartheid theology which has been disseminated in South Africa for a long time clearly has its roots in a distorted (Christian-national) Calvinist lifeview and also indicates the influence of different European philosophical schools, for example, German Romanticism. In this way I could continue *ad infinitum*.

In spite of this overwhelming historical evidence it is both strange and unbelievable that the majority of Protestant theologians either still deny that their work is determined philosophically or try to limit the influence of Philosophy in such a way that the true state of affairs is not properly addressed.



### 15.5.5 Only limited philosophical influence?

Some make the assumption that theology only uses certain philosophical concepts *formally*. Certain liberation theologians, for example, maintain that they only use the Marxist *method* of social analysis without the whole of Marxist *philosophy* having any further influence on their thought. This is an illusion.

Others, again, are of the opinion that they can limit the philosophical influence to certain theological subjects. For example: Dogmatics or Systematic Theology cannot extricate itself from philosophical influences, because it has to use concepts with a strong philosophical nature such as *nature, essence, person, substance*, etc. For this reason Dogmatics is not regarded that highly in certain circles. As against this Old and New Testament Exegesis has the task of opening up Scripture without paying attention to any worldview or philosophical presuppositions. For this reason Exegesis is regarded more highly by some because it is felt to be purer or to stand closer to the Bible.

In the academic world change has come about, fortunately. Theologians have begun to see that the neutral, presuppositionless reading of a text is not really possible. And yet many ministers still believe that they can stand before the Scriptures as a blank tablet. They wish to offer a "simple explanation of Scripture". In all honesty but with terrible naiveté they maintain that between them and Scripture no single philosophical concept, scheme or prejudice can be found. They say: "We do not tire ourselves with philosophy." This while they do not realize that a specific philosophy does in fact have them in thrall thoroughly!

### 15.5.6 Exorcising the devil with Beelzebub

The more liberal theologians are often critical of the philosophical background of older theologies, but are totally uncritical of their own positions. Two to three decades ago many modern theologians liked to maintain that Existentialism was more Biblical than Aristotelian Thomism. And contemporary contextual theologies are also of the opinion that they are better than the "classical" theologies. It is ironic that if this procedure is followed, one unacceptable philosophy is exorcised by another also non-Christian philosophy.

More conservative theologians, on the other hand, often adhere to a philosophy which has become outmoded in the philosophical world itself! In my own studies, for example, I could clearly see how the well-known Dutch theologian Voetius tried to combat the rising rationalist philosophy of Descartes from an archaic Scholastically coloured theology. This makes one think of somebody who tries to use an assegai against a firearm. Or somebody who may want to confront today's sophisticated armament systems with the primitive arms of the First World War. The worst is that in this way one tries to exorcise the devil with Beelzebub - or any other devil, for that matter.

### **15.5.7 The choice of Theology**

This close, intimate link between Christian theologies and non-Christian philosophies which has obtained through the ages cannot be denied.

It is also a further tragic fact that the influence of the non-Christian philosophies on Christian theology has very definitely been an obstacle in the progress of the Gospel. Scholastic theologies have had the effect of limiting Christian faith to "spiritual life". Marxist liberation theologians have caused a simplistic concept of society (oppressor versus oppressed) to become current, and a one-sided concept of liberation (liberation only in terms of politico-social-economical factors) has been the result of this.

We have to be careful, of course, not to attribute all heresies in Christian theology only to the "corruption of philosophy" - even if it was a non-Christian philosophy - because of the assumption (as explained above) that Theology is inherently pure, and Philosophy, by its very nature, is the mother of all heresies. This is the well-known dualist viewpoint of Theology as Christian without further argument, as against Philosophy which would then be inherently neutral or un-Christian.

Our conclusion with regard to the relationship between Theology and Philosophy therefore is the following: the choice of Theology is not whether it prefers to be philosophically or not philosophically founded. The only choice is whether Theology finds its philosophical basis in a Scripturally-true or in an un-Scriptural philosophy. As an academic

discipline it cannot exist without a philosophical basis. (And what is true of theology is true of all the other sciences.) In the light of this Ph. J. Hoedemaker was correct when he once stated: "Heretics are theologians in whom the philosopher has not yet become converted".

A theologian can, of course, *consciously* work from a point of departure based on a specific philosophy or, as is often the case, operate with a certain philosophy *unconsciously*. It also need not be a single philosophical system, but it can, as a result of an eclectic method, be a whole mixture of philosophies. Whitehead quite correctly stated that everybody who maintains that he does not use a philosophy in his scientific endeavour has become a victim of a "chance philosophy".

### 15.5.8 The task facing us

Thirty-five years ago, when the so-called neutrality concept was still current and influenced theology strongly also, one could still pardon a theologian who did not pay serious attention to the worldviewish and philosophical points of departure of this theology. Today a theologian who does this is not worth his salt. Christian Theology in general and Dogmatics in particular are too important to be left to a theologian who does not have clarity about the worldviewish and philosophical foundations of his work. A Christian Theology worth its salt is one which has been developed against the background of the comprehensive perspectives of a truly Christian worldview and Christian philosophy.

The obvious question now is: "Yes, but do we have such a worked-out Christian worldview and philosophy?"

The response to this can be positive. A.M. Wolter's *Creation regained* (1985) is an example of a truly Biblical reformational worldview. And in the work of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, which started in the Netherlands more than sixty years ago, we have a clear example of a Biblically-reformational philosophy. In the meantime their work has gained adherents all over the world (see chapter 5, section 5.7.3 and 5.7.4).

The next question is: "Is there an example of a Christian theology which has consciously taken the reformational worldview and philosophy as its point of departure?"

After I had been involved for quite some time with indicating the wrong influences of unbiblical philosophies on Christian theologies, I set it as an ideal one day (more positively) to indicate what a truly reformational theology would look like, that is, one that is not ashamed of its reformational worldvish and philosophical *prolegomena*. It has, alas, not yet been possible to get around to it.

For this reason I am overjoyed to be able to tell you of the effort of somebody else. It was written by Prof. Gordon J. Spykman (who died in July 1993) of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, USA, and published in 1992 by the well-known publisher Wm. B. Eerdmans in Grand Rapids. The title is: *Reformational Theology; a new paradigm for doing Dogmatics*.

In this work the points of departure of a reformational philosophy are applied to Dogmatics. In the first place Spykman has done away with the thousand-year old dualist Christian worldview, and reality is conceived in a more holistic perspective. Biblical concepts such as creation, fall, redemption and consummation are used in their comprehensive and radical meanings.

In the second place it also employs a new theological method. The classical Scholastic *loci* method in Dogmatics (for example, *locus de Deo*, *locus de creatio*, *locus de homine*, etc.) is replaced with the historical line of Biblical revelation.

In the light of the preceding pages of this book you should be able to understand why I am so enthusiastic about this *opus magnum* of Spykman. We know him as someone who can make difficult issues accessible in simple language. This book is also the ripe fruit of a lifetime of reflection.

In the Western world a great deal has been done in recent years to direct the attention of scholars to the presuppositions and methodology of theology. This began to happen in South Africa recently too with the publication, of books by among others, W. van Huyssteen: *Teologiese*

*en kritiese geloofsverantwoording (Theological and critical justification of faith)* (Pretoria: HSRC, second printing, 1988), and J. Mouton, A.G. van Aarde and W.S. Vorster (eds.): *Paradigms and Progress in Theology* (Pretoria: HSRC, 1988). This type of work, however, has not yet been done from an outspoken Christian-reformational perspective. Spykman does not only say that such an approach is possible; in his book he also gives a clear indication of how it should be done. In this regard his *Reformational Theology* is unique in the world.

The second reason for my enthusiasm about this work is that we can use it as a point of departure in order ultimately to reach something similar in Africa, in other words, a contextualised reformational theology aimed specifically at our continent. Where I have recommended A.M. Wolters's *Creation regained* as a point of departure in order finally to arrive at the formulation of an African reformational *worldview*, I would like to use Spykman's *Reformational Theology* as a point of departure to start working towards an African reformational *theology*. In view of the important role played by theological training in Africa, it may be worthwhile bringing together the best theological and philosophical talents from Africa for such a project.

## 15.6 A CREDO FOR AN INSTITUTION FOR CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The draft credo below is intended to recapitulate the preceding material succinctly. Although it was originally written for a specific university, it may also with adjustments be applicable to a variety of other institutions for Christian higher education, such as colleges for agriculture, nursing, theology and education. It could also, with the necessary adjustments, serve as a personal credo for individual Christian scholars.

### 1. *We subscribe to*

- the Christian character of our University, which should determine our thoughts and deeds and which should answer to God unconditionally;

- the reformational worldview as the root from which this institution has sprung and the source of sustenance from which it daily draws inspiration, power and direction.

## 2. *We confirm*

- that our personal relationship to the living God underlies, binds together and directs our lives in their entirety;
- that we have to love God with all our heart, mind and strength, so that everything that we do or think may be to His glory and in His service.

## 3. *We accept*

- the whole revelation of God, wonderful in His creational Word, infallible in His written Word and perfect in the incarnated Word, Jesus Christ;
- the indivisible unity in Jesus Christ of His revelation in creation and in Scripture;
- the indisputable relevance of this revelation for each task, including scholarship, which He has entrusted to us.

## 4. *We believe*

- that God is the sovereign Creator, Upholder and Ruler of heaven and earth, which can only exist through His goodness;
- that the whole of creation is corrupted as a result of the fall of man and is subjected to frustration, enslavement and transitoriness;
- that the children of God have been liberated through the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, out of grace been freed from the power of evil, even if they have to struggle against it daily;
- that the Holy Spirit is already renewing everything, and that the kingdom of God will dawn in perfection on the new earth at the time determined for it.

## 5. *We undertake*

out of gratitude, to think and to act reformatively by

- prophetically studying God's revelation in a darkened world, proclaiming it to our students, colleagues and others, so that the illuminating power of His Word will renew our thinking, bring every thought into obedience to Christ, in this way contributing to the advent of His kingdom of justice and peace in the sphere of academic work;
- working as priests in a broken world to make science and education serve, through prayer and love, the reconciliation in and the renewal of the world, so that the healing power of His gospel will become visible to all inside and outside this University;
- reigning humbly as kings to combat, in a rebellious world and also within ourselves, all worldviews and theories which deny or oppose God's sovereignty, and to guide and direct our students in such a way that they will be equipped for the struggle against every idolatry, so that the liberating force of God's kingly dominion will also be experienced in the field of scholarship.

## 6. *We acknowledge*

- that this University is a gift from God, which therefore has to fulfil its task of training people for scientific work to the benefit, welfare and joy of all the children of God, without exception;
- that this institution is an academic expression of the community of the holy and that each member therefore has a special responsibility to execute his/her task in a spirit of Christian fellowship with others, e.g. students, lecturers and other staff.
- that the task of the University has to be fulfilled responsibly, that is, in accordance with the norms and standards of the kingdom of God;
- that this responsibility has the particular implication that students have to be guided towards wisdom, that is, to an understanding of God's creational Word in the light of Holy Scripture, so that their

education at this University will support the fulfilment of their calling for any profession for which scientific education may be a prerequisite.

7. *We realize*

- that the reformational tradition offers clear directions on the way to true wisdom, and that we should therefore study it seriously to be enriched and equipped for our task;
- that we should not only work in the expectation that those who think differently may listen to us, but that they may also open our eyes to be able to understand God's creation better, so that we can use their insights critically - just as we are called to weigh the results of our own academic labour regularly and critically.

8. *We confess*

- that in the execution of this high and glorious calling we are, every moment, deeply dependent on the Almighty God, so that we can do this only in prayerful dependence on Him;
- that this Christian institution, which carries the name of Christ, may never exist for its own sake or some other purpose, but - true to its name - should exist only for the sake of the honour and the glory of the Triune God, from whom, by whom and to whom all things exist.

9. *We are looking forward* to cooperate in the field of Christian higher education with all Christians who are willing to endorse this academic confession.

10. *We promise* to embody this confession in academic freedom, that is, to seek and disseminate truth in love according to the strictest religious, ethical and scientific requirements and not to allow ourselves to be hindered through personal or group interests or mere tradition. In this way it will emerge from the fruits of our labours that this is a place of learning where God alone is obeyed and our fellow men served in love.

\* \* \*



Due to limited space, we unfortunately have not been able to include questions for discussion and hints for application at the end of each chapter of this book. It is of the utmost importance, however, that what is given in *The liberating message* should not remain abstract theory, but should become concrete practice!

The proof of the pudding has therefore been postponed until the very end of the book. Chapter 1 started with a number of urgent calls for direction from all over Africa. My diagnosis was that all these people are in need of a Christian worldview. Your task now is to read these letters from Africa again and to try and apply the therapy I have prescribed in each one of these cases. How would you answer each of these letters in view of what you have read in the previous pages of this book?

Should you succeed in doing so - even in 70% of the cases - the author could be assured that the therapy he has prescribed has not been vague or irrelevant to the African situation. If not, he will have to start all over again!

Whatever the case may be, your comments will be highly appreciated. They may contribute towards improving a possible second edition of this book. My address is:

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## POSTSCRIPT

What follows here is not essential for an understanding of the preceding pages, but it may help the reader to have more understanding - and sympathy! - for what he/she has read, as it offers some kind of an outline of the history of the book - from the first beginnings to indications of how we see its further course.

### 1. The beginning

This is to be found in a modest little book, *A Christian worldview and Christian higher education for Africa* (124 pp) which I wrote for the first regional conference for Africa of the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE) in Harare, Zimbabwe, March 1991. Various people responded enthusiastically to it and also made constructive suggestions for its improvement. People who gave valuable advice with regard to both content and language include Dr. Paul G. Schrottenboer, General Secretary of IAPCHE, Grand Rapids, USA; Prof. Emeritus Gordon J. Spykman, Dept. of Religion and Theology, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, USA; Dr. John Newby and Mr. Craig Bartholomew, George Whitefield College, Kalk Bay, RSA; Dr. Jan H. Boer of the Institute for Church and Society, Jos, Nigeria; and Dr. Yusufu Turaki, General Secretary of the Evangelical Churches of West Africa, Jos, Nigeria.

During a visit of Dr. Turaki's to Potchefstroom (August, 1991) it was decided to extend the content of the above-mentioned booklet and to add sections to be written by Dr. Turaki himself. A heavy workload and communication problems made this joint project very difficult, however. In view of the fact that I had a sabbatical of a few months in the second half of 1992, which gave me the opportunity to work on a new edition - an opportunity which would not present itself again soon - I decided to prepare a more extended second version of the book myself. (The original edition had already gone out of print by the end of 1991.) This does not, of course, exclude a joint project with Dr. Turaki and possibly other collaborators in the future. In view of the fact that I would not, however, have the time to spend on such a project again soon, and because there is at present an enormous need for such a book, I decided to go the road alone. I am glad that at least some of the additions which my friend Turaki recommended in 1991, and which he

was able to put in writing while in Potchefstroom, could be included in chapter 2. I also appreciate his willingness to write the preface to "our" book.

## 2. The need

The need in which I have tried to provide with this new edition can be found on three different levels.

In the first place, at the university where I teach. I did publish a book in Afrikaans in 1992 (*Venster op die werklikheid - Window on the world*), but we are getting more and more (especially black) students from South Africa and elsewhere in Africa for whom only an English version will be accessible.

In the second place, groups of students (from, among others places, Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Durban) have over the past three years evinced great enthusiasm about the value of a Christian worldview. A Christian Worldview Network came into being which recently (August 1992) held its first National Conference on "A Christian worldview for South Africa" at Stellenbosch. These different groups and individual students are mostly English-speaking and urgently in need of a guideline relevant to the South African and the broader African contexts.

In the third place, there is also a great deal of interest - and therefore a need for guidance - with regard to a Christian worldview in other African countries. As early as 1988 a Worldview Consultation was held in Nairobi, Kenya, and something similar in Jos, Nigeria, in 1989. The response to the above-mentioned booklet also convinced me that there is indeed a great need for this kind of literature in Africa. As an African leader has correctly remarked: "Our people perish because they are without a vision."

It is therefore the author's and the publisher's sincere hope that this publication will help to provide in this widely-felt need.

### **3. The product**

It would have been ideal to have written a new book from scratch, but with only three months at my disposal I had to follow a different course. I mainly used existing material that had gone out of print (among others, the already-mentioned *A Christian worldview and Christian higher education for Africa* and also *On being human; a gift and a duty* published in 1990) and some unpublished lectures which I have delivered since 1991. All these were revised and extended. Where there were still gaps, new sections were written.

This procedure made inevitable the following weaknesses in the final product which could not be excluded completely: overlaps and repetitions will occur; things which should have been dealt with early on are perhaps only considered later in the book; some chapters are too long/brief in comparison with others and - this is perhaps the greatest disadvantage! - the book could have been more condensed. With the limited time at my disposal, however, this was the best I could manage.

The book is, as I have already indicated, not intended to be a scholarly work of outstanding quality, but simply a popular introduction to a Christian worldview for first-year students at a college or university. For this reason the material has been ordered in such a way that, should it be used as a textbook, the fifteen chapters could be dealt with within a semester. (At my university a semester is about 15 weeks long with three to four lecturers of one hour each per week.) Initially I wanted to add questions for class discussion as well as assignments for further study at the end of each chapter, but the final length of the book did not allow this.

### **4. The structure**

The intention of the book can briefly be described in the following terms: to make clear (1) what a worldview is and then especially a Christian worldview, and (2) what the implications of this would be for our view of man and human society. In doing this cognisance was taken of the fact that the reading public of the book would be African, and therefore as much as possible of the African context was worked into it.

To achieve these objectives, the book has been divided into three main sections: worldview, view of man and view of society. The latter has been sub-divided into two subsections: views of society in general and specific societal relationships.

The line of thought through the different chapters is constituted as follows: the introduction (chapter 1) focuses the attention on the need for and value of a Christian worldview for Africa. Then follows (chapter 2) an outline of the radical transformations which the African continent has undergone in the course of the past century (about 1890 to 1990), and the resultant need for a Christian worldview to offer the people of Africa direction and perspective again. This is followed (chapter 3) by a description of what a worldview is. In the subsequent chapter (4) I offer my viewpoint of God's revelation - the foundation for a Christian worldview. Following this we are confronted (chapter 5) by the fact that even among Christians there are various worldviews from which we have to choose. I am personally in favour of an integral-holistic Christian worldview, which, I believe, has truly liberating and transforming power. I call this a Biblical-reformational worldview and in this chapter also give an indication of how this worldview came into being and developed. (Should it not have come across clearly enough from the book, I would like to re-emphasise that "reformational" is not used here to indicate a specific church, confession, doctrine or theology. A reformational worldview is not bound denominationally, but has a far wider meaning which cuts across denominational borders.) In the subsequent chapter (6) a few basic distinctions and points of departure of a reformational philosophy are spelled out.

Chapter 7 offers a brief outline of a Biblical view of man. Chapter 8 offers insights on man as a creator of culture and the whole issue of cultural differences and possible cross cultural co-operation between Africa and the West is also discussed.

Chapter 9 is the beginning of the section dealing with human society. This introductory chapter outlines (against the background of a reformational vision of society) the different clashing views of society from which contemporary Africa has to make its choice. In chapter 10 three views of society are worked out in detail, as well as the reformational viewpoint on office, authority, power and responsibility.

The following chapter (11) deals with three points of view on how a society should be changed. It also indicates how Christian organisations can play a crucial role in societal renewal. This section of the book is concluded (chapter 12) by directing attention to the enormous role ideologies play in modern life. A description is given of what kind of idolatry an ideology is (a kind of closed, petrified worldview) and then two ideologies, which are very important in the African and South African context, are discussed as examples.

In chapters 13 to 15, in a subsequent main section of the book, different societal relationships are analysed: the friendship relation, marriage, family, school, business and church (chapter 13). Then a whole chapter (14) is devoted to the state and politics, because they have such an enormous influence on our lives, and because we as Christians often do not realise and fulfil our obligations in this field. A substantial chapter (15) is devoted to Christian higher education, because tertiary education is a key area which will to a large extent determine the future of our continent.

In a nutshell the book intends to open more and more windows on God's world. It wants to provide African Christians with a new vision of the tasks to which God calls them on this continent.

## **5. The sources**

Because I regard this book as a popular work for students and not as a scholarly work, a fair amount of space and time could be saved by cutting out as many references as possible. In view of the fact that this could indicate ingratitude towards the many people from whom I have learned, I append a bibliography which is as complete as possible. Apart from the bibliography being an acknowledgement of my many sources of information, I trust that it will also encourage students to further their reading.

## **6. The title**

By way of the title of this book, I have made an attempt to express in a nutshell the meaning that the reformational worldview has had for me personally, and I do hope that this will also be the case for many

Christians in Africa: it brings a liberating message. Why should this be? The reasons include the following:

- This is not a worldview (such as Western individualism, pragmatism and secularism) which seeks to *destroy* African identity, but rather seeks to *renew* it. For this reason the symbolism of the front cover is important: an African man and woman beating a drum and sounding a rattle because the Biblical message is experienced and transmitted in a typically African way. It is not foreign or dangerous to us as Africans.

- This book is more profound than previous efforts to make the Gospel "relevant" for Africa. Instead of simply attempting to accommodate, to make indigenous or to contextualise, this book makes an effort to help build a whole new worldview to replace archaic or wrong worldviews.

- As an encompassing perspective on life (a *worldview*) it invites many African Christians to replace their often myopic and narrow spectacles with lenses that permit a wider vision than simply personal faith and salvation. As an eye-opener it opens our eyes to the fact that God calls us to serve Him in *all* areas of life and with the *whole* of our being. We as Christians need no longer live with a divided soul!

- It also indicates how the whole of our lives coheres in a unity. It tells us clearly *who* we are (the image of God), *where* we are (in His creation, of which we are the stewards), *what* we have to do (obey His will), *why* we live (to seek His kingdom), and *where* we are going (to a new earth). It therefore releases us from the suffering that came upon Africa as a result of Western colonialism and dualistic Christianity, and which the Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe, expressed so strikingly already in 1958 in his novel, *Things fall apart*.

- In the final instance it is able to liberate us from the prison of all kinds of Biblically alien thoughts, myths and ideologies which are locked in such a vicious struggle for the "soul of Africa".

A Christian worldview can also be derailed, however. For this reason it is crucial to state explicitly that it can only have this liberating character, and retain it, as long as it is based on the revelation of God and inspired by a close fellowship with Him.

## 7. The road ahead

What I have been able to achieve in the limited time, I am sharing with my brothers and sisters in Africa through this book. I do this with joy because I love Africa and its people. I was not only born and raised on African soil, but my ancestors came to Africa to live here nearly three centuries ago. I am therefore a full-blooded African - and proud of it.

And yet I realize that I have been raised as a Christian in Western culture, and that I had my training within a European cultural mindset. I will therefore never be able to detach myself fully from this background, and therefore I cannot consider myself competent to "contextualise" the perspectives of a Christian worldview for somebody from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zaire or Zimbabwe - just as it should be impossible for me to do this for somebody from Japan. I should not do this either, because it would amount to arrogant paternalism. I therefore have limited myself to a *Christian* worldview for Africa - I am not able to propound an *African* Christian worldview.

For this reason I would like to close this postscript with the prayer that this book will not be the *end* but merely the *beginning* of a continent-wide study and implementation of a truly liberating Christian worldview.

May the Lord, in the years to come give us dedicated and capable men and women to apply and live according to these liberating perspectives in their own countries, cultures and circumstances.

Bennie van der Walt  
12 April 1993



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Only English publications are included in this bibliography. Books and articles in other languages, like Afrikaans and Dutch, which were consulted are omitted because the majority of the readers will be able to read only English.

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## About the book

Many people in Africa experience life as a dark, subterranean labyrinth in which they wander around in a daze, without any meaning and direction to their lives, without any hope of ever escaping from this labyrinth.

This feeling was already known to Greek mythology. Whoever landed in a maze or a labyrinth with all its deceptive cul-de-sacs never got out of it alive again. One man, Theseus, did, however, get out alive. What was his secret? He used a ball of twine given to him by Ariadne, his beloved, who did not want to sacrifice him to the maze. He unrolled this when he entered the terrifying labyrinth, and could get out again by backtracking along the twine.

This book would like to serve the people of Africa as a liberating ball of thread from Ariadne, to enable them to find their way through the often uncertain, treacherous and dangerous labyrinth of life and reach their destination with rejoicing. This lifeline is a Christian worldview.

Without a worldview which is true to the Bible, man, a nation, a whole continent will go under. A worldview, a vision of life, offers light in a dark world, it liberates, orientates, motivates and inspires. It is therefore just as indispensable in each individual's life as a navigator's sea map, a compass and rudder for a sailor.

## About the author

*Professor B.J. van der Walt has been intensively involved in the study of African worldviews since the seventies of the previous century. He has also traveled and lectured extensively in Africa, and has participated in or arranged many conferences attended by prominent Christian leaders from Africa. He can therefore write with authority about Africa, from Africa itself and for the people of Africa.*

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