



**B.J. van der Walt**

# **UNDERSTANDING AND REBUILDING AFRICA**

**from desperation today to  
expectation for tomorrow**







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towards  
expectation for tomorrow**



**B.J. van der Walt**



**Potchefstroom  
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The grotesquely fat Baobab tree (*Adasonia digitata*), about 10-15 meters in height with a bole up to 28 meters in circumference (a diameter of 8 meters) can become 3 000 years old and has a remarkable vitality. Even when the interior of this largest tree of Africa has been burnt out it continues to flourish. Their hollow trunks have served as storage barns, houses and places of refuge. Their seeds are refreshing to suck and are believed to have medicinal power. It is no wonder that these extraordinary trees are surrounded by a wealth of African legend. To me this tree symbolises traditional African civilization. To **understand** Africa we have to know both cultures and to **rebuild** the continent on our way into the future we should know how the best from these two different cultures can be merged.

**This book may be ordered directly from:**

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## PREFACE

It is a pleasure to introduce this book to its readers by first saying something about the author and then more about the book itself.

I first met Bennie van der Walt at a special session for religious groups of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in East London (17-19 November 1997). On behalf of a few Christians from Potchefstroom he presented a confession that the apartheid ideology was a terrible derailment of the Calvinist (Christian-national) ideal amongst his people. Already during the apartheid era he (as director of the Institute for Reformational Studies), through publications and conferences, warned against this inhuman ideology. At the same time he indicated that genuine Christianity, faithful to the Gospel, can play a positive, liberating role in society.

For the following reasons I would like to recommend this unique book:

- In the first place it is about our beloved continent, Africa. It assists us not only to understand what has happened in the past, but also what is happening at the moment in Africa. It, furthermore, contains many valuable suggestions of how to rebuild our continent, how our many problems can be overcome and the well-being of our people be enhanced.
- In the second place it is an honest book and at the same time full of hope. On the one hand it does not try to cover up our internal weaknesses. In a well-informed, balanced way it indicates both the strong and weak points of traditional African culture and modern Western culture. On the other hand it does not succumb to Afro-pessimism, but expects a better future.
- In the third place this is not the work of a Western outsider, who often tend to argue that the Africans deserve the present crisis our continent is experiencing. This book is written by an insider, who has not only read extensively and has travelled to many African countries, but he has fully associated himself with the African people and therefore acquired first-hand experience of some of their problems and potentials. (He, has for instance, joined a Tswana-speaking black congregation in a rural area and at the moment serves as one of its elders.)
- Fourthly, this white African has in a remarkable way succeeded to understand the religion, worldview and culture of black Africans. At the same time he provides us with a penetrating critique of Western culture. His emphasis on the differences between

these two cultures is not intended to divide – we are all human beings – but rather to enrich and unite.

- Fifthly, it is clear from the book that the author is not only a sincere Christian; as a Christian philosopher–theologian he also approaches the material from a Christian perspective. I regard this as an outstanding contribution of this work. It enables the author to indicate the relevance of the Gospel for our entire life – including moral, social, political and economic affairs. The Christian faith can make a difference! A holistic, biblically based worldview can contribute towards human dignity, freedom and equality.
- In the sixth place – in spite of its explicit Christian approach or exactly because of it – the author strongly believes in reconciliation, religious freedom and tolerance. According to him confidence in one's own faith and tolerance towards other faiths are not opposites but the two sides of the same coin.
- Lastly, this book is exceptional because it is written by a Christian philosopher. Can a Christian be a philosopher or a philosopher a Christian? Professor Van der Walt has proven that this is possible.

Philosophers are, of course also known for their ability to wrap their ideas in cliquish language or jargon, completely incomprehensible for ordinary human beings. On both points the philosopher in this book failed the requirements for a real philosopher: this is a clear, down-to-earth book, written in a non-technical style for ordinary laymen and –women to follow.

**Understanding and rebuilding Africa** is of such a foundational nature that it deserves to be read by a very wide audience, including more or less every profession: politicians, economists, sociologists, religious leaders, development workers, educationists, etc. It offers compulsory reading for everyone who wants to communicate effectively cross-culturally. It will benefit Westerners involved in Africa and it will assist Africans dealing with the West and evaluating the impact of Western culture on the continent.

My sincere prayer is that our Lord will bless brother Bennie's hard work. May He provide wings to the excellent book to reach not only the remote corners of our continent but also the centers of Western culture in London, New York and Paris.

**Desmond M. Tutu**

Archbishop Emeritus

## INTRODUCTION

To many people Africa is still a **terra incognita**, an unknown continent. This is not only the case with outsiders, but even with those living on the continent. It applies to white Westerners as well as black Africans. This kind of ignorance can be dangerous: Without a proper understanding of our situation we cannot improve it.

### **Understanding Africa**

This book is a humble attempt to provide a popular introduction to a better understanding of our vast continent. The aim is not to be comprehensive. The focus is mainly on the religions, cultures and worldviews of Africa. Because of their fundamental nature, however, they could facilitate a better understanding of Africa's socio-economic-political situation.

Two introductory chapters first provide some general information about Africa. It is impossible to comprehend the contemporary African situation without grasping something about its past. The powers of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and Christianity shaped present-day Africa in a decisive way (chapter 1). These combined factors have led to a deep and comprehensive crisis (chapter 2).

In chapters 3 to 7 different facets of the traditional religion, culture and worldview of Africa are discussed and compared with the West. This is necessary because traditional African culture still plays a prominent role all over the continent. In their contemporary search for an own identity Africans cannot ignore their roots. The remaining two chapters (8 and 9) illustrate how tradition as well as the Western influence continue to impact on the quest for a genuine African philosophy, theology and morality.

### **Rebuilding Africa**

The second aim of this book is to illustrate how Africa can, with the preceding knowledge, solve its vexing problems and be rebuilt. More than insight is needed to face the challenge, but insight remains one of the prerequisites.

Already in the first nine chapters some flashes of the possible rebuilding of Africa are seen. From chapter 10 onwards, however, we return to some issues identified in the first two chapters with the deliberate aim of looking for perspectives which can liberate the continent from its crisis. The issues addressed include the following: the desacralisation of authority and power (chapter 10); the role of the state (chapter 11); human rights (chapter 12); reconciliation (chapter 13); religious freedom and tolerance (chapter 14);

corruption (chapter 15); ecological stewardship (chapter 16); development (chapter 17), the economy (chapter 18) and finally the African Renaissance (chapter 19) – a sign of hope for the future.

The last chapter (20) is an essay on an integral Christian worldview, which the writer regards as a key factor in the rebuilding of Africa. This chapter also explains the perspective from which the author wrote the whole book. Readers may therefore prefer to consult it first.

### **The readers**

The introductory and elementary nature of this book is explained by the fact that it was written as a textbook for a course on "Philosophy in Africa" to be used by students at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education in South Africa. This also explains its attention to the religious, cultural, ideological, worldviewish and philosophical forces involved in shaping Africa, as well as its Christian approach.

My sincere wish is that, apart from students, it will also be of value to other readers interested in Africa. What it offers is not new – it is intended for the novice – but it is necessary to be known in order to remove the predominantly bad image of our continent.

### **Bibliographies**

Instead of a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the book, I have provided bibliographies of books and articles at the end of every chapter on the specific issue discussed. These bibliographies contain works consulted in the writing of each chapter as well as material for further reading.

### **Acknowledgements**

In want to thank Prof. Willie van Wyk, director of the School of Social and Government Studies at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, for his encouraging support. Mrs. Jorita Coetzee, secretary of the same School, patiently typed and retyped the manuscript. Dr. Marietjie Nelson was willing to improve my Western Transvaal English.

A grant from a foundation in the Netherlands assisted in the writing and publication of this book. In spite of the fact that it prefers not to be mentioned by name, I want to thank its board.

I am honoured in that Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu was willing to attach his name to this book by writing a **preface** to it. I have the greatest respect for the excellent Christian



leadership he, through many and difficult years, offered to our country and our continent. Therefore it caused me great joy when his various contributions were recently acknowledged by my University in granting him an honorary doctor's degree.

### **Dedication**

I am dedicating this book to the younger generation – who have the responsibility of rebuilding Africa – including my four children and their spouses: Mias and Marti, George and Marjeanne, Barend and Amelia, Marieta and Brink.

\* \* \*

If **Understanding and rebuilding Africa** whets the appetite of the reader to know more and understand Africa better, the goal of my unpretentious effort has been achieved to replace Afro-pessimism with Afro-optimism or, according to its subtitle: to change the **desperation of today into expectation for tomorrow!**

November 2002

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PS: A study guide, containing questions and assignments to be used with this book, is available from the above address.



## Chapter 1:

# THE IMPACT OF SLAVERY, COLONIALISM, NEO-COLONIALISM AND CHRISTIANITY ON AFRICA

To understand present-day Africa, one should know something about its past. This is the aim of this first chapter. A brief overview of the early history of Africa forms an introduction to the chapter. The main emphasis will be on colonialism, neo-colonialism and Christianity in Africa. Why was Africa colonised and Christianised? What was the nature of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the Christianity transplanted to Africa? What was the impact of these Western activities on the continent itself?

### 1.1 A brief overview of the early history of Africa

It is important to know something about the history of Africa to dispel the (Western) idea that our continent was without civilisation or development.

Khapoya (1994:70ff) divides the early history of Africa into the following phases:

- Prehistory
- Ancient history
- Medieval history
- Early modern history
- History of the nineteenth century.

We will follow his division in this brief overview.

#### 1.1.1 Prehistoric Africa

Evolutionary theorists and archeologists provide us with the following information about Africa during this time:

- About 200 million years ago hunters-gatherers (**homo habilis**) developed tools and language.
- One million years ago these hunters-gatherers (**homo erectus**) discovered how to make fire and some migrated from Africa to Eurasia.
- During the past 200 000 years archaic **homo sapiens** developed into modern **homo sapiens**.

- Around 10 000 years ago some of these prehistoric hunting-gathering nomads or bands began to settle along the fertile banks of the Nile River where they kept domesticated livestock and cultivated grains.
- About 3 500 B.C. broadening community linkages led to the development of two large confederations, the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt.

### 1.1.2 Ancient history

First a look at the kingdoms of ancient Egypt and then at other ancient African civilizations.

#### The kingdoms of Egypt

We leave aside the debate about the skin colour of ancient Egyptians. The fact is that they were Africans and the civilisations they established were African civilisations. The early history of Egypt can be divided into the following eight periods:

- **The Old Kingdom (c. 3100-2180 B.C.)**, under the rule of the divine pharaohs, was Africa's first large-scale political economy. During this time many of the impressive pyramids were built.
- **The First Intermediate Period (c. 2180-2080 B.C.)**, was the time when the Old Kingdom gradually fragmented and regional political centres regained their autonomy.
- **The Middle Kingdom (c. 2080-1640 B.C.)**, reunited the Nile Valley and maintained an effective large-scale government for about 400 years.
- **The Second Intermediate Period (c. 1640-1570 B.C.)** was the time when Egypt was conquered by the Hyksos invaders and central authority again fragmented.
- During Egypt's **New Kingdom or Empire (c. 1570-1090 B.C.)** regional leaders re-imposed centralised authority in the entire Nile Valley, conquered other neighbouring civilizations and established the first multinational empire in ancient Africa. The new capital city was Thebes. Today we know many of the famous pharaohs who reigned during this period, like Queen Hatshepsut, Akhenaton, Tutankhamon, Ramses II and his followers.
- This great empire was conquered by different nations like the Libyans (c. 950 B.C.), the Kushites (c. 750 B.C.), the Assyrians (c. 660 B.C.), the Babylonians, the Persians (who ruled from about 535-332 B.C.) and the Greeks under Alexander the Great (330 B.C.).
- Finally Caesar Augustus conquered Egypt (c. 30 B.C.) and established four centuries of Roman rule.

- Constantine, emperor of the Roman Empire declared tolerance for Christians (313 A.D.) and later Emperor Theodosius (381 A.D.) declared that Christianity would be the official imperial religion. Alexandria became the centre of Christianity in North Africa.

### **Other Ancient African civilisations**

The following should be mentioned:

- Kush-Meroe (c. 2000 B.C. – 350 A.D.)
- Nok (c. 500 B.C. – 200 A.D.)
- Maghreb (c. 600-150 B.C.)
- The ancient West African Empire of Mauritania
- The ancient Sudanic Kingdoms of Ghana and Takrur
- The ancient Ethiopian Kingdom of Axum (c. 200 B.C. – 700 A.D.). In about 360 A.D. Coptic Christianity was declared the official imperial religion of this kingdom. Coptic Christianity survived for 1600 years (c. 350-1975 A.D.) in A.D. Ethiopia, while in many other countries the expansion of Islam (c. 640-710 A.D.) destroyed Christian traditions.

#### **1.1.3 Medieval Africa**

Again we cannot go into detail, but provide only a few flashes.

- By the early 700's the Muslims conquered and converted most of Egypt and the Maghreb in North Africa.
- About 1270 A.D. a new dynasty of Christian Abyssinian rulers claimed royal authority by virtue of being direct descendants of ancient Israel's king Solomon and Sheba's Queen Makeda. They maintained ties with Alexandria's Coptic Christians and coexisted peacefully with neighbouring Islamic governments.
- Muslims from the Maghreb conquered Egypt in 969 A.D. and established the Fatimid Dynasty in Cairo (970-1170 A.D.), where they founded the Western world's first modern university.
- A new Islamic empire was established in the Maghreb (1090-1150).
- The kingdom of Mali emerged along the upper Niger River as the centre of a new imperial confederation and subsequently rose to become the second great empire in the medieval Western Sudan (c. 1230-1430). One of its rulers was said to have

launched Mali's first trans-atlantic voyages in the early 1300's – almost two centuries before Christopher Columbus!

- The medieval kingdom of Songhay, founded around 1000 A.D., broke away from Mali and became the third great empire in medieval Western Sudan (c. 1460-1590). Songhay rose to become one of the medieval world's largest multinational empires. Some of the Islamic world's most respected scholars taught at Sankore University in Timbuktu.
- Gold from Africa was for many centuries carried across the Sahara desert. By the late 1400's local leaders on the West coast had begun to sell gold to the Portuguese. However, many medieval civilisations rose and fell on the coasts and hinterlands of West Africa long before the Portuguese sea-explorers first "discovered" them (c. 1440-90).
- By the 1520's Portuguese ships had begun transporting West African slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. This was the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade which lasted to 1870. By 1600 many coastal cities traded directly with European slave ships.
- But during medieval times (c. 1000-1600 A.D.) different communities in the interior lay beyond the immediate range of coastal trade. The Shona kingdom of medieval Zimbabwe was producing gold for international trade as early as 1000 A.D.. As Indian Ocean sea trade increased, medieval Zimbabwe flourished (c. 1250-1450).
- By 1600 Portuguese fleets and fortresses had disrupted the medieval sea trade along the East coast of Africa – just as they had disrupted earlier patterns of commercial growth and political consolidation along the West African coasts.

#### **1.1.4 Early modern Africa (1600-1800)**

Dutch, Spanish, French, British, German, Scandinavian and Arab ships joined the Portuguese in the growing international slave trade from Africa (c. 1520-1870). Estimates differ, but Khapoya (1994:91) puts the number of slaves exported from West Africa at about 12 million and several millions from East and Central Africa. (Some people even mention a total of 25 million from all over Africa.)

Recently much more has been written about the slave trade. The reader may wish to consult an earlier publication by Davidson (1961) or a more recent work like that of Reader, (1998) for more details. Students will understand this horrible trade in humans much better by viewing the video **Amistad**, directed by Steven Spielberg. Fascinating

reading on the topic is also offered in Alex Haley's best seller **Roots** (1977), the saga of a black American family whose ancestor was transported in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a slave from Gambia to America.

Whatever the real numbers were, the slave trade severely disrupted political and economic growth in Africa. Some African kingdoms dissolved while others tried to adapt to the new circumstances to be able to survive.

### **1.1.5 Nineteenth-century Africa**

Early nineteenth century states and confederacies were developing more modern approaches to nation-building, military and educational systems, commercial transactions and international relations.

The first half of Africa's nineteenth-century history continue to be significantly disrupted by the international commerce in slaves. New Euro-American markets also began to demand large imports of African commodities like palm oil, cotton, peanuts and ivory.

By the middle of the century European merchants realised that Africans could produce these commodities more efficiently by working in their own countries than by working as slaves elsewhere. They thus increased trade in natural products and decreased their demand for slave labour from Africa which was finally abolished (1833).

Finally, however, at the end of this century (1880-1900) followed the wholesale invasion of the continent by the different colonising nations of Europe. All the tendencies towards economic and political development in different parts of the continent were disrupted. Colonised Africans could no longer be active participants in shaping their own history.

Khapoya (1994:109) concludes: "During Europe's scramble for Africa (c. 1880-1900) external colonial armies, businessmen, settlers and missionaries conquered different African nations, destroyed indigenous networks of community self-government, reorganised long-standing patterns of trade, took over ancestral lands and undermined local belief systems. European colonialism in Africa interrupted important continuities of local life as well as the continuing development of great traditions in large-scale political economies throughout the continent".

### **1.2 Colonised Africa according to Vincent Khapoya**

The formalisation of colonial rule (which had already started in the mid 1800's) was accomplished at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. No African state was represented. The conference was called to reach agreement on boundaries and so to avoid future

conflict among European powers. All the European powers met and partitioned Africa between them. Following World War I, Germany was deprived of her colonial possessions which were parcelled out to the victorious allies.

These are the facts. But we are interested in what lies behind the simple facts. The following are some of the questions to be answered if we really want to understand colonialism in Africa.

- Why was Europe interested in Africa?
- What were the reasons for Europe's imperialism?
- How did the different nations view their mission in Africa?
- How did the European powers execute their rule over their African colonies?
- How were the colonial economies structured?
- What were the results (positive and negative) of colonial rule in Africa?

We will take the book of Khapoya (1994) as a guide to answer these important questions. Because Fowler (1995) has some important insights to add to the valuable information provided by Khapoya, we will also review his book on the oppression and liberation of Africa.

### **1.2.1 Why was Europe interested in Africa?**

Khapoya (1994:113,114) mentions three reasons why Europeans were so keen to acquire colonies in Africa and elsewhere: (1) to gather scientific knowledge about the unknown, (2) to spread the Christian gospel to Africans and (3) the desire of Europeans to contribute to their country's fame and grandeur by laying claim on distant lands. These three reasons are not mutually exclusive, but very much interrelated.

### **1.2.2 What was the rationale for Europe's imperialism?**

Khapoya (1994:116-119) provides the following three reasons why Europeans were so keen to acquire colonies in Africa and elsewhere: (1) political, (2) cultural and (3) economic motivations.

Colonial possessions were equated with political prestige and status. Just imagine the sense of importance and pride as a tiny country like Belgium ruled a country like Zaire, 80 times the size of Belgium! It thereby gained the status of a world power.<sup>1</sup> Or Britain which controlled – in Africa alone – an area that was more than 40 times its own size! The colonies also provided a large reservoir of manpower in times of war.



The cultural reason arrives from the ethnocentrism (Eurocentrism) of the European people. They regarded anyone different from themselves as culturally inferior. The Europeans, therefore, felt it their duty to "civilise", "uplift" and "evangelise" the African people. This provided them with a moral "justification" for colonialism.

The desire for wealth, trade, resources and cheap labour also motivated European expansion into Africa and other parts of the so-called third world. They needed cheap natural resources to fuel the industrial revolutions in their own countries. And, as the European economies grew, markets for disposing of surplus goods became necessary. They also sought to exploit the plentiful cheap labour in Africa. All these were the inherent demands of the new capitalist European economies.

### **1.2.3 How did the European nations conceptualised their mission to "civilise" Africa?**

What type of person did they expect to see once their mission in Africa was accomplished? Answers to this question will reveal interesting contrasts between the European colonisers, especially the British, French and Portuguese.

- **The British approach** to their "mission" was that the indigenous people and the British should be **segregated**. An African could acquire British culture – and many did – but never the ancestry to go with it. What constituted a real Englishman was based on both ancestry and culture. The only way someone could be as good as an Englishman/woman was to have been born one!
- **The French approach** also looked down on the Africans and their culture. Instead, however, of a policy of segregation, they accepted a policy of **assimilation**. Their mission was to convert the Africans into Frenchmen. This implies an acceptance of the African's potential humanity but on the condition of a total dismissal of traditional African culture. The French, therefore, considered culture rather than racial ancestry as the fundamental ingredient of Frenchness. The British could not even think of an educated black man as a social equal or "black Britisher", while the French were prepared to accept an African as a "black Frenchman".
- **The Portuguese approach**. Their concept of what constituted a Portuguese, which determined their "mission" in Africa, was a combination of the ideas of both the French and the British. It included both culture and ancestry. They therefore condoned and promoted the mingling of cultures and races through marriage and cohabitation – usually only one way, viz Portuguese men and African women. This does not imply

that the Portuguese did not see themselves clearly as being superior to Africans. In Portuguese colonies, an African would be considered "civilised" only if he/she could speak Portuguese and had rejected all traditional tribal customs.

The consequence, over time, of this social policy was a stratified social pyramid: (1) full-blooded Portuguese at the top, enjoying all the rights and privileges of Portuguese citizenship; (2) a tiny group of **mestizos** (mixed-race people) in the middle, who were entitled only to a few rights and (3) full-blooded African people at the bottom who were exploited and subjected to all kinds of abuses and indignities.

Khapoya (1994:126) summarises the different approaches in the following words: "The French offered the promise of full membership in the French community if the African assented to complete acculturation. The British sought to 'uplift' the African but without the promise of social equality with the British. The Portuguese went a step further in condoning or perhaps encouraging one-way miscegenation in the belief that to 'change' the African required an infusion of Portuguese ancestry. Thus an African with some Portuguese blood was inherently superior to one without, but obviously still not the social equal of a full-blooded Portuguese person".

#### **1.2.4 How did the European powers rule in their colonies?**

Khapoya (1994:128-135) distinguishes between four types of colonial administrative styles: (1) indirect rule, (2) direct rule, (3) company rule and (4) indirect company rule.

- **Indirect rule** was applied by the British colonial masters. To achieve this, new 'chiefs' and 'tribes' were created where none existed before. These chiefs were expected to enforce law, to collect taxes, to provide cheap labour and were accountable directly to the British district officer or commissioner. In return the 'chiefs' would receive British protection, a house, salary and other gifts.

The hope of the British was that one day, at independence, the African colonies would be able to use the skills and values they had learned from their masters to run their own countries. This was a misplaced expectation, because British rule actually introduced ethnic tension and/or reinforced it where it was already present. It was unrealistic to expect ethnic groups, that had been played off one against the other by the British for so long, to know suddenly how to forge one nation overnight at independence.

- **Direct rule**

This was the type of administration applied by the French, Portuguese, Germans and Belgians. In this highly centralised administration European rule was imposed on the Africans regardless of the existing political relationships among the indigenous people. The French empire was, for instance, directly governed from Paris, The “chiefs” they appointed did not come from ruling families and the uniqueness of the various African political institutions were not preserved. French rule did, however, give Africans from the empire the opportunity to work together across ethnic groups and regions. Because the Africans were governed without any regard to existing ethnic differences, reinforcement of ethnic fragmentation did not occur.

Portugal's centralised administration was much stricter and harsher. They regarded their colonies in Africa as “overseas Portugal” and had no intention of granting them self-rule.

- **Company rule**

This kind of administration, applied by the Belgians, was probably the most brutal. The king of Belgium gave free reign to Belgian businessmen to exploit the Congo – with no accountability to anyone, except the king. Forced labour was rampant and Africans who resisted or did not work hard enough were flogged or had their ears cut off!

It was no surprise that, at independence, Zaire (the old Belgian Congo) was the least prepared for self-rule and continues to be amongst the worst governed and also the poorest countries despite its size and its mineral and other natural resources.

- **Indirect company rule**

The example here is that of Cecil John Rhodes, the British entrepreneur, who wanted to extend British colonial rule from Cape Town to Cairo. In only ten years (1885-1895) he acquired two countries, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). He also gave British “protection” to Botswana and Malawi, almost took Mozambique from the Portuguese and a part of Zaire from the Belgians!

Rhodes set up a private company, the British South African Company, and applied for a royal charter. That gave him the right to administer the countries known as Zimbabwe and Zambia today. From 1890 to 1923 this company set up a colonial administration according to the British model of indirect rule. It crushed every opposition and was responsible for the bureaucracy, police, tax collection, etc. In 1923 the “company colony” of Rhodesia

became a de facto self-governing colony. The local white residents ran the colony without interference from the Colonial Office in London.

### **1.2.5 How was the economics of colonialism structured?**

Khapoya (1994:135-145) discusses in detail imperialist colonial economics applied in Africa under the following headings:

- expropriation of land
- exploitation of labour
- the introduction of cash crops and one-crop economies
- unfair taxation
- the introduction of immigrant labour from India
- the transfer of mineral wealth from Africa to Europe
- the lack of industrialisation.

We will not discuss these points, but rather try to answer the important question who benefited from this type of economics.

### **1.2.6 What was the negative and positive results of colonial rule in Africa?**

Both Europeans and Africans have strong feelings about the question whether colonisation helped or hurted the African people. Khapoya (1994: 145-147) mentions, first, six negative effects and then five positive consequences.

**On the negative side** he mentions the following:

- There was massive exploitation of Africa in terms of labour exploitation, resource depletion, lack of industrialisation, the prohibition of inter-African trade, unfair taxation and the introduction of fragile one-crop economies.
- The exacerbation of ethnic rivalries, which especially the British exploited in furthering their rule, continued in post-colonial conflicts in Africa.
- The undermining of traditional African authority patterns (the use of chiefs for colonial duties) made the task of nation building after independence that much more difficult.
- The creation of artificial boundaries by colonial powers has caused much suffering in post-independent Africa because of territorial claims and counterclaims.

- The destruction of African culture in general caused the loss of the confidence Africans had in themselves and their institutions. It also led to a dependency syndrome.
- The denial of political participation and the excessive use of force in addressing political issues were carried over to the post-colonial period. Africans were generally ill-prepared to take over the governance of their new independent states.

**On the positive side** Khapoya mentions the following benefits of colonialism:

- The introduction of Western medicine made an incredible difference in the survival rate.
- The introduction of formal education helped to broaden the outlook of the people and unlock their hidden potential. Most of the liberation leaders enjoyed Western education.
- Colonial rule left behind a limited infrastructure of harbours, railroads, roads, water systems, electric power and telephones which could be used at independence.
- The introduction of Western culture and Christianity influenced important aspects of traditional African culture. Western individualism, for instance, undermined the traditional collective ethos, but it also made individual progress possible. Christianity liberated many Africans from the belief that everything that happened was due entirely to the intervention of ancestors and other spirits, causing a very fatalistic attitude.
- Much pain and suffering were avoided because the colonial masters created boundaries between different countries, in this way shortening the process of state-formation. In the past, pre-colonial times, states were formed slowly and painfully, as powerful leaders waged wars and annexed their weaker neighbours.

### **1.3 The oppression and liberation of Africa according to Stuart Fowler**

As said previously, on many points Fowler agrees with Khapoya's viewpoints on colonialism in Africa. As a Christian, however, Fowler also adds important perspectives. In this section the emphasis will not be on their agreement, but mainly on the additional insights Fowler's book (1995) offers. An important contribution of Fowler's book is that it pays special attention to the ideological and religious forces involved in shaping Africa.

There was little questioning of slavery until the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise the righteousness of the colonial subjugation of Africa was not seriously questioned until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The subjugation of Africa to European rule was seen as a good endeavour because of the righteous goals of (1) civilising the Africans, a necessary discipline for their advancement from barbarism to (Western) civilisation and (2) evangelising the pagan people, a God-given task of Christians. Underlying these two goals was the assumption of European moral, cultural and religious superiority. The irony is that the subjugation of Africa in fact became a major stumbling block in its development!

No doubt, economic interest was a major factor in the European powers' scramble for Africa. They needed raw materials and markets. The above-mentioned motives (of civilisation and evangelisation), however, provided the moral justification for colonising Africa.

What did not come into consideration, were the interests of the Africans themselves. The Europeans did not see the need to take into account the existing social and political realities of Africa.

By 1914 the whole of Africa had been divided by the European powers. The division reshaped the political map of Africa to suit the interests of the colonisers. Closely related people were divided, while it brought together peoples with little common interests.

### **1.3.1 Disruption by the imposition of alien structures of European society**

The existing social and political arrangements of African societies were undermined and disrupted when they were replaced by European views of "law and order". The colonial authorities would appoint "tribal chiefs" as agents of colonial authority. Or existing African leaders were recruited as agents of the colonial authorities. The result was that the traditional African leadership ceased to be accountable to their own people.

The colonial powers also extended the power of African leaders from one community over people from other communities. This fuelled ethnic (tribal) rivalries and animosities that, in post-colonial Africa, were to erupt in destructive tribalism.

### **1.3.2 The invention of tribalism**

The Europeans believed that Africans lived in tribes and that tribal loyalties were the only primitive stuff of African politics. Therefore they divided Africa into tribes, and where these tribes did not exist, they had to be invented.

In many cases there were ethnic identities, based on the kinship of common traditions, language, social and religious customs and history. But this ethnic identity did not coincide – as the Westerners believed – with political identity. Political allegiance at times crossed

ethnic boundaries. The traditional Africans' political identity did not define their ethnic identity and vice versa. The colonial practice of linking political identity to ethnic identity introduced something new and foreign into African society, viz the politicisation of ethnicity, based on the European model of nation-states.

The negative result was a closure of ethnic identity. Healthy ethnicity is always fluid and open to be enriched by other identities. When, however, ethnic identity becomes a closed relationship so that **all** human relationships are ethnically qualified, then ethnicity becomes a divisive social force. This was one of the most devastating colonial legacies in Africa from which few African states have been free. Political interest became permanently tied to ethnic interest and vice versa. (For tribalism in Africa see also Buconyori, 1977 and Turaki, 1997.)

### 1.3.3 Structural incoherence

Turaki (1993:248) distinguishes, apart from what remained of the original, traditional ones, three different new types of social structures in colonial and post-colonial Africa: **transformation** of precolonial indigenous institutions; **migrated** social structures which were almost literally transferred from the metropolitan centres of the imperialist West to Africa and **emergent** social structures, which were neither indigenous nor Western but born during colonialism in Africa.

The European powers imposed on Africa its democratic political structures and free market economies. But it could not destroy the indigenous African social structures altogether. Fowler (1995:21) describes the result of structural incoherence in the following words: "On the one hand, there were the political and economic structures imposed by the colonial power, founded in the secularist values of modern Europe. On the other hand, there were the remains of the traditional African social structures, founded in traditional values that recognised the religious nature of all human life. The first dominated the political life of the new nations invented by the arbitrary colonial partition of Africa. The second dominated the grassroots social life of the majority of Africans ... These two sets of social structures were based on incompatible values, beliefs and assumptions that made it impossible to integrate them in a single, coherent social framework for the new African nations".

As we have seen from the book by Khapoya, different tendencies towards economic and political development were present in 19<sup>th</sup> century Africa. These were interrupted and brought to a halt by colonialism. Fowler emphasises (1995:22) that, had African societies remain free to make these changes **from within**, the likelihood is that they would have

done so successfully in a way that would have made Africa today the home of stable, prosperous, modern societies with a distinctively African character. The chances are that all the benefits of modernisation would have come to Africa without the alienation, social disruption and instability that accompanied and followed the colonial experience.

The colonial authorities, therefore, bequeathed to the new African leaders a fractured society. A successful modern state requires more than an efficient, democratic structure. It requires, firstly, a strong, cohesive network of social structures, the so-called civil society. Secondly, it requires a coherent set of social values, supported by appropriate social sanctions as a check on abuses of power. Fowler (1995:47) is emphatic: "There can be no effective set of social values with appropriate social sanctions constraining political life in the absence of cohesive and strong social structures independent of the state".

Two problems occurred in this connection. Firstly, the colonial structures had systematically undermined the indigenous African social structures. The structure had persisted at the local and family level, but it lacked the strength and coherence on a national scale that was needed for it to provide the social base and moral constraints that the new states needed.

Secondly, the colonial political structure had never been integrated with indigenous African social structures. The transition to a stable and prosperous state could not have been made by a mere **adaptation** of the colonial political structure. It would have required a comprehensive **restructuring** to achieve coherence with the indigenous African social order.

#### **1.3.4 The economic legacy**

By 1968 the majority of African colonies had become independent African nations. But the influence of colonialism could not be wiped out.

Prior to colonialism, Africa had balanced, self-sustaining economies. It did not have the industrial output or the wealth of consumer goods of modern Western economies. But it did have productive manufacturing and agricultural industries, which included trade with nations outside Africa.

During colonialism the African colonies were seen, on the one hand, as sources of primary products (raw materials) and on the other hand, as markets for the surplus products manufactured in the colonial homelands. The African economies became dependent subsidiaries of the European economies.



The results were that African trading systems were replaced by European and Indian traders. Agricultural production was shifted from products suited to Africa's needs to products suited to the needs of European markets. The traditional economies dwindled in importance or disappeared altogether, as their products were replaced by products from Europe.

"The leaders of the newly independent African states inherited not only a fractured social order, but a fractured economy, split between a colonial economy that existed only as a dependent subsidiary of a European economy, and an indigenous African economy that had survived the adverse conditions of colonial rule only by the vigour of the African initiative" (Fowler, 1995:45).

This structural dependence of the economies of the now independent states was not to their benefit. Firstly, it is not consistent with the status of a sovereign state for its dominant economic structure to be dependent on foreign interests. Secondly, the base of the colonial economy was too narrow to serve the needs of the new states.

### **1.3.5 Post-colonial economic developments**

The leaders of post-colonial Africa did not lack intelligence, competence or, for the most part good will. It was also not the case that they lost touch with their African roots or lacked the will to impart a distinctively African character to the new states. The problem was that they missed the crucial issue of the structural incoherence in the post-colonial politics and economy of Africa. The reason was their Western education. They took it for granted that the colonial economy, rather than the indigenous economy, should provide the basis for development. They did not regard it necessary to merge the two distinct economic structures into a single, integrated national economy. The fundamental issue was not – as many have thought – a choice between (Western) capitalism or socialism.

The colonial education of the African leaders, on the one hand, equipped them to lead the struggle against colonialism, because they were enabled to challenge the colonial masters on their own terms. On the other hand, however, they tended to think in European terms in planning the future development of their countries.

Fowler's perspective on the problem is the following: "To suggest that the African nations look more to their own African heritage in building a modern society does not mean trying to resurrect the social and economic structures of the past. Neither does it mean rejecting all that comes from outside Africa. It means building social and economic models that suit the Africa of tomorrow by building on the strengths of the African heritage and traditions

while selectively incorporating features from the Western world, or anywhere else, that modify and adapt these strengths to the needs of the modern world" (Fowler, 1995:58).

### **1.3.6 Post-colonial politics in Africa**

We will not go into the details of Africa's struggle for liberation from colonialism, independence and afterwards. Many books (cf., for instance, Mazrui & Tidy, 1984) provide information on this period in Africa's history. We will briefly focus on the nature of the state (politics) in post-colonial Africa and again use Fowler (1995) as our guide. (See Davidson, 1992 for a detailed study on the influence of the European idea of the nation-state on post-colonial African politics.)

In the European viewpoint the nation-state was the sociopolitical norm. The leaders of the new African states accepted it without question.

Fowler (1995:59) distinguishes between two basic meanings of the word **nation**. The first is an ethnic nation, which means a group of people united by common traditions, language, culture, values and way of life. An ethnic nation is not necessarily organised as a single political unit. The second meaning of **nation** is a political nation, meaning a group of people living under the rule of a single state within territorial borders.

The idea of a nation-state decrees that the identity of a political nation should coincide with that of an ethnic nation. The citizens of a political nation (state) should have a common ethnic identity.

Two beliefs are fundamental to the idea of a nation-state. The first is the totalitarian idea that the state is the builder and overseer of the nation. It is responsible for the development and well-being of the nation. Other societal institutions (the church, family, business, education etc.) are subordinate to the state. Secondly, "nation" has no meaning apart from the state. Also ethnic interests should be submerged to the interests of the state. This boils down to a politicisation of ethnicity, which has made the task of building unified political nations in post-colonial Africa far more difficult than it might have been.

Different ethnic nations can be harmoniously united in a single political nation if ethnic identity is not politicised. But when politicised ethnic nations came together in one state, the result in Africa was a divisive and often destructive competition for political power along ethnic lines.

At the root of the problem, therefore, is not Africa's ethnic diversity as such, but the systematic politicisation of ethnic diversity by the colonial authorities and its continuation

after independence. Fowler (1995:64) states that "the nation-state idea, with its associated beliefs about the nature of society, is possibly the most damaging of all the legacies of colonialism..."

### **1.3.7 The illusion of the political kingdom**

The belief in the power of the state to direct and develop society that will bring well-being to all, is one of the illusions inherited from colonialism. It is necessary to unmask this illusion because it stands in the way of Africa's future development.

Usually traditional African society is called "primitive", because it was a structurally undifferentiated society. This viewpoint is misleading, because various social functions were organised within a single communal structure. There were cultic activities of the community, but they were not the activities of separate societal relationships or structures like a temple or church. The African communities did have procedures to settle disputes, but it was not organised in a separate judicial system, independent of the community. Education was provided to the youth, but again this was not done by a school system, it was the educational function of the community.

When, usually through a combination of internal and external factors, these homogeneous traditional societies develop into more heterogeneous societies, a process of structural differentiation occurs to cope with the increased diversity of social interactions. A number of distinct social structures, like churches, the judiciary, schools, businesses and states develop from the existing homogeneous society. Everyone of these societal relationships has to fulfil its own distinctive role in society.

This also applies to the state, comprising government and citizens. The state should not function as the overlord of society. It has qualified sovereignty within defined territorial borders. It should not be an oppressive power, but it should ensure the freedom and security of the whole society. The state's authority is qualified because its role is the legal regulation of relations between diverse interests of society, both individual and communal. The norm it has to follow is justice and equality for all. If one looks at the state in this way the question of state power is not how much the state should be involved in the affairs of society, but what kind of involvement it should be.

The coercive power of the state makes it always highly susceptible to abuse of power and corruption. Political abuse and corruption is not peculiar to Africa. Western democracy is also not a guarantee against the corruption of state power. The particular form of the state structure is not the most important.

Fowler (1995:70,71) mentions three conditions that must be met if the tendency to abuse and corruption of state power is to be effectively controlled:

- There must be a recognition built into the social values of the society that the power of the state is not absolute but qualified and therefore limited.
- Social values must include clear standards of conduct that set limits to those who hold any office in the state, whether as politicians or as bureaucrats.
- There must be a network of social structures or organisations, independent of the state, with the collective strength and will to call those who exercise state power to account in terms of the accepted social values.

As a direct result of colonialism all three these conditions were lacking in postcolonial African societies:

- The colonial undermining of the traditional social order together with the pervasive role of the colonial state, had left post-colonial Africa with a political structure that dominated society.
- There were few well organised social interests independent of the state with the strength and the will to resist the power of the state.
- Colonialism also left African societies lacking a coherent set of social values governing conduct in political affairs.

### **1.3.8 Colonial imperialism**

An important contribution by Fowler is his description of the imperialist nature of colonialism as well as neo-colonialism. Let us have a look at both of them.

To really understand colonialism, it should be placed in the context of imperialism. We may define imperialism as the use of the power of a state to dominate the affairs of people beyond the state's territorial borders. As indicated above, a state has qualified authority within defined territorial borders. Imperialism does not include the oppressive use of power by the state or its government over people **within** its territorial borders. This is also abuse of the power of the state, but it is not imperialism.

A range of factors drove the imperialist activities of the European nations in Africa. Fowler distinguishes between base conditions and actuating conditions. The base conditions must always be present for imperialism to exist, while the actuating conditions translate the potential of the base conditions into the actual practice of imperialism.

## **The base conditions**

Imperialism can only exist when two base conditions are met. The first is a significant imbalance of power. The second is the presence in the more powerful state of beliefs that justify the use of its power. The possession of power is never sufficient in itself. There must be appropriate beliefs commonly held by the more powerful state that justify the use of its power to dominate other people. Humans need to believe that their actions are justified. Fowler (1995:98-107) discusses four such beliefs:

- **The belief about a civilised society**

The colonial powers believed that the existing African social structures have to be replaced by a society based on a European-style nation-state, because the European society was the model for a civilised society. The formation of a state was deemed necessary to a civilised society. A fully developed society, furthermore, requires a democratic form of government for the state.

This European model involves a very state-centered view of society. The constitution of the state constitutes a civilised society. And the way in which the state is organised (democracy) determines the level of civilisation that has been achieved. It clearly reveals a misplaced belief in the state as the source of all social good.

- **Social liberalism**

The European Enlightenment proclaimed belief in human equality and individual liberty. It exhibited intolerance towards any who differed from its views. This led to systematic efforts to replace African communal values (regarded as primitive) with the individualistic values of European liberalism.

- **The ideology of progress**

This was a further moral justification for the practice of European imperialism in Africa. In the ideology of progress the norm of a civilised society is constant progress, moving forward to always happier and better social conditions. Change, always for the better, becomes a basic norm of society. Because traditional African societies were regarded as static and backward their condition was unacceptable in the eyes of the European colonisers.

- **Social Darwinism**

Social Darwinism is the application of the evolutionistic idea of the survival of the fittest to social life. It believes that social development depends on conflict and competition

between individuals and social groups in which the strongest – and by implication, the best – survive. Linked with the idea of progress, it leads to the conviction that the more powerful society is clearly the superior society. It is a doctrine that justifies the use of the military and economic power of the more powerful against the less powerful in the interest of human progress.

These four sets of beliefs provided sufficient justification for Europeans to believe that they were doing a righteous work in bringing Africans under the domination of European imperialism. Of course this does not mean that Europe was doing a righteous work in its occupation of Africa. On the contrary, it brought decades of devastating oppression.

### **The actuating conditions**

The above-mentioned base conditions are not enough for the emergence of imperialism. They provide only the potential. For the potential to be translated into actual imperialist practice, there need to be the appropriate actuating conditions or historical circumstances. Fowler (1995:108) distinguishes between self-interest and humanitarian concerns. The latter will never be sufficient in themselves to move a state. The basic motivation will always be self-interest.

### **Self-interest**

The following five self-interests should be mentioned:

- **National pride:** having an overseas empire was seen as enhancing a state's status in Europe.
- **The protection of national interests:** to protect, for instance, British traders and missionaries.
- **International rivalry:** the struggle for dominance amongst the European powers.
- **International political advantage.**
- **Economic interests,** though not the one dominant factor, undoubtedly played a part. Europe needed both fresh resources and new markets.

### **Humanitarian concerns**

Influenced by the reports of explorers and missionaries about the primitive character of Africa, as a land of savagery and the darkest heathenism, liberals and missionaries joined in urging European occupation of Africa as a means to Africa's "enlightenment" and

“civilisation”. To the missionaries it would provide a political environment favourable to the proclamation of the Gospel.

### **1.3.9 Post-colonial or neo-colonial imperialism**

The decolonisation process which began in the late 1950's and ended in about 1968 brought an end to European colonialism, but it did not end Western imperialism (sometimes called neo-colonialism). In many respects the new, post-colonial imperialism was the same. Fowler (1995:110), however, draws our attention to two important differences: the emphasis shifted from formal to informal imperialism and the centre of imperialist power shifted from Europe to the United States of America.

The former colonial powers tried to ensure that their former colonies would remain within their sphere of influence, but the US became the dominant player in Africa as in the rest of the world. Americans, of course, do not like to think of themselves as imperialists, but it is a fact that after World War II the US became a country which dominates the conduct of weaker countries for the sake of certain domestic interests.

#### **Informal imperialism**

Formal imperialism is the use of the power of the state to dominate another country by the imposition of formal **political** rule. European colonialism was a clear example of formal, political imperialism.

The main instrument of informal imperialism is **economic** power. The economic interests are, however, backed by military power if necessary.

Some would argue that informal imperialism is less oppressive than formal imperialism. Imperialist domination in any form is, however, oppressive because of its basic failure to respect the full human dignity of the dominated peoples. The last few decades provided many examples of the oppressive economic power of the US as well as its military force to protect its own interests.

#### **The justification of US imperialism**

The four basic belief systems that justified European imperialism have also had a significant place in the development of American society. The Americans have a passionate belief in the rightness and therefore inherent superiority of the American social, economic and political system – not just for the US, but as ideal for the whole world. The American way of life should be spread around the globe to all humanity.

Several actuating factors played a part in turning this imperialist potential into an actuality. Firstly, self-interest and, secondly, humanitarian motives.

### **Self-interest**

In the first place there was economic interest. The US found its access to the expanding world markets hindered by the division of the world into imperialist spheres of interest governed by the European powers. This was a significant factor in the US readiness to support campaigns for the independence of African countries and to portray itself as the champion of freedom and democracy. Secondly, the US became involved in exploiting the politics of international rivalry in order to strengthen its own position on the international scene. The Cold War between East and West was an important factor in this regard.

### **Humanitarian motives**

Economic self-interest was not the whole motivation for the US to champion the cause of independence for European colonies. Its commitment to political freedom motivated it to support calls from the peoples of Africa and elsewhere to be allowed self-government. Together with this there was the zeal to promote American civilisation or the American social, political and economic values.

Fowler (1995:113), however, warns that whenever there is a conflict in the motivations for imperialist action, it is always the motivation of self-interest that prevails in US policy. The promotion of economic and political systems that are right in American eyes has consistently taken precedence over the right of people to choose their own government or type of economy.

### **The practice of American imperialism**

While the US, with its support for decolonisation, did much to hasten the end of formal European imperialism in Africa, it very quickly moved in with its own imperialist agenda. Initially the agenda was seen as the helpful hand of a friendly big power. As time has passed, however, it has become increasingly clearer that the US involvement in Africa has the character of new informal imperialist domination – with sometimes disastrous consequences for Africa.

The US uses its formidable power to promote what it sees as desirable political and economic reforms in African countries.

As far as political reforms are concerned, it should be kept in mind that imperialism always uses its power to stamp its own image on other peoples and nations. And the nation that



accepts this image becomes subservient to the imperialist power in whose image it is remade. It cannot achieve beneficial political reform when it is dependent on intervention from outside. The intervention of a foreign power can only distort a real democratic process.

As far as the economic reforms of the US are concerned, they are pursued with little regard for local economic interests. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are dominated by the US and operate as key instruments for the promotion of US economic interests in the international arena. The IMF and the World Bank does not exist for the sake of justice, but they are designed to maintain a stable international economic order that is dominated by the industrial nations of the West. And the United Nations Security Council has become a vehicle enabling US military interventions to be represented as being in the interest of the international community.

In the West it is usually said that Africa is a black hole into which the West pours its money without return. This is a blatant lie. The US, like the rest of the Western world, annually gains from the developing world billions of dollars more than it puts into Africa. For instance, in the years 1988-1989 alone the net gain to the West from Africa was at least 5.8 billion and 5.5 billion US dollars respectively. (For more details, see Rowbotham, 2000.)

We should remember the simple fact that there is no philanthropists in the world of international politics and economics. The politicians and economists may at best do some good for others provided it also serves their own interests. (See further section 5 of chapter 18 on the influence of economic globalisation on Africa.)

#### **1.4 The influence of Christianity**

Christianity was brought to Africa chiefly by missionaries from the Western world. In some cases they preceded the colonial takeovers or came immediately after a country had been declared a colony. Like everything else in this world, Christianity was a mixed blessing.

On the one hand, as Christians, we should rejoice in the spread of the Gospel, because it brought personal transformation for millions of individuals. Some missionaries also played a significant role in opposing the excesses of colonial administrators, calling for a more humane colonial practice. Khapoya (1994:152-158), in spite of his criticism of the close symbiotic relationship between Christian missionaries and colonial authorities, has appreciation for the role the missionaries and churches played in the education of Africans. He also acknowledges the role that the Christian church played in the liberation of Africa:

"The Christian church became an unwitting catalyst in the development of African nationalism, by equipping the African intellectually to fight for his freedom ..." (1994:159).

On the other hand, we should not ignore the shortcomings of the missionary enterprise either. Today, in hindsight, we know that Christianity also disrupted African society and values. It mostly supported the colonial enterprise (cf. Boer, 1984 and Turaki, 1993:110-118).

#### **1.4.1 Missionary support for colonialism**

The kind of Christianity promoted in Africa by Western missionaries – in spite of their good intentions – tended to support the colonial dislocation of African society. Fowler (1995:25-28) mentions four major reasons why:

- The missionaries generally shared the individualism of the colonial administrators. For them the human person was first and foremost an individual. Society was the coming together of independent individuals. Consequently the missionaries saw as their calling the transformation of individuals. From transformed individuals, they assumed, would come a transformed society. They therefore saw little need to engage in a critique of social structures. They did not address the complex issues of social transformation that contact with modern Europe posed for African societies.

The individualism of the missionaries also led them to a generally negative assessment of the traditional African social structure with its strong communal character.

- Missionaries on the whole also shared the common European view that the introduction of European civilisation with its social structures was the only way to lift Africa out of its primitive savagery. The missionaries did not clearly distinguish between European civilisation and Christian civilisation. The European or American civilisation was seen as the ultimate in Christian civilisation! (We should therefore not blame the Africans that they did not distinguish between Christianity and Western culture.)
- The missionaries' perception was that the African social order is pervaded by pagan beliefs and values. Therefore it had to be replaced to provide a satisfactory social environment for Christian living. Because the whole traditional African culture was regarded as rotten it was required that Africans converted to Christianity should make a clean break with their "pagan" past.

- Missionaries also accepted the basic tenets of Western secularism, namely the secularisation of public life and the privatisation of religion. The affairs of everyday life, including the political affairs of the state, were viewed as secular affairs. They were, in principle, religiously neutral. Religious faith was seen as a private matter for the individual and the church. Questions about the basic structure of the political and social order were deemed to be secular matters, to which the Christians, as Christians, had no distinctive contribution to make.

Missionaries consequently saw their role as the salvation of individuals gathered for worship and witness in the churches. They also had to exhibit appropriate standards of Christian conduct in their personal and family lives. The education and medical services provided by the missionaries were means for achieving the primary missionary goal of individual salvation.

Missionaries were therefore content to leave the issues of the political and social order associated with colonialism to the secular colonial administration. They saw the civilising role of colonialism as complementary to their own evangelising role. They also expected from the colonial administration to provide a supportive political environment for their missionary endeavours. From their side the missionaries provided powerful support for the colonial authorities by teaching African Christians that, according to the Bible, it was their Christian duty to obey the colonial authorities.

In spite of the fact that the missionaries avoided involvement in colonial politics, they were in fact deeply involved, because they acknowledged the role of the colonial administrators as a righteous mission in the secular sphere. They believed that achieving the twin goals of civilising and evangelising could only be in the best interests of the temporal and eternal well-being of the Africans.

The final result then was, on the one hand, a reinforcement of the political subjugation of Africa and, on the other hand, an undermining of the African social authority, culture and values.

#### **1.4.2 The muting of the Gospel message**

Reviewing the situation from today's perspective it is clear that, despite good intentions, the missionary endeavour during the colonial era did contribute significantly to the disruption of African society. It is unlikely that anyone of us, placed in the same historical situation, would have acted differently. But it is clear today that the unrecognised influence of the secularist belief system in Western Christianity robbed the missionary message of

much of the penetrating power of the Gospel in relation to questions of the social order. The reduction of the Gospel to a message of private, individual salvation left African Christians ill equipped for their social responsibilities. We should learn from this experience to enable us to proclaim the fullness of the Gospel message instead of a muted one. (cf. Van der Walt, 1995.)

### 1.4.3 The full Gospel message

Fowler (1995:33-40) has the following valuable suggestions:

- **The missing communal note**

The individualistic interpretation of the Gospel commonly adopted by missionaries involved a distorted conception of the human person. Scripture certainly affirms human individuality and presents faith in personal terms addressed to humans individually. But **personal** does not mean **individualist**. Individualism makes individuality central and definitive, subordinating all social relations to individual interests. The identification of the Gospel with the values of Western individualism led to a negative assessment of African society with its strong communal basis.

The conflict between Western individualism and African communalism, according to Fowler (1995:34) is not a conflict between the Christian Gospel and pagan idolatry. Viewed in Biblical terms, it is a conflict between two idolatries, each of which distorts the human person and society. Western individualism is founded in the idolatry of the autonomous human person. It results in the overestimation of the individual aspect of a person and the underestimation of communal relations. African communalism is founded in the idolatry of spiritual powers operating through traditional communal structures. The result is a tendency towards a distorting submersion of individuality in an all-embracing communal life. A view of the human person and society that does justice to the Gospel needs to be purged of both these distortions.

- **The confusion of Gospel and Western civilisation**

The idea that transplanting Western civilisation to Africa was good because it provided an environment compatible with the Gospel, rested on two faulty assumptions.

The first was the faulty assumption that European civilisation was basically a Christian civilisation. Undoubtedly Christian influence played a part, it left its mark on Western civilisation. But after the 17<sup>th</sup> century Christianity played only a subordinate role in the Western world, its influence steadily declining. The civilisation that was taken from Europe

and North America to Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not without marks of the Christian faith, but the central governing principle was in man and not in God, it was faith in an autonomous humanity.

The second faulty assumption underlying the attempt to transplant European civilisation to Africa is the belief that the European model of social order and way of life was equally well suited to all peoples in all places and circumstances. However, a stable and prosperous social environment can only develop from within a society in response to the particular cultural and historical circumstances of that society. African Christians were encouraged by the missionaries to accept uncritically the European and North American patterns of social and political order. At the same time it discouraged the transformation of African society from within that could have developed new social and political structures suited to the changing African situation.

- **A lack of spiritual discernment in social issues**

It was a serious misconception of the missionaries that, in order to be faithful to the Gospel, Africans were required the wholesale rejection of their traditional social structures and practices, because these were pervaded by pagan beliefs.

The renunciation of a religious faith that is alien to the Gospel does not require the wholesale rejection of everything that the followers of this faith say and do. By God's grace, no human being loses all touch with the goodness of creation – just as none can altogether escape the effects of human sin.

Determining what is in harmony with the Gospel can, therefore, never be a simple matter. This is done, for example, by dividing human societies into Christian (which is good) and pagan (which is bad). What is required is spiritual discernment. We have to discern the good that, by God's grace, is present in any society and the bad distortions of the good that, by human rebellion, is present in all societies. Our task is to affirm the good and to correct the distortions.

Instead of being encouraged to embrace the culture of the "Christian" West, African Christians should rather have been encouraged to reform the traditional patterns of African society according to the Gospel. Then the Christian community would have been much more effective as salt and light in shaping the future of the continent.

- **The secularist seduction**

According to Fowler (1995:37) the most disastrous weakness of all the proclamation of the Gospel in Africa was the secularisation of public life and the parallel privatisation of religious faith. This was a fundamental surrender to modern secularism. It confined the power of the Gospel to a small part of our entire lives (the "spiritual"), while the greatest part of everyday life was put out of reach of the reforming and renewing power of God's Word. "None of the arguments advanced in favour of a secularised public life and privatised faith will stand up to scrutiny in the light of the Word of God. That so many Christians have been persuaded to accept this dualism as natural, right and proper must be one of the greatest success stories in the never ending campaign of the father of lies to blunt the edge of the witness of the Gospel in this world" (Fowler, 1995:40).

## **1.5 The liberation of Africa**

Modern cultural values which have been borrowed from the West can no longer promise humanity a balanced and human lifestyle.

The inadequacy of these values is evident throughout Western societies. Their adoption, without question, by Africans would be disastrous, especially when Africans can draw on their own heritage to correct many of the inadequacies of current Western culture.

### **1.5.1 Recovering Africa's riches**

Fowler (1995:136ff) has selected a few features that he believes could enrich African development if they were to be incorporated in a modernised African society:

- person, individuality and community
- the spirituality of human life
- trade and technology
- education
- welfare

Let us take a brief look at each one of these.

- **Person, individuality and community**

As we have already heard previously, whereas the West defines the human person as an individual, the common African view, in contrast, defines the human person by membership of a human community. The kind of collective action that the West calls

“community” fails to fulfil the communal aspect of human personhood. In the West individuality, which also belongs to our personhood, is highly developed, but communality remains severely underdeveloped.

It would be tragic if Africa in the future were to lose touch with the communal experience in its own heritage to embrace the distorting individualism of the West. At the same time it should be acknowledged that communalism could also be distorting if it fails to adequately develop individuality. We should draw on the strength of this heritage, while at the same time reforming it.

Fowler (1995:139-141) mentions two examples. One is the political community of the state. The recognition of the state as a political community would transform for good both the way the people experience the state and the way the state itself functions. To see the state as an organic body politic is to recognise that the well-being of the state and all its citizens depends on the well-being of each and every citizen. Corrupt, unjust and oppressive use of power against a single citizen is an injury to the whole body that affects the well-being of every citizen. Such a view of the political community would encourage greater grassroots involvement. It would also transform the idea of government by emphasising its service and accountability to the community. It will furthermore counteract the destructive conflicts between competing factions.

The second example mentioned by Fowler is the issue of human rights. Social relations should be governed by social obligations rather than by individual rights. The human rights movement is founded in Western individualism. However, all the good that the idea of human rights wants to achieve can also be achieved within a framework of social obligations. Such an approach will also avoid two of the side-effects of the individual rights approach.

In the first place the individual rights idea depends heavily on **legal** sanctions, while a communally based social obligations approach, in contrast, depends more on **social** sanctions, that is communal approval or disapproval of certain kinds of conduct. This last approach is much more effective and less divisive.

In the second place, the individual rights approach causes a very self-centered attitude to social relations that does not enhance love for the neighbour. A social obligations framework shifts the focus from what others owe to me to what I owe others. If I have social authority and power, I have the obligation to use that power not to enrich myself, but to use it in the interest of the weak and poor.

(The issue of African communalism versus Western individualism will be discussed in detail in chapter 5, while the human rights issue will be dealt with in chapter 12.)

- **The pervasive spirituality of human life**

In traditional Africa religion and spirituality were not confined to one sphere or part of life. It pervaded the whole of life. This contrasts strongly with modern secularism in which religion is assigned a very small area, the so-called "sacred" component of life. The rest of life is regarded as non-spiritual and neutral.

According to Scripture, spirituality does not refer to a certain quality of human experience that can be confined to the prayer room or the church. It refers to the human relationship to the spiritual world. This relationship is at the heart of human life. It is either a relationship of service to God, or it is one of service to the spiritual powers of this world.

Therefore, to live spiritual lives is not to cut ourselves off from the everyday affairs of this world. To live spiritual lives is to live a life that is led by the Spirit of Christ. It is a life that recognises the pervasive spirituality of life in all human affairs.

African Christians can and should recover from their own heritage the recognition of the pervasive spirituality of life, reformed in the light of the Gospel.

- **Trade and technology**

The West regarded African trade and technology as primitive and inferior. Africa's development, therefore, depended on replacing whatever already existed with superior Western models.

Africa did not have the technology and trading systems of a modern industrialised society. Nevertheless, it did have many effective technologies, like metal melting and metal working, tanning and leatherwork, textile manufacturing, pottery, basket work, woodwork, building construction, the manufacture of musical instruments, thriving agricultural and pastoral industries and many more. These productive activities led to a complex network of commercial trade over wide areas.

The traditional technologies were adapted to the African situation and yet open to innovation. And the network of trade made responsible use of finite resources and served human needs rather than market growth.

The colonial policy led to the suppression and finally displacement of African technologies in manufacturing and in agriculture in favour of European alternatives. Like wise the



traditional commercial network was disrupted in favour of a commercial network operated by European and Asian traders.

For the future development of Africa the mere borrowing or transfer of Western technologies and commercial strategies is unlikely to be the best way to develop Africa. Technologies and commercial systems developed by Africans for Africa are more likely to further African development than Western imports. This does not imply that Africa should ignore the technical and commercial development of the West. It can definitely learn from modern technology but has to do so carefully and not simply accepting it as better than indigenous African technologies and know-how.

#### • Education

The Europeans were sure that, when they came to Africa, they had encountered primitive people wholly lacking education. Systematic education, therefore, was essential to advance these "primitive savages" to civilised humanity.

Western education will, however, not help Africa's development if this is at the cost or the neglect of the riches of Africa's own educational tradition. An education that will serve today's Africa well will be one that draws on both the Western and African educational traditions.

Fowler (1995:146-147) mentions three characteristics of the traditional educational systems of Africa that should not be neglected in future.

In the first place, it can provide a much broader perspective on values. It should not only teach survival values, like in Western education, but trans-survival values, that is moral, social and spiritual values, as was done in traditional African education.

In the second place, in traditional Africa, one of the central goals of education was learning how to live as an effective member of the community, fulfilling social obligations and developing personal relations that promote a healthy communal life. This stands in sharp contrast to Western education, which, as a result of the individualistic view of the person, emphasises individual development and achievement in a competitive process that encourages students to do better than others.

In the third place, there was an emphasis in traditional African education on learning by involvement in the practical affairs of daily life. Education did not mean withdrawal from daily affairs to learn in the segregated environment of a classroom, as in the Western

model. This African tradition could be combined with features of the educational heritage of the West.

- **Welfare**

In traditional Africa welfare was not the responsibility of an impersonal bureaucratic organisation, but was a personal responsibility fulfilled in a context of intensely personal relations. Today the disabled, unemployed, poor, aged, orphans, physically and intellectually handicapped are dependent on state welfare. The state can, however, do no more than provide for biological survival (food, shelter, clothing and medical care). It cannot provide the social, moral and spiritual support that is essential to full human well-being. To provide this it is imperative that the grassroots communal life of Africa's heritage be not only maintained but also carefully nurtured and strengthened. Self-centred Western individualism should be avoided at all costs. Modernisation does not require the adoption of individualistic secularism!

### **1.5.2 The liberation of Africa**

The previous section on Africa's riches already sounded a note of hope for the future. This hope is strengthened in the last chapter of Fowler's excellent book.

It would be an extremely distorted view of modern African history to deny that any benefits had come to Africa from Europe and America over the last century and more. One should only think of modern technology, medicine and above all the Gospel of salvation in Christ. However, all these benefits could have come to Africa without the oppressive impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Those who see the present problems of African countries as peculiarly African problems, due to factors indigenous to the continent and its inhabitants, have a very superficial understanding of Africa, its peoples and history. The inescapable conclusion is that, in varying degrees, the major problems facing African nations today have their roots in more than a century of imperialist domination by foreign Western powers.

However, the solution to these problems is in the hands of Africans, and no one else. Outsiders can assist and support, but they should never displace Africa's own initiatives. Africa's future agenda must be controlled and directed by Africans for Africa.

Fowler (1995:155ff) identifies five conditions that must be met if Africa is to experience an authentic liberation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are:

- overcoming the syndrome of dependence

- rebuilding the African social order
- developing political structures that serve righteousness
- depoliticising ethnicity
- developing coherent social values.

Because of their importance some of these issues will be discussed again in following chapters of this book.

- **Overcoming the syndrome of dependence**

One of the legacies of colonialism that stands in the way of Africa's full liberation is the dependency syndrome. It is clear in economic dependence, but its deepest roots lie in an intellectual dependency syndrome.

It is not true that Africans are only copycats, that no independent African thought exists (see chapter 8). However, there is still too much dependency on Western models in African intellectual, social and economic development.

It would also be incorrect to require that there should be no interaction with the Western world of ideas. However, it should be real interaction, a two-way traffic of ideas that replaces the one-way traffic from the West to Africa.

Such intellectual independence would have beneficial results in many areas. It would encourage entrepreneurial endeavours in African economies. In the area of technology, it would not be enough to think of transfer of Western technology to Africa. Technological innovators are needed to counteract a one-way dependence.

The syndrome of dependency is probably nowhere more evident than in the Christian church. Ways should be found to formulate and experience the Christian faith that is distinctive of the African situation. The Gospel and God's Word are universal and constant. However, our formulations and experience of faith in response to that Word are human products shaped by historical circumstances. African Christians should respond faithfully in a way that is appropriate to Africa's situation. Only in this way could we expect depth, impact and relevance. (See chapter 3 and 4.)

- **Rebuilding African society**

The effective liberation of Africa needs a strong social order that is independent of the political order and able to act as check on the powers of the political order. What is needed is a whole network of social organisations, like commercial, agricultural,

professional, educational, welfare organisations, the media, the church and other ecclesiastical organisations, etc. Such a network of social organisations, completely independent of the state and political parties, can be an effective watchdog against corruption and abuse of state power.

Christian churches, because of their closeness to grassroots life and their independence of the state, are well placed to encourage and facilitate such development. It is important that such a social order cannot be built by state planning, but must be developed from the grassroots of African societies.

- **Developing political structures for righteousness**

Africa inherited from colonialism the political structures based on the arbitrary, authoritarian exercise of power. Colonial administrators did not give account to the people they governed for the way they used their power. Independence put Africans instead of Europeans in positions of power, but the basic political structure did not change in any fundamental way.

At the end of the previous century Western advocates of multiparty democracy argued that democracy would achieve the desired accountability. However, this has already proved to be an illusion. A competitive democratic system only increases the competition for power. It can only marginally check the tendency to the arbitrary exercise of power.

According to Fowler (1995:159) two basic requirements are needed that provide adequate control and accountability in the exercise of state power.

The first condition is a clear recognition of the qualified and therefore limited nature of state authority. Those in power cannot do as they like. They are authorised to act only in accordance with the distinctive nature of the state which is focused on ensuring justice and equity for all within its borders.

This should be accompanied by other mechanisms to ensure that those who hold power remain within the agreed boundaries. As already said, a strong social order, independent of the state, has an important role to play in this. A democratically accepted constitution is another mechanism. A third is an independent judiciary with the authority to pass judgement on the constitutionality of the acts of the legislative and executive powers, with power to enforce its judgements.

The second requirement for a political structure that provides adequate control and accountability in the exercise of state power, is the involvement of all the diverse interests of society.

The conflictive, majoritarian model of democracy is promoted vigorously by the US, France and Britain in Africa. For most African countries having a colonial legacy and a multiplicity of politicised ethnic interests, this is not an appropriate model. It generates conflict, as the stronger struggle for power and the weaker become more and more subject to the domination of the more powerful.

Switzerland provides another model of a different kind of democracy based on consensual decision-making and collaborative rule that may be much more suitable for adoption by African countries. According to this model all the parties – large and small – representing a wide variety of interests, are represented in the national parliament. The Swiss parliament does not have government and opposition parties (like the US and South Africa). It has a multiplicity of parties collaborating in the process of government. This is made possible by a consensual process of decision-making based on give-and-take negotiation between the various parties. Conflicts are resolved, not by the more powerful overriding the weaker, but by negotiated agreement between the conflicting interests.

The Swiss society is made up of a wide ethnic, religious and social diversity. Yet it has one of the world's most stable and conflict-free political systems. This is a direct consequence of the collaborative, consensual model of democracy on which the system is founded. The basic principles on which this model rests could serve African nations, with their ethnic and religious diverse societies, far better than the conflictive, majoritarian principles on which democratic government is usually based. (See also chapter 10 and 11.)

- **Depoliticising ethnicity**

One of the most difficult, yet most important, requirements for the liberation of Africa in this century is to break the colonial link between ethnic identity and political interest (Fowler, 1995:161). Everybody's interest is not best served by organising political power along ethnic lines. This only feeds the destructive force of nationalism. The exploitation of ethnic loyalty for political ends sets neighbour against neighbour. Strong multi-ethnic political coalitions should instead be built.

- **Developing coherent social values**

The structural reforms mentioned above will not succeed if they are not based on coherent social values. And these values cannot be developed by the leadership elite or by conferences. They need to be developed from the grassroots of African society. The leaders can only stimulate, encourage and coordinate such a grassroots initiative.

Traditional Africa has many strong values like family, individual and social responsibilities, love for children, respect for life, mutual sharing, etc.

The Christian church would fail Africa unless it is in the forefront of leadership in developing new social values. But African societies do not consist of Christians only. The values that govern public life need to be values that enable these diverse groups to live together in neighbourly love without any group using political power to impose its values on others. (See also chapter 9.)

#### **The role of Christian leadership**

Because this book is to be used *inter alia* in a philosophy course at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, in conclusion, we make this last point about the great responsibility of Christian leaders in Africa (cf. Fowler, 1995:152-155).

There is probably no group as strategically placed to take the lead in the liberation of Africa as the leaders of the Christian churches. The wide network of churches, involving people at the grassroots level, together with the non-political nature of the church, puts these leaders in a unique strategic position to influence the future of our continent.

Currently, however, two positions tend to dominate the Christian attitude about social involvement, especially in relation to political affairs.

The first viewpoint is that the Gospel is concerned solely with the salvation of the individual. Biblical liberation is liberation from sin, with everything else following automatically when this is achieved. This viewpoint is simply accepting the framework of modern secularism that secularises public life and privatises religion.

Christ brings liberation to human life in its fullness, including the fullness of human relationships – also political life. As has been said above, the spiritual liberation of the Gospel does not mean its restriction to some spiritual dimension of life. In Scripture spirituality is the central driving force (for or against God) in **all** of life. The spiritual person is the person renewed by the Spirit, and guided and directed by the Spirit in **all** things.

To maintain the integrity of the Gospel it is important to preserve both its **focus** and its **scope**. Its focus is the regeneration of the person by grace through faith. To keep the focus clear requires a close relationship with God in Christ by the Spirit, nurtured in prayer and reflection on God's Word. The scope of the Gospel, however, is as wide as human life. However sharp we keep the focus, we will compromise the proclamation of the Gospel if we narrow its scope to anything less than all things created.

While the first viewpoint amongst Christians one-sidedly emphasises the focus of the Gospel, the second viewpoint tends to emphasise its scope. It sees involvement in the struggle for social justice as an integral part of the Christian's calling. While this second view takes a wider view of the scope of the Gospel, it sometimes loses sharpness in focus.

The full proclamation and living of the Gospel requires both a sharp focus and a wide scope.

What we badly need is an effective structural social critique **founded in the Gospel**, one that does not rely on a secularist framework. Christian action in social and political life can only be faithful to the Gospel if it includes a Biblical critique of the social and political structures. Fowler's book is a good example of such a critique firmly grounded in the Word of God and in this book the author wants to continue on the same line (see chapter 10 and following).

Christian involvement in shaping socio-political life should, in conclusion, be **servant** involvement. We need **servant** leaders. Our calling is to be, as our Master was, servant to all. The righteousness of Christ's Kingdom only advances by the power of his Word and Spirit, never by the power of the sword. (Chapter 2 will elaborate on the need for servant leaders.)

"Challenging as the task is, I have no doubt that it is achievable. Indeed, as Christian I am certain that it is God's will for Africa and that God is calling his people to go forward in faith to give leadership at every point where action is needed for an effective liberation from the oppression of the past" (Fowler, 1995:164).

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## **Chapter 2:**

### **THE CONTEMPORARY CRISIS IN AFRICA**

#### **Its characteristics and causes**

Most informed people today know that the African continent is in a crisis, a deep and serious crisis. According to some this crisis has already passed the alarming stage and reached a fatal stage.

The main emphasis in this chapter will, therefore, not be on describing the crisis again, but rather on trying to find out what caused the crisis. Extensive use will be made of the book of an African, professor G. Kinoti (1994), because of his excellent and balanced overview of the whole situation.

#### **2.1 Why many people in Africa are not aware of the crisis or refuse to face it**

Kinoti (1994:iii) mentions the following five reasons why we are so blind to the wretchedness of African people:

- Because oppression, disease, hunger and poverty are so common, we tend to accept them fatalistically as normal.
- Because the majority of Africans have no or only little education, they are unable to recognise or analyse their plight.
- The few educated people are also struggling to survive economically themselves and/or their pursuit of power and wealth leave no time to care about the poor.
- Many Christians and other religious people (like Muslims) use their faith wrongly as a narcotic to evade the difficulties and suffering, instead of being motivated by their religion to change the situation.
- Because of many so-called development projects by overseas governments and organisations, a false sense of security developed amongst Africans themselves. But, in spite of all these activities, conditions in Africa are degenerating and not improving.

To make us aware of the extent and seriousness of the crisis we are facing, a brief look at the social, economic and political situation follows. It will not be possible to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation in Africa. Turaki (1997:33-35) lists the most burning problems of Africa under the following headings: (1) Social and cultural issues, (2)

political issues, (3) economic issues, (4) judicial issues, (5) religious issues and (6) other issues, like aids, epidemics, abuse etc.

## **2.2 The social situation**

To many writers on Africa poverty is the most pressing problem on the continent, at the heart of the other depressing problems. Poverty has many manifestations and consequences, like the following:

- **Suffering**

The **Human Suffering Index**, created by the Population Crisis Committee compares living conditions in 141 countries. The measures of human well-being are rated from 0 to 10, with 0 as the best rating. They are (1) life expectancy, (2) daily calorie supply, (3) clean drinking water, (4) infant immunisation (5) secondary school enrolment, (6) GNP per capita, (7) rate of inflation, (8) communications technology, (9) political freedom and (10) civil rights. Of the 27 countries with extreme human suffering, 20 are found in Africa!

- **Hunger**

One out of every three Africans does not get enough to eat. As far back as 1990 170 million Africans already were victims to chronic hunger – an increase of 40 million in 10 years' time! Millions of African children suffer from malnutrition which results in retarded mental and physical development, disease and death (cf. also Achebe *et al.* 1990).

- **Disease**

Poverty also means disease and disease means pain, inability to work and finally death. Many infectious diseases are prevalent in Africa because of the poor living conditions and the fact that Africans are too poor to pay for the vaccines and drugs to cure them. The poor state of health in Africa is clearly indicated by high infant mortality rates and low life expectancy. In 1991 the average death of children under 5 years of age was 108 for every 1000 births. In some individual countries this figure was 160! In the rich Western countries the average was only 8. Life expectancy in Africa is about 50 years, while it is 76 years in North America and Europe.

- **Low income**

Poverty furthermore implies not having adequate income to meet basic needs like food, clothes, shelter and education for one's children. Lack of education imprisons people in ignorance and makes it impossible to cope in the modern world. In 1987 60% of rural

Africans were already living below the poverty line. Africans are the poorest people on earth.

- **Dehumanisation**

Because of their poverty, black people are treated with prejudice and this in turn causes an inferiority complex amongst Africans, which is bad for self-esteem, material and intellectual development. The result is that black people tend to copy the culture and lifestyle of the West, especially America's materialistic and superficial Coca-Cola culture.

- **Injustice**

It is unjust for some to live in great luxury while others have to live in abject poverty. This applies to the few rich African elite as well as the rich Northern (Western) countries.

### **2.3 The economic situation**

In the first decade of independence many African countries experienced economic growth. Then it started to stagnate and decline. Today Africa is not only not developing, it is not even able to maintain the standards of living at independence round about the 1960's. It is estimated that more than 400 million people in Africa are living below the poverty line today. What could be the reasons for this state of affairs? Kinoti (1994) mentions the following:

- A decline in production and a decline in the prices of African commodities on the world market.
- The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP's) introduced in the 1980's worsened the economic crisis, hitting hardest the most vulnerable groups, namely the women, children and old people.
- Dependence on food imports from overseas. Because Africans were forced (already during colonialism) to grow crops for export, they neglected to produce basic foods for themselves.
- The rapidly growing population (it doubles every 20 years in Africa compared with 40 years globally) puts an enormous burden on the continent. Muriithi (1996:121) provides a whole list of consequences of this population explosion, like scarcity of food, land scarcity, decline in soil fertility, lack of employment, poor education etc.

- Lack of investment from overseas, because of declining profits. Many factors play a role in this regard: high transport costs, poor infrastructure, bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption etc.
- Poorly developed production factors like land, labour and capital. The culprits are African governments who exercise too much control over the economy.
- Bad governance by both civilian and military rulers have led to political instability and wars, resulting in the collapse of the economies. Corruption, inefficiency, high costs for business transactions and theft of public property are common all over Africa.
- Socio-cultural factors also have a detrimental influence. They include: an inability to manage property or to use modern technology, a poor work ethic, a lack of incentives, preference for imported goods, extended family responsibilities and more.
- Dependence on Western economies is another important factor in the light of the increasing globalisation of world markets. To a great degree African economies are still colonial, based on unequal exchange: Africa supplies raw materials to the West and buys manufactured goods and services from the West – at prices and on trade terms dictated by the West. Because of Africa's foreign debt there is now a net outflow of resources from Africa to the West. While Africa requires a massive infusion of foreign aid, it is increasingly unable to attract foreign investments because of many factors: political instability, deteriorating infrastructure, corruption and low returns on investments.
- Development theories developed and implemented by the West have failed in Africa. The problem here is twofold: The hordes of foreign advisers and technical experts who had little knowledge of the context, on the one hand, and incompetent and corrupt Africans, on the other hand. A few of the development theories of the past 50 years were: The industrialisation theory, import substitution theory, the export-oriented strategy, basic needs development, poverty eradication and, at the moment, sustainable development.

## **2.4 The political situation**

It should be remembered that the different aspects (social, economic and political) cannot be separated from each other. Museveni (1992:12) correctly states that the freedom, democracy and economic well-being of the people are inextricably linked.

Politics after independence developed through the following three stages:

- At independence most African countries accepted (Western) democratic systems of government (multi-party parliamentary systems, universal adult suffrage, an independent judiciary and all kinds of checks on the executive power).
- Within a few years democracy was, however, replaced by "African democracy" which first meant one-party rule, then personal rule by the president (dictatorship) and finally military rule when the demi-gods were overthrown. The result was political instability and civil (ethnic) strife. Nearly every African country has had its share of autocratic rule.
- In the late 1980's and during the last decade of the previous century it became clear that autocratic rule was killing Africa and the masses could no longer bear the oppression and suffering. A struggle began for what was called the "second liberation" of Africa. Multiparty elections were held in different African countries, but already in the mid 90's it became clear that it was much easier to talk about democracy than to put it into practice. The movement for democracy again dissipated. The Organisation for African Unity (OAU) has not done anything to protect the people against dictatorships. African leaders do not seem to have the commitment and discipline to change this very unhealthy situation.

The political situation in Africa is bleak indeed, deeply worrying and should be unacceptable to every African.

After this brief glimpse of the socio-economic-political situation as explained by Kinoti (1994), it is time to look at the causes for Africa's wretchedness. Knowing the causes is important to decide on strategies for resolving the crisis.

## **2.5 Causes for the socio-economic-political state**

The causes of Africa's crisis are complex and many. They are so interlinked that it is often impossible to distinguish between cause and effect. Is widespread poverty, for instance to be regarded as a cause or as an effect?

It will be impossible to mention all the causes, but we can at least try to mention some key factors. We will try to be as comprehensive as possible to avoid the piecemeal approach in which only one or two issues are stressed.

To avoid the reaction that the criticism is that of "a white man who, after all, knows very little about Africa and the Africans", this section will survey the reasons provided by black Africans themselves for the backwardness of our continent.

The following fifteen causes will be discussed:

- Bad government.
- The international economic system.
- African culture.
- Bad management.
- Lack of education.
- Decline of morality.
- Lack of appropriate science and technology.
- Population growth.
- Deteriorating environment.
- Incompetent leadership.
- Corruption.
- Tribalism.
- Religious intolerance.
- A wrong type of Christianity.
- The AIDS pandemic.

### **2.5.1 Government**

Poor and autocratic political leadership has been a disaster for virtually every country in black Africa. The most important single cause of Africa's social and economic problems, according to Kinoti (1994:36) is certainly bad government. It keeps poor countries poor and turns a progressive nation into a retrogressive one. According to him independent Africa has experienced more violence, violation of human rights, corruption, injustice and oppression than did colonial Africa. How did African governments bring about such misery? The following are mentioned by Kinoti (1994:37ff):

- **Sheer incompetence.** Incompetence and gross inefficiency render African governments virtually useless. Their civil services are paralysed by indiscipline, favouritism, disregard for merit and experience, corruption and low salaries.

Achebe (1984:19) makes the statement that it is difficult to find one important job held by the most competent person. Leaders do not show an excessive desire to surround themselves with talented people (1984:61). In this regard he uses the expression “cult of mediocrity” and emphasises that denial of merit is a form of social injustice.

- **The misuse of public institutions and embezzlement of public funds** is a second reason. Kinoti (1994:38) does not hesitate to say that “In many African countries government is quite plainly in the hands of crooks”, who siphon millions of dollars out of their own countries every year. Funds that should go into essential services are lost for the country’s development.
- Bad governance has led to the **extensive militarisation of Africa** - at the expense of health, housing, education and security. In many cases “defence” means placing and maintaining illegitimate regimes in power with all the horrors accompanying them. For Africa it means a loss of human lives and resources. The West only benefits because she makes and sells the arms.
- **The West maintains a stranglehold on Africa** and therefore has to take a large share of the blame for the mess. This is done through its political and economic power, diplomacy, indoctrination and bribery. The structures and agencies used for this purpose are, for instance, multi-national corporations, the World Bank, the IMF and the United Nations.
- **Also the churches** played and continue to play an important part in the misrule of Africa. The church cannot be neutral with regard to politics. Even through silence and inaction she can contribute to bad governance. But there are even sections of the church that have actively supported and continue to support corrupt and oppressive regimes. It is a sad fact that the churches, for instance, contributed to apartheid in South Africa and to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

See chapter 10-13 for possible solutions to Africa’s political problems.

### **2.5.2 The international economic system.**

The present international economic system perpetuates – in more subtle ways – the exploitation of Africa which began with slavery (1520-1833) and colonialism (1880-1960). Africa serves as the source of cheap agricultural and other raw materials and provide markets for the manufactured goods of the West. The Western countries use a wide range of mechanisms to maintain complete control over the international economic systems (cf.

Kinoti, 1994:45). Even so-called Western "aid" to Africa ultimately benefits the rich countries of the North and exploit and impoverish the poor South. (See chapter 18, section 5 on globalisation.)

### 2.5.3 African culture

Traditional African culture contains many fine elements, like its strong community spirit, family ties and generosity. There are, however, also aspects of African culture that hinder progress. More and more Africans themselves are starting to realise these negative sides of their culture. In my book on development (Van der Walt, 1999:127-136) I have mentioned seven Africans who draw our attention to different facets of traditional culture not beneficial for development. These aspects include the following:

- **A disregard for time.** Africans enjoy time, but often do not use it productively.
- **A fatalistic attitude.** Everything that happens is either the will of God, the work of evil spirits or the curse of the ancestors. This provides an escape from personal responsibility and action.
- **Tolerance of evil.** Africans tolerate oppression, torture, corruption, disease, humiliation, etc. – things which they should not tolerate but rather fight.
- **Weak management, planning and maintenance** are other reason. (Cf. also Muriithi, 1996:86ff).
- **The lack of a work ethic.** Generally most Africans seem to carry to work a carefree attitude and a lack of commitment (Cf. also Adeyemo, 1997:39,40).
- **Ancestor worship** has different consequences that contribute towards development retardation for instance, expensive and time-consuming feasts and funerals.
- **Being directed towards the past** or nostalgia, rather than anticipation of the future, also hinders progress.
- Because of **Africa's communalistic** orientation loyalty to the group, harmony, solidarity and equality are regarded as more important than individual achievement and progress.
- **A belief that personal wealth should be shared** with others. Especially extended family responsibilities can place a heavy financial burden on one's shoulders.
- **A hierarchical and paternalistic view of authority** does not leave room for or encourage those who are below or young to progress.



- **Consensus decision-making**, regarded as essential in Africa, can be a time-consuming practice.
- The idea amongst Africans that **many children are a blessing** leads to the population explosion already mentioned.
- **The subservient position of women** (more than 50% of the population) is also to the detriment of the development of Africa.
- **The cult of mediocrity, complacency, lack of initiative and dependency.** These are issues mentioned by different authors. Museveni, (1992:113,114) criticises Africans' intellectual laziness or their "dependency syndrome" which has detrimental consequences in every area of life. To simply imitate the West will bring Africa nowhere. It leads to the mentality that it is impossible for Africans to solve their problems. Adeyemo (1997:40-42) also draws attention to the dependency syndrome and complains that Africans only want to receive and not to give. They are consumers rather than producers. Somebody has said: Africa consumes what it does not produce (import) and produces what it does not consume (export).

See chapter 4 to 7 for a detailed discussion of African culture.

#### **2.5.4 Management**

Bad management is also part of African culture, a serious disease throughout Africa. Because of its importance it is treated separately by both Kinoti (1994:48-50) and Muriithi (1996:96ff).

Management is the skilful and efficient use of resources to provide the necessary goods and services to the people. The sad fact is that institutions (businesses, hospitals, schools, farms, development projects) efficiently managed by foreigners, usually deteriorate when they are taken over by African managers. Africa lacks a culture of efficient organisation, competence and productivity in all the sectors of society. To improve this situation there should be a proper attitude to the use of time, the ability to do long-term planning and an appreciation of excellence and integrity. Suggestions to achieve this goal are:

- Africans must overcome personal, family, ethnic and denominational considerations in order to place the very best people in leadership positions.
- Because Africa is very short of good managers, every effort should be made to train them in managerial skills.

- The massive brain drain should be prevented. The main causes of the brain drain are: poor salaries, political interference, lack of “tools” for the job, lack of job security and depressing social, political and economic conditions.
- Also the management style, in which the boss or a small clique monopolises decision-making, should be changed.

### 2.5.5 Education

Widespread illiteracy, low educational standards and inappropriate education contribute in a very significant way to Africa’s problems. The quality of African education should be a matter of grave concern. We should ask ourselves why the standards are declining. Kinoti (1994:52-54) provides the following reasons:

- **Unnecessary political interference.** The state took over mission schools and other church-related institutions because it wanted complete control. Education was politicised and deteriorated.
- Because of **economic reasons** there is a severe shortage of the necessary infrastructure (classrooms, teaching materials, libraries, laboratories, etc.) which prevents good education.
- **Inappropriate curricula** promote rote learning which is of no advantage either for real learning, creativity or character formation.
- **The churches** are no longer significant participants in the educational process. They could create model centres of educational excellence to train men and women of vision, education and character.

### 2.5.6 Morality

According to Kinoti (1994:55) moral failure is at the heart of the prevailing socio-economic crisis in Africa. We are living in a growing moral vacuum. Africa’s moral capital has been severely eroded by many forces like colonialism, urbanisation and Western secularism. Selfishness, corruption, dishonesty, embezzlement, laziness etc., etc. are widespread. It applies to both the rich and the poor.

The challenge is indeed awesome. We urgently need Biblical values in word and deed. We need a Biblical worldview, providing us with norms or guidelines for **every** aspect of life – spiritual, social, economic, political, cultural, intellectual and moral (see chapter 9.)

### **2.5.7 Science and technology**

Today science and technology are not luxuries to be enjoyed only by rich countries. They are essential "tools" for the development of a poor continent like ours. According to Kinoti (1994:56) there is perhaps no better indication of Africa's backwardness than the rudimentary state of its science and technology. Africans are completely dependent for these basic means of material development. He illustrates this with the amounts of money spent in Africa on research and development compared to that of the West and also with the numbers of scientists and engineers in the two regions. The situation is worsened by the fact that Western nations own and often jealously guard practically all of modern science and technology. Africa must pay heavily to obtain it and simply does not have the money to do so.

To improve this unhealthy situation, Kinoti (1994:59-61) recommends the following:

- Africans must recognise that they can become self-reliant.
- Africa should establish a few high quality research institutions.
- It needs a few top quality universities.
- African governments must insist on Western technical assistance projects to help them to become self-reliant instead of perpetuating dependency, as is the case at the moment.
- The churches should also do what they can, even if it is only encouraging and assisting gifted Christian young people to take up natural science and engineering as careers.

### **2.5.8 Population**

From 1960 till 1990 Africa's population more than doubled from 210 million to 490 million. This was the result of three factors: (1) improved child survival, (2) a high fertility rate and (3) a decline in mortality because of better medical services.

Most Africans regard the growing population as a blessing, because to them a large family is a source of joy and pride.

Some also argue that, compared to other parts of the world, Africa is still sparsely populated.

The problem, however, is that the population is growing faster than the economy and the production of food and basic resources to have a decent life. Hunger has increased dramatically in many parts of Africa. In twelve years' time food aid has increased by 294%

- a clear indication of the magnitude of the problem. When discussing the question of population growth, Muriithi (1996:121) also draws attention to the fact that, apart from food scarcity, there is also an increasing land scarcity and lack of employment.

Three things should be done about this rapid population explosion:

- The intellectual and physical development of Africa's people – its most important asset – must be given priority, especially the young people.
- Parents should be encouraged to have smaller families in order that they can educate, feed and in other ways can take adequate care of their offspring.
- African countries will have to promote their own food production.

### **2.5.9 The environment**

Africa is a vast continent compared with the rest of the world. Adeyemo (1997:23) provides a map of Africa which includes the following countries: USA, India, Argentina, Europe, China and New Zealand! Apart from its size, Africa is rich in natural resources, mineral resources, energy and human resources. But at the same time large parts of the continent are ecologically fragile and subject to periodic droughts. There is today a general agreement that Africa is also faced with an environmental crisis.

Muriithi (1996:101ff) discusses drought and famine in detail, indicating that drought is not only a natural disaster. Kinoti (1994:64) agrees that the environmental crisis is largely man-made. Poverty, underdevelopment and environmental degradation form a vicious circle (cf. also Timberlake, 1994).

A number of factors have contributed to this situation:

- Rampant exploitation by industrialised countries of the minerals, lands and forests of Africa.
- The introduction of monoculture crop farming for markets in the West contributed to environmental damage.
- Overpopulation also plays a role.
- Unjust land distribution, where a few wealthy and powerful Africans own the fertile land, while the poor are deprived of ownership, become tenants and have no incentive to care for the land.
- Neglecting traditional environmental conservation practices, like intercropping, fallowing, terracing and the nomadic use of pastures.

- The adoption of locally untested products like chemical fertilisers, new seed varieties and pesticides.

For two reasons care of the environment is important: (1) it is God's creation of which we are the appointed trustees or stewards; (2) without a good natural environment economic and social well-being will be impossible. (See chapter 16.)

### **2.5.10 Leadership**

To substantiate that poor, incompetent and corrupt leadership is not an isolated problem but a general phenomenon in Africa, I will refer to a number of authors. Many writers emphasize the need for a totally new type of leadership in Africa.

- Kinoti (1994:31-32) says: "What we need is a different kind of leader, namely men and women of integrity, ability and education who have genuine concern for and commitment to the well-being of their fellow citizens".
- Museveni (1992:55) bemoans the "incredible incapacity of public servants, including ministers, to carry out their duties". "No effort is necessary and everything is timeless. Simple routine things are not done" (1992:77). The government should not be the master but the servant of the people (1992:22).
- Also Adeyemo (1993, 1997) emphasises the need for servant leaders.
- Throughout his book Achebe (1984) emphasises that Africans must take a hard and unsentimental look at the crucial question of leadership and political power. He believes (1984:1) that his country, Nigeria, could change today if she should discover leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision. Usually leaders only have appetite for power and self-interest. They are also corrupt and not disciplined examples for others. This indiscipline of leaders are very dangerous, because (1) there is no one to restrain them, (2) ordinary people follow their adoration of power and (3) their indiscipline incite anger and rebellion.

What we need, is selfless leaders who serve. Ordinary people have to ask critical questions to their leaders, like: Why do you seek political power? Why do you want to rule? Why do you want my vote?

Good leadership, however, is rare. Kinoti (1994:31-32) gives the reasons why:

- The majority of Africans have little or no education. They are not in a position to understand the real issues or to take informed decisions and are easily manipulated.

- The widespread poverty makes corruption almost inevitable and the buying of votes easy.
- Ethnic and religious differences further complicate the situation.
- We have to deal with the interference of powerful foreign forces that have much to lose if Africa becomes a democratic and well-managed society.

Osei-Mensah (1990:8) also draws attention to the fact that the existing models of leadership according to which people are trained are aggravating the poor situation. He mentions, for example, the model of the successful marketing executive, skilled in management, in getting programmes implemented and goals accomplished. However, the model that we need – and which the Scriptures consistently recommend – is what we may call the model of the servant-leader. The little booklet by Van Wijk (n.d.) provides excellent guidelines for genuine Christian leadership.

#### **2.5.11 Corruption**

Museveni (1992:75, 92) does not hesitate to call corruption a cancer which, if not checked, will hinder progress in all sectors of society.

According to Achebe (1984:42) his country (Nigeria) is without any shadow of doubt one of the most corrupt nations in the world. In spite of that not one high public officer in 23 years of independence has been made to face the music of official corruption. His country is corrupt because the system under which they live makes corruption easy and profitable. It should be made difficult and inconvenient. He also draws attention to the fact that corruption usually goes with power. We are reminded of the statement of Lord Acton: "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely". Also tribalism (our next point) breeds corruption.

Because this book contains a separate chapter on the issue of corruption (chapter 15) and how to prevent it, we will not go into the matter in detail now.

#### **2.5.12 Tribalism**

The word "tribe" refers to a group of people comprising numerous families or clans living together for generations and claiming to have one ancestor. Such a tribe is characterised by a strong in-group loyalty, affinity and obligations for their own preservation.

The word "tribalism" refers to the conception of a tribe as the central focus of everything and the advancement of the tribal identity as the highest good. It also places the own tribe above others (cf. Turaki, 1997:7).

Tribalism existed already in pre-colonial Africa where all kinds of tribal myths explained the origins, values, greatness, destiny and pride of the group. Under colonialism new theories, such as the innate or biological inferiority or superiority of races and ethnic groups, were introduced into Africa. The colonial ideas about the superiority of certain groups over others consolidated the pre-colonial tribal myths and stereotypes.

Turaki's conclusion (1997:31) on why injustice increases in Africa is "that the inherited unjust structures of inequality of the imperialist colonial era and/or the pre-colonial era have been uncorrected by post-colonial programmes of nation-state building". He provides a long list of consequences of tribalism (1997:25-53):

- nepotism;
- injustice and inequality;
- unequal opportunities to certain groups in economic matters and in recruitment into the civil service;
- denial of full participation or representation in government to certain groups;
- the neglect or failure to develop certain ethnic groups;
- the subordination of one or more ethnic groups to the other's rule and political control;
- the institutionalisation of the dominance of one or more ethnic groups through the development of their ruling families;
- the maintenance and defence of the privileged position of the ruling tribal group(s) leading to
- political and social alienation, rivalry and antagonism.

In chapter 9 we will deal in detail with tribal ethics or morality and its consequences.

### **2.5.13 Religious intolerance**

Of the many religions in Africa, the three main ones are Traditional African Religion, Christianity and Islam. Traditional African Religion is a peaceful religion, accommodating other religions. However, in many African countries where Muslims and Christians share citizenship, the minority group often suffers oppression. In regions where the two beliefs are more or less equally strong, like in Nigeria, violent clashes continuously occur with loss of property and human lives as a result. When tribalism and religious fanaticism coincide the situation gets worse.

Many African countries have yet to learn that adherents of different religions should tolerate each other and live peacefully together as citizens of the same state. Religious freedom as a basic human right has to be accepted. The state and its government should be religiously neutral and should not favour one religion and its adherents to the disadvantage of others. The task of the state is not to promote a specific religion, but to see to it that justice is done to every citizen. It is the task of the church and the mosque to promote religion. (Chapter 14 will discuss this issue in detail.)

#### **2.5.14 A wrong type of Christianity**

Christianity is growing at an astounding rate in Africa. In 1900 there were only 8 million Christians in Africa (10% of the population). By 1990 it has already increased to 275 million (57% of the population). It is estimated that at the moment we have approximately 400 million Christians on the continent (62% of the total population).

In spite of their numbers Christians, however, have little impact on the political, social and economic situation on the continent. It is rare to find committed Christians amongst those fighting for justice in these areas (Kinoti, 1994:9).

The main reason for this state of affairs according to Kinoti (1994:2,3) is that the Christianity which Africa received from the West emphasised the spiritual aspect of life, sometimes to the neglect or even exclusion of the intellectual, social and material aspects. This is the reason for the widespread neglect of economic, political and social affairs by African Christians. They failed to apply the whole Gospel to the whole of life. They read the Word of God selectively, placing emphasis on (spiritual) salvation and neglecting those sections of the Bible that speak of justice, peace and material well-being.

The dominant form of Christianity in Africa can be described in the following terms:

- **Dualistic:** A division between a sacred or private domain (faith, the church) and a secular or public sphere (the rest of life) in which the Bible, faith and the church has no influence.

There are two kinds of dualism that plague African Christians. To the right there is the evangelical or pietistic version of dualism which calls for an inward Christianity that fails to apply the Gospel to the whole of life. To the left we have the liberal or humanistic form of dualism which calls for a political and social Christianity that lacks the personal salvation and transformation through faith in Christ. The first seeks Christ without the world and the second seeks the world without Christ (Bonhoeffer):



- **Escapist:** An attempt to escape within the safe walls of one's religion from the harsh realities of "the world". The current situation on the continent strengthens the appeal this kind of world-flight Christianity exerts.
- **Pietistic:** Which views the Christian faith as individual piety, rejecting communal involvement in the affairs of "the world". A Christian president will, for example, read his Bible and pray for God's guidance, but the way he performs his daily political duties does not reveal anything of what God requires of political leadership.

In this regard Adeyemo (1997:64) correctly writes: "While it is a dream to expect any system or structure to change without changing its individuals, it is equally unrealistic to assume that changed individuals will automatically transform any system. Both must be addressed in the proclamation of the Gospel". And elsewhere (1997:89) he adds: "For 2000 years, traditional Christianity has been preaching the repentance of sins, but the consequences of sin were left untouched".

- **Ecclesiasticism:** The viewpoint according to which Christianity is confined to reborn individuals and the church. Social life (politics, economics, education etc.) has to be brought into the confines of the church or "churchified" whenever one intends to serve God in these areas of life. Christianity is narrowly confined to the ecclesiastical sphere. A broader vision of serving God's kingdom outside the church in every area of life is lacking.

To overcome these dualisms Christians should distinguish between the good and evil aspects of creation and culture. We have to rediscover the Biblical doctrines of creation, fall and redemption: All is good by creation; all is misdirected by the fall into sin; and all can be redirected by redemption in Christ. Then we will have discovered a comprehensive worldview upon which can be built a holistic witness to the Gospel (cf chapter 20). Then it will become clear to us that politics can be as holy as prayer if done for God and not for idols. And that preaching can be as misdirected as prostitution if done for self-glory instead of the glory of God.

Searching for this "third way", the real Biblical way, is not an easy task. Yet in finding a "third way" Christianity, lies the hope for African Christianity.

### **2.5.15 The AIDS pandemic**

Of all the diseases, AIDS should be mentioned separately because of its dramatic impact on the whole continent. The following are a few alarming statistics:

- The global epicentre of AIDS is in sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 34 million people in this region are infected with HIV/AIDS.
- Because the poorer the people, the worse the pandemic, it is no surprise to find the world's 20 worst hit countries in Africa.
- In 2002 already 8% of adults in Sub-Saharan Africa were HIV-positive.
- About 2 million people per annum die of AIDS. Approximately 12 million have already died of AIDS.
- There are at the moment about 10 million AIDS orphans in Africa.

The devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on the continent is clear from the following:

- **Economically** it effects the labour market, adds extra costs to health care, insurance, more funerals, extra training to fill the vacancies, causes absenteeism at work, etcetera.
- **Educationally** teachers/lecturers and students are a high risk group.
- **Socially** in some African cities 15% of the children are already orphaned.

It is interesting to read that the president of Uganda is not against the medical prevention or treatment of AIDS, but that he puts the emphasis on sexual behaviour, having realised that HIV-infection is mostly dependent on voluntary behaviour, unlike most of other transmittable diseases. (Museveni, 1992:278). The time-tested cultural practices of fidelity and the condemnation of premarital and extramarital sex should, according to him, be revived (Museveni, 1992:273).

## 2.6 Possible solutions

The aim of this chapter is not to provide solutions to the very depressing situation in Africa. In the rest of this book some of them will be tackled. I will now confine myself to a few of the ideas presented by Kinoti (1994), because they at least provide a beginning.

### 2.6.1 Do not ignore the situation

Kinoti (1994:67) tells the story of an unkempt jungle dweller who one day found a mirror while walking about in the forest. Out of curiosity he picked it up and he saw an ugly, dirty and unshaven face. In disgust he smashed the mirror and walked away satisfied that he had done away with the ugly face! We can either smash the mirror of the previous pages – which will not improve our situation at all – or we can tackle reality itself.

### **2.6.2 Get a vision of a better Africa**

A vision begins with indignation of **what is** and it grows into an earnest quest for **what ought to be**.

According to Kinoti (1994) and Adeyemo (1997) Africa is not cursed, it cannot be God's will that it is experiencing such a terrible crisis. God wills peace and prosperity also for the African people. He has endowed the continent with adequate resources and he also equipped the Africans with the moral and intellectual capacities for a prosperous society. There is no reason to think that the black race must be inferior to other races. Differences in culture do not imply inferiority or superiority.

Africans should furthermore remember that they are not the first people in history to experience a severe social, economic and political crisis. Many examples of previous crises in Europe could be mentioned. Immense as they are, Africa's problems can be solved.

The growing number of Christians in Africa can be the instruments for the transformation that our continent desperately needs. Individual Christians, Christian groups and churches have shown in the past that Christianity can play a vital role in the betterment of life.

### **2.6.3 Take charge of Africa**

Globalisation today implies that the Western world controls the whole world for its own benefit. It especially applies to the economy where this domination enriches the West and impoverishes Africa and other poor nations. African mismanagement of their economies has played in the hands of the West who now dictates economic policies and supervises their implementation. It is true also politically. The West's immense economic and technological power gives her tremendous political power over Africa. The gross political mismanagement by African leaders has given the US and Europe reasons for tightening their grip.

The time has come for Africans to take charge of their own continent! (See chapter 19 on the African Renaissance.)

Taking charge of their own lives is, however, not going to be easy for Africans because, firstly, they lack confidence in themselves, are plagued by a dependency syndrome. Secondly, there are those who will do their best to stop Africans thinking for themselves. They include powerful foreign interests who will lose financially if the Africans take charge of Africa. Others consider it unnecessary to do so since the West has already figured out

the solutions for our problems in Africa. There is also the rich African elite who benefit from the prevailing conditions. They will not benefit when ordinary people start thinking for themselves.

#### **2.6.4 Get organised**

According to Kinoti (1994:77ff) a great weakness of the African people is that they are very disorganised. If they are to overcome the present crisis they must simply get organised. Africans are not by nature disorganised. Pre-colonial times provide many examples of large, well-managed states (see chapter 1).

Governments in Africa must, in the first place, become governments of the people, by and for the people. Secondly, governments must become transparent and answerable to the citizens. And, thirdly, African governments must become competent, efficient, just and free from corruption.

In all this Christians can play a vital role. They should not simply watch from a distance and pray that things will improve. Prayer has to go with action, Christians should be involved in the political affairs of their countries – both as citizens and as a part of government.

#### **2.6.5 Follow the whole will of God**

Why are Christians in Africa not the salt of the earth and the light of the world? Why does Christianity not seem to make much difference in spite of its numbers?

Kinoti's answer (1994:86ff) is that the type of Christianity we have in Africa is very much a man-centred religion, tailored to meet human needs, particularly spiritual and emotional needs. True Biblical Christianity, however, is God-centred. It emphasises that the will of God should be obeyed in our entire life. The greatest challenge facing Christianity in Africa today is how to teach and live by the **whole** Word of God. We need a **holistic** Christianity, one that emphasises **full-time** service of God, no matter what our work or profession is. Christianity is not only about evangelism!

Let me conclude with an important quotation from Kinoti (1994:90): "Like the church in other parts of the world, the church in Africa is usually much better at preaching than at being and doing what it preaches. There are glaring contradictions between what the church says and what she actually does, between the high morality we Christians proclaim and the lives we actually lead. We preach integrity but practice corruption. We preach fair play but practice nepotism and tribalism. We proclaim that God created all people equal

but treat some if they were more equal than others. We claim a new nature as a result of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts but we cannot be trusted with money and sex".

Africa has lost the previous century. But let us not succumb to Afro-pessimism. Africa can be reborn, it can experience a real renaissance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see chapter 19 of this book). The state president of South Africa, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, is fully aware of the numerous problems we are facing on this continent. But, in spite of that, he dared to declare at the end of the previous century: "Africa's time has come ... the new century must be an African century" (Mbeki, 1998:204)!

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## Chapter 3:

### AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

From the many religions on the African continent those with the greatest number of adherents are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (abbreviated as ATR). This chapter will not deal with the first two, but only with the last. (For brief descriptions of the history and influence of Islam in Africa, cf. Mbiti, 1970a: 242-254 and Parrinder, 1969:171-222.)

The exposition will be done under the following main headings: The African's view of:

- visible and invisible reality, including the Supreme Being;
- being human and society;
- the world of the spiritual intermediaries;
- law, sin, judgement and salvation;
- death;
- suffering, sickness and healing;
- witchcraft.
- In conclusion we reflect on the choice between African Traditional Religion and Biblical religion.

A Christian missionary should know that, to be effective, he/she should follow at least the following steps: (1) understand the message of the Bible in the light of its religious-cultural background; (2) understand the relevance of the Gospel message for his own culture, and (3) transfer the message in such a way that it will also be understood by the people of the third culture to whom he is bringing the Gospel. The missionary, therefore, is a wo/man living simultaneously in three cultures! This simple fact illustrates how important it is to know ATR. When a Christian, for instance, uses well-known Biblical concepts like "sin", "reconciliation" and "salvation" he/she should be aware of the fact that these words (if they exist in the African context) have totally different meanings in ATR.

The main aim of the chapter will be to understand ATR and not to provide a detailed critique from a Biblical perspective. (For comprehensive, systematic treatments of ATR from a Biblical perspective, see Gehmann, 1987, 1989, 2001; O'Donovan, 1996, 2000;

Olowola, 1993, Turaki, 1999 and Van Rooy, 1978, 1990 and 1995). However, our approach is from a Christian perspective.

Because it was written by an African Christian with first-hand experience of ATR and based on extensive reading on the subject, our main guide will be L. Nyirongo's book **The gods of Africa and the God of the Bible** (1997).

We start with the question of how the traditional African viewed reality as a whole.

### **3.1 The traditional African view of reality**

Different words can be used to describe ATR, like tribal, folk or primal religion. E.B. Taylor (in his book **Primitive culture**, 1871) used the word "animism" to describe this kind of religion. The term is derived from the Latin word **anima** which means "breath (of life)", "soul" or "spirit". Steyne (1989) also prefers the word "animism", because it so aptly describes ATR, in which everything is interpenetrated by the spiritual and is under control of spiritual powers and forces. I regard his book as one of the best sources to understand ATR. The author indicates that animism is not only confined to Africa, but is encountered in many other parts of the world. It is also one of the world's oldest religions. Israel of the Old Testament was already confronted with animism. The Old Testament, therefore, also offers a penetrating critique of this kind of religion.

The Africans do not really distinguish between the spiritual and physical modes of existence. They have a holistic or organic worldview. According to Turaki (1993:250) "Nature, man and the spirit world constitute one fluid coherent unit". However, to enable us to understand their view of reality, we deal with the two "worlds" separately.

#### **3.1.1 The spirit world**

While for the modern West the material, physical world is important, the spiritual world is pre-eminent in the minds of Africans. According to Turaki (1997:54) the spirit world defines the African worldview and life. Pervasive, hidden, unexplainable, unpredictable and powerful spirits govern and control everything and everyone and effect the well-being of individuals, families, clans and tribes. The fear of these hidden and mysterious powers can be frightening, consuming and devastating. For this reason they have to be placated, manipulated and even used to one's own advantage or someone else's disadvantage. Special people (intermediaries) often are needed to help one to do so. Even Christians who have embraced Christianity or Islam will, in time of difficulties, problems and crises, revert back to these beliefs in the powerful spirit world.



Comparing the views of reality of African people in different parts of Africa, the general conclusion is that the following "levels" in the spirit world can be distinguished:

- (1) the **Supreme Being** or Creator at the top followed by
- (2) **chief divinities** (non-human spirits), who are believed to control the natural phenomena, like lightning, rain, storms.
- (3) The **ancestors** (living dead), who are the closest intermediaries between the higher spiritual forces and man, and
- (4) at the bottom the spiritual forces embodied in **charms and amulets**.

The closer the lesser spirits are to the Supreme Being or God the Creator, the more potent they are. They actually share in his divinity. They can also act in an autonomous way – they are free to do as they please. These lesser deities are unpredictable, because they not always seek the good of human beings but may act maliciously.

### 3.1.2 The material world

The material world also exists according to a hierarchy of the human community at the top, then animals, plants and material things. The important point, however, is to understand that the African never exists in a merely material or visible world. He combines the spiritual and material in the way he interacts with his environment.

Nyirongo (1997:27, 28) provides the following examples:

- The dead and the living have the same level of existence. A dead person lives more or less the same life as when he/she was alive and can therefore eat and drink and talk with his relatives left behind and at the same time be invisible.
- A medicine man can catch the soul of a sick child and restore it to the body.
- A witchdoctor can become invisible to be able to bewitch a person.
- An illness can have the form of a stone or a lizard and can be extracted by applying a herb.
- Men can change into animals and animals into men. A crocodile can, for instance, leave the river, take off its skin, play a game with a football team and at dawn change back into a crocodile again.
- Humans can talk with animals or things and offer sacrifices to them.

- Ordinary incidents have the power to explain or foretell danger or misfortune. If an owl cries on top of one's roof at night, it means that a sick neighbour will die. If a puffadder or duiker crosses somebody's path, he must expect a funeral where he is going. A witchdoctor can harm or kill someone from a great distance by sending a snake, an owl or lightning or by striking a mask.
- Charms and amulets are visible, tangible things, a part of the African's material world, but they are charged with (spiritual) power.
- People in authority (like chiefs) and aged people are more powerful and therefore able to protect or harm younger ones.

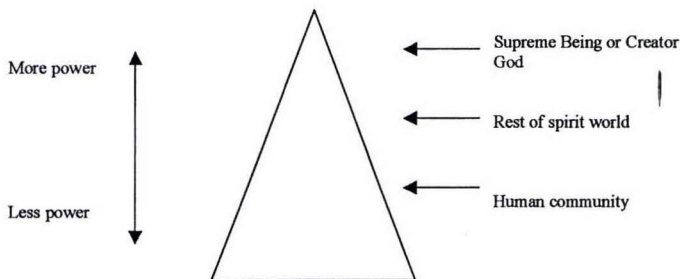
It is clear that what, in the West, we call the "spiritual" and the "material" are not separated in ATR. The spiritual is always present in the material.

Spirit also implies power. The higher the spirits, the more powerful they are, the Creator God being the most powerful.

Every moment and at all sides the human being is exposed to these (spiritual) powers. They decide whether he/she will be fortunate or unfortunate. Therefore, the purpose of life is to get as much power or vital force as one can. The more power one can amass, the stronger one will be to protect oneself. It is therefore not surprising that in the whole organic hierarchy the African considers himself (his community) as the focus point, the centre of the universe. God and the rest of the spiritual world exist for the sake of the human community. This is called an anthropocentric (man-centred) viewpoint.

### 3.1.3 Explained by way of a diagram

In a previous publication I have tried to explain the above by way of the following diagram:



The triangle explains the following:

- The hierarchical structure of the African view of reality.

- That the higher one moves up in the hierarchy, the more power is available.
- That, in spite of the fact that the Supreme Being is the highest and most powerful, the actual focus point is at the broad bottom of the diagram, the human being, which is never viewed apart from his/her community.
- That for the human being to acquire more power from above, he/she needs a variety of spiritual forces as intermediaries (the middle section of the triangle) between him/her and the Supreme Being, because the Supreme Being is far away and usually not approached directly.

### **3.1.4 The supreme being**

Contrasting ATR's concept of the Supreme Being or Creator God with the God of the Bible may be helpful, as a start, to understand something about the Supreme Being.

- The Supreme Being is Creator, but not Sustainer of everything because, after creating everything, he more or less withdrew from the world.
- He is not worshipped but rather used.
- He is seldom – only when other efforts have failed – approached in prayer.
- He does not have a personal relationship with human beings and, therefore, they don't live in close relationship with him either.
- He does not reveal himself as the God of the Bible reveals Himself in Creation, in Scripture and in Christ.
- He does not provide laws to guide man's conduct. (Norms are given by the community).
- He does not regard man as a responsible being who is accountable to him.
- He does not show love towards us.
- Neither does he ask love from our side.
- No relationship of faithful trust exists between man and the Supreme Being.
- Gratitude is absent from the relationship with the Supreme Being.

Let us now try to describe the nature of the Supreme Being.

What the diagram above does not explain is that in ATR no clear distinction is made between different "entities" in the hierarchy of this organistic ontology or view of reality. On

the one hand, as already indicated, the lower spirits can also be divine. On the other hand, the Supreme Being can be a "thing", an "it".

A few quotations from Setiloane (2000) will illustrate this viewpoint clearly. According to him the vital force (**seriti**) permeates everything: "**Seriti** is a portion of, and of the same quality as the immanent, all pervasive, omnipotent divinity – **Modimo**" (2000:28). The human being is therefore "a tributary of the primary, all generating Vital Force ... of the same essence as the great source of life" (2000:58). The same applies to the ancestors (**badimo**): they participate in the divinity of **Modimo** and are charged with his divinity. "**Badimo** are not **Modimo** and yet they are 'of **Modimo**' in the same way **motho** (the human being) is 'of **Modimo**'" (2000:32).

According to Setiloane **Modimo** is not a person and also not transcendent in the ATR of the Tswana people. The first missionaries (Moffat amongst the Botswana and Casalis among the Basuto) read the Biblical idea of a transcendent God into the concept of **Modimo** and the black people accepted it because of similar characteristics between the Biblical God and **Modimo**: "They overemphasised the transcendent aspect and sought and found in Africa a Supreme Being corresponding to their God, instead of the Immanent, nevertheless Supreme Vital Force" (2000:54). According to Setiloane **Modimo**, however, was never viewed as a person in ATR. He, therefore, does not speak of God as "he" but as "it": "**It (Modimo)** was understood to be **something** intangible, invincible, a **natural phenomenon** able to penetrate and percolate all things" (2000:41). Elsewhere he writes: "The Source of Being diffused and permeated all nature like mist and dew and gave life and right to it, to all, replenishing the overpowered and frustrated even as IT lets the grass grow after a savage winter's denudation. He takes on the cause of the widow, the orphan, the insignificant ant and circumstances ITS own weapon" (2000:61). Note that he describes the Supreme Being as "it" but once (was it a mistake?) also as "he".

Setiloane has no objection (p. 42) to indicate the ATR's view of reality as "animism", meaning that everything is full of spirits or spiritual. He also accepts that ATR is pantheistic. He uses the word pantheism (p. 42) which literally means "everything is in God" – the consequence of the fact that God is in everything.

In the light of all this it is inconceivable how Setiloane could say that **Modimo** and **Yahwe** (the God of the Old Testament) is the same! As we will soon see, there is a radical difference between this kind of organic pantheism and what the Bible teaches about God and his relationship towards creation.

According to such a view of reality as that of ATR one should expect the Supreme Being to be close to the rest of reality. The enigma, however, is that he/it is regarded as remote, far away from the human being. No personal relationship is possible with him and Africans will only approach him in cases of very serious problems when all other efforts for help from inferior divinities and the ancestors have failed. This Supreme Being also does not require any responsibility towards himself from the human side. Not even in life hereafter will he judge our actions. What makes it even more complicated is that sometimes the Supreme Being is regarded as the source of both the good and the bad.

How can one explain this fact that the Supreme Being is simultaneously **part of** reality (a kind of pantheism) as well as **distant from** reality (a form of deism)? At best it could be explained by saying that in an **ontological sense** he is near to us (part of reality), but stated in **religious terms** he is far away. There is no real, personal contact between him and us.

From a Biblical perspective the following should be stated:

- According to the Bible God is **radically** different from everything He created. God is not a creature and creatures are not divine. Exactly because of the **difference** between Creator and creature they can also have a **relationship**.
- God did not remove Himself (in the religious sense) from us. It is we who broke the relationship because of disobedience to his law.
- In spite of our sins, God is not a far-away God. He remains the Sustainer and Governor of everything He has created.
- It is also not true that we should not directly bother God with our daily problems. The Bible teaches a **personal** relationship with God and in prayer we may approach Him for help.
- God also gave us his will, formulated in different laws, to guide our conduct. We are responsible to live accordingly and will also be judged accordingly.
- God is not to be **used** but to be **served** and glorified. This is a totally different relationship from that according to ATR where the Supreme Being is merely approached to enhance one's own power, where offerings are presented to get something in return, where one gives in order to receive.

- Finally, God is not the source of both good and evil. If this was the case, we would have no other option but to accept fatalistically evil as our lot, without any motivation or power to fight what is bad and wrong.

We have now explained the ATR's view of the Supreme Being. (For more details on God or the Supreme Being in Africa see Adeyemo, 1978; Gitari & Benson, 1986; Mbiti, 1970b, Smith, 1966 and Van Rooy, 1995.) We move to an exposition of the second part of the diagram: what it means to be human. This will be followed by a description of the third part of the diagram: the spirit world as the intermediary between the human world and the Supreme Being.

### 3.2 The traditional African view of humanity and of society

If, for the moment, we distinguish between man as an individual and man in society, we can say the following about the nature of man as an individual according to Nyirongo (1997):

#### 3.2.1 The nature of the human being

According to the African view, the human being consists of two major parts: the **immortal soul** or **spirit**, which goes to the land of the spirits after death, and the **visible body** which rots in the grave. After death the deceased transforms into a spiritual existence which is called the **ancestral spirit** or simply ancestor. If, however, the deceased did not live a good life he/she can also become an ordinary or malevolent spirit. The way of existence in spiritland is not different from the present existence. If one has been a farmer here, one will continue to be one there. The ancestors are also capable of maintaining a spiritual bond with their relatives and communicate with them, especially through dreams.

Apart from the two elements (body and soul/spirit) many tribes also add other components to a person's being, like the following:

- The **shadow** or double of the body which functions as an enabling force "behind" the body. At death this shadow is transformed, together with the soul, into a spirit.
- The **ghost** is man's visible manifestation after death but exists only for a short while. A man usually ends up as a ghost if he did not receive a proper burial ceremony. This explains the elaborate funeral rites.
- The **destiny spirit** is what a person inherits at birth. It decides whether he/she will be good or bad, rich or poor, have many children or none, etc.

- The **vital breath** is believed to leave the body and animate a new being like a bird, snake or other animal (a kind of reincarnation).
- A **name** to the African does not simply indicate one's identity on the pay-roll. It influences the personality. Usually an individual is given a new name at each important stage of his/her development, e.g. immediately after birth, at puberty and with the birth of the first child.

### 3.2.2 Man's identity in the community

Different factors determine the human being's identity in this case:

- **The tribe.** The community – both the present and the past (ancestors) – gives the individual his/her identity. This identity is gained step by step through various rites. Especially the initiation ceremony truly incorporates the individual into the social group of the family, clan and tribe. Without this transition, one remains a child, a "half" person, an outsider or a nobody.

We call this view of being human and of society "communalism" or "communitarianism". It will be discussed together with all its implications in more detail in chapter 5.

- **Age.** In traditional Africa the older people are regarded as more important than the younger ones, because they are closer to the ancestors and the rest of the spirit world. They possess more power and wisdom while children is regarded as having no soul, and when they die they become nothing. At meals the adults will eat the best portions while the children have to wait for the remains. Children should also not challenge the wisdom of the elders, but always respect them. Seniority is therefore used as a criterion for an individual's worth and authority.
- **Seniority at birth.** Related to the above is the fact that even in a family seniority has priority. One is expected to carry the load and weapons of one's elder brother. The same applies to the elder brother of one's father. One is also not permitted to marry earlier than one's elder brother. It would not only be a sign of disrespect, but it is against the will of the community and would anger the ancestors.
- **Roles.** In the social hierarchy father, mother, grandmother, chief and diviner each has their proper place. One's worth is judged according to the position one occupies. In the family the grandparents occupy the highest status and the grandchildren the lowest. In the tribe the chief has more personal worth than ordinary tribesmen. When one becomes a chief one is no longer a mere human being, but a kind of divinity to be

served and adored by one's subjects. Therefore an ordinary tribesman are not allowed as many possessions or wives as the chief. And the wrong done to a chief is considered as much more serious than the wrong done to an infant.

- **Gender.** In most African tribes to be a female is to be by nature inferior. Men consider themselves to be superior to their wives and daughters are worth less than sons. Men regard women fit only for sex and for bearing children. Singleness is also treated as a misfortune and society usually exerts strong pressure to get married. As a result of all this the souls of women and daughters may not qualify as ancestors, except in a few tribes where inheritance falls on the female line. In practical life, however, women do play an important role in the community.
- **Ritual status.** African rites – especially those associated with puberty – upgrade one's worth as a person. To ignore these rites is to relegate oneself to an inferior status. In many African tribes men can also qualify to become members of secret societies which are closed to the majority of tribesmen. Their members live a mysterious life and know all the secrets of the tribe. They are the closest to the ancestors and can therefore reward or punish the ordinary tribesmen.
- **Material possessions.** We should not simply judge the quality of the African community by its willingness to share with others. All human beings have a tendency to worship money and possessions. Given the opportunity, the African is as prone to value material wealth as anyone else and status is determined accordingly.

From the above the communalistic or communitarian character of the African society is clear: first the community then the individual. The community makes the individual, because the worth and identity of the individual depends on where in the hierarchy the tribe places him/her. Also his/her behaviour is governed by what the tribe believes is right or wrong.

Nyirongo (1997:139) warns that it will be an illusion to say that we have to turn to African communal life to recapture what true community is. He regards communalism as a form of idolatry – the worship of the community. His reasons are the following:

- **The ancestors, not God, are the centre of the community.** Everything in life must be conducted according to the rites and the taboos prescribed by the ancestors. The ancestors, and not God, guarantee the well-being of the community (family, clan and tribe). God or the Supreme Being does exist, but He is not the Lord of life, He is only there to be called upon in times of serious crises.



- **Emphasis on the community at the expense of the individual.** Because the individual has to wait for the group to make decisions, his initiative is submerged to the community's influence. When it comes to making important decisions, for example, the individual has no will of his own – he has to submit to the collective will of the community. Consequently his/her initiatives and innovativeness are inhibited. There is also a tendency to evade personal responsibility by transferring it unto the group. (My uncle's riches are mine too, so why should I work hard?) Because the individual has to fit into a social hierarchy, he cannot change his position unless the group qualifies him for a higher category. In short, it is the approval of the group which counts – not one's own judgement and self-determination.

If the individual person's identity is not important and cultivated – reduced to a mere shadow of the community – the well-being of the community is inhibited as well.

- **No real equality.** "Equality" in ATR means equality in material blessings, communal decision-making and unity or solidarity based on blood relationships. Those outside the clan or tribe are not necessarily perceived as equals or brothers. In this kind of tribalism outsiders may be discriminated against and even oppressed.

However, according to the Bible, all human beings are equal in the eyes of God. We are not permitted to perceive those outside our own tribe or clan as subhuman or enemies.

- **Totalitarianism.** In the African tribe the chief and his indunas control all other social units. They are in charge of religion, economic affairs, judicial matters, etc. And since the chief is believed to be divine, whatever he commands is final. This is also one of the major reasons for dictatorships in contemporary Africa. However, no single societal relationship or person should control all the other institutions or try to run everything. The principle of structural pluralism implies that each societal relationship has autonomy in its own sphere.

In conclusion we could say that, contrary to what some African theologians and politicians have argued, the African community is very much a hierarchical and status conscious society. A tribesman/woman has to know where he/she fits in the whole maze of relationships and how he/she ought to conduct him/herself in relation to his/her position. Like the paramount chief, God is remote from man, not concerned about him and does not demand personal accountability. The community is the law, it shapes the individual and

determines his conduct. The word "communalism" or "communitarianism" is an apt description of this absolutisation or idolisation of the community in ATR.

We have thus far described two facets of the triangle (see diagram above), viz ATR's conception of the Supreme Being as well as its conception of the community. We now move to an exposition according to Nyirongo (1997) of the rest of the spirit world (the Supreme Being excluded) which acts as intermediary between human beings and the Supreme Being.

### **3.3 The world of spiritual intermediaries**

The argument for the need of intermediaries is that the Supreme Being is so awesome that the African feels unworthy to approach him directly. He must therefore present his needs and worship through intermediaries. They pass them on to the Supreme Being, who in turn sends his favours to the intermediaries. These intermediaries are, however, so powerful that they can also act independently of the Supreme Being. Unlike the Supreme Being, they can also disappoint man. Like the Greek and Roman gods of old they can be jealous and revengeful.

#### **Types of intermediaries**

Some of the intermediaries belong to the spirit world proper, while others are part of the visible world.

The first group includes the higher deities or semi-gods, ordinary spirits and the ancestors. The second group is comprised of kings, chiefs, prophets, priests, medicine men, witchdoctors, diviners and mediums. This last group is believed to be capable of tapping the blessings from the spiritual realm, and passing them on to individuals, the family and tribe.

In practice there is no one single spirit or person who plays the role of mediator. In a single situation the African may pray and offer sacrifices to as many intermediaries as he/she can to enhance the success of his/her request. In most cases, however, Africans will direct themselves to their ancestors for help.

#### **The ancestors**

Not everyone has the privilege to become an ancestor. One has to live a long and good life and at one's death receive the necessary funeral rites – without such ceremonies the spirit of the deceased becomes a harmful ghost.

While in Christianity the role of the Mediator (Christ) is the atonement of sin, in ATR the focus is not on God, his favour is not sought since he is far away. The focus is on man, his social and material welfare. Health, protection, property, fertility and a long life are requested from the ancestors. Apart from these, the ancestors also have the following functions: (1) to make one's medicines more powerful; (2) protection from the harm of witchdoctors; (3) removal of all kinds of evils and calamities; (4) conquest in wars and (5) revelation of all kinds of mysteries, e.g. indicating enemies who have caused one harm or illness.

Many African theologians try to blur the radical difference between what the Bible teaches about Christ as the only Mediator between God and man and ATR's belief in ancestors. Christ is called our greatest Ancestor (cf. for instance the books by Nyamiti, 1984 and Schreiter, 1989). They don't see a real difference between our belief in angels and their belief in non-human spiritual intermediaries. Or between the belief of the Catholic Church in saints and their belief in the ancestors. Nyirongo (1997:54-58), however, clearly indicates the radical differences as well as the clear Biblical message that our ancestors are dead so that we cannot expect any help from the deceased. The Bible teaches with abundant clarity that Christ is the only Mediator. It also explicitly prohibits efforts to have contact with the dead (cf. Deuteronomy 18:10-13).

#### **Other intermediaries in the visible world.**

Apart from people in high positions, like kings and chiefs, the African community also knows people who are specialist intermediaries. Nyirongo (1997:171-172) mentions the following types:

- **Medicine men or herbalists**, which may specialise in one disease or may be general doctors.
- **Diviners**. They are experts at unveiling the spiritual causes of diseases. They may use various techniques to trace the causes, e.g. throwing of bones and other objects or simply talking to their patients. Some of them, especially the many commercial **nyangas**, take advantage of their knowledge of the beliefs of the people to cheat them.
- **Mediums**. As intermediaries they stand between the patient and the spirit who knows the cause of the problem. The cause could be an unhappy or angered ancestor, a malevolent spirit, a witchdoctor or a living relative.

- **Disease and rain specialists.** The disease specialists are concerned with specific diseases, like mental illness or heart disease. Others have the power to pray for rain or to protect homesteads, fields and crops.
- **Priests.** They also mediate between people and the spirit world. They serve in the shrines of family and clan ancestors but can also practice medicine. The distinction between the different types of intermediaries are not always clear.
- **Witches, wizards, sorcerers, magicians etc.** They are the destructive intermediaries. If an African is sick, he will consult one or more of the five previously mentioned specialists. But if he wants to take revenge by causing harm, he is expected to consult a witch, sorcerer or magician. They use either natural means, e.g. herbs, or supernatural techniques, e.g. spells, to cause harm to the living.

In ATR man lives in constant fear of the caprice of the spirit-world. He has to try his best to manipulate the good and bad spirits in his favour by way of offerings. The Bible also teaches the reality of evil forces under the leadership of the devil. However, it also clearly reveals that the power of the devil is not equal but subjected to God's power. It is therefore not necessary out of fear to sacrifice to evil forces as in ATR.

### 3.4 View of law, sin, judgement and salvation

The above diagram distinguished between three levels in the ontological hierarchy of ATR: (1) The supreme being, (2) the spirit world and (3) the community of human beings. Because every society lives according to certain laws, norms and values, the question may be asked where in this diagram, explaining ATR, should we look for these elements.

#### 3.4.1 View of law

The answer is obvious. While in the modern West the individual is the seat of authority, according to ATR authority resides in the community. Not the individual is the law (autonomy), but the community provides the norms (communomy).

Turaki (1997:54-66) describes some of these laws governing traditional African society:

- **Law of destiny.** "Every individual or group have their own destiny decreed for them by the Creator ... It can not be changed. Destiny is meant to be accepted in gratitude. It is one's lot. Thus one's place in human society has been determined and fixed" (Turaki, 1997:55). Examples of the consequences of this law are that Africans too easily accept bad circumstances as their fate, maintain the **status quo** and are not critical enough about bad leadership.

- **Law of harmony.** The greatest duty of human beings is to live in harmony with the spirit, human and natural world. Distorting the balance can lead to disastrous consequences. This law does not imply tolerance and equality, because it is limited by the kingship or racial boundary and does not apply to outsiders. This law does not address the issue of what is right and wrong, just or unjust either.
- **Law of kinship.** According to Turaki (1997:61) this law defines both the position of the individual and the outsider: "The individual self does not exist in itself and has no social life of itself nor determines its course of life on its own. The individual takes his/her life and entire existence from its kinship foundations. He/she belongs to the community of kinship and of common ancestry. He/she is owned by his/her bloodgroup ... He/she does not exist for himself / herself, but for the bloodgroup and its community".

About outsiders Turaki explains: "The law of kinship defines usually in unequivocal terms those who are 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Outsiders and strangers do not belong, for this reason they are not entitled to (1) equal treatment; (2) ownership; (3) affinity, loyalty and obligations; (4) community rights and protection; (5) they are not people, they are outside of the commonwealth, they are strangers" (Turaki, 1997:61).

- **Law of the outside world.** Turaki has the following to say about this law: "Anything outside the kinship system is labelled 'outside world' ... In this sort of place, kinship or tribal rules do not apply. In fact there are no set of rules to govern its operation or control. In such a place 'might is right'; 'the end justifies the means'; 'it is a war zone' ...." (Turaki, 1997:63).

Turaki also indicates the disastrous consequences of the application of this law in modern Africa in social and political relations. The Scriptures teach something totally different, viz universal love and righteousness and therefore abolish all kinds of tribalism and racism which are the results of the application of this law.

Chapter 9 (about morality in Africa) will discuss the moral implications of these different laws of ATR in detail.

### 3.4.2 View of sin

The elders and ancestors are the originators and custodians of the laws and customs of the tribe. The whole community has the responsibility to see to it that these laws and customs are applied.

There are numerous legends explaining how human beings got estranged from the Supreme Being as a result of which he decided to withdraw himself from them. But although the African believes that sin originated from man's first offence against the Supreme Being, in daily life sin is not committed against him but against the community, one's family and tribe which include the ancestors. Fear of disapproval from one's family / tribe is more valid than fear of God's wrath over sin. The shame one experiences in one's community is greater than the possible guilt experienced in relationship to God.

Nyirongo (1997:61 ff) describes the types of sin, the gravity, consequences and remedy for sin in the following way:

### **Types**

- The African people were aware of different laws mentioned in the **Ten Commandments** describing one's relationship towards fellow human beings, like "you shall not commit adultery or steal, you shall honour your father and mother", etc.
- The **breaking of taboos** seems to be the most common offence found in the tribe. Breaking a taboo disturbs the harmony in the community and the peace with the ancestors. Hundreds of taboos exist of which Nyirongo mentions only a few examples, for instance that a woman is not permitted to climb upon the roof or her hut or a man to sleep on or step over the bed of his child.
- **Ritual impurity** is also a sin. This happens, for instance, when an infant cuts its upper teeth first, when a beard grows on a women's chin or a man grows breasts. Such events make a person ritually unclean and a ceremony must be performed to prevent certain disasters to befall him/her or the family.

### **The gravity of sin**

The gravity of sin depends on who is offended and by whom the sin is committed. The more influential the person against whom the sin is committed the more serious the sin (Mbiti, 1970a:208). This is so because the more important the person, the closer he/she is to the ancestors. The same applies to seniority in age. To offend elders is more serious than to offend a child, because children have less vital force. Conversely, if a person of influence and status commits an offence against a poor man, it is not as serious as when the poor man commits the same sin against the rich (Nyirongo, 1997:63). When Nyirongo later on (p. 65-70) explains the Biblical view of sin, it becomes very clear that the gravity of sin does not depend on by whom or against whom the sin is committed.

### **The consequences of sin**

Calamities to be expected when trespassing community laws, taboos or being ritually impure are: growing thin, childlessness, madness, an accident, sickness, even sudden death and other misfortunes.

Since sin is primarily against the community or tribe, it is the same community which chastises and punishes the wrong-doer. Offences like adultery, theft and murder are dealt with at the chief's court. In spite of that the ancestors may still send their own punishments. Sin is primarily to lose one's face in the community (shame) and not guilt against God. Only in very rare cases is sin perceived as an offence against the Supreme Being.

### **The remedy for sin**

Restitution has to take place. If, for example, one has stolen something, it has to be returned. Acceptance and reintegration into the community is also necessary. And finally the ancestors have to be appeased by way of gifts or the sacrifice of an animal.

### **3.4.3 View of judgement, salvation and immortality**

In Africa these three Biblical concepts are also interpreted according to the communalistic worldview (cf. Nyirongo, 1997:71-73).

#### **Judgement**

When the African has violated the laws, taboos and morals of the tribe, he expects to be punished in this life through calamities such as poverty, poor harvests, sickness and death. Unless he repents to the community and offers sacrifices to the ancestors the calamities will continue. Apart from the punishment in this life, there is no further punishment in the hereafter, because the dead continue to live more or less the same life they once led when they lived on earth (cf. Mbiti, 1970a:149). There is no last judgement, hell or heaven or the resurrection of the dead.

According to Bujo (1990: 61,62) belief in the ancestors does not provide much hope for the future and also no real encouragement for a virtuous life: "... the believer in ancestors is no more assured of a better future, for if, after death, the rich are rich and the poor stay poor, if beyond the tomb, tears and misery go on, then why waste so much effort in this short life? And what of those ancestors who seem to enjoy holding their descendants in fear and anguish all their lives, those who extract endless offerings under the pain of becoming or remaining unhappy or discontented? Can those who revenge themselves on

their loved ones and show nothing but crass self-interest, can they be the ultimate foundation of human life beyond the grave? ... Why so much effort and pain, why such an obsession to avoid wrongs and practice virtue, if, in the end, all turns into nothing? Or what if there is no surprise beyond the world of the forefathers? If all ends with the tomb, or certainly does not change after death, then treachery and loyalty, debauchery and chastity, theft and integrity, fortune and justice, drunkenness and temperance, war and peace are all the same. 'Drink and eat for tomorrow we'll be dead!'

What is crucial is not what God thinks of you, but how the tribe judges you. To avoid being rejected by the tribe – the worst kind of punishment one can ever face – one must strictly observe all its laws, taboos and customs.

### **Salvation**

One's identity is realised by incorporation into and participation with the community. This is salvation according to traditional Africa and not a renewed relationship or eternal life received from God (cf. Nyirongo, 1997:72 and Adeyemo, 1997).

According to Nyirongo the traditional African experiences "salvation" in the following ways:

- **Through "rebirth" at the initiation ceremony**, in other words when he/she is incorporated into the tribe as a full human being. Those who have not been initiated are jeered at, because they are considered "half people" or outcasts.
- **By acquiring good health, wealth and plenty of children.**
- **By winning approval from your tribe**, because to be despised and rejected by one's own people, is to be a nobody. Therefore one should be loyal to one's community at whatever cost.
- **The individual also experiences salvation when he/she approaches old age**, because then one knows all the wisdom and secrets of the tribe and one is closer to the ancestors.
- One may also receive salvation by the process of dying and living in the next life, i.e. **by becoming an ancestor**. An ancestor has more power to bless and punish his relatives and can also be "reborn" into the family he leaves behind. But he has to be remembered by his relatives, otherwise he is as good as dead. This brings us to the African's idea of



## **Immortality**

As long as someone who dies is remembered by his relatives and tribe and keeps in touch with those he left behind, he experiences immortality as an ancestor. But if he is forgotten - which is inevitable after several generations – he becomes an ordinary spirit, a mere thing in the spirit land.

Nyirongo's conclusion is: "(a) Judgement does not focus on man's rebellion against God but on his behaviour towards the community. For this reason, the yardstick for wrong doing is not God's law, but the community's code of behaviour. (b) Salvation comes not as a gift but is earned through one's efforts and is perceived as social, physical and material prosperity. There is no resurrection or eternal union with God. (c) Immortality is also earned through one's contact with the community" (Nyirongo, 1997:73).

### **3.5 View of death**

Something more has to be said about traditional Africans' view about death and life after death. Nyirongo mentions the following:

#### **3.5.1 View about death**

- For the African there must always be evil intentions behind each death. It can be an ordinary person, witchdoctor or evil spirit. A materialistic, scientific (medical) explanation only would not be accepted.
- Death is regarded as a sad and unnatural event and great sorrow is expressed at funerals.
- Africans dread death as demonstrated by the various attempts to delay or prevent it.
- Death is viewed as a separation between body and soul. The soul, the most important part of man, leaves the body and lingers around until it is bid a proper farewell by way of rituals, sacrifices and petitions. If the funeral rites are neglected, it is feared that the soul (as a spirit) will hover around and plague its relatives with misfortunes. These rites help the deceased in their transition into a spiritual existence. Death, therefore, does not end life – it is continued in more or less the same way in the spirit world.
- Death also does not sever the bond between the living and the dead, and fellowship between the two continues. The relatives – especially in a crisis and at life cycles (birth, puberty, marriage and death) – bring offerings and in exchange they receive warnings and blessings from their ancestors.

- Therefore death is not only a time to mourn, but also the beginning of great blessings from the one who will become more powerful as an ancestor. The burial of a deceased is therefore accompanied by dancing, eating, drinking and other celebrations.
- Death also affects the whole community, because the departed belongs to the community. Everyone attends the funeral and not only the close relatives. To keep away, even for good reasons, may invoke suspicions of witchcraft. If a husband died, his widow has to suffer all kinds of restrictions – she may even be beaten and denied food – as ways of expressing her sorrow.

### **3.5.2 The soul after death**

As already said, the soul first roams around its homestead or neighbourhood till after the funeral rites when it is believed to have joined the other ancestral spirits in spiritland. There is no heaven, hell or resurrection of the body as the Bible teaches. The only difference with the present state is that the individual, as an ancestor, gains more vital force to control and manipulate the living. When an ancestor is finally no longer remembered his/her status changes to that of an ordinary spirit, a mere shadow, a thing.

### **3.5.3 Fellowship with the dead**

According to Nyirongo (1997:82-83) and many other writers on ATR there is no concrete evidence of the existence of the ancestors, but people experience them as real through the following: (1) prayers; (2) dreams; (3) misfortunes and blessings; (4) significant social events, like childbirth, initiation, marriage, the installation of a chief etc.; (5) the appearance of snakes and other animals; (6) images and shrines; (7) prophets who claim that they have risen from the dead where they were in contact with the ancestors and (8) mediums whom the ancestors possess in order to pass on their messages to families.

However, according to Nyirongo (1997:84 ff) the Bible teaches the impossibility to commune with the dead. It is demons who masquerade as ancestors. This is the reason why God forbids the cult of the dead (Deut. 18:11). Anything - real or imaginary – that comes between us and God is an idol, and behind each idol is a demon.

### **3.6 View of suffering, sickness and healing**

According to Nyirongo this is an important aspect of ATR to be dealt with. First something about suffering.

### 3.6.1 Suffering

When the first man or couple sinned, God withdrew from them into the sky, leaving them to suffer the consequences of their fall. Man can no longer approach God directly. He has to earn his "salvation" in different ways, such as protecting himself with powerful medicines and charms; striving for acceptance by his own people; bearing many children and finally qualifying as an ancestor when he dies.

#### Daily causes and effects of suffering

In his day to day life, however, suffering has nothing to do with the African's relationship with God but with fellow human beings and the spirit world.

- **Fellow human beings** include: (1) ordinary people who can utter curses; (2) people who act as passive vehicles of dangerous mystical powers; (3) specialists who practice anti-social, secret magic (witches and witchdoctors) and who wield revenge for their clients.
- **Ancestral spirits** can be both agents of good and agents of suffering. They do not send suffering just to chastise their relatives, but can also cause malicious harm. The only safe attitude, therefore, is to constantly offer them sacrifices and libations.
- **Nature spirits and other non-human spirits** may, when angry, withdraw rain and send locusts or diseases. Then they have to be appeased with sacrifices and rituals.
- **Lesser gods** are responsible for individual calamities. Some tribes believe in a predestination or fate spirit which is responsible either for regular blessings or perpetual troubles in an individual's life.
- When the source of suffering continues or can not be unravelled, it will be attributed to the hand of the **Supreme Being**.

#### Responses and solutions to suffering

Two types of reactions are distinguished by Nyirongo (1997:159-161): protective, preventive measures and counter-measures.

- **Protective and preventive measures**

Protective measures are those involving the use of various types of charms and medicines.

Preventive measures include both avoidance and observance.

Avoidance includes avoiding the transgressing of various taboos, like contact with people in a state of impurity, abstinence from certain foods or from killing certain animals.

Observance includes the careful management of good and bad omens. For instance, if a certain bird sings to one's left it is a bad omen, while its singing on the right hand side of the road is a good omen. Omens foretell events or their outcome before they have happened, while oracles are consulted to find out the causes of events that have already happened.

Dreams also bring bad or good omens. Not ordinary dreams, because they are not taken seriously, but strange dreams that occur frequently cause alarm. If, for example, a person frequently dreams of his/her dead father it will be an indication that his/her ancestor is unhappy. The inspection of animals' entrails is another method of forecasting the future.

- **Counter-measures**

The difference between protective and counter-measures is that the first is to deter suffering before it occurs and is experienced, while the purpose of the latter is to fight or neutralise the magic before it causes harm. To achieve this, one should consult a diviner to detect what or who is causing the suffering or threatens to do so and to launch one's counter-attack.

As in previous cases Nyirongo (1997:161-168) again contrasts the traditional African view about suffering with the Biblical view. We will not go into the detail but simply note that whereas the African's view of suffering is community-centred, the Biblical view is God-centred.

### **3.6.2 Sickness**

Westerners and traditional Africans have different views about sickness and healing. The West will look for the physical reasons, like the bacteria or the malfunctioning of an organ of the body. To the African these are not the real causes of illness, one has to determine the spiritual causes. These may be the following: angered ancestors, an evil spell cast by one's enemy, or a broken tribal custom or taboo.

Both Western and African views of healing are based on different worldviews, resulting in different views about sickness. Therefore, Western medical science is not something which can be taken out of its cultural context and simply be introduced as a better alternative to the traditional African methods of healing. Why should African's for example,

build toilets to prevent infection by intestinal parasites when it is believed that these worms are sent by a discontented ancestor?

Apart from the fact that sickness indicates a spiritual encounter, it is also communal in nature. In the West a sick person is isolated in a hospital and treated kilometres away from his family, surrounded by unknown doctors and nurses. In Africa illness is a family affair. Not only is the disease itself usually believed to be caused by one of the family members, but during the treatment close relatives must be involved to give support and assurance to the patient. Even the medicine man/woman is usually someone the patient's family recognises as a relative.

### **Causes of sickness**

Nyirongo (1997:170) lists the following causes:

- **Malevolent relatives** still alive are usually blamed. It is rare to blame a stranger.
- **Ancestors** who may have been offended.
- **Disobedience to taboos and customs** of the clan or tribe can also be a cause for sickness.
- **Misfortune caused by a guardian spirit or destiny soul** may also be perceived as the cause of ill-health. In this case the victim simply has to accept it as a fate.
- **Possession by spirits** is another reason. Possession by a bad spirit may drive the patient mad and is treated by exorcism. "Sociable" possession affects mainly women and is characterised by frequent headaches and bodily pain, speaking in strange tongues, the ability to spot curative herbs etc. Finally such a patient is recognised as an **nyanga** by the community.

### **3.6.3 Healing**

#### **Types of medical specialists**

Under point 3.1 above we have already mentioned the different intermediaries which can effect healing from sickness.

#### **Categories of healing**

There are no clear-cut demarcations, but healings may be graded according to the extent of mystery surrounding the practice:

- **Straightforward herbal treatment.** In this case there is no mystery or occult practices involved – no spell, divination or enchantment.
- **Treatment accompanied by mystical powers.** In this case the treatment is presumed to be beyond ordinary human understanding. The diviner-doctor is assisted by a medium in discovering the cause of the sickness and in identifying the right cure. He may also rely on prayers, sacrifices and libations to appease the ancestors or other spirits.
- **Treatment which is completely mystical.** In this case medicine is not used at all, but words, spells, enchantments, statues or specific rituals are used to effect the healing.

This exposition of the African view of sickness and healing is followed by Nyirongo's (1997:173-180) explanation of the Biblical view of sickness and healing. The interested reader should consult this important section.

### 3.7 View of witchcraft

This is the last important aspect of ATR to be investigated in this chapter. Because there is still much uncertainty and confusion on this issue, I have listed in the bibliography at the end of the chapter a number of books dealing specifically with this topic (cf. Boakye-Sarpong & Osei-Hwedie, 1989; Bührmann, 1984; Gelfand, 1985; Hove, 1985; Makinde, 1988; Kavale, 1993; Lagerwerf, 1987; Mbambo, 1994; Moreau, 1990; Muthengi, 1993; Nyirongo, 1999 and Thorpe, 1993).

The African has an ambiguous view of witchcraft. Because of his holistic, organistic worldview he does not clearly distinguish between demonic influence and the power of the Supreme Being. Although evil is attributed to evil spirits, witchcraft is at the same time a gift from the Supreme Being.

#### 3.7.1 Distinctions

Neither is it possible to draw rigid distinctions between witchcraft, sorcery, divination and magic. All of them could be combined in one practitioner. Nyirongo (1997:183) distinguishes them as follows:

- **Witchcraft** is mystical even though witches also use medicine when the need arises.
- The power of a **sorcerer** is embodied in the medicine he uses.
- **Divination** is the ability to discover or explain mysterious causes of illness, death and other misfortunes which cannot be unravelled by the ordinary observer.

- **Magic** is the art of using spells to invoke supernatural powers to influence people or events.

### 3.7.2 How witchcraft is acquired

It can be acquired in various ways:

- A person can be **born** with such powers, the signs of which may be visible already at childhood.
- Witchcraft can also be **inherited** from living or deceased parents (ancestors).
- It can be **bought** from a dealer, namely a sorcerer who practices it as a commercial undertaking.
- It can be obtained **directly from a god** as a reward for faithful devotion. Such witchcraft is considered to be very powerful.

### 3.7.3 How witches operate

They are usually a well-organised group, meeting in secret places and planning their missions carefully. Secrecy is maintained by taking strict oaths not to reveal their secrets to anyone.

Amongst the techniques employed to kill their victims are the following:

- Casting spells which can kill from a distance.
- Direct use of poisonous substances in food or injected into the victim's body.
- Witches are believed to collect their victim's body parts (hair, nail cuts) or articles worn by the victim and then apply magic to them to harm or kill the victim.

### 3.7.4 Sources of witches' power

A witch's power does not always reside in herself but in the following (Nyirongo, 1997:186-187):

- **Cultic objects**, like a calabash, horn (both of which may contain curious substances), talisman, beads, rings, small pieces of cloth, a mask, statue etc.
- **Totems** which may include certain animals, birds, snakes, bees and fireflies. A witch can also transform herself into a totem animal, bird or snake by applying certain herbs to her cultic objects.

- **Observance of certain rules or rituals.** Such a code of conduct may be initiation into the witches' group, taking oaths, carrying out purification rites, attending meetings regularly and offering frequent human blood sacrifices to rejuvenate her powers.
- The ultimate source of their power witches believe is the **Supreme Being**. This belief is not surprising in the light of the African's ambiguous view about witchcraft mentioned already. Witchcraft is not necessarily anti-social, but can also be used for good! Both blessings and misfortunes can come from the same source. When one is sick, one must not only look for a cure, but also acquire powerful medicine to harm the person who is seeking one's life. This is also the reason why a witch does not necessarily have to exhibit a lonely, anti-social or wicked disposition. She/he can be a progressive businessman, a respected chief or a university professor!

### **3.7.5 The Bible and witchcraft**

As was the case with previous sections, Nyirongo (1997:188-194) discusses in detail the Biblical perspective on witchcraft. This is another case where it is not permitted to call upon the God of the Bible for protection and at the same time not part company with witchdoctors, sorcerers, diviners and magicians. One has to make a definite choice. The reason is that witchcraft power is real because the devil is real. It is wrong to believe that witchcraft does not exist, that it is just some sick peoples' imagination or fear of the unknown.

### **3.8 The choice between African Traditional Religion and biblical religion**

As stated right at the beginning, the primary aim of this chapter was not to discuss the encounter between ATR and Christianity or the Bible, but to provide as objective an exposition as possible of ATR. Many books have been written each propagating its own way in which the Christian faith and ATR should interact or should not interact. (See in the Bibliography for instance, Bediako, 1992; Boulaga, 1984; Daneel, 1987; Ela, 1990; Healey, 1981; Ngewa, 1998; Parratt, 1995 and Walliggo, 1986.) I will only mention one popular position in which ATR serves as the foundation for the Gospel and Nyirongo's (1997) reaction to it.

Nyirongo (1997:1ff) mentions different African theologians who believe that ATR should be regarded as the beginning, inspiration or foundation for faith in the Gospel. The beliefs of traditional Africans are regarded as a stepping stone or "scaffold" to the Christian faith. In other words, their beliefs are right, good and beautiful and they only need to be fulfilled or completed by Biblical truths. As God prepared the Jews with the Old Testament for the



coming of Christ, he has prepared the Africans for the same event through ATR. Nyirongo regards this approach as wrong, as blind sympathy with the African past.

Those theologians (cf. Idowu, 1973 and Mbiti, 1970a and 1970b), who claim that the African worshipped the true God before he came into contact with the Gospel, base their "evidence" on the following: (1) the African's belief in the existence of a god or Supreme Being as the Almighty and Creator of all things; (2) the fact that the African acknowledged the same attributes to his god as those mentioned in the Bible, like eternity, omnipresence, providence etc. which set god above the rest of reality, and (3) the African's dependence on this god. Conclusions about the African's alleged "true knowledge" of God are based on such "evidences" and not on what God himself has decreed as the right way to seek, to know and to worship Him.

"To say that we can know and worship God on our own terms or merely on the basis of our own perceptions of God's power, character and his dealings with us, is to delude ourselves ... Even prayers to God can not necessarily be the proof. There are many cults which also claim to pray to God, but as far as God is concerned they do not know Him; what they pray to are gods of their own making" (Nyirongo, 1997:11).

According to Nyirongo we should not, as the above-mentioned theologians do, first sympathise with ATR and then go to the Bible to validate them. We first have to listen to what God says in his Word and evaluate ATR in the light of the Bible.

That God revealed Himself to the pre-Christian African cannot be denied. He continues to do so today. The problem is not that God did not speak clearly to the African in the past through His creational revelation. The problem is what the African did with this so-called general revelation. He was left with no doubt that God exists, what his character is and that He had created him and cared for his needs. But instead of worshipping the true God, the African suppressed his revelation and exchanged the true God for his own idols (Romans 1: 18-21). When man persistently suppresses God's revelation he becomes spiritually blind and deludes himself into believing that he still trusts and worships the real God. The African's "god" is not the God of the Bible. His gods are non-human spirits and ancestors which he uses for his own convenience.

Nyirongo's (1997:23) emphatic conclusion is: "Though the pre-Christian African acknowledged God's existence in nature and could call upon Him for help in times of distress, he did not seek and trust Him as Lord and Saviour of his life. Instead he devoted

his attention to non-human spirits and ancestors ... It is of no use to the African to put his confidence in the past ... He needs a new beginning, a new life".

Later on in his book he makes the statement that ATR is nothing but idolatry (p. 37). Idolatry is to absolutise something in creation to the status of a god and those who worship idols, worship demons (1 Cor . 10:18-22).

Nyirongo (1997:47,48) distinguishes between three types of idolatry in ATR:

- Worship of carved images representing non-human gods and ancestral spirits.
- Worship of animals, persons, spirits and lifeless natural phenomena.
- Worship connected with charms.

There is a great variety of opinions about man's relationship in ATR to the ancestors or living dead. Should this relationship be described as simply to **remember** them, or to **respect** and **honour** them, to **venerate** them or to **worship** them? According to some the first words do not indicate the strong attachment to the ancestors, while the last word ("worship") is perhaps too strong. The fact, however, remains that the traditional African put his trust in his ancestors instead of in God alone.

The worshipping of foreign gods and idols is not something typical only of ATR. Through the ages and all over the world many nations worshipped a variety of deities. This was also the case at the beginning of Western civilisation (cf. the Greeks and Romans). Even today the West worships modern idols like science, technology and material wealth.

A careful reading of the Old Testament reveals how God viewed Israel's relationship towards the cultural-religious context in which they lived. From God's attitude African Christians may learn how to determine their own relationship towards ATR. For Israel (1) some aspects of their surrounding culture was **accepted**. There was, for example, not much difference between the way family life was structured in Israel or their neighbours. (2) Other aspects had to be **changed**. Slavery and polygamy, for instance, were not accepted without reserve. (3) Still other aspects, like the surrounding Eastern religions had to be **rejected**.

### **3.9 Towards the future**

In conclusion it should be kept in mind that ATR was already strongly influenced by both Christianity and Islam as well as Western secularism and materialism. In the Western world the process of secularisation (thinking and living as if God does not exist or does not matter – especially in the public domain) gradually developed since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It

seems as if the process of secularisation will come about much faster in Africa, especially in the large African cities (cf. the study on the city of Nairobi, Kenya by Shorter and Onyancha, 1997). While ATR may still be alive in many rural areas, it is also changing and not always available in the "pure" form as described in the previous pages.

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## Chapter 4:

### CULTURE, WORLDVIEW AND RELIGION

#### A comparison between the West, Africa and the Bible

While the previous chapter concentrated on African Traditional Religion, this chapter will broaden our perspective by paying attention to African culture in general. Firstly it describes what is meant by the terms "culture", "worldview" and "religion" and, secondly, it provides a comparison between the modern Western, traditional African and Biblical worldviews.

##### 4.1 Culture

We have many - hundreds of - definitions of culture. I only mention the following two: the **segmental** and the **comprehensive**.

The first includes in the term **culture** only "spiritual" achievements like intellectual and artistic products (orchestras, performing and other arts, museums etc.). Culture is regarded as something that bestows lustre upon life, a "higher" level of existence, the "icing" on the cake. It can therefore only be acquired by and is reserved for the wealthier and more leisured members of society. Inhabitants of monasteries and universities have much of it, while prisoners and the poor don't have any!

I am aware that this viewpoint is more or less outdated today. It is furthermore a Western idea never held in Africa. I mentioned it in order to contrast it with a second, more acceptable viewpoint.

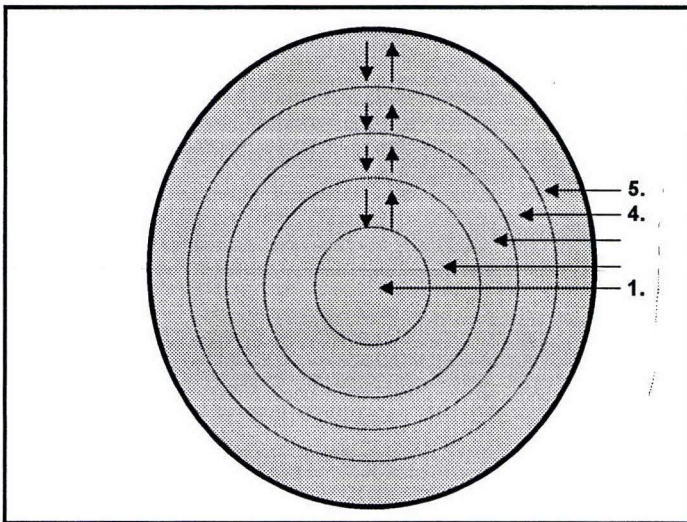
This second, comprehensive view of culture regards human **life in its totality** as culture, not merely the intellectual and artistic aspects. It is not something "sublime" or disconnected from, but includes our ordinary attitudes, customs, behaviour, values, beliefs, institutions, etcetera. It is not necessarily acquired by (formal) education and reserved for a section of the population. Every human being is a cultural being - prisoners and the poor included! Culture is our "frame of reference" for human thought and conduct. We are hardly aware of it. It is like the air we breathe; like the water in which a fish lives; we are "programmed" by our own culture. We only become aware of our culture when something goes awry or when we encounter people of other cultures.

### Distinctions also important

I prefer the comprehensive view of culture, but simultaneously realise that one should distinguish between different facets of a culture. The distinction made by Reformational philosophy between different modalities or aspects of life can help us indicate **which aspect** of culture we have in mind: the domain of faith, moral or ethical, aesthetic, juridical or political, economic, social, lingual, technical or historical, logical, sensitive, biotic, physical, spatial and arithmetic aspect or modality. The arts are an example of the aesthetic aspect of culture and commerce an example of economic culture.

### A simple diagram

I am aware that, while a diagram can help us to understand difficult issues, at the same time it oversimplifies and should therefore always be used with great caution. To reduce the complex phenomenon of culture to comprehensible proportions, I use the following diagram, consisting of five concentric circles:



For the sake of simplicity, I distinguish between only five layers. Feel free to add and subtract to the number! My five layers symbolise the following different aspects of a culture:



1. **The religious dimension.** We may also call it the **directional** dimension, because religion is the central directedness of all of human life towards the real or presumed ultimate source of meaning and authority. In the case of the Christian religion this directedness is our response to the true God who reveals Himself in creation, in Scripture and in Christ. The response should be according to His will (summarised in the central commandment of love).

### Two problems

My diagram does not solve two important problems. (1) In the Reformational tradition our **central** religious commitment is clearly distinguished from the **dimension** of faith (usually indicated as the pistic aspect or modality). This is a very important distinction because it prohibits the identification of **all-encompassing** religion with only **one aspect** of life (the faith aspect). We have to serve God in **all** the other aspects of our lives and not only in our faith.

Unfortunately my diagram does not clarify this vital distinction. (2) A second problem is whether we may regard religion (and worldview) – as portrayed in my diagram – as a part of culture. According to Reformational philosophy the whole of our lives is religion, service to God or a substitute god. Religion and worldview, are both influenced by culture, they definitely have a cultural **side**. But is it correct to subsume them under the one concept of "culture" and in this way regard them **as such** as cultural phenomena?

2. **The worldviewish dimension** provides a perspective on the interrelated character of cosmic reality and our **place** in it. Stated metaphorically: a worldview provides us with eyes, ears, feet, hands and a mind to serve the real God (or a substitute) in this world.

### Two remarks

- In brief I see the distinction between religion and worldview and their interrelatedness as follows: The **difference** between the two is that religion is our relationship towards God, while worldview describes our relationship towards the world. But because we believe that this world belongs to God, we can never separate the two. The close **relationship** between the two becomes evident in the fact that our service to God does not happen in a sphere somewhere above, but manifests itself **in** this world!
- If religion is the **direction** towards God (or a god) and worldview indicates our **place** in creation, then we may say that the remainder of culture indicates our **task** or **calling**. **Culture is the historical manifestation of our religiously directed response to all**

## **God's mandates for life, as expressed in our understanding of creation and our place in it.**

3. The **"social" dimension**. Because I could not find a more appropriate term, I put "social" in quotation marks. It includes *inter alia* morals, arts, politics, economics, language, styles of thinking, the way our emotions are expressed as well as the different societal relationships, like marriage, family, the state, business and other institutions.
4. The **material or technical dimension** includes food, clothes, tools, machines, buildings, etc.
5. The **behavioural dimension** includes our habits, customs, and behaviour – our lifestyle.

As already stated, this diagram is not prescriptive, but merely a preliminary aid to try to explain the richness of the concept "culture". Let me mention something about its value as well as its limitations.

### **The value of the model**

- **It is integrated, holistic.** I deliberately put light, dotted (not solid) lines between the five different layers to indicate that we may distinguish them from each other, but can never clearly separate them. We should therefore neither judge a culture by isolating one facet nor try to change it by replacing only one aspect. The two-way arrows between the different layers emphasise that they are interrelated and have mutual influence on each other.
- **Visibility and describability.** The diagram indicates that not only the more visible aspects of a culture are important, but also its deeper, invisible core facets, like worldview and religion. This is to be kept in mind in spite of the fact that the outer, overt layers (e.g. an artefact or custom) are easier to describe, while the inner, covert aspects (e.g. worldview and religion) are much more difficult to define.
- **Cultural change.** The outer, "softer" layers of a culture usually change more easily. The "harder" core is more resistant to change. (An example: Africans wearing modern, Western clothes, while still believing in ancestor worship.)
- **The determining role of the core.** The heart or soul of a culture, to my mind, is its religion and worldview. It directs the outer, more visible cultural layers. Only in the light of a specific religion and worldview can we properly understand the outer cultural

manifestations. I therefore also believe that real, deep change in any culture is stimulated from its core.

### **Limitations of the model**

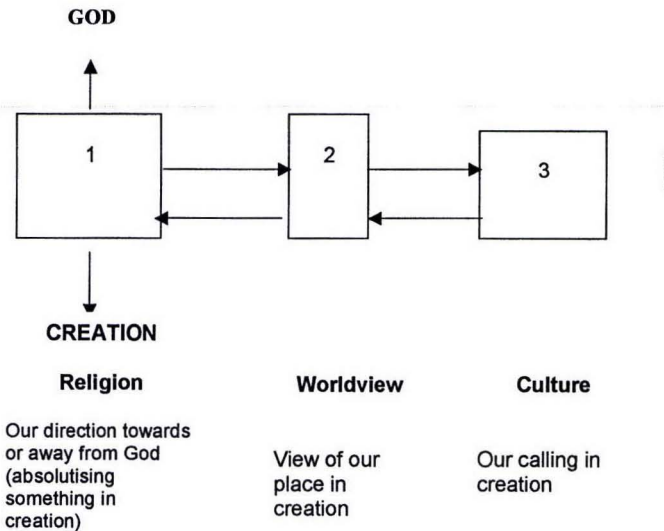
All these reservations are related to the fact that real life is always much more complicated than our schematic, theoretical models – irrespective of how sophisticated they may be. We should therefore never absolutise any model, but rather be willing to relativise it in the light of the complexities of reality.

- I would like to keep religion and worldview in the centre. As far as layers 3 to 5 are concerned, I have no order of priority in mind - in the sense that 3 is built on 2, 4 on 3 and 5 on 4. If you wish, you may move 4 (the material dimension) to position 3 (the social) or the behavioural (5) may be regarded as part of the present 3 (the social). In other words, keep in mind that it is merely a model and feel free to improve on it!
- My model should not encourage the idea that religion, worldview and other aspects of culture are static entities. Especially those who idealise the past tradition believe in a static culture. All cultures change, some slowly, others more rapidly. They do so by way of *inter alia* the following: (1) inheritance; (2) innovation; (3) the free borrowing or adoption from other cultures which implies adaptation (acculturation cannot be separated from inculturation) and (4) forced change from a foreign, imposed culture.
- Neither should my model create the impression of a homogenous or pure culture – the axiom of cultural purists. Culture is usually a hybrid or mixture – especially in our contemporary, multi-cultural world. According to development experts, an introvert culture does not provide the potential for development. Too much influence from outside, resulting in a lack of cultural identity, also proves to be detrimental to development, however.
- We cannot (physically) see a religion or worldview. Therefore we will have to derive their features from their more visible, concrete manifestations in the other aspects of a culture.
- Not only does religion and worldview influence culture, but - as indicated in our diagram by the arrows in both directions between the different cultural layers - the remainder of culture influences religion and worldview too. An example is the strong influence of contemporary secularist culture on different religions like traditional African religion, Islam and Christianity in Africa.

- Such a change caused by the influence of the outer layers of a culture on the centre may result in a complete “power shift” in the core. Thus, the original religious commitment could be destroyed and replaced. More often – at least initially – the result is a double (religious and worldviewish) core. Simply because of our sinfulness as Christians we may have a split religious and worldviewish loyalty. (An example is the Christian-national ideology behind apartheid in South Africa, which tended to cause a split between Christian belief and national patriotism.) We may also have a “divided soul” as a result of our contact with other, foreign cultures. (A common phenomenon in Africa because of the clash between traditional African and modern Western culture.)

We should therefore reckon with the fact that while older, “closed” (“primitive”) cultures had a single religious core, cultures may have more than one religious centre in the contemporary, “open”, multicultural world. It seems however, that one of them gradually tends to become dominant. It is noticeable in the case of secularism, which marginalises other religions so that they start functioning “outside” the core. They are not relevant to the **entire** culture, but their influence is limited to a small part, for example, in the case of Christians their “spiritual” or ecclesiastical life.

A visual summary of the above may be the following diagram, as long as we keep in mind that it cannot do justice to a very complex issue:



The two-way arrows are very important: Religion and worldview influence (the remainder of) culture, but culture (for instance socio-economic-political circumstances) also influences worldview and religion.

One may experiment with more models to try to explain the difference as well as relationship between religion, worldview and culture. Every model has advantages as well as drawbacks, because it could be misunderstood. It is time to move on to other important aspects of our topic.

### **Cultural diversity**

Today, more than at any previous time in history, we are confronted with cultural diversity. People in Kinshasha or Nairobi are different from those in London or New York. They make love differently (for instance, some African tribes believe that kissing is only done by monkeys), get married in different ways, buy and sell differently, live, die and are finally buried in different ways. How is this great variety to be explained? How should we evaluate different cultures?

We have already defined culture as our task of answering to the real God (or a presumed god) according to a specific worldview that describes our place in the world. Our place in creation is determined by four basic relationships: towards God/god, nature, our fellow human beings and ourselves. However, when considering these relationships, different worldviews tend to overemphasise one relationship. Consequently they interpret the other three relationships in the light of the one they absolutised. Africa, for example, emphasises the community and interprets the other relationships in the light of its communalistic worldview. The West stresses the individual and "reads" the remaining relationships from its individualistic perspective.

In previous publications (Van der Walt, 1997a, 1997b) my conclusion had been that every culture contains something good and beautiful, because it emphasises an important relationship. At the same time every culture has its "valleys" and "blind spots", because it does not acknowledge the equality of these four basic relationships.

I can therefore not accept ethnocentrism – neither Eurocentrism nor Afrocentrism – which believes that its own culture is the only true and wholesome culture. Neither can I accept present-day relativism that is of the opinion that, because cultures and their cultural traits or features are equally true or good, they should not be judged, criticised or changed. I don't deny that it is very difficult indeed to decide what is good or bad in a specific culture – especially in one's own – but I still believe it should be done.

Let us first have a very brief look at the second main concept, viz. worldview.

#### 4.2 Worldview and ideology

Venter (1997:41–45) correctly distinguishes between **worldpictures** and **worldviews**. We can for example picture the world as an organism (traditional Africa) or as a machine (the modern West). A worldpicture (which describes what **is**) has the tendency to develop in a worldview (what **ought to be**), which gives direction and meaning to life. In the case of a worldpicture reality is viewed as **similar to** an organism or a machine, while in the case of a worldview reality **is really** an organism/machine – the picture became a design, standard or model according to which reality has to be structured.

Human beings know that they are tiny, transitory beings compared to the vast, age-enduring universe. They therefore search for meaning and direction, but realise that they cannot find it in the everyday world. To find meaning, to know what lies beyond their own brief stay on earth, they have to transcend their own limitations.

According to Venter (2000:38) there are two fundamental ways in which worldviews come about. Either one reaches the “beyond” by way of one’s own imagination, or the “beyond” reaches out to you by way of revelation. Because human imagination will not be able to form a notion of the beyond, the first approach usually claims that what is beyond everyday experience is similar (analogous) to what we experience daily. (Reality is like an organism or a machine, like the examples above.) The second approach, however, accepts in faith a revelation from outside of the beyond.

Either we try to transcend our own limited perspective by our own human potential (we declare ourselves divine) or our view of reality is fundamentally determined by a (divine) revelation of what transcends our experience. These are the two fundamental ways in which worldviews originate. (For more about the nature, structure and functions of worldviews, cf. Van der Walt, 1994:39-55.)

Of the three worldviews to be compared later on in this chapter, the modern Western and traditional African worldviews belong to the first category, viz. they are not built on divine revelation. However, the third worldview, the Christian, is based on God’s revelation.

As mentioned already, a worldview is our perspective on created reality. It is an indication of our place in the world in which we have to fulfil our cultural task, the direction of which is provided by the will (laws) of something or Someone regarded as our absolute authority in life. A worldview functions like a map, it provides **orientation**; like a compass, it gives **direction** from a deep religious commitment.

A worldview also calls for action. It should not only help us to **understand** reality better, but also to **deal** with it correctly. Its beneficial results will determine its value.

The danger of a worldview – even a Christian one – is that it can degenerate into an ideology. An ideology is an absolutised, hardened, closed, dogmatic orientation about the world, our place and cultural calling. In essence it is not prepared to see the world as it really is. It forces reality into its own preconceived mould and wants to change it accordingly. It cannot see our place and task correctly, because it (partly or totally) rejects the direction provided by God in his central commandment of love. It lives according to its own norms.

Basically therefore, a worldview and an ideology have the same **structure**, but different **directions**. A worldview is something normal and healthy; an ideology can be very dangerous. (How a **Christian** worldview looks like will be discussed in detail in chapter 20. See also bibliography at end of this chapter.)

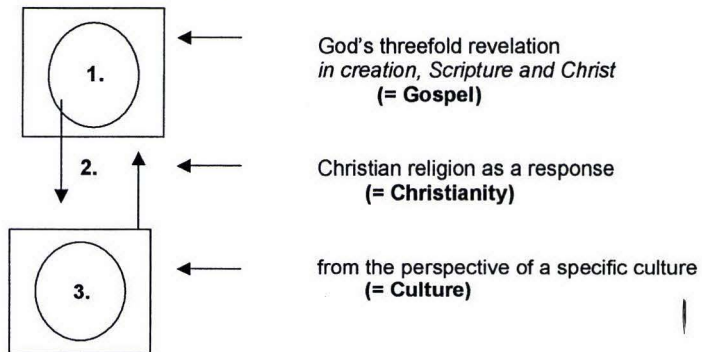
### 4.3 Religion

In the explanation of my diagram of concentric circles, I have already given the following definition of religion: it is the central directedness of all human life towards the real or presumed ultimate source (God/god) of meaning and authority. I will not elaborate further on this definition.

In this section I want to deal with the relationship between religion and (the remainder of) culture. Our diagram has already indicated that religion is not something disconnected from culture but part of it. We have also indicated that (the rest of) culture is “coloured” by its religious core. But the obverse is also true: other cultural facets may influence the religious core.

Here we do not focus on religion and culture **in general**, but specifically on **Christian** religion and culture. The relationship between Christianity and culture is not the same as the relationship between Gospel and culture. The Gospel is the infallible Word of God, while Christianity is our fallible, human response to God’s Word. People often fail to distinguish clearly between the two.

The following diagram will help to distinguish between them:



We will first deal with the relationship between Gospel and culture and then with the relationship between Christianity and culture.

### **Gospel and culture**

Because the Gospel (of the Old and New Testament) is given to us in the words and histories of different people through many ages, it is not a culture-free revelation. It is always embedded or embodied in cultural "clothes" or forms. God met the people of Israel in their own culture. They were not without culture. Apart from their own language, they had their own culturally defined family life, laws, government, ways of commerce and types of worship. God did not provide them with a "sacred" language or culture!

In the Old Testament the Gospel appeared in the "clothes" of the cultures of the Near East. In the New Testament, especially the Book of Acts, we see the gradual transition from an embodiment of the Gospel in the culture of Judaism to a more Western, Hellenistic form – the dominant culture of the Roman Empire.

Apart from this **relative continuity** between Gospel and culture we do, however, see a **radical discontinuity** between the two. Without a degree of continuity, the Gospel could never be relevant. Without discontinuity, it would not be able to challenge the culture in which it was embodied. It would become syncretised. The Biblical message is clear: The Gospel associated itself with different cultures - never to be domesticated nor to become the captive of these cultures - but to liberate and transform them!

The Bible abounds with such examples. Many of the Old Testament laws were derived from the environment in which Israel lived. At the same time, however, the Old Testament



**torah** changed the harsh, inhuman laws of, for instance, Eshnunna (an Acadic Law Book of 1800 BC) and that of Hammurabi (a Babylonian Law Book of 1726 BC). New laws on slaves, women, the poor, foreigners and excessive wealth indicates how traditional laws from the surrounding cultures were “softened” to acknowledge human dignity.

The same pattern is repeated in the New Testament where the décor changed to Greek-Roman civilisation: this culture was reformed and not simply accepted. An example is the power of the **pater familias**. Men had almost absolute power over their wives, children and slaves. In Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9, Colossians 3:18 – 4:1 and 1 Peter 2:13 – 3:7 these inhuman customs are replaced with new guidelines for Christians.

### **Christianity and culture**

The Gospel should determine our Christian religion. Therefore the same principle which we discovered in the relationship between Gospel and culture, should also be applied in the relationship between Christian religion and culture: **relative continuity** and **radical discontinuity**. We will first pay attention to relative continuity.

We have to serve God **in** and **with** our culture. We cannot do it outside our own culture. We should not try to do it in the garb of a foreign culture, because it will not touch us deep in our hearts and minds; it will not be relevant to our situation. There should be a **relative continuity** between the culture in which we were brought up and our conversion to the Gospel as Christians.

A problem arises, however, when the **relative** is omitted from “relative continuity” and only **continuity** remains.

The gradual Christianisation of the West resulted in the Westernisation of Christianity (first it was Hellenisation, then Germanisation). This was a normal process. The trouble, however, was that Christianity became too comfortable in its Western clothes. In many respects it was so accommodating that it conformed completely to Western culture. The price paid, was that, in such cases, it became more Western than Christian!

The situation turned even more complex when Western missionaries proclaimed the Gospel to non-Western regions like Africa. There are many exceptions, but many made the following three mistakes: (1) they did not always distinguish clearly enough between the Gospel and its Western cultural embodiment; (2) they did not fully realise that Western culture has good and bad aspects; (3) they did not see much good in non-Western cultures. (See chapters 1 and 2 of this book.)

In order to warn against the dangers of syncretism, much attention was therefore paid to African Traditional Religion and culture. Syncretism (excessive emphasis on the element of continuity) was regarded as something that happens when **other** cultures (like the African) encounters Christianity and its Gospel. There was little awareness amongst Western Christians, churches and theologians of the fact that their brand of Christianity may have failed to challenge the assumptions of their own Western culture. To what extent may Western Christianity also be called syncretistic?!

Let me use the metaphor of bread (the Gospel) packed in a plastic bag (Western culture) to explain. The essence of the Gospel was often not clearly distinguished from the Western packing – not only by the West, but also by Africans who swallowed the unhealthy plastic with the bread!

In the relationship between Christianity and culture we have thus far only discussed one Biblical principle, namely relative continuity. We have also indicated what happens if the **relative** (in relative continuity) is not honoured. This issue, however, also arises because this first Biblical principle has to be applied jointly with the second principle, viz. **radical discontinuity**.

### **Three possible positions**

If applied jointly, the first principle guarantees **relevance**. The second provides a **challenge**. If only the first principle is applied, it may result in **syncretism** or **uncritical accommodation**. If only the second principle is applied, the result will be the **isolation** of Christianity from its surrounding culture. Consequently, it cannot really challenge its cultural environment. Only when we apply both principles, will it be possible to be **part of a culture** as Christians and at the same time to **reform it from inside**.

In summary then, we have the following options:

- **conformity** between Christianity and the culture of which it is part, because it stresses the continuity between the two;
- the **isolation** of Christianity from culture, thus emphasising discontinuity and
- **reformation or transformation** of culture (and Christianity as part thereof), emphasising simultaneously relative continuity and absolute discontinuity.

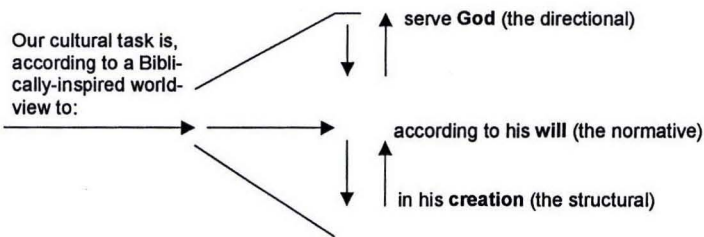
When we study the history of Christianity we encounter these three positions over and over again. We find these positions, for example, in the Christianity of the first centuries when Christians had to work out their relationship towards Greek and Roman cultures.

Today the same basic positions are adopted in the relationship between Christianity and traditional African culture (cf Bediako, 1990). The isolationist position is very difficult to uphold. It is in fact impossible to maintain. The Christian religion is always part of a culture; we can never operate as Christians outside a specific culture. Therefore the representatives of the isolationist position are few compared to those propagating the accommodation strategy. This very popular attitude in Africa believes that traditional African culture is a stepping-stone, a preparation for Christianity and the Gospel. The Gospel and Christianity accordingly merely complete, perfect, fulfil what was already present in traditional African culture and religion (cf. section 8 of chapter 3).

The third (and correct viewpoint) is neither to **accommodate**, nor to **flee**, but to **reform** culture. It is surely no easy option. That is perhaps why we find so few examples to guide us. I was privileged to get to know the Reformational tradition in philosophy, started by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck in the 19th century and continued by scholars like H. Dooyeweerd and D.H.Th. Vollenhoven in the Netherlands and their many successors all over the world during the twentieth century. The Reformational position is a Biblically-based viewpoint. It provides us with a really liberating perspective on the relationship between Christianity and culture. (For more detail, see chapter 20.)

A second important insight of the Reformational tradition is the importance of creation. We have to serve God in his creation. A supercreational, otherworldly relationship to God is not Biblical.

A third valuable perspective is that this service has to be done according to God's will. In the form of a diagram:



The vertical two-way arrows indicate the close relationship between the three realities (God, his will and his creation): they can be distinguished but never separated from each other.

#### 4.4 A brief overview of the development of worldviews

We need to understand the differences between the African, Western and Christian worldviews at their deepest level. A simplified review of the history of (Western) philosophy can be of help. We approach history with the following three questions: (1) How did a specific period view the **divine** (God or gods)? (2) How did it see **visible reality** (the creational)? (3) How did it visualise the **laws or norms** governing reality (the directional)? The history of philosophy is simplified to only four main periods.

- **The ancient pre-Christian world**

It seems as if all over the ancient world different peoples adhered to more or less the same kind of worldview. This worldview is of great importance because it shows remarkable similarities with the traditional African worldview.

The ancient Greeks had no other way of explaining the movements of the heavenly bodies and other phenomena in reality than by viewing them according to self-moving things within their own experience, like the human body. This perspective of describing the world as a living being is called an **organismic** worldview.

Reality was viewed as a cyclical stream of life. Out of this stream emerged the individual forms of plant, beast and man, which are born, mature, perish and come to life again. The life-stream is ceaselessly repeated. Time was also seen as **cyclical** and not linear.

In this "all is one" worldview no clear distinction is made between the material and spiritual. This idea that the world is full of spirits is called **animism**. The consequence was all kinds of **occult** practices to gain the favour and influence the spirit-world.

The divine was not a concrete form or personality. The nature gods were always fluid. Instead of one deity, they believed in a countless multiplicity of divine powers, bound up with the great variety of natural phenomena. We may call this viewpoint **polytheism** (belief in many gods). It may also be indicated as **pan(en)theism**, because no clear distinction is made between the god(s) and visible reality. The universe as an eternal living being is divine! Some use the term **holistic** to describe this viewpoint, because everything is connected with everything else.

Not only the gods are not clearly distinguished from the visible world, but there is also no clear distinction of the laws/norms that should guide human conduct. This results in **relativism** – there is no radical antithesis between correct and wrong, good and bad.

According to an organismic worldview individuals are viewed as “parts” of the larger whole on which they are fully dependent for their life and well-being – in the same way an organ is dependent upon the living body of which it is a part. The interests of the whole always takes precedence over that of the parts. The laws/norms according to which the individual should live, is derived from the community. The consequence is an almost complete control of the lives of individuals by the tribe and its ancestors. The result is **totalitarianism**.

During the phase of Greek thought of about 500 B.C. – 100 A.D. the nature gods of the previous period were replaced by culture gods. As spiritual beings they are now more clearly distinguished from the material, visible world. These now gods (like the Delphic god, Apollo) are also regarded as the origin of the laws to be obeyed by humans.

- **Christian thought during the age of the Church Fathers and Middle Ages of about 100-1500 A.D.**

This period is characterised by an effort to reach a synthesis between pagan Greek and Christian-Biblical ideas. In spite of this unfortunate accommodation, a much clearer distinction is made between the one, true God of the Bible and the visible world which He has created. It is also accepted that the will of God provides us with clear guidelines for life.

- **The Modern, anti-Christian, secular worldview (about 1500 to today)**

Since the Renaissance (1300-1600) the influence of Christian faith steadily declined. In the West, God was gradually ousted from peoples' lifeview and lifestyle. If we identify God and his worship with “the spiritual”, it is clear that the West not only distinguished the spiritual world from the material, but rejected the spiritual world. This becomes evident from the new type of worldview which slowly developed since the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the West.

While ancient people preferred to view the universe as a organism (see above), Western man, because of his fascination with all kinds of newly invented mechanical devices, started to view the world as an automaton. This **worldpicture** developed into a **worldview** with normative implications. We call it the **mechanistic** worldview. The universe is not divine any longer (ancient pantheism), or God distinguished from creation (as during the Christian era). Now God/god is only the engineer (which invented and made the world as a machine). Later on He/he merely became the maintenance mechanic who, only when necessary, would “interfere” and “repair” or “service” the world. This theory is called **deism**. Still later on in Western history God/god became totally redundant. He could

retire as engineer or mechanic, because he was not needed any more in a world run by itself and explained without any “beyond”. First the idea of God was considered without any relevance and later on God himself was declared dead. Today people don’t even use the word “god” any more. We call this **secularism**.

Because God/god died in the thinking and actions of contemporary Westerners, his divine laws can no longer be directional to mankind. The human being – usually the individual – became his/her own law or norm. We call this **autonomy**.

This mechanistic picture and view was soon transferred to other areas of life besides the explanation of the physical universe. Physiological and social processes were also explained mechanistically.

While the original organismic worldview emphasised the whole (society) and regarded the parts (individuals) as of less importance, the new mechanistic worldview accepted exactly the opposite viewpoint: the individual is of primary importance. Like the parts of a machine that can be removed, repaired and replaced, individuals have a relative but important independence. This worldview, therefore, rejects the dominance by a social whole, like the tribe, church or state. It wants to reduce the power of the state in favour of the freedom of the individual and the private sphere. We call this **individualism**.

However, because the contemporary mechanistic, individualistic worldview overemphasises the economic aspect of life (the so-called free market mechanism), it again – like the organismic worldview – obstructs any sense of institutional differentiation. Everything is commercialised, reduced to money and profit. The freedom of individuals and weaker institutions in society is lost in a world of economic totalitarianism. Simple egoism becomes the norm.

While the African organismic worldview enforces social **integrationism**, the Western mechanistic worldview takes an **isolationist** stance, promoting an individualistic, private sector approach with a strong **economistic** slant. Both are therefore one-sided or reductionistic in nature. A genuine Christian worldview will reject both. It rejects the organismic totalitarian view of society and advocates the differentiation of social institutions. However, it also rejects the isolationist perspective of individualism and promotes integration. These two sides of a Reformational philosophy of society (differentiation and integration) do not indicate a simple compromise between the organismic and mechanistic worldviews or a dialectical relationship. Differentiation simply recognises that every societal relationship or institution has its own, specific task to fulfil in

a whole network of relationships, while integration implies that every societal relationship does not exist in isolation, but it has to fulfill its own task in a way sensitive to the whole network of societal relationships.

- **Contemporary post-Christian spirituality**

Arriving at the end of the previous century, it seemed as if the West completed a full circle during 2500 years. At least some Western thinkers clearly indicated their dissatisfaction with the mechanistic, individualistic and materialist worldview. The extreme poverty of the cold, scientific, economic Western culture became evident. All kinds of efforts (like the New Age Movement) tried to put "spirituality" back into Western civilisation. Emphasis should no longer be on diversity but on the unity of everything. Everything – including the human being – is divine (a new kind of pantheism). Reality is a holistic organism, following a cyclical route. Occult practices are accepted and no longer regarded as superstition. Relativism in all areas of life has replaced the old certainties. This kind of worldview shows striking similarities with the ancient, pre-Christian worldview described above as well as the traditional African worldview.

- **The Biblical worldview**

The Biblical worldview, unlike the organismic (Africa) or the mechanistic (the West), is not based on human imagination or speculation, but on divine revelation. Therefore it simply accepts in faith that God exists. It furthermore teaches a clear (ontological) distinction between God and everything created. Nothing in creation is divine (a rejection of pantheism) and nothing of God is creational. At the same time a worldview based on Gods revelation teaches a close (religious) relationship between God and his creation (a rejection of Western deism and atheism). God is good and He cares for creation and sustains it daily. God also did not leave us in the dark on the question of the direction of our lives. His will applies to all creatures, in the form of natural laws to matter, plants and animals and in the form of normative laws in the case of human beings. We can therefore know what is good or bad, right or wrong.

\* \* \*

With these broad outlines we have probed the deepest levels of the Western, African and Biblical worldviews. We are ready now to compare them in more detail.

## 4.5 The six components of the Western worldview

Every worldview consists of at least six components or elements: (1) a concept of God/a god (religious orientation); (2) specific norms or values; (3) a view on being human; (4) a notion of ideal community life; (5) a view of nature and (6) a concept of time and history.

I like to think of these components in terms of the image of a tree: (1) it is rooted in a specific type of **soil** (= religious orientation towards God/a god), (2) from which its **roots** (=values/norms) draw the necessary nourishment. (3) Its **trunk** symbolises its view of being human; (4) its **branches** its idea of community; (5) its **leaves** its view of nature and (6) the **fruits** that the tree bears, symbolises the concept of time and history.

I prefer this image because it clearly indicates the interrelatedness and interdependence between these six worldview components. One's norms, for example, are determined by what one regards as one's highest authority – God or idols. One's view of being human is also determined by one's idea of the absolute – more and more you resemble the God/god you serve. The outcome is that you create a community according to your own concept of being human.

I am aware of the fact that the term "Western worldview" implies a generalisation, since we do not encounter one single worldview in the Western world. What I am specifically referring to is the worldview of the northern part of the world – Northern Europe and North America. This worldview was predominant during the colonialism of the past (political imperialism) and the neo-colonialism (economic imperialism) of the present. It was transplanted in the form of "development" to the Southern countries. In spite of the fact that the Christian God was declared dead in contemporary Western culture, we can deduce the West's concept of a god from, its ideas about development for instance.

### 4.5.1 Concept of a god

Different scholars have already revealed the religious character of Western development ideals. Some of the religious traits are the following: (1) The promise of a not yet visible, but better future (idea of salvation), (2) towards which the world is guided by the development experts (the "priests"), (3) providing precise prescriptions (norms), (4) which should not be questioned (because it is the only truth, the only way towards life). (5) In order to attain this all-important goal, it is considered a sacred duty to eliminate all "sinful" obstacles (like traditional cultures and religions). Unconditional obedience is required: question the Western way of development, and you are automatically regarded as a modern-day atheist!



Two additional characteristics of this "religion" is that it is (6) a **secular** religion – the real God of the Bible has no place in it – and (7) a **materialistic** religion.

In general terms we may say that, while Africa is sometimes still **pre-Christian** in its worldview, the Western worldview today reveals a predominantly **post-Christian** nature. And, while the African worldview emphasises the **spiritual**, in the West the emphasis is on **material things**. In Africa one is not considered "civilised" if one doesn't reckon with and stay in tune with the spirit world. By contrast, in the contemporary Western world, one is only deemed civilised (developed) when one possesses enough. Despite the fact that Africa may not yet be Christian (in worldviewish terms) and the West not Christian any more (in other words that both adhere to non-Christian worldviews), their divergent religious emphases (on the spiritual versus the material) play a very important role in their worldviews. As we will see, it results in a head-on clash.

Finally, in this contemporary type of Western materialism (8) the economic aspect of reality (money, profit, wealth, and possessions) is absolutised. We may call it an **economistic** worldview, serving the god Mammon. It is, furthermore, (9) a (neo-) **capitalistic** form of economism. In Reformational circles much has already been written about this worldview. There is no need to repeat these valuable, penetrating critiques. It has, for instance, become clear that the so-called free market of global neo-capitalism can by no means be called "free"!

#### **4.5.2 Normative concepts**

Words that occur regularly in Western language are **competition, progress, growth, achievement, production** and **consumption**. Viewed from a Reformational perspective, all these words indicate **things**. They should, therefore, be subjected to **norms**, evaluated in the light of values. As such, these things cannot be regarded as directing norms/values.

Our most basic critique on the Western worldview is its **subjectivistic** nature; the fact that it does not clearly distinguish between **things** and **norms**, between what *is* and what **ought** to be.

"Competition" may serve as an illustration. The concept as such cannot be good. In a normative evaluation we have to distinguish between good and bad competition. Despite some beneficial results, many writers have indicated the bad and even brutal sides of the contemporary competition mania. Finally it boils down to the "law of the jungle", the "survival of the fittest" - wrongly regarded as the "best". If one cannot count one's

economic success, one simply does not count any more! One then becomes a dropout with no self-respect left.

Never-ending competition not only ruins human relationships, but is also no guarantee of real quality. Many authors have indicated that it is not even economically viable to eliminate all opposition! The greatest danger, however, is that competition is not only regarded as a means towards an end, but has itself been elevated to the status of a norm.

The dominant forces of the West are greed, self-interest, selfishness and egoism. All these norms, we as Christians know, clash with God's central and basic commandment to love God more than anything in this world and to love our fellow humans as ourselves.

#### **4.5.3 View on being human**

The contemporary Western view of man tends to result in a very reductionistic anthropology. It has lost the broader view of man as a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional being. Man is reduced to: (1) an economic being (economism); (2) the individual aspect of his existence (individualism); (3) a rational-scientific being (scientism) and (4) a consumer of things that provide immediate satisfaction (hedonism). This Promethean man appreciates and uncritically accepts everything (e.g. technology) that may contribute towards his power to control, dominate and exploit reality.

In all fairness I should emphasise that many individuals in the West are protesting today against this one-dimensional view of man, which reduces not only the human being to profit, acquisition and power, but everything else as well. A commercialised society like this is a sick society, sick to the depths of its cultural being. It is culturally underdeveloped. It implies alienation amidst plenty – at least as dehumanising as alienation in poverty.

It becomes clear how "poor" the West really is, especially when compared with the cultures of the "Third World". In traditional Africa, for instance, the notion "poor" does not mean that one does not have a large house, an expensive car or earn a huge salary. It does not in the first instance indicate a lack of material means (food, clothing, housing etc.), but to have no relatives, no children, no social relations – to be a "social orphan". He who is blessed with many children and close social relationships, is really rich!

#### **4.5.4 View on community or society**

The West's individualistic view of human nature leads to an individualistic view of community life. Its basic characteristics are exactly the opposite of the African communalistic view of society, as will become clear from the following:

In the case of individualism the **basic objective** is first individual liberty, then equality, while communalism's primary emphasis is on equality (unity, solidarity, brotherhood).

The **basic points of view** can be described as follows: Individualism ascribes a higher ontic status to the individual (individuals are more important than the societal life of the group). Communalism believes exactly the opposite: a higher ontic status for society (the whole is more important than its "parts" or individual members). As a consequence of the overestimation of the individual and an underestimation of the associative nature of human life in the West, societal relationships (marriage, family, the state etc.) are viewed as mere artificial, contractual collections of individuals. As a result of communalism's overestimation of the community and underestimation of individuals, the individual finds meaning and fulfilment only by belonging to the larger group. Finally, individualism believes in individual human autonomy, while communalism emphasises obedience to the collective will of the people.

According to individualism, all human activities (education, politics, commerce, etc.) are geared towards the enhancement of the individual. This viewpoint therefore favours the rights of the individual. In contrast, communalism views all human activities primarily as a means to serve the purposes of the community at large. Not rights, but social duties, are of paramount importance.

In the case of individualism, one has a kind of mechanistic, atomistic relationship between individuals and between different societal relationships. In the case of communalism one usually finds one overarching social institution or megastructure, like the tribe in primal cultures. Individualism basically destroys the unity of mankind. Communalism destroys plurality and diversity.

It is important, however, to note that communalism not only has a totalitarian society as end **result**. Totalitarianism is the logical outcome of the consistent application of communalism's basic **starting point**. In the case of individualism, totalitarianism is the consequence of a more indirect route. Not only communalism, but also liberalism finally has to face the danger of tyranny. The basic objective of liberty and equality (see above) proves to be a pipedream.

#### **4.5.5 View of nature**

The Western idea of nature (the non-human environment of matter, plants and animals) can again be described much clearer when we compare it with other viewpoints. In some Eastern (pantheistic) worldviews, nature is regarded as divine and should therefore be

revered, sometimes even worshipped. In Africa (with its holistic, organistic worldview), man is viewed as part of nature. He should treat it with respect. When he has to interfere, it should be done very cautiously. In the modern Western worldview, nature is viewed more or less as an object, separate from man, his opponent. Nature should be conquered, used and even exploited to the benefit of the human race.

#### 4.5.6 View of time and history

The essence of the contemporary Western concept of time can be summarised as follows (for more details, see Van der Walt, 1997a:51-71, as well as 1999:182-184): Time is a commodity "outside" man "through" which he moves. He has to use and fill it. This is evident from expressions like **time lost, saved, made up, passed and time wasted**. Time is furthermore something abstract, independent of ordinary life, measured and determined by a clock on the wall or a watch on one's arm.

The implications of this view of time are, on the one hand, impoverishing because it reduces man to a slave of time. It results in the well-known rat race, tense human relationships and alienation from one another. On the other hand, it leads to punctuality, thorough planning and tight schedules, e.g. the effective use of time.

Only when viewed from other cultures' perspectives, can we clearly see both the benefits as well as the dangers of this conception of time. According to many other cultures (including African culture), Westerners idolise time and do not really know how to enjoy it!

Time, according to the West, moves from the past, through the present towards the future (i.e. a linear concept and not a cyclical concept of time as in some other cultures). Thus its close relationship to the Western idea of history becomes evident. In contrast with Africa, which emphasises and respects the past, the eyes of Western man is directed towards the future. While the Middle Ages harboured a pessimistic view about the future (traditional Africa also does so), the contemporary West is generally optimistic about life to come. This future-orientation (of which I can unfortunately not trace the philosophical roots and historical development in this chapter) is very evident in the Western idea of progress - a secularisation of earlier Christian eschatological expectations.

In summary, the six basic components of the contemporary Western worldview are the following: (1) To be able to achieve the highest goal of material welfare (concept of **god**), (2) one has to obey the economic **laws** like competition, production and effectiveness. Thus (3) **man**, driven by self-interest, creates (4) a commercialised **society** in which (5) **nature** is exploited and (6) a future of continuous **progress** and development is achieved.

We have already learned (by way of comparison with the West) much about the traditional African worldview. In the next main section it will be our main focus.

#### **4.6 The six components of the traditional African worldview**

As was the case with **the** Western worldview in the previous section, "**the** African worldview" also implies a generalisation. The expression "traditional African (worldview)" needs some explanation: (1) Does a **traditional** worldview still exist? (2) Can one speak of a **single** African worldview?

The answer to the first question – by Africans themselves – is that, in spite of the fact that the traditional African culture and worldview was suppressed and to a certain degree also modified (acculturation and inculturation) by Westernisation, Christianisation and Islamisation, it has survived the onslaught and is well and alive.

The answer to the second question is that, in spite of a great local variety – an estimated 2 000 different ethnic groups! - Sub-Saharan Africa has a remarkable number of common cultural characteristics. We may, therefore, speak of an African culture and worldview.

Before we describe the six components of this worldview, two general remarks are necessary.

##### **A holistic, animistic, pre-Christian worldview**

In his excellent book **Christianity and African gods** (1999) Yusufu Turaki indicates that the African holistic reality is a spiritual reality. This is in sharp contrast to Western materialism already described. Basically everything is of a spiritual nature. This is the reason why the African worldview was in the past described as "animistic". Recognition of and participation in the spirit world is of the utmost importance to the African people (see also Steyne, 1989).

We have to add to "holistic" and "animistic" also the word "pre-Christian". The African worldview is not yet fully Christian. In too many cases Christianity was simply **added to** traditional African religion. The majority of Africans are mere **adherents of** Christianity and not real **converts**. They have **adapted** Christianity to traditional religion.

We already have many churches and Christians in Africa. What we urgently need is a fundamental conversion and the much broader kingdom perspective of the Bible. A real Christian worldview still has to be developed in black Africa. It will have to be a worldview with the correct **focus** or religious direction (real, deep conversion), as well as the correct **scopus** (of serving God in every area of life).

This is the only way to escape the pietistic, apocalyptic, “gospel of wealth” and other types of Christianity imported from the US, which are regrettably spreading like wildfire on the continent. All of them are Christian “narcotics” rather than Christian “tonics”. They do not encourage challenging the **status quo**, but rather promote submissive acceptance.

### **A communalistic worldview**

As already indicated, in contrast to Western individualism, Africa emphasises the community. While many Western people would argue: “We are, because I am” (the community exists because it is constituted of individuals), the typical African would say: “I am, because we are” (I share in the community, therefore I exist). Many beautiful proverbs in all the various African languages testify to this basic perspective. (Cf. Van der Walt, 1997a:29-32 for the various implications of such a worldview in contrast to that of the West and also the following chapter (5) for a detailed exposition on African communalism versus Western individualism.) Keeping this basic communalistic orientation in mind, we will be able to grasp its six worldviewish components better. Much of what has already been said in the previous chapter (3) about African Traditional Religion is relevant in this summary of the traditional African worldview.

#### **4.6.1 Concept of a god**

As we already know from the previous chapter, most Africans believe in a Supreme Being. He is, however, an aloof god, a **deus remotus**, not much interested or involved in his creation. He is (due to the holistic character of this worldview) also not clearly distinguishable from the all-encompassing spiritual reality.

Because this impersonal god is so far removed from human beings, He is approached only in exceptional cases of great crisis. Usually man will take refuge in other resorts. He is not – as in the case of Christianity – the Highest Authority, Who should be obeyed. Neither is man viewed as a steward, responsible to God.

#### **4.6.2 View of community**

The religious life of Africans is not something isolated, focused on a god. It is an inherent part of their communal life. The community does not only include living human beings, but also the spirit world of demi-gods and the ancestors or “living dead”. Important members of society who passed away are not really dead. They continue to play a decisive role in the lives of all the members of the clan and tribe. They – not a god or semi-gods – have to be revered to ensure the well-being of everybody. Different kinds of mediators (like

witchdoctors) fulfil a very important role. They provide the link between the living and the "dead".

"Salvation" to Africans, therefore, does not depend on a god. Salvation means to belong to an extended family, clan and tribe and to live in peace with the spirit world. "Hell" to Africans will be the opposite: not to belong to a community or not to be at ease with the spirit world.

The powerful, omnipresent spirit world is inseparable from their daily lives. It is a very unpredictable world. Because of man's lack of power, the spirits have to be manipulated and continuously pacified. Most Africans live in fear of a host of spirits. And this fear causes a fatalistic attitude.

#### **4.6.3 View of man**

In the dominant Western view, **individuality** defines the person. Consequently, society is the end-product of the collective will of individual persons. An individual may attach himself to or detach himself from a community, without affecting his personhood, because the latter is defined by personal individuality.

By contrast, according to the traditional African, the **social group**, his membership of a community, defines the person. Individuals become persons through membership of a community. They cease to be persons if detached from the community.

We should not romanticise any one of these viewpoints, as both of them are one-sided distortions. The West reduces communality to a social contract or artefact that prevents real, profound experience of communal life. Africa, on the other hand, produces its own distortion by suppressing human individuality, subordinating it to communal life.

Neither in the West, nor in Africa can a healthy communal life ultimately be attained. The West tries to establish communal life through organised group activities. These substitutes for authentic communal life press the human person into organisational moulds that inhibit individuality. But ironically, by obscuring individuality, Africa too, prevents a healthy development of communal life. Defined by membership of only one community, the human person can only be a marginal participant in any other community. If human life is enclosed within all-encompassing community life, rich communal diversity cannot unfold.

From a Biblical perspective – which equally asserts individuality and communality – human identity neither arises from within the individual nor stems from the community. God created human beings with both an individual and a communal **facet**. We are **defined**

neither by our individuality nor by our communality. Individuality and communality are two aspects or qualities of the multi-dimensional human being. It is preferable to say that a person *has* individuality or speak of a person as **having** the quality of communality, rather than saying a person *is* an individual or **is** a communal being. Furthermore, individuality and communality are complementary. The one cannot develop normally without the other. Healthy individuality will look for fulfilment in communal life. Obversely, a healthy communal life will nurture the individuality of its members.

#### **4.6.4 View of norms or values**

Every aspect of the African worldview is coloured by its emphasis on the community. It has a communalistic notion of religion, of being human, of norms and also – as we will soon see – of time.

The African traditional worldview does not regard the laws that give guidance and direction to life as the commandments of a Supreme Being. While the West favours individual autonomy, Africa derives its norms from the community; it favours communal autonomy. We may call it **the law of kinship**. The family, clan and tribe (all those related by ties of blood) are the highest law, determining what is good or bad. Traditional Africans have to live in harmony with each other, the spirit-world and nature.

Therefore they do not acknowledge universal norms for one's behaviour towards other human beings. Only an insider has privileges and rights. An outsider has neither rights nor enjoys any protection. Anything done to him/her has no moral value. Discriminating against or even killing a person from another tribe, is not considered a crime or sin. Good and bad, right or wrong can only be committed against a member of one's own ethnic group. Anything outside the kinship system is labelled the "outside world" of strangers where no rules apply and where "the end justifies the means" or "might is right".

#### **4.6.5 View of nature**

Africa does not clearly distinguish between a creator and its creation, as already indicated. It is not acquainted with the Biblical idea of creation. What is, has always been. As a result "nature" is not something isolated from the divine, separate from the spirit world. Nature is full of spirits (pantheism).

This explains the traditional African attitude of reverence towards nature. As part of nature, man should live in harmony with and not interfere with his natural environment. When he has to do so, he should first consult the spirits, especially his ancestors. Land, for instance, is not merely regarded as valuable property that could be sold at will (as in the West) – it



belongs to the ancestors. As indicated above, this attitude towards nature is more or less the opposite of the Western view which sees nature as something separate from and even in opposition to man, to be conquered, used and exploited.

In this instance, too, the Bible provides an alternative: neither **reverence** for nature (because it is not divine), nor **exploitation** of nature (because it is God's creation, not a mere object), but careful **stewardship**, both using and protecting it.

#### 4.6.6 View of time and history

Communalism also determines this component of Africa's worldview. Time cannot be separated from human relations. One has to **make** time for one's fellow human beings, while the emphasis of the West will be on the **use** of time for a specific task. Time is consequently also something concrete connected to specific situations. Africans usually have plenty of time available for social interaction, while time is considered a scarce commodity in the Western world. Furthermore, an African considers himself to be in charge of time. Westerners have to a great extent become the slaves of their watches. The **quality** of time spent with others (not the **quantity** of time available) is important to Africans. To wait for the appropriate time to do something, is also of great importance.

The implications of the African concept of time is obvious: (1) a tranquil instead of a rapid pace of life; (2) a flexible use of time instead of strict schedules; (3) no need for punctuality; (4) poor planning and a continuous change of plans and (5) postponement of tasks because of the priority of social relationships. Viewed from a Western perspective, Africans simply do not know how to use time – they waste time in a very irresponsible way.

A last aspect of the African conception of time explains its concept of history: Time does not move forward but backward. While, for the West, the present develops into the future, for Africa the present becomes the past.

According to the African everything was fine and good at the beginning (the origin of the world). It was the golden time of paradise. Traditional Africans therefore have great respect for past traditions and customs. They don't change them easily like Westerners do. They look "forward" to the past, one day to be united with their ancestors.

The reverse side of the coin is that they are not much interested in the future – at least not in the distant future. The future is so far removed from the sacred past that it cannot participate in the original goodness and power of the past. Such an optimistic view of the past and a pessimistic view of the future are evident in the lack of planning amongst many Africans.

Here, too, the Word of God can liberate us both from Africa's traditionalism and the progressivistic attitude of the West. Scripture recognises not only the goodness of the past, but also the fact that Adam and Eve fell into sin. It teaches our responsibility in the present. And it also warns against expectations of future utopias and presents a unique perspective on the future (e.g. the book of Revelations).

#### **4.7 The six components of a Christian-Reformational worldview**

In every kind of action the six elements of a worldview play a decisive role, even though they are ideas or concepts. They are like the invisible bone structure or framework determining the shape of our bodies. In the previous two main sections, our x-rays revealed the concealed skeleton of the Western and African behaviour. In this section we will discuss the implications of the Biblical distinction of creation, fall and redemption for the six basic components of a Christian worldview.

Like any other worldview, a Christian worldview can degenerate into an oppressive ideology. I nevertheless believe in the liberating perspectives of such a worldview.

##### **4.7.1 Creation, fall and redemption**

We have already said that religion is the **direction** towards God, worldview indicates our **place** in creation and culture is our **task**, viz. to serve God in this world, according to His mandates. **Culture, then, is the historical manifestation of our religiously directed response to God, as expressed in our understanding of creation and our place in it.**

Culture is historically determined. Every period in history reveals its own brand. This is also clear from the Word of God which reveals that the history of mankind developed through three main phases, namely creation, fall into sin and redemption in Christ. History will culminate in the final consummation, when Christ returns to live with us on a new earth.

We may call creation the time of **formation**, the fall the moment of **deformation** and redemption the period of **reformation**. At the moment we are living in the age "between the times", the time of "already" and "not yet". The reason is that Christ's redemption of the world, started during His first coming to this world, will be completed at His final, second coming when He will completely reform and renew everything.

Man's direction, place and task were different in each of these three main divisions of history. We will concentrate on the worldview aspect (describing our place in creation), especially the six components of the Biblical worldview of creation, fall and redemption.

#### 4.7.2 Creation

At the dawn of creation

- The direction of the lives of Adam and Eve was towards the true **God**.
- They were created in the image of God, indicating that they obeyed His **commandments**.
- The essence of their **humanity** was that they were God's caretakers, His stewards. Their place was that of trustees – not masters – who had to see to it that the whole of creation in its immense richness and diversity should develop, evolve, unfold and reveal its potential. (To use an image: the exposed but undeveloped film has to be developed and printed to reveal all its beautiful colours.)
- Adam and Eve not only served God and acted according to the will of the God they served, they also created a **community** life (marriage, family etc.) which reflected their own concept of being human and in the final instance also revealed which God they served. (Our idea of humanity and of society is determined by the kind of God or god we serve.)
- They were permitted to use **nature** because it was not something divine, but part of God's creation entrusted to them. They did not misuse nor exploit it, but used it carefully and respectfully.
- Finally, they knew how to both use and enjoy the **time** God granted them.

The **direction** of their lives was correct. They knew their **place** in God's creation. They could, therefore, also fulfil their **calling**, the cultural mandate entrusted to them by God. They could perform their task in a balanced way, without one-sided distortions, enjoying life in its fullness.

#### 4.7.3 Fall

When Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation of the Evil One, everything changed.

- While their hearts were previously directed in love towards **God**, it was now directed away from Him towards themselves. They rejected being the image of God (**imago Dei**) and wanted to be like god (**sicut Deus**). According to them, God was redundant.
- They consequently did not want to obey God's **commandments**. They preferred to blow up their own image, to be a law unto themselves (autonomous) – not realising that it was a contradiction in terms. They thought that they could take care of themselves as

well as the rest of creation. By doing so, they lost their **place** in creation, namely that of **stewards**. Instead of **taking care** of God's creation, they were **hiding** behind trees! (Gen. 3:8). God reminded them that they had deserted their proper place when He asked them: "Where are you?" (Gen.3:9). They thought they had become **masters**, but in actual fact they were now **slaves** of the devil. When they had lost their **direction** and their **place**, they could also no longer fulfil the original cultural *task* given to them.

- They also lost the real meaning of **being human**.
- They began creating a **community** (see the rest of the Genesis story) not directed by love, but by hatred. In essence the community they created, was a reflection of their own corrupted nature. It was also a reflection of the new substitute god (Satan) they were serving.
- While it was not clear directly after the fall how recklessly and harshly man would treat **nature**, it is evident today. The simple fact that God banned them from the Garden of Eden was an indication that they were not regarded fit, capable, responsible caretakers of nature any longer.
- Finally fallen man/woman had forgotten how to correctly use and enjoy the **time** God has given them. Because they misused it, their life span was decreased (Gen. 6:3). Their time on earth was terminated by death. Man may try as hard as he can, but he will never be able to re-establish paradise lost – neither in the past (like Africans) nor in the future (as the West).

#### **4.7.4 Between redemption and consummation**

As said before, we now live between the times. Christ redeemed the world, but the final result will only be fully visible when He returns to earth. We live in a totally different historical epoch than that of creation or the fall. The good seeds and the weeds grow together (Matt. 13:37-43).

We are no longer in the favourable position of Adam and Eve. In fulfilling their cultural task, they started with a clean slate. On our own "slate" the word "evil" is written in large letters. Our task is not like theirs, simply to govern, develop or form. Because of the terrible deformation caused by sin, we have to **reform** - to reform our entire lives according to the six worldviewish components.

What exactly does the concept "reformation" entail? This will be discussed in the following section.

## 4.8 Reformation as a return to the correct norms

Reformation basically means dealing with what is wrong and evil. But the question is **how**? The answer depends on how serious we take both man's fall and Christ's redemption.

### 4.8.1 Different Christian worldviews

According to how serious man views both fall and redemption, we may divide Christian worldviews in three main groups (for more details, see chapter 20):

- **The optimistic** ones emphasise the many good things left in creation after the fall. They don't see too great a tension between the new creation we are heading for and the old sinful world (cf. different liberal Christian worldviews).
- **The pessimistic** worldviews emphasise the tension between the present (old) world and the salvation promised for the new. This viewpoint could be divided into three subgroups: (1) Redemption is something **against** creation; recreation implies another, alternative creation (cf. the Anabaptists in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and their contemporary descendants). (2) The second group sees less tension: redemption is placed **next to** creation (e.g. the Lutheran position). (3) A third group views salvation as something simply to be **added to** the existing creation (e.g. Thomism and neo-Thomism).

Neither the optimistic nor the pessimistic worldviews want to change the world as it is. For the optimists, it is **not necessary** while the pessimists (in their various subgroups) **cannot** do it, because they have more or less separated redemption from creation. All of them have a "weak" concept of redemption.

- In a **realistic Christian worldview**, on the one hand, the evil of the present world is neither underestimated (as in the case of the optimists) nor overestimated (as the pessimists do). On the other hand, realistic Christians neither overemphasise the good (like the optimists) nor do they underestimate it (as the pessimists tend to do). They face the evil in this world and at the same time believe in the power of redemption. According to them, redemption does not simply condone the existing order (the optimists), nor is it something against, next to or above the evil of this world (the pessimists). According to this third group the old, sinful, evil creation therefore has to be renewed or reformed **from within**.

This is a "strong" and clear viewpoint about redemption: it is radical. Like salt it wants to penetrate the old in order to stop the decay. Like light it intends to eliminate the darkness.

Redemption is not merely something **added** to the old; it **renews** the old without **destroying** it. (For more detail, see chapter 20.)

Unlike the African worldview, the real Biblical worldview does not want to return to an idealised past. Neither does it try, like the Western worldview, to create a future utopia. In spite of the fact that it emphasises our human responsibility in the present to reform the world, it believes that only God will finally bring about a new heaven and a new earth. We cannot **force** it. We have to **await** it.

#### **4.8.2 The essence of reformation: a return to the correct norms**

Each of the six components of a Biblical-Reformational worldview is important for reformation. If, however, we have to select the most important for our topic, it would be the normative component. **Reformation in essence can be described as a return to the correct norms applicable to the different aspects of our lives.**

The Western worldview believes in the individual autonomy of man and the African worldview in communal autonomy. Autonomy in both cases implies a subjectivistic view of God's will. Instead of obeying God's laws, man elevated himself to the status of law.

In the place of both kinds of **autonomy**, Christians will have to reply with **heteronomy**: our norms do not originate from ourselves, but from a Higher Authority, from God (**theonomy**).

#### **4.8.3 The character of norms**

We have to (1) obey God's **will** which is (2) expressed in different **laws**, e.g. the Ten Commandments but also revealed in the history of God's dealing with Israel and in the life of Christ. Because these laws were given to a specific nation (Israel) in specific historical circumstances, we have to (3) "translate" them to be relevant to ourselves, living today under quite different circumstances. These "translations" we call **norms** (for a detailed description of this process, see chapter 9, section 2).

**Briefly defined, norms are our human and fallible responses or answers to the real God or an idol whose will we regard as the highest authority.**

In spite of the fact that our norms are time-bound and fallible – they have to be reformed continuously – they play a very important role, (1) providing **direction** to our lives, (2) indicating **limits** to what may be done, as well as (3) what **ought to be done**. In other words, they teach us how to distinguish between what is bad as a result of the fall, as well as how we should reform life to attain the goodness possible through Christ's redemption. **Without correct norms, no real reformation would be possible!**

#### **4.8.4 How to know that we are following the correct norms**

The norms of our Christian worldview are fallible responses, themselves influenced by our own culture and sinful nature. How then can we know that they are the correct norms to guide us in our task of reformation?

Our first answer is that we will have to test and retest them continuously against God's laws or mandates as revealed in the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ. Are they the correct responses to God's authoritative will?

The second answer to this important question is that God also reveals His will in our everyday lives. This is called His creational revelation. Apart from the norms of our Christian worldview, we have to watch creation carefully for "green lights" and "red lights".

The green lights are signs that the norms prescribed by our worldview are the correct ones. This happens when man experiences joy, physical and spiritual health, peace – in brief: the fullness of life.

The red lights serve as warning signals. They flash in the case of disorientation, a lack of vision, pain (physical, psychological and spiritual), suffering (of different kinds), the death of humans and animals and damage done to the rest of creation. These signs are an indication that the norms provided by our worldview are wrong – in spite of the fact that they may be called "Christian". They are not the correct responses to God's will.

The old South African apartheid ideology may serve as a concrete illustration. Many (white) Christians believed it to be based on the Bible. It was part of their Christian-national worldview. However, the red warning signals from the real day to day life in apartheid South Africa, could finally not be evaded nor ignored any longer. It became clear that apartheid meant disorientation, no hope for the future, different kinds of pain and suffering and even death. Christians advocating apartheid was consequently forced by the South African reality, especially the new South Africa after 1994, to return to the Bible; to reconsider their socio-political norms derived from the Word of God. They finally realised that apartheid was a great injustice – committed in the name of their "Christian" worldview. They discovered that they were actually misled and blinded by an unbiblical ideology, prohibiting them to read the Bible correctly!

Another example is Western inspired development in Africa which should also be subjected to this kind of normative evaluation from the perspective of the true experience of the African people. A clear direction, hope and genuine, full human well-being are green lights. Disorientation, hopelessness, damage to the environment, suffering, pain and death

committed to the animal and human world, are however flashing red signals, warning that development is directed by the wrong norms.

I therefore believe that we should not only “read” creation in the light of Scripture, but that it is as necessary to interpret the Scriptures in the light of God’s creational revelation.

At the same time we should keep in mind that the “voices from creation” are only *aids* to keep us on the correct normative tract. They cannot provide us with the **final yardstick** of what is good or bad, right or wrong. Our hearts are so sinful that, despite urgent warning signals from creation, we may still ignore them and try to explain them as “teething problems” or “necessary sacrifices” if we want to reach the final goal.

#### **4.8.5 Structural and directional norms**

Important to our normative approach is the distinction between **structure** and **direction**. It is closely connected to creation, fall and redemption. “Structure” is connected to creation. Creation as it was meant to be, had to answer to God’s creation order. “Direction” indicates obedience to God’s central commandment of love towards Him and our fellow-creatures. This direction was changed at the fall. Love towards God and our neighbour changed direction, away from God and from our fellow creatures towards ourselves. Through Christ’s redemptive suffering, however, it became possible for our lives to be redirected.

Both structure and direction, therefore, are subjected to God’s will. The first is subjected to His creation ordinances and the second to His fundamental, directional commandment of love. In the normative evaluation of any cultural product **both** have to be considered. The following two examples explain this.

A book, for instance, has to comply with the following **structural** criteria: understandable language, no spelling mistakes, clear typography, attractive technical workmanship, etcetera. If this is the case, we may still not call it a “good” book in the full sense of the word. This is determined by the **direction** of the contents of the book. If it is God-denying and morally offensive, it cannot be called “good”, because then – as Da Costa has once said – it is a step in the direction of hell and not heaven.

The same applies to development: it should be both structurally and directionally good to be really beneficial. In reality we may encounter development projects which may be acceptable, but when its direction is considered its wrong religious direction is revealed – it is not motivated by real love. The reverse situation is also possible. The direction may be correct, e.g. it could be inspired by real love towards God and our fellow creatures (as in



the case of sincere Christian development projects), but the people involved do not have the slightest idea of the structural requirements for effective development!

“Love” indicates the will of God in its fullness. In His commandments God “analyses” or “dissects” love into various kinds. We should keep in mind that “love” as **such** is an abstraction. It always acquires different shapes in different areas of life. In marriage it takes on the form of mutual loyalty or fidelity; in the family of paternal and maternal love as well as the love of children towards their parents; in the church as brotherly/sisterly love; in the state as public justice and in business as stewardship. In our task of development we should also manifest the central commandment of love in a specific manner.

#### **4.9 A comparative summary of the Western, African and Christian worldviews**

In the comparative table on the next page I have tried to summarise the preceding main sections briefly (5, 6 and 7). Some of the differences between Africa and the West, presented in the table only in summary, will be dealt with in much greater detail in the following three chapters.

COMPONENT	WESTERN	AFRICAN	CHRISTIAN
<b>God</b>	A secular, materialistic, capitalistic god  Post-Christian	Distant creator-god, Not demanding responsibility, replaced by unpredictable spirit world  Pre-Christian	The personal God of the Bible, Creator, Sustainer and highest Authority  Christian
<b>Norms</b>	<i>Individual autonomy</i>  Subjectivism (things are laws)  Self-interest, individual egoism	<i>Communal autonomy</i>  Subjectivism (the kinship group is the law) Group-interest, group egoism	<i>Heteronomy</i> : God's will, revealed in his commandments (both directional and structural) to be positivised in norms for different areas of life
<b>Man</b>	A reductionistic anthropology characterised by individualism, materialism, hedonism, etc.	A reductionistic anthropology in which one aspect (the communal) is absolutised and the individual aspect subordinated, suppressed	A multi-dimensional anthropology: all the different aspects of being human to be developed in a balanced way
<b>Community</b>	Atomistic-liberalistic:  Individual liberty and rights first  Destroys communality, finally results in totalitarianism	Organistic-communalistic:  First communal equality and duties  Destroy individuality, leads directly to totalitarianism	Individuality and communality are complementary facets of multi-dimensional man; both to be developed to enhance individual and community  Anti-totalitarian
<b>Nature</b>	Viewed anthropocentrically: Separate from man; to be used and exploited for wealth	Viewed holistically: Man a part of nature; it should therefore be revered and not interfered with	Viewed Biblically: Man distinguished from, but not separated from nature – has to use and protect it in a stewardly way
<b>Time and history</b>	A commodity to be measured and used for one's own benefit. Future-oriented (progress)	Something to be shared and enjoyed with others. Past-oriented (restitution)	Granted by God both to be used and enjoyed in a responsible way. Past, present and future are equally important

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## Chapter 5:

### AFRICAN COMMUNALISM AND WESTERN INDIVIDUALISM

In spite of the fact that we are all human beings, African and Western culture are different. African and Western ontologies (understanding of reality), their anthropologies (views of man), views of society, theories of knowing (how knowledge of reality is obtained) and axiologies (norms and values) are often diametrically opposed. One of the outstanding differences between the two cultures which will immediately be noticed by the careful observer, is that the one (Africa) stresses human community, while the other (the West) emphasises the individual as the most important.

The focus of this chapter will be primarily on the differences (and not the similarities) between African and the Western culture as well as their implications. For answers on **why** they are different and **how** we should evaluate these differences the reader is referred to my book **Afrocentric or Eurocentric?** (2001:1-27).

#### 5.1 A few examples of the differences

The difference in emphasis is clear in the following comparison:

<b>African communalism</b>	<b>Western individualism</b>
Communal self-concept	Individual self-concept
Interdependence	Independence
Survival of the community	Survival of the individual
Group assurance	Personal gratification
Co-operation and harmony	Competition and conflict
Affiliation	Ownership
Shared duties	Individual rights

To bring the difference home clearly, two examples could be valuable. Starting from a Western perspective, we will use the same cultural features but indicate how the assumptions and conclusions of African culture can be totally different from that of the West.

- **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. Traditional Africans, however, view buying as a social person-to-person transaction and will therefore take their time to bicker over the price in order to establish a personal relationship between buyer and seller.
- **Marrying**, Westerners will assume, is a contract between two individuals. Their conclusion will be that the father and mother of both bride and bridegroom may out of courtesy be asked for their consent to the marriage, but it is not really of vital importance, because marriage concerns only the two people. According to Africans, however, one individual does not simply get married to another individual. One marries (into) a family and even a clan. Stated differently: the two families or clans get married! Many people therefore have to be consulted, negotiations conducted and a "bride price" be paid to the bride's family before the couple could dream of getting married!

In the West a wedding is an exclusive affair. A specific number of guests are invited. (In many instances there is a fair amount of arguing as to whom should or should not be invited!).

In Africa the opposite is the case. A wedding will include as many people as possible. On the wedding day, anyone who would like to, attends. But people do not arrive empty-handed. They bring beer and food (besides the gifts for the bridal couple) to add to the celebration.

This communalistic attitude is, of course, not something unique to Africa. It is encountered on other continents and in other parts of the world. Westerners could describe such cultures with different names, such as "primitive", "primal" or "traditional" of which none is really satisfactory. The individualistic approach, too, will be encountered in other than Western cultures often referred to as "modern", "developed" etc. which again are not very satisfactory descriptions. I will therefore abide by my characterisations of **communalistic** or **communitarian** and **individualistic** to describe African and Western culture respectively.



Communalism/communitarianism should be clearly distinguished not only from Western individualism but especially from Western collectivism, such as socialism and communism.

Western individualism and collectivism differ according to whether priority is given to the individuals or the society as a whole. Individualism views societal relationships as a mere contract between individuals and therefore favour a limited government, while collectivism propagates more or less complete control of society by means of government. In both cases human community is viewed somewhat like a mechanism, an artificial reality, organised and controlled by way of laws and rules.

The African idea of community could be explained, not by a mechanism, but by an organism, a natural rather than an artificial whole or unity (Venter, 1991:25-28). The individual members see the community as more or less identical to themselves. The clear Western distinction between the individual on the one hand and the community on the other is not applicable. However difficult it may be – especially for Westerners – to define it exactly, African communalism is different from Western forms of collectivism.

Before we compare the two cultures, it should be mentioned that not only African culture is communalistic in nature. By far the greatest number of people in the world live in cultures where the community is viewed of greater importance than the individual. Examples are Eastern and South American countries (For details see, Kim, *et al.*, 1994).

## **5.2 Communalism versus individualism**

Before I indicate the differences between Africa and the West, let me again state clearly – in the words of a person for whom I have the greatest respect – that these differences are not listed to **divide** but rather to **enrich** us all. "None is an outsider, all are insiders, all belong. There is no aliens, all belong to one family, God's family, the human family. There is no longer a Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free – instead of separation and division, all distinctions make for a rich diversity to be celebrated for the sake of the unity that underlies them. We are different so that we can know our need for one another, for no one is ultimately self-sufficient. A completely self-sufficient person would be sub-human" (Tutu, 1999:213,4).

The following table offers a number of the most prominent differences between African communalism and Western individualism:

	<b>Communalism</b>	<b>Individualism</b>
	First the community, then the individual. (I am because we are. I share in the community, therefore I exist.)	First the individual, then the community or social relationships. (We are, because I am. The community exists, because it is constituted of individuals.)
	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Implications</b>
1.	A high regard for the group, elevates it above the individual	A high regard for the individual, elevates it above the group
2.	Like people (socially-centred)	Gear people (ego-centred)
3.	Inclusive attitude	Exclusive attitude
4.	Security	Loneliness
5.	Dependence on people	Individual independence
6.	Intense, strong personal relationship	Casual, impersonal interpersonal relationships
7.	Open in social context	Closed in social context
8.	Closed in inter-individual relationships	Open in inter-individual relationships
9.	Group pressure strong	The opinion of the group is not so important
10.	Individual initiative is not appreciated or encouraged – good human relations are a priority	Individual initiative is highly regarded – personal achievement is more important than attention to the community
11.	Co-operation	Competition
12.	Great degree of uniformity	Individual differences are referred
13.	Duties towards the community are emphasised	The <b>rights</b> of the individual are stressed
14.	The law has to restore social harmony – <b>restitution</b> is important	The law has to determine which individual is guilty/innocent – <b>punishment</b> is important, even though it causes bitterness at time
15.	Readily shares with others, generosity (Venda proverb: Children share the head of a locust)	Acquisition for personal use, the danger of materialism

16.	Eating is mainly a social event with a view to sharing food and discussion	Eating is usually not a social event but mainly directed at acquiring new energy
17.	Peaceful co-existence is highly regarded	Confrontation is not avoided at all costs
18.	Dialogue: decisions have to be taken with the approval of the group, and everybody has the opportunity to air views	Monologue: decisions are often taken individually or by a few – don't waste time through endless discussions!
19.	Modesty, compliance, pliability, willingness to compromise – character traits which lead to peaceful co-existence with one's fellow human beings (Westerners see this perhaps as a sign of dishonesty)	Honesty, frankness, incorruptibility, steadfastness and perseverance – all individual virtues. (The African might, as a result of these, regard the Westerner as rude)
20.	More casual and indirect way of asking and answering questions; would rather keep quiet than disturb relationships; prefers to give the answer one thinks the other would like to hear	More direct questions and answers; if necessary, somebody is told the unmitigated truth – even if it hurts and is injurious to relationships
21.	Values such as friendliness, helpfulness, hospitality, a forgiving nature, patience and brotherliness are highly regarded	Formality, independence, self-sufficiency, etc. are highly regarded
22.	Poverty means that one does not have children or does not belong to a family	Poverty is an indication that one (as an individual) does not have a (large) house, (expensive) car and earn a (huge) salary
23.	<b>People</b> are important	<b>Things</b> are important (possessions, buildings, machines)
24.	Joy is experienced in social relationships	Joy is sought in possessions
25.	A community-centred culture: <b>be available</b> to others	A task-oriented culture: <b>do</b> something for others
26.	Builds relationships by greeting people	Obtains information in greeting someone
27.	Greet with a soft handshake, don't look each other in the eye	Greet with a firm grip, looking the other straight in the eyes
28.	Prefers to do things <b>together</b>	Prefer doing something <b>by oneself</b>

29.	It is not fitting to work for individual status, the norm is group status. (Good social character implies acceptance and guarantees status)	Strives for individual achievement and excellence. (For this reason academic qualifications can provide status)
30.	Salvation is acceptance by the group	A more individualistic concept of happiness and therefore also of the Biblical concept of salvation
31.	Responsibility is easily shifted on the community – and everybody's responsibility easily becomes nobody's	Individual responsibility is emphasised
32.	Group egoism	Individual egoism
33.	Ethnic or tribal ethics or morality. Right means defending your own group and wrong means to sin against your own group	More universal ethics; any transgression against other individuals is therefore wrong
34.	<b>Shame</b> plays a more important role than guilt in morality (it is important that people should not know that you erred, so that your public image should not be damaged)	<b>Guilt</b> is perhaps more important than a sense of shame (personal guilt is felt even though nobody else knows about it)
35.	Tolerance and forgiveness, easier acceptance of others' viewpoints and religions	More intolerant and inclined towards conflict – something is either true or false
36.	Marriage is compulsory for all, needs the consent of the community and intended in the first place to engender children	Not such strong pressure to marry, and marriage is in the first place intended for the sake of the two individuals
37.	Strong bonds with the <b>extended</b> family (many brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers)	Slacker bonds with a <b>nuclear</b> , more mobile family
38.	More personal communication by way of the spoken word (cf. riddles, proverbs, poetry, stories, dramas and song). Thus: oral tradition, strongly developed memory, danger of parroting in study	More impersonal modes of communication by means of the written, printed word and electronic media
39.	Little personal space required	Huge personal space needed
40.	Spent much time with other people	Have little time for fellow human beings

This comparative list of differences between the two cultures is far from being exhaustive. Consulting a study like that of Terblanche, 1996 will enable the reader to add many more characteristic differences.

### **5.3 The beautiful sides of African communalism**

Space does not allow us to discuss all of the 40 different points of the above comparison. What follows will only describe in broad outlines and as examples some aspects of African communalism. Because this chapter is written, in the first place, for white Westerners to assist them in their understanding of black African culture, the emphasis will be mainly on the latter. It is taken for granted that Westerners will at least know something about their own culture. Therefore Western individualism will be dealt with very briefly.

As indicated already in the previous chapter (see also Van der Walt, 2001:1-27), every culture provides a different response to God's revelation. However, because of our sinful nature, no culture gives a perfect answer. Therefore every culture is a mixture of good and bad, it contains fine elements but also aspects which are not good.

#### **Man as a communal being**

Creation is man-centred and man is socially directed. Tempels (1959:43) already noticed this: "The created universe is centred on man" 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 (African), 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..." (Tempels, 1959:71, 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".

Many people in South Africa today are interested in and write on **ubuntu**. (cf. Shutte, 1993:46-58 and Shutte, 2001). Mostly, however, it is not very clear what **ubuntu** means. According to myself the essence of **ubuntu** is communalism and its implications such as unity, solidarity and communality. Mbigi and Maree (1995:2) correctly writes: "The cardinal belief of **ubuntu** is that **man can only be man through others**".

Tutu (1999:34,35) explains in more detail: "**Ubuntu** is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, '**Yo, u nobuntu**'; 'Hey, he or she has **ubuntu**.' This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'a person is a person through other people.' It is not 'I think therefore I am'. It says rather: 'I am human because I belong.' I participate, I share. A person with **ubuntu** is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the **summum bonum** – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good. To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me. Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them."

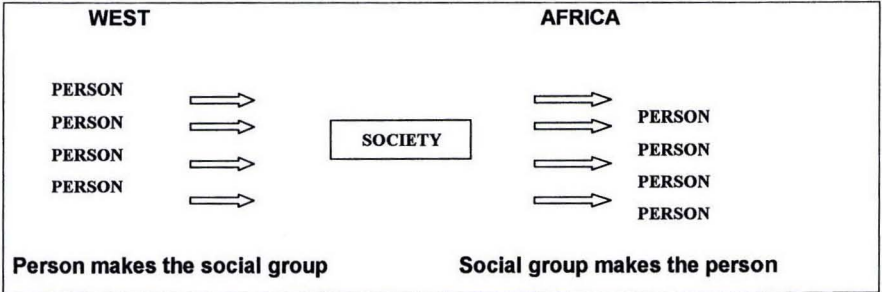
Summarised: **ubuntu** "has to do with what it means to be truly human" (Tutu , 1994:125).

If we cursorily compare the traditional African view with the Western way of thought the uniqueness of the first will emerge more clearly. 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.

In a nutshell the viewpoint of communalism is: "First the community and in the second place the individuals", while individualism says: "First the individual(s), then the community".

Explained by way of a diagram:



**Duties – not rights**

This communalistic 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."

The human rights movement is clearly founded in Western individualism. In the traditional African view, however, social life is regulated by the obligations that individuals have to the community. Fowler (1995:140-141) correctly observes that all that the human rights approach wishes to achieve (e.g. the right of privacy, freedom of speech, social security etc.) can be achieved as readily within a framework of social obligations.

A social obligations framework can furthermore avoid some of the negative side-effects of the individual rights framework. In the first place, the social obligations approach depend more on social than on legal sanctions and can therefore be more effective and less

divisive. Secondly, the individual rights approach generates a very self-centred, destructive attitude in social relations, because the focus is always on what society owes me, while the social obligations approach, in contrast, shifts the focus to what I owe others.

### **Restorative and not retributive justice**

According to Tutu (1999:51, 52) this is another strong point of traditional African culture. He explains: "... retributive justice – in which an impersonal state hands down punishment with little consideration for victims and hardly any for the perpetrator – is not the only form of justice. I content that there is another kind of justice, restorative justice, which was characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. Here the central concern is not retribution or punishment but, in the spirit of **ubuntu**, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships. This kind of justice seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offence. This is a far more personal approach, which sees the offence as something that has happened to people and whose consequence is a rupture in relationships. Thus we would claim that justice, restorative justice, is being served when efforts are being made to work for healing, for forgiveness and for reconciliation".

### **The ideal person according to African culture**

Virtues of sharing and compassion are regarded very highly in Africa. The individual 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 from the Kamwe perspective: "Kindness and good character, generosity, hard work, discipline, showing honour and respect and living in harmony." (See also section one of chapter 9.)

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 proverbs offer us a glimpse into the



hearts of Africans. 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 this background of the priority of interpersonal relationship and co-operation, one has to note the fact that Africans especially inculcate characteristics such as friendliness, helpfulness, modesty and compliance in their children. If we keep in mind that most Western people highly regard 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 being dishonest.

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 warm-heartedness 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."

### **An appreciation of people for their 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 as an asset in Africa.

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 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 manoeuvre their elderly to old age institutions, something which is unheard of in traditional Africa. It is a sin to deprive old people of especially their grandchildren. It is damaging not to be able to listen to their wisdom. It is therefore not a duty but a pleasure to care for them personally.

### **Cooperation and not competition**

I agree with this statement by Kaunda, Tutu (1984:137), as an African, has the following to say about the achievement ethics of the West, which puts such a strong emphasis on competition over against traditional Africa's cooperative attitude: "It is drummed into our heads ... that we must succeed. At school you must not just do well, no, you must grind the opposition into the dust. We get so worked up that our children can become nervous wrecks as they are egged on to greater efforts by their competitive parents. Our (Western) culture has it that ulcers have become status symbols. It has got to the stage where the worst in our society is to have failed. We don't mind how a person succeeds, or even in what he excels, so long as he succeeds ... Of course this rampant competitiveness takes its toll. We are hagridden by anxiety lest we fail. We worry that we may be inadequate ... We work ourselves into a frazzle in order to succeed, in order to be accepted".

### **Consensus decisions and not majority rule**

A last example of which I personally have had experience in different kinds of meetings, is that important decisions are always taken in concert. A Westerner does not hesitate to make a quick decision by himself. Africans do this **together** - they talk about a matter until everybody agrees, no matter how long it takes. Decisions are not simply taken by means of a majority vote.

### **Appreciation for Africa's emphasis on the community**

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 Westerners 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.

#### **5.4 The shadows of communalism**

However, as little as we should idealise and idolise Western culture, we should not romanticise African communalism, either. It would be dishonest not to mention examples on the debit side as well. An over-appreciation of the community must of necessity imply under-appreciation of the individual. Also in this case only a few examples will be given, because more extensive treatment is not allowed by limited space.

#### **Group pressure**

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!

Boon (1996:107, 108), executive chairman of a large business group in South Africa, sees this tendency in African culture as a great stumbling block in the acceptance of responsibility: "The process of personal responsibility works directly against the African concept of **uMona**. For want of a better description, this is the 'tallest poppy' syndrome. If you stick your head out or raise it above the group, it is seen as exposing the group and pressure will be brought to bear on the individual to retract. This can extend to threats of violence, witchcraft and even death, and needs to be taken seriously ... During the freedom struggle **uMona** was used as control. Anyone standing against the group was in severe danger. This culture now disempowers many managers ... Leaders must be aware of the enormous courage it takes for any individual to stand against **uMona**."

### **Envy**

Envy is a common 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 realise 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.

### **A morality of shame**

Benedict (1946) was the first to distinguish between shame cultures (more communalistic cultures, like that of traditional Japan and Africa) and guilt cultures (individualistic cultures, like the West). Lienard (2001), however, argues that the salient difference is an honour orientation versus a justice orientation, more so than shame and guilt. After a transgression an honour-oriented person experiences shame, while a justice-oriented person feels guilty. Restoration, therefore, deals either with shame by restoring one's honour in the community or with guilt by seeing that justice is done. Lienard (2001:136-139) also indicates that the Bible has a message for both honour- and justice-oriented

people and that it has implications for how we communicate the Gospel to the two different cultures.

The reasons why one refrains from doing wrong should not simply be shame when one's faults are exposed, causing one to lose one's position in society. Personal relationships are, however, often more important for an African than the truth is. A Westerner feels that he has the right to speak the truth. If an African realises that speaking the straight 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, you pretend to believe what he is saying or tell the truth in an indirect, round about way. You will say to someone who wishes to drive with you that you will pick him up tomorrow - rather than saying that he cannot come with you. Another example: if your mother-in-law asks for a goat, you dare not say directly that you do not wish to give it to her. If she enquires again later, you will 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. 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 his fellowmen.

### **A form of idolisation**

An African Christian, T. Adeyemo (1979), reveals the negative side of African communalism unequivocally when he comes to the conclusion that salvation and blessedness for the African (even Christians among them) usually means acceptance by society. Another researcher H.J.Möller (1972:430), 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, the idea that only the African can really know what the communion of the holy means) he postulates (ibid.:434) 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, we should also, apart from appreciating it, look critically at African culture. No culture is perfect, revealing both light and darkness. 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.

### **5.5 Communalism still a dominant characteristic**

Many people tend to believe that communalistic behaviour amongst black Africans is something of their past, traditional culture. This, however, is not the case at all if we read what Kotzé (1993) writes.

Kotzé 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 this 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 African can 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 and

themselves. It determines, for instance, how one defines human nature, masculinity and femininity, authority, love, justice and other ingredients of life" (Kotzé, 1993:53).

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 co-operate with others in the same situation of deprivation. Because people with a collective consciousness are far less aware of themselves as individuals, their egos 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.

It is 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 culture, 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.

We may therefore conclude that African communalism is not something merely inherited as a tradition from the past. Present circumstances in Africa may strengthen this characteristic culture.

If we view the African culture as a response to God's creational revelation it contains a special beauty, dignity and legitimacy. According to a Western missionary, Donovan (1982), he had to come to Africa to experience - for the first time in his life - what real community means. Next to the positive, however, we also have to take note of the negative: its lack of beauty and dignity. The irony is that the negative is the result of an over-emphasis of something (e.g. community) which in itself is not bad!

Therefore it is often not easy to distinguish between what is good and bad, because the same cultural habit may have beneficial as well as detrimental consequences. The extended family may serve as an example. It has to be appreciated that a person should take care, not only of his own wife and children, but also of his relatives. At the same time his relatives may behave like parasites, bringing about his financial ruin.

## **5.6 Something about Western individualism**

The fact that Western individualism was only mentioned in the comparative table, but was not discussed as fully as African communalism, is not because I am uncritical about Western culture. The only reason is that this chapter is written in the first place for white Westerners to assist them in understanding African culture. At the same time, however, a critical look at one's own culture could contribute towards greater openness towards other cultures. Even if not in such detail we will therefore conclude with some critical remarks



about Western individualism. I will employ only one source to do so. Even if this book is according to my own viewpoint, not critical enough about Western individualism (in its American form), it remains one of the few books written by Westerners who do not simply take individualism for granted. The book is the best-seller, **Habits of the heart; individualism and commitment in American life** (1985, updated with a new introduction in 1996) written by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler and Tipton. (Other important books about individualism are those of Gelpi, 1989; Hofstede, 1980; Lukes, 1973 and Waterman, 1984.)

### **Liberalistic individualism**

According to **Habits of the heart** individualism is the essence of American culture. It is a liberalistic individualism because freedom is regarded as the highest American value. The emphasis is on free **from** and not necessarily freedom **towards** something. Americans want to do what they like, want to be left alone, to be independent, not to be involved or committed. The struggle against dependence to be independent and autonomous is an overriding concern. Americans don't like having responsibilities towards others. They also want to be free from the past and from tradition. Even justice is regarded simply as every individual's right to do as he pleases in the attainment of personal happiness. Self-fulfilment and self-realisation are of cardinal importance.

### **Individualistic values**

In **Habits of the heart** the typical values of individualism are spelled out clearly: (1) independence and self-sufficiency; (2) perseverance, initiative, efficiency and hard work making possible the "self-made" self; (3) being impersonal, hard and powerful; (4) competition and individual achievement is praised; (5) success is highly evaluated and measured in terms of material prosperity (capitalism); (6) cash, consumption and convenience (the three c's) are important and (7) finally individualistic American culture is driven by a strong faith in progress - the future is of far greater importance than the present and the past.

### **Consequences**

The writers of the book **Habits of the heart** are of the opinion that most Americans do not really proceed beyond a negative concept of freedom (free **from**). They do not have a notion of its possible positive meaning (freedom **towards**). Their freedom, for example,

simply means that they do not want to be bound, obliged or committed. The writers are of the opinion that, for this reason, individualism has become a cancer destroying freedom itself. The "freedom" to be left alone as an individual in the end did not deliver exactly what people wanted: a very lonely freedom. The book describes loneliness as a national feeling. Egoism (the writers acknowledge that individualism is basically the same as egoism) cannot expect something better than isolation and loneliness!

No real criterion exists against which achievement can be measured - except greater income and consumption. An important consequence is that the inherent value of work is also lost. Because success is separated from the deeper meaning of life, more and more Americans question its worth.

Even self-realisation and self-fulfilment finally appear to be illusionary concepts. The self-made self in the end is an empty self! Many people, it is said, have a terrible feeling of emptiness. The final consequence of individualism is nihilism!

The consequences of individualism for the community and the environment are even worse. The book complains about the absence of interdependence, solidarity, trust, care and compassion. Softness and weakness are despised and for their poverty the poor have only themselves to blame. It is stated that Americans do not have a need for God and therefore they don't feel a need to have contact with their fellow human beings. According to their capitalist ideology not only their human but also their natural environment is exploited for personal enrichment.

### **The irony of individualism**

In spite of the fact that the writers of **Habits of the heart** are not happy with individualism, they don't want to reject it totally. They have succeeded, however, in clearly describing the bankruptcy of Western individualism.

The irony is that when one ignores the three other basic relationships (towards God, one's neighbour and nature), one actually destroys oneself. One becomes a lonely and an empty self!

Individualism carries with itself its own bankruptcy, the germ of its own decay, death and destruction. It tries to reduce the three relationships (towards God, fellow humans and nature) to a value for the individual. Because a relationship to God and other human beings could be of little value to the self, they are rejected. Nature is exploited for personal gain. But finally one discovers that, as an individual, one's life is empty, without

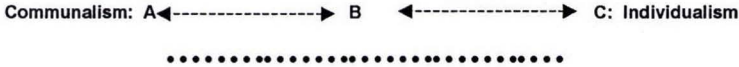
meaning. In its extreme, radical individualism annihilates not only the first three relationships, but all four of them!

The opposite, however, is also true: When one lives in the correct relationship towards God, one's fellow human beings (the community) and nature, one will personally benefit. One will not be an empty self, but fully human!

**5.7 Degrees of communalism and individualism**

To conclude our comparison between communalistic Africa and the individualistic West, it is important to remove a possible wrong impression. It is not true that Africa does not know or acknowledge individuality at all - just as it is not correct to think that the West has no idea of what community is.

Both types of cultures are encountered amongst different groups in different parts of the world in different degrees. Gyekye (1998:319, 320, 334), for instance, speaks of extreme, radical, unrestricted and moderate, restricted communalism. (We also encounter cultures which are mixtures of communalism and individualism. Usually they are communalistic in their private family relationships, but more individualistic in public life.) The grading of communalistic and individualistic cultures may range from very weak and passive to very strong and active. The following diagram helps to explain:



A indicates an extreme form of communalism and C an extreme form of individualism. At point B the contrast between the two cultures is not so sharp and the differences between communalism and individualism become vague. The dots indicate different people or groups. People, groups and cultures close to A and C will differ clearly from each other. Those, however, close to point B, will not be as clearly distinguishable from each other.

The African and Westerner with a low degree of communalism and individualism, will therefore be much closer to each other (the two dots on both sides of point B) than either the African (at B) to his strongly communalistic fellow-Africans (the dot next to A) or the Westerner (at B) to his extremely individualistic fellow-Westerners (the dot next to C).

Some white Westerners, for instance in rural areas or in the southern parts of Europe, reveal communalistic tendencies, while some black Africans, especially those who are urbanised and under strong Western influence, tend to become more individualistic in

their behaviour. Culture is not something static, but it changes continuously. In our "global village" the different cultures are no longer as isolated as in the past and they reciprocally influence each other.

This chapter in fact only concentrated on points A and C of the above diagram and did not pay attention to the different nuances in both communalism and- individualism. The reason is, as stated previously, to clearly indicate the differences between the two types of culture.

It is, however, possible to try and measure more exactly the degree of individualism and collectivism. Hofstede, (1980) developed a scale from 0 to 100 in which 91 indicates the highest degree of individualism van 6 the lowest degree or the highest form of collectivism. According to his rating the United States of America has the most extreme form of individualism (91), while South American countries, like Guatemala (6 on the scale), are extremely communalistic. Eastern and African countries have a rating of between 14 and 27.

### **5.8 The way out of the dilemma**

Most African writers today are fully aware of the difference between African communalism and Western individualism and they also view both as one-sided viewpoints. Tutu (1995:xiv), for instance says: "... Africans have a strong sense of community, of belonging, whereas Occidentals have a strong sense of the individual person. These attributes, in isolation and pushed to extremes, have weaknesses. For instance, a strong herd instinct can smother individual initiative so that the person is sacrificed for the collective, whereas a too highly developed individualism can lead to a debilitating sense of isolation ..."

How are we going to address the clash between African communalism and Western individualism? The easiest option, viz simply to **choose** for the one or the other as the standard to be followed, is not acceptable because of the weaknesses inherent in each one of them. Both Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism is unacceptable.

Some (like Shutte, 2001) make a great effort to solve the dilemma by way of a **synthesis**, a putting together of the two types of culture. My problem, however, is that the result of a simple **combination** between two inherently one-sided perspectives (Africa overemphasises the community and the West absolutises the individual) cannot change it

into something correct or acceptable. (Two half-truths taken together do not become a full-truth, but remains a half-truth!)

One way out of the dilemma is a perspective from "outside", a third viewpoint, critical of both African and Western culture. As such a "third way", I prefer the Word of God, the Bible. This method was applied earlier in the comparative table of the Western, African and Christian worldviews (see end of chapter 4). In this chapter (and also the following chapter on African and Western concepts of time) the diagram at the end of chapter 4 is only explained in more detail.

Any -ism, like communalism and individualism, entails an absolutisation of something good in God's creation. In spite of their beautiful aspects, both of them are distortions – also from a Biblical perspective. Being aware of this is important, because many Western Christians try to prove their individualistic perspective from the Bible. Other Christians, however, 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 the Scriptures.

### **Asking the wrong question**

Both individualism and communalism provide unsatisfactory answers to the question "Who am I?" because both ask the wrong question. Both ask 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 being human lies beyond the human being in God. It is in an obedient relationship to Him and his law that we find our true identity. This starting point gives us a true perspective on individuality and communality.

### **Two complementary dimensions**

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 view of being human. 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 humanity, but neither **defines** the human person. (As will be indicated in chapter 9.2.5, the human being is not onedimensional but multidimensional in nature.)

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 (1995:22) 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 21:20-22) 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. Luk. 10: 13-14 and Rev. 2, 3).

In the third place it is heresy to say that "I only belong to the group" (communalism) or that "I only belong to myself" (individualism). Both viewpoints are in conflict with the heart of the Gospel, viz. that in life and death I belong to Jesus Christ, who paid with his own blood to liberate me from the devil (cf., for instance, Rom. 14:7, 8 and Eph. 1:1-14). This central Biblical message is also echoed in the very first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism.

### **Authority**

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 judgement. 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! However, this is not based on the priority of the individual over communal judgement. It is based on the illegitimacy of the claim to authority or the abuse of that authority - never because the authority's judgement is simply in conflict with my individual judgement!

### **A liberating perspective**

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 being human 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 being human that individualism has denied: the experience of community.

To apply these general remarks concretely will not be an easy task. I, nevertheless, want to make the following proposal to students. Add a third column to the right hand side of the two columns, comparing communalism and individualism at the beginning of this chapter. In this third column write down your proposal for a better, third alternative to each one of the forty points of comparison provided in the table.

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\* \* \*

## Chapter 6:

# TRADITIONAL AFRICAN AND MODERN WESTERN CONCEPTS OF TIME

Every human being **lives** in time. We are temporal beings. Whether we are aware of it or not, we also have a **view** about time - what it is and how it should be utilised. One's concept of time is one of the six basic components of one's worldview (cf. chapter 4). In some cases one's view of time plays such a key role that it can be used as a starting point to investigate other aspects of a person's worldview.

Not only cultural anthropologists and philosophers are aware of the difference between the modern Western and traditional African concepts of time. In the encounter between the two cultures ordinary people experience this difference on a daily basis. Very often the difference leads to tension and even conflict. The friction is present where people from Europe have to work with people on the African continent. It is also present, like in South Africa, between white Africans of European descent and black Africans. It may even appear between the more or less 30% urbanised Africans and their approximately 70% rural fellow-Africans. (An interesting fact is that the tension between two different concepts of time is also present between Northern and Southern Europeans. The people of Southern Europe have a view more similar to that of traditional Africa.)

In order to answer the question **how** these tensions can be overcome, our reflection includes answers to the following two questions: **What** exactly are the differences? And: **Why** are they different? On the question **why?** previous chapters have already given a general answer. The different concepts of time of Africa and the West are different cultural responses to God's creational revelation. These responses are very much influenced by the specific circumstances in which people live.

### 6.1 The African idea of time

In the past some Westerners were of the opinion that, because Africans do not know how to **use** their time properly - according to Western standards - they also do not have any **concept** of time. A well-known African theologian, John S. Mbiti, (1969:17), wrote at the end of the sixties of the previous century that traditional Africans adhere to a two-dimensional view of time: a long past, a present and practically no concept of the future. A few Africans supported his viewpoint (cf. Kagame, 1996), but most of them were very critical. They indicated that different groups or tribes do have an idea of the future. (Cf.

Gyekye, 1995, 1996; Kato, 1987; Masolo, 1995, Moreau, 1986 and Wiredu, 1996. For detailed studies on the different African tribes, compare Alagoa, 1998; Ayoade, 1979; Kudadjie, 1996 and Kusa, 1998.)

My own viewpoint (based on extensive reading – see bibliography - on the issue as well as on practical experience) is that most probably there is not so much difference between the African and Western **experience** of time. The experience of all human beings is more or less confined to the actual present. The solidified past can only be **remembered**, not experienced. And about the potential future one can merely have an **expectation** (Spier, 1953:123). Because human beings from every culture live in the present, they can only have a limited "experience" of the nearest past and very little of the future. Perhaps the difference between traditional Africa and the modern West is therefore not to be looked for in their **experience**, but in their **conception** of the past, present and future. Africa is more oriented to the past, while the West is more future-oriented. Tradition plays an important role in Africa, while the idea of progress - in spite of some serious setbacks - is still a strong driving force in the West.

One of the most important reasons why traditional African people are more oriented towards the past is because of the important role attributed to their ancestors. These "living dead" are powerful. From the past they determine one's well-being in the present. This explains the different rituals performed in honour of the ancestors to obtain their favour and blessing (cf. Van der Walt, 1997:114-118).

On the question why the traditional African orientation is towards a supposed glorious, perfect, primordial state of the past and less to the unknown, uncertain future, Turaki (1993:252-3) provides the following answer: The world of the ancestors is always the best, closer to the perfect origin and therefore has more potency than the present or future. 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 generation. The moral obligation to conform to traditions and conventions overrides any desire for change or non-conformity.

This orientation of traditional Africans is closely connected to another very important feature of their idea of time. According to them time is inseparably connected to a specific place or event. Time is therefore considered as something "concrete". "Empty" time (the abstract Western idea of time) does not exist.

This may also be the reason why the future dimension is not of such great importance – it has not happened yet. It may also explain why Africans cannot understand the West's concern that time can be wasted. How can time be wasted if it can not be separated from concrete things or events?

## **6.2 The one-sidedness of Western reflection**

In contrast to the African perspective on time, already very early in history Western thinkers (starting with the ancient Greek philosophers) tended to reduce time in its fullness to one or more aspects or forms of time. While time is something multi-dimensional (see below), they have narrowed it to a one- or two-dimensional entity. Examples from history are time being reduced to mere physical, biotic, psychical, analytical or historic time. (Cf. Spier, 1953:7-76; Popma, 1965 for the older Western views about time and Kimmerle, 1995:74-80; 1996:11-17 and 1998:18-21 for contemporary, post-modern views like that of Derrida and Lyotard.) On this point a Biblical-Reformational philosophy can provide some liberating perspectives.

## **6.3 The contribution of a Reformational philosophy**

In agreement with Biblical revelation, Reformational philosophers (cf. Dengerink, 1986:240-245; Dooyeweerd, 1953-1958; Hart, 1973; Mekkes, 1971; Popma, 1965; Spier, 1953 and Van Riessen, 1970:119, 123, 186) believe that God only is eternal. Everything in creation is temporal, including humans. Furthermore time is not to be viewed as a thing or on event. Nowhere in creation is time in its "purity" to be encountered. At the same time something like "empty" time is non-existent except in the case of an abstract idea about time. Temporalness characterises every creature.

A further unique contribution to our understanding of time is the distinction made by Reformational thinkers between different aspects of created reality. A material thing (e.g. a stone) is (1) countable, (2) it comprises space and (3) reveals a physical side. Apart from these three facets, plant life participates in an additional aspect, viz. (4) the biotic. Plants are living creatures, but they don't have any feelings. The (5) emotional (sensitivity) is typical of animals. In human life - an even richer creation of God - the following additional facets can be distinguished: (6) a logical, (7) historical (or cultural), (8) lingual, (9) social, (10) economical, (11) aesthetic, (12) juridical, (13) ethical and (14) pistical (or faith).

According to these aspects or modalities universal, cosmic time (which is so closely interwoven with the entire created reality) acquires different shapes or natures. We may, therefore, speak about different forms of time and distinguish *inter alia* between the

following: physical (or clock time), organic or biological time (time needed for the growth of living beings), psychological time (the feeling that a pleasant weekend lasted only a few hours), economic time (like production and consumption time), juridical time (e.g. the time stipulation of a contract or the duration of a law), pistical time (for instance, prayer time or the time of a worship service), etcetera.

One should be careful not to reduce God's many-coloured creation to only one or two aspects. This happens when, for instance, one regards it as a purely physical or economic reality. Or when man/woman is defined as "nothing but a material or economic or social being". In this way one aspect or reality is absolutised and the result is some or other kind of -ism, e.g. materialism or economism or socialism.

In the same way only physical or economic or social time should not be regarded as "real" time. Time in its multidimensional fullness cannot be contained in one of its different forms. Things or events participate in **all fourteen** forms of time.

Usually one of these forms of time is the determining or qualifying form. Prayer time, for example, reflects all the different time forms. This is clear from the fact that physically the person is in a praying position, devotional language is used, etcetera. The essence of the praying act, however, is not determined by physical time. Whether the prayer lasts for a minute or an hour, does not change the nature of the **devotional** time spent with God. The time spent to conduct a business transaction is economically qualified, it is **economic** time. The duration of tooth pain is typical **psychical** time.

In spite of the fact that I have to a great extent simplified the insights of the Reformational philosophy about time, it provides fruitful perspectives from which to approach our problem concerning the different concepts of time in Africa and the West. The question to be asked is whether the traditional African and modern Westerner is not guilty of reducing time in its multidimensionality of forms to merely one or two time-forms. A look at how Africa and the West measure time, could provide a clue, because how one perceives and measures time reveals much about one's concept of time.

#### **6.4 Time measurement in Africa**

As an introduction it should be mentioned that Africa differs from the West, which tends to reduce time to clock time, because it acknowledges different forms of time. Examples are: the mythical time of the past, ritual or religious time, agricultural time, the time of different seasons, the time of the sun, moon, etcetera (Hiebert, 1985:131 and Tiemersma, 1998:281). Traditional Africa did not accept one fundamental time (like clock-time) which

regulated all other forms of time. They did not apply a numerical system, but relied on concrete events (cf. Ayoade, 1979:77-81; Kagame, 1996:82-83; Kudadjie, 1996:139-141 and Wiredu, 1996:132-134).

Depending on the events regarded as important in a specific African culture, the different groups applied a variety of time measurements. If, for example, cattle played a vital role, a day would be divided according to one's responsibilities in this regard. Early morning would be "milking-time", followed by "grazing-time", "drinking-time", "the time to return to the kraal" and finally in the evening "milking-time" again.

A month was usually calculated according to the position of the moon. Furthermore the different months of a year were not indicated by our present Western names, but according to concrete events occurring in nature during that period of time. For instance, the "dry" or "wet month", "the time when the aloes bloom", "time to harvest the maize" (or other crops), etcetera. In traditional agricultural communities a year could be shorter or longer than 365 days.

Over against the **mechanistic** worldview of the modern West, traditional Africans adhered to an **organistic** worldview. Reality is viewed as a living organism and not as a lifeless machine. Africa's calculation and measuring of time reflects the organic rhythm of nature. The day, month and year "grows" and at a certain point becomes "ripe". The time for a certain activity should also ripen - it can not be decided in an arbitrary way according to a clock!

In spite of the fact that different African writers have indicated that the conception of some African groups also includes a linear element, the dominant idea is that time in traditional Africa can be described with the image of a circle, spiral or wheel. This can most probably be explained by the fact that Africa's conception of time is so closely connected to concrete reality and especially with what happens in nature. Similar to the way spring, summer, fall and winter follow upon each other in an endless repetition, time and history do not have a beginning (origin) or an end (goal).

A next important characteristic of the African's concept of time is determined by his communalistic worldview which sharply contrasts with Western individualism (see previous chapter). Without exception all writers on African culture emphasise this salient characteristic. Human beings **have** an individual as well as a social **side** or **aspect**. African communalism overemphasises one of these two aspects by saying that humans are to be defined as social beings. A refrain to be found in numerous African proverbs is:

"We are, therefore I am" - the reverse of Western individualism's slogan: "I am, therefore we are."

This communitarian orientation is clearly visible in the African's conception of time. Time is primarily viewed as **our** time to be enjoyed **together**. Time is not meant to be used - as in the West - for personal, material enrichment. One should therefore see to it that ample time is available for one's interaction with others. A clock or a wrist-watch should not determine or limit social time to be spent with one's neighbour, friends and family. In contrast to the inflexible time concept of the West (like a steel measuring rod), Africans believe in the abundance and flexibility of time (to be compared to an elastic).

### **6.5 Time measurement in the West**

Many centuries before the arrival of the Western clock, time was already measured by means of a sun-dial. We read about it in 2 Kings 20:9. Archaeological excavations in Palestine discovered one dating back to 1300 B.C.!

Mechanical clocks were invented in the West in the thirteenth century A.D. (Tairako, 1996:94). Their advantage above the sun-dial was that time could also be measured in the absence of sunlight and even at night. In the beginning clocks were used only in churches and cathedrals to indicate the time for prayers. But already during the 14<sup>th</sup> century clocks appeared in public life. During the next century clock-towers were erected in many city-centers. Slowly natural, rural time was replaced by artificial, urban time - a transformation from sacred to secular time. Artisans could now determine their working hours and tradesmen could calculate their profits accurately. Time - and money - was emphasised! The table clock and watch followed during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a development which enabled the individual to determine personal time management. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century the use of personal watches was common among the middle class. Autonomous, individual use and planning of time became possible. The time at one's disposal was no longer influenced by or dependent upon human emotions and the natural environment, or determined by political or ecclesiastical authorities. Time became the "property" of the individual to be used according to personal preference! Western individualism not only influenced the concept of time, but this new concept of time also strengthened individualism.

Both the sun-dial and the clock as instruments to measure time were possible because time and space (an aspect of reality) is so closely related. It is much easier to visualise (physical) space than time. Furthermore, the dial of a clock or watch was not arbitrarily



designed, but according to astronomical time (the time which the earth needs to complete the circle around its own axle). The dial is also numerically subdivided into equal units (minutes and hours). Together these aspects of a clock could be called its **mathematical-physical** foundational aspects.

A watch, however, is much more. It is also a **cultural** product which became **socially** accepted. Our perception of "time" on a watch is **psychologically** qualified, but all other human functions (like the analytical) are also involved. (A **clock** does not measure time. **We do it by means of a clock!**)

Measurement can only take place in the case of two comparable or similar entities. Thus, clock-time cannot indicate or measure time in its fullness, but merely mathematical-physical time. A clock can indicate the most about the time of physically-qualified entities, like the time a bullet or projectile takes to hit its target. In the case of time measurement of things more complicated than the physical (e.g. plants, animals and humans), a clock can indicate much less. A few simple examples will explain this.

It does not really matter whether a worship service in a church, mosque or synagogue lasts an hour or three hours, because time does not really change the essentially religious character of this event. Whether a tooth-ache continues for only ten minutes or ten hours, in both cases it is something psychologically painful. How long love-making between husband and wife lasts, does not necessarily say something about the quality of their (ethical) relationship.

Clock-time can reveal something but not everything about an event. I am not suggesting that what can be measured in time is irrelevant. The age of a tree, a cathedral or the time a stomach-ache lasts do have meaning. (A pain of the stomach lasting too long may indicate serious illness). Westerners, however, because of their adoration of clock-time, tend to approach the **total** time of an event merely from the perspective of mathematical-physical time, in other words **one** of the time-forms. Time in its **fullness** is thereby reduced to one of its **aspects!**

## **6.6 Two additional characteristics of the Western concept**

Attention should be paid to two other outstanding traits of the Western concept of time, viz. that time is viewed as linear as well as primarily economic in nature.

The Western concept of time can be compared to a straight line with an arrow at the end (Tiemersma, 1996:161). The line is divided into equal units. The present (a point on the

line) moves at a constant speed towards the future. (In the case of a clock-dial the straight line is changed into a circle.)

This linear view of time with its directedness to the future greatly contributed towards the hurried or restless nature of Western culture. The competition for material wealth (see below) is not only a struggle for the survival of the **fittest**, but also of the **fastest**. Western technological advances increased this rat race.

In contrast to the metaphor of a straight line or wire to explain the Western time concept, some writers portray the African time concept as a circle. It may, however, be better to use the image of a spiral or a wheel, because Africans do not view time simply as a static repetition without any variation or new possibilities (cf. Kudadjie, 1996:146).

According to the West time is continuously progressing. Towards what? The answer to this question brings us to a second outstanding feature of this concept of time. Time is primarily progressing towards material wealth. Everyone knows the expression "time is money". The economic aspect of time is overemphasised or absolutised. The irony is that Western man's striving for prosperity in order to be free, eventually leads to his enslavement to money. When time has to be used exclusively for material gain, it becomes one's **master**, it dominates one's whole life. Africans have great difficulty with such an idea, because they regard time as their **servant**.

### 6.7 Comparative summary

Our conclusion is that both the African and Western concept of time is one-sided. Time is not viewed in its multidimensional variety and fullness as is the case with the viewpoint of a Reformational philosophy of time.

In the African concept time is viewed from the perspective of the group. Time in its fullness is narrowed to communal or group time. The traditional African's time concept is **organically founded** and **socially directed**. The Westerner's concept of time is **based on the mechanical** (mathematical-physical) and **economically qualified** or directed.

Both viewpoints contain moments of truth. At the same time both of them represent a distortion of the full truth about time. Distortions (half truths) can be dangerous as is evident from the clash between the African and Western ways of using time.

Africans are seldom in a hurry. Like an apple time has to "ripen". Therefore a meeting will not start at a specific time, but when everybody has arrived - usually later than the scheduled clock-time! The meeting is also not concluded within an hour or two, but when

everyone has had the time to express his/her opinion. A bus or taxi service is not run according to times of arrival and departure. It will only depart when it is filled to capacity!

Westerners, in contrast, will constantly check the time on their watches and get very frustrated with the slow African time.

The following diagramme provides a summary of the two differing concepts of time:

### A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO VIEWPOINTS

Traditional African concept		The modern Western concept	
1.	Time is concrete	1.	Time is abstract (mathematical)
2.	Bound to space and events ("filled" time)	2.	Not dependent on space and events ("empty" time)
3.	Natural	3.	Artificial-technological
4.	Integrating	4.	Fragmenting, causing the disintegration of life
5.	Each moment in time is unique	5.	Clock time is everywhere the same
6.	Heterogeneous - different types of time	6.	Homogeneous - only one type of time (clock-time)
7.	Qualitative - time is more than what can be expressed in numbers	7.	Quantitative - expressed numerically
8.	Measured according to concrete events	8.	Everything measured according to clock-time
9.	Time is something subjective, <b>within</b> the human being	9.	Time is objectified - something <b>outside</b> the human being
10.	Experienced existentially	10.	Experienced in a neutral way
11.	Organic in nature	11.	A mechanistic nature
12.	Social ( <b>our</b> time), unifying the group	12.	Individual ( <b>my</b> time), alienating people from each other
13.	Cyclical (a spiral or wheel) and therefore repetitive (no beginning or end)	13.	Linear (arrow) and therefore irrepeatable (clear beginning and goal)
14.	More oriented towards past	14.	More future-oriented
15.	Kairological: the appropriate time is important - time for something has to ripen	15.	Chronological: any time is appropriate - time is a sequence of events
16.	Elastic and flexible - punctuality and planning therefore not important	16.	Inflexible - strict schedules, punctuality, careful planning important
17.	Because of its abundance the time needed can be <b>made</b>	17.	Because time is limited it has to be <b>used</b>
18.	Time should be <b>enjoyed</b> – together	18.	Time should be <b>used</b> - time means money for the individual

19.	A tranquil pace and relaxed human relationships	19.	A hurried pace and tense human relationships
20.	Time is our <b>servant</b>	20.	Time is our <b>master</b> .

In my effort to clarify the difference, I may be guilty of overemphasizing and of forcing the two positions into the comparative tables. In real life the degrees of difference will vary.

### 6.8 A possible solution

It was the year 1895. The missionary looked at his watch and asked the deacon to ring the church-bell (a gift from the European missionary society to the local mission station) for the Sunday worship service to commence. This was a simple event, but its consequences were far-reaching. The tolling of the church bell introduced a new concept of time into far-off rural Africa.

Westernisation and modernisation have to a lesser or greater degree influenced the contemporary African's view of time. However, the appropriate view to solve the difference - and sometimes tension - between African and Western concepts of time is not simply to force Africans to accept the Western concept (Hoffmann, 1998:304). The African concept contains worthwhile aspects. And because a people's view of time is an integral part of their culture, a sudden change is not advisable as it may disrupt the entire culture.

The reverse position (accepting the African concept of time as the norm) would not be a good solution either. It would, for instance, be difficult, if not impossible, to run an airline or to manage a factory without Western clock-time.

Writers struggling with this issue recommend the ideal of an intercultural concept of time. I regard this as the correct solution, because cultures should be open to learn from each other. My condition would be that such a new concept of time should not merely be a combination of the valuable aspects of African and Western ideas. Of course we should acknowledge the moments of truth in both. However, this would still not produce the desired result. As indicated above, the perspectives provided by a Christian philosophy can broaden and enrich one's concept of time beyond a simple synthesis between the Western and African ideas about time. Such a new concept would enrich our view of life as well as our daily way of life.

My suggestion to the reader is to add a third column to the right hand side of my two columns above comparing the African and Western concepts of time. This column should contain your creative proposal for a better concept of time than both the African and Western concepts. To assist you a little bit, I provide a concluding perspective from the

Scriptures. The biblical perspective on time differs from both the traditional African viewpoint (we are the **masters** of time) and the modern Western conception (we are the **slaves** of time) in its teaching that we are the **stewards** of time.

It is interesting to know that the Bible does not accept the dilemma of being either the **master** of time (Africa) or its **slave** (the West). The Biblical concept is that time is both a **valuable gift** and an **important duty**.

Time is, in the first place, a **gift** from God. He holds our times in his hands (Psalm 31:15). Time should therefore not be seen (as in the West) as a tyrannical enemy. We are not the slaves of time, but the recipients of a precious gift. Our temporariness (being-in-time) should not be confused with our transitoriness either. According to Scripture our mortality is the result of our sinfulness and not of our temporality (Ephesians 5:16 makes a connection between the transitory nature of life and evil. Time can sometimes weigh heavy on our shoulders as a result of our sins.) We are not only temporal beings now, but will continue to be so in eternity. (It is wrong to say that a person who dies has exchanged time for eternity). Time, therefore is not our enemy, something to get rid of.

Because time is such a valuable gift from God, He wants us to enjoy it. (cf. Ecclesiastes 2:24-25; 5: 17,18; 9:9 and 11:8,9). Christ himself instructs us not to worry about tomorrow, because his Father provides enough for every new day.

In the second place, time also implies a **duty**. (Stated in philosophical terms: the concept of time includes a normative aspect.) Because time irrevocably passes (Job 7:6; Psalm 39:6 and 103:15), we can be too early, late or on time. In many places in his Word God therefore encourages us to use his gift in the proper way. (Compare for instance Ecclesiastes 12:1; Ephesians 5:15 and Colossians 4:15.) Therefore we are not the boss or master of time as Africans would like to think, we are the **stewards** or **trustees** of this divine gift. We have to be **responsible managers** of a God-given present. To view time as a precious gift from God to us – to be used in his service – is the best antidote against the misuse of time.

How closely the time at our disposal is related to God, becomes clear from the following: it is God who gives, controls, interprets, terminates and establishes the purpose of time (cf. Nyirongo, 1997:93-95).

He **gives** time to be born and to die, to weep and to laugh, to love and to hate, etc. (Ecc. 3:1-8). He also gives time to repent (Hos. 10:12).

He **controls** time (John 11:6), there are no delays on his side (2 Peter 3:8-9).

He is the only correct **interpreter** of the times. We should not be like the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt. 16:2-4) who could not interpret the signs of their time, misread their times and missed the greatest opportunity in their lives. We should listen to God's Word and his Spirit to read our times correctly.

God is also the **terminator** of time. The rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) thought that he had all of life to live and did not realise that God holds our time in his hands. Psalm 90:11-12, however, warns us that our days are limited.

God also establishes the **purpose** of our times (Phil. 2:13). We were not created to live aimlessly. In everything we do we should use our time to love God and our fellow human beings.

Even from these few remarks it is clear that the Bible indicates a different perspective from both the traditional African and modern Western viewpoints on time.

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## Chapter 7:

# THE AFRICAN WAY OF THINKING COMPARED WITH THE WESTERN MODE OF THOUGHT

Africans find the Western way of thinking and practicing science difficult to understand. Western people, likewise, find it difficult to gauge how Africans think. The question "Who has to change?" has to be asked. Do the Africans, so that they can master the Western way of thinking? Or do Westerners perhaps have to change?

Proponents of Western culture (of which western science is one of the most important facets) usually respond sceptically to the second option: The effort to Africanise science cannot succeed because this would affect the essence of science and would simply lead to the lowering of standards. Science is a thoroughly Western product and is therefore averse to Africanisation. If Africa wishes to progress, it will simply have to acquire the Western mode of thought. On the other hand, the response of those who have become the prey of a new Afrocentric ideology is also predictable: this attitude is simply the result of a Eurocentric vision.

If Westerners should argue that science cannot be Africanised, because black people cannot be good scholars, they would be wrong - our continent has already delivered many excellent scholars. The issue of Africanisation, however, is much more complicated.

### 7.1 Voices of criticism

The problem raised is not unique to South Africa or the African continent. A Brazilian theologian, Ruben Alves (1980:41), started his response to a paper by a British scientist on the nature of science at the 1979 conference of the World Council of Churches on **Faith, Science and the Future** with the following parable: "Once upon a time a lamb, with love for objective knowledge, decided to find out the truth about wolves. He had heard so many nasty stories about them. Were they true? He decided to get a first-hand report on the matter. So he wrote a letter to a philosopher-wolf with a simple and direct question: What are wolves? The philosopher-wolf wrote a letter back explaining what wolves were: shapes, sizes, colours, social habits, thoughts, etc. He thought, however, that it was irrelevant to speak about the wolves' eating habits since these habits, according to his own philosophy, did not belong to the **essence** of wolves. Well, the lamb was so delighted with the letter that he decided to pay a visit to his new friend, the wolf. And only then he learned that wolves are very fond of barbecued lamb."

With this parable Alves wanted to make it clear that Western science likes to speak about itself in such a way that its eating habits (detrimental effects) are hidden. The "lambs" of the so-called Third World were blinded by that for a long time, but are beginning to realize more and more what its dangers are, more so than those who are paid to practice that science and to defend it as a "civilizing power." The difference between the British scientist and the Brazilian theologian lay in the different ways in which they saw the role of science in culture. The first saw it as progress and civilization, while the latter saw its immense assimilative and ultimately destructive power.

One of the most important Western values, which has also emerged clearly in science, is that of the autonomous power and control of man over his environment. Science enables man to do with the environment what he pleases. How he does it is thought not to be subject to higher norms. His concern is with power for the sake of power and especially for the sake of economic-material progress. Norms like stewardship, responsibility, accountability, and respect for the environment are neglected. While the objective of Western man is autonomous control, the key or method of achieving this is his scientific control of reality. This method is often idolized and scientific knowledge is regarded as being higher and more important than other forms of knowledge.

The scientific endeavour has undoubtedly led to enormous prosperity in the West. Today the West measures its wealth especially by way of scientific knowledge, technological power, and commercial wealth. The other (mostly submerged) side of the picture, however, is that this has led to the creation of "intellectual barbarians," very poor people indeed. The mere fact that we measure wealth in terms of material possessions in the West testifies to our immense poverty, because human life does not consist of an abundance of possessions and pleasures.

The West, obsessed with its faith in progress, sees development simply as scientific, technological, and economic development. Unfortunately, but entirely understandably, it is only in these fields that the West has developed (over-developed?). In other aspects the West is poverty-stricken. As far as human relationships and our awareness and experience of true human communion are concerned, we are poor. We are poor in aesthetic experience. We hurry through life without enjoying the vast wealth offered in abundance by creation, because joy has to be manufactured and bought.

Biko (1987:46,47), an African, responds to Western culture in the following words: "We reject the power-based society of Westerners that seems to be ever concerned with

perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on the spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationships. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face”.

The present Western scientific practice therefore clashes with the culture of the “Third World,” Africa included. The tragedy of the matter is that many Africans do not notice this danger. The Western way of doing science is uncritically accepted as normal. The only question still discussed is how this type of education in the sciences can take place in a more effective way and be made more “acceptable” to other cultures - or simply be enforced. But we have to accept that nothing in this world is inherently good. Even the best products of our culture have a mixed character. On the one hand science and technology release or liberate man from many things (such as monotonous routine labour), but on the other hand they enslave man. It is therefore of crucial importance to reflect on, at least, the nature, purpose, practice, and results of science and technology.

## **7.2 Important guiding questions**

How could one - in a fair way - compare the thought patterns of Africa and the West? Whoever asks questions of this nature immediately opens a hornet’s nest of problems and is susceptible to all kinds of criticism. These problems, however, are so important that we do have to address them first.

Does the whole of Africa think in the same way? With more than 2000 ethnic groups and languages/dialects spread across the continent, such uniformity is, of course, impossible. If one wishes to say something about African and Western patterns of thought, one can only generalize; otherwise one would achieve no more than monographs about the ways of thinking of individual tribes or groups.

A subsequent general question is whether it is possible for one to describe and understand the way a person from another culture thinks. Would one not, if one were a Westerner, distort African culture by trying to render it in Western categories? Of course the answer to this has to be in the affirmative. This does not mean, however, that one is so enveloped in one’s own culture that one is not capable of understanding anything whatsoever of another person’s culture and way of thinking. It is important to remember, however, that should such an understanding emanate from a paternalist attitude of superiority, it would definitely distort and thus be unjust to the other culture.

A third general question is: Why stress the differences rather than the similarities between Africans and Westerners? Surely we heard enough about differences during the era of colonialism in Africa and apartheid in South Africa? My response to this is that we should indeed stress similarities, because our shared humanity is most important. In the old Africa and South Africa this was not a generally acknowledged fact. The differences we stressed in the old South Africa were, however, superficial ones, such as differences in skin colour, habits, and customs. We should now look at some of the more deeply seated differences, and then not stress difference for the sake of difference (a sort of neo-apartheid), but know the differences in order to understand each other better. My purpose is therefore not to emphasize the differences in order to keep the cultures separate or drive them apart, but to bring them closer to each other, to understand each other better, to accept, and respect each other.

To do this, with an eye to clarity, one has to exaggerate these differences somewhat. But doing so exposes some queries. Do Africans still think as their traditional ancestors of 100 years ago did? Have they not changed a great deal as a result of the enormous influence of Western culture? These are legitimate questions. There has indeed been a great deal of acculturation between the two cultures.

However, there is also a "but". In spite of Westernisation, traditional religion and worldview - the deeper cultural layers of Africa, which co-determine the mode of thought of black people - have not been eradicated. In fact, when one scrapes off the Western "paint" (clothing, habits, customs) on top, one discovers a totally different layer of "paint" underneath. It is not unique to Africa either that the traditional may continue to exist virtually intact for generations beneath the modern layer.

Furthermore, in the new South Africa, liberated from white oppression, conscious efforts are made today to seek out the traditional roots and to revive them.

According to Biko (1987:45) "... it is difficult to kill the African heritage. There remains, in spite of the superficial cultural similarities between the detribalised and the Westerner, a number of cultural characteristics that mark out the detribalised as an African". And elsewhere he says: "... in essence even today one can easily find the fundamental aspects of the pure African culture in the present day African" (1987:41).

A more difficult question is, to which cause(s) should the differences in the mode of thought between Africa and the West be attributed? Is one's mode of thought determined only by one's own (cultural) attitude or is it the result of a variety of geographic, economic,

social, and political factors? My own viewpoint is that one cannot begin to separate the two sides of the issue because they are too intimately interwoven. Even to say that they influence each other reciprocally is still too simplistic. In reality the problem does not only have two sides, but many facets. Because humans are biotic, emotional, language creating, social, economic, aesthetic, ethical, and religious beings, all these factors influence the way in which we think. Furthermore, everyone lives in a specific environment from which he/she cannot be isolated. We are human **within** our environment. And this environment, too, is multifaceted.

An example could explain the problem. Scientific thought is not the invention of the West. The highly developed cultures of the Chinese, Sumerians, Babylonians, and Egyptians flourished thousands of years prior to modern Western science. (Examples from ancient Egypt are its agricultural methods, pyramids, embalming techniques, and writing.) Modern science, however, blossomed in the West. Why? Why did it only happen at a specific moment in time? One could try to explain this riddle in different ways. Some point to the written word in contrast to conveying information orally. Others use intensive intercultural contact with totally different cultures as an explanation, or the need for worldwide trade, which led to the discovery of foreign countries and cultures. These and many other factors, however, do not yet fully explain why modern science developed in Europe at a particular point in time. I would want to maintain that the most fundamental solution to this mystery, from a Christian perspective, is that different cultures respond differently to God's creational revelation by focusing on different aspects of his multifaceted creation.

This brings us to a subsequent problem - perhaps the most important in this investigation. It is the question: **What** in Africa is to be compared to **what** in the West?

One possibility is to compare the **traditional** mode of thought of the West with the **traditional** mode of thought of Africa. There will definitely be differences. But problems arise as well: (1) Westerners do not think in traditional ways any longer, but have been changed significantly by the modern scientific mode of thought. (2) If we studied the original, pre-scientific Western mode of thought (sources are available for this purpose), it would probably emerge that it does not differ all that much from the present traditional mode of thought still found in many places in Africa.

One could also compare the **modern** Africa with the **modern** West. Then we would have the opposite problem, however. In many instances Africa still thinks in traditional ways.

The "modern" is often a matter of a Western window-dressing on an African substratum. (There are also, of course, Africans who have become almost totally Westernised.)

Another alternative - and I do not believe that it is unfair, because it takes the factual reality into account - is to compare **traditional** Africa with the **modern** West and to keep in mind that this has to be done with the following reservation firmly in mind: The picture that we draw will not be 100% in line with reality. Wide reading and experience in a dozen African countries, however, have convinced me that this need not be a meaningless exercise. It can help us, in spite of all the reservations, to understand each other better.

### 7.3 Pre-scientific and scientific thought

When I compare traditional African culture with modern Western culture, it almost amounts to comparing something that is pre-scientific with something that is scientific. I can say this because, as already stated, Western culture today is a strongly "scientised" (and technicised) culture.

I am aware that the word "pre-scientific" can be misunderstood. For example, that pre-scientific would only be an elementary preamble to scientific knowledge, which would be real, genuine knowledge. This is not the way I use it. Neither do I understand pre-scientific as pre-logical or un-logical. Pre-scientific knowledge is logical! One could replace **pre-scientific** with the words **concrete** or **naive** knowledge, but they are not very satisfactory replacements. With the necessary reservations, I therefore prefer to use the word "pre-scientific."

For the sake of clarity, and to avoid any misunderstandings, a little more should be said about the distinction between pre-scientific and scientific.

By pre-scientific knowledge I mean the ordinary, everyday way of knowing - the common sense mode. This is typical of all people. Even among Westerners, who have been strongly influenced by the scientific way of thought, we still find this way of understanding reality.

"Pre-scientific" also does not mean that this form of knowing is in any way inferior. There is often an attitude, especially among scholars but also among ordinary people, that scientific knowledge is somehow better than the knowledge of the person in the street. This, however, is not the case. In every scientific abstraction something of concrete reality is lost. Someone once remarked correctly: "On the dissecting table of science, real life dies." An example to illustrate this is the fact that poor people often have a better

understanding of poverty than all the knowledge of different scholars studying the phenomenon of poverty!

The one way of knowing is not **better**, but simply **different** from the other (see later). Both are ways of trying to understand, explain, control, and predict reality. Both, for example, seek to find regularity in the midst of apparent irregularity, order in the midst of apparent chaos, and unity in the midst of diversity. However, they do this in different ways.

This can be explained with a simple example. A child is ill and the mother (who has already raised a few children) is certain that it is chicken pox. However, she takes the child to the doctor. With his medical knowledge he diagnoses chicken pox and prescribes the necessary treatment. It would be foolish to try to determine whom would **best** know what is wrong, because the mother does not know **less** or the doctor **more** about the child, but they both have a **different** type of knowledge of the child's illness. (The mere fact that the mother realized that the child was not well is already an indication that she is capable of knowledge.)

It is important, therefore, that we **distinguish** the two ways of knowing and the two types of knowledge - but never assume each has its own airtight compartment. The scientifically trained doctor's knowledge **builds on** the pre-scientific way of thinking. Without this more concrete way of knowing it cannot exist. And pre-scientific knowledge can in turn also be **enriched** (sometimes also **impoverished**!) by scientific knowledge. One could therefore think in terms of two overlapping circles -because it is not always clear where the pre-scientific ends and the scientific begins. (Especially in a strongly scientised culture, such as the Western one, the distinction can be difficult to make at times.)

In proceeding I will assume that there is a strong traditional component in African culture and that this component provides a good picture of what most people's pre-scientific knowledge was like (including early Western people). My aim is to compare this pre-scientific way of thinking with the modern scientific mode of thought. The focus is therefore not only on comparing Africa and the West, but also on a comparison between pre-scientific and scientific. Traditional Africa is our example of what the pre-scientific mode of thought was like before it came under the influence of Western science.

My ultimate goal is to determine whether the scientific cognitive attitude tends to let one lapse into one-sidedness and concomitantly impoverishes life instead of enriching it. And if it is the case, whether its disadvantages can perhaps be limited by once again considering the pre-scientific mode of thought. It might sensitise us to the fact that



“science” cannot simply be associated with one kind of science (so-called standard science). The mathematics and physics, for example, which one finds in most textbooks have been built on specific Western cultural presuppositions and are perhaps not the only possible kinds of mathematics or physics. From this new perspective it may, for example, be possible to write a textbook for a specific subject in such a way that more attention is given to the religious, worldview, and cultural contexts of the African.

#### **7.4 The outlines of the African worldview**

Not only **what** we think but also **how** we think is determined by our worldview, the “soul” of our culture. (In the case of scientific thought, philosophy will be the determining factor.) A worldview, as was already explained above (see chapter 4), contains different components, like our view of reality as a whole, our view of God, of being human, etc. All these components determine what the focus of our thinking will be. (On a scientific level it will be one’s ontology and anthropology which determine one’s theory of knowledge.)

This chapter is not about the Western and African **worldviews**. However, to understand the African way of thinking better, it is necessary to highlight again very briefly the outstanding aspects of the traditional African worldview. We will use the book of Steyne (1989:176-185, 240-242) as a guide. Because the readers are more or less acquainted with the Western worldview, the emphasis will be on the less-known traditional African worldview.

The modern secular Western worldview emphasises the physical and material. It also believes that scientific knowledge and technological skills will enable one to deal with all of life’s problems. It does not need God or a god to overcome the challenges of life.

The traditional African worldview can be summarised in the following ten points:

- The traditional African believes all of life to be spiritual. There is no difference between the physical or material and the spiritual – they are of one fabric.
- This spirit-world controls everything. Spirituality is encompassing. Nothing escapes it, nothing is meaningful without it and nothing can be achieved aside from it.
- The spirit-world is not necessarily an ordered world. Uncertainty and caprice reigns in this unseen world.
- Man lives in constant fear of the spirit-world. He is, however, master of his own destiny. He can have a good and meaningful life or success, happiness and security by securing spiritual power.

- By way of all kinds of rituals man can manipulate, hinder or deflect the spirit-world to serve him.
- Religious specialists (mediators) are the facilitators who can help man to coerce the unwilling spirit-world to conform to his will. Nothing is left to chance. The specialists know a potentially successful ritual for every case.
- Man is not responsible or accountable for his own actions, because all of life is subject to the control and caprice of the spirit-world.
- The search and acquisition of (more) power supersedes any commitment to ethics and morality. "Right" is what enhances power and "wrong" is what diminishes one's own power.
- The existential application of power counts more than cognitive reflection. Thinking is wearisome and to be avoided. Acting out what one feels and believes relieves feelings and brings a sense of peace.
- Even the gods or the Supreme Being are not worshipped or served but used by man to attain his self-seeking aims.

Steyne (1989:176 ff) summarises the traditional African, animist worldview under the following four interrelated basic beliefs and five supplementary beliefs.

The four **basic beliefs** are:

- **Wholism**

Reality is a whole which is more than the sum of its parts. The whole world is in interaction and interreaction. Everything is alive and everything is of the same fabric. Because it is a united whole, it is impossible to compartmentalise life. To make a distinction between the physical or material and spiritual is not only unthinkable, but also absurd. This wholism borders on or are identical to what we call pan(en)theism.

Because of this kind of worldview the traditional, animistic African is not likely to analyse or distinguish clearly the different parts or aspects of the world.

- **Spiritism**

Life is saturated with what we in the West would call the "super-natural". Spirituality is the essence of life. Everything can be influenced by and also responds to the world of the spirits. Whatever happens in the physical realm, has a spiritual co-ordinate, and whatever

transpires in the spiritual realm has a direct bearing on the material world. Man too, is related to the unseen and dependent on the unseen world.

Man is keenly aware of his lack of power and dependence for power on the spirit-world. By way of all kinds of rituals (prescribed by different kinds of specialists) man, therefore, has to channel the spirits to serve him, to strengthen his power, to help him to rise above his limitations and to attain prosperity and happiness.

Because of this kind of worldview the African's way of thinking will be to understand all matters of life spiritually and also to deal with them in a spiritual way. This requires that man listen carefully to and observe meticulously the interaction and exchange of communication between the visible world and the invisible. Disasters, calamities and sickness, for instance, can never only have material or physical causes.

While Westerners think in terms of "what?" and "how?" the traditional African will tend to ask questions of "who?" and "why?". Two examples will explain this. When a murder has been committed, the African will not be satisfied with answers to what exactly happened and how it happened, in other words who the murderer was and how he performed the murder. The African would like to know **who** has forced the person to become a murderer and **why** it was necessary. Similarly the explanation that malaria is caused by a certain type of mosquito will not be enough. One has to ask: **who** sent the mosquito and **why** did he do it?

- **Dynamism**

Not to have power or to have access to power sources produces great anxiety in the face of a capricious spirit-world. A life without power is a life not worth living. Power brings effective control in man's uncertain world. The essential quest of life is therefore the securing of power. This power or life-force permeates everything, though not in equal amounts. It has to be focussed to serve man's purpose.

This is done by way of ritual manipulation in the form of sacrifices, offerings, observing taboos, charms, amulets, etc. Because power must be acquired, whatever the cost and whatever the means, witchcraft and sorcery may be employed also. African Traditional Religion is a power-religion!

In such a kind of worldview not rational but "magical" thinking will be prominent.

- **Communalism**

Closely related to the three previous characteristics is the fact that the traditional African does not think individualistically. He never thinks of himself apart from the community. He feels insecure without others. The community is designed for harmony. If anything may be called "sin" it is a broken relationship between persons of the same group. (The group also includes the ancestors.) Therefore man tends to do nothing without the group.

At the same time, however, man is self-centred, self-conceited. He may, therefore, use the community for his own benefit. Ultimately his goal is the attainment of power in the community and over his own destiny.

In communalism each member of society is to function within prescribed roles. Various pressures – overt and covert – are used to force conformity to community customs and norms. Such a communalistic worldview also determines one's way of thinking. Independent, critical thinking is not allowed, it is a costly eccentricity.

To these four basic beliefs of the traditional African worldview five supplementary beliefs can be added:

- **Anthropocentrism**

In Africa, man exists for himself. Outside beings (e.g. divinities) or codes of behaviour (e.g. those of the community) are only significant as far as they can facilitate and support man's pursuit of self-seeking and self-significance.

- **Humanism**

Everything is from man, to man and for man. The spirit-world, including the gods, is in the service of humanity in Africa.

- **Egoism**

Everything the human being does is self-centred. He prays, sacrifices, implores the spirit-world not out of devotion, but in order to realise his own full potential. He venerates divinities to coerce them to provide him the necessary power. He gives in order to receive!

- **Utilitarianism**

The African seeks to be at the "master-controls" of life in order to achieve his own goals. He is the central element of the cosmos and everything else must serve him. Only that which can be of use to himself has any value. A supernatural world, which does not deliver what he needs, is worthless!

- **Relativism**

There is no clear distinction between good and bad, right and wrong. Man may seek to align himself with good spirits unless he discovers that an evil spirit can help him to achieve his ends. Man's will cannot be subjected to questioning. Own responsibility and accountability is not accepted. Failure to achieve something does not lie with man, but with a ritual not performed correctly or with the reaction of the spirits.

The human being thinks of himself as essentially amoral or neutral in his actions – whether good or bad – until affected by circumstances. Even then he firmly believes that he can negotiate with the spirit-world to excuse him from his wrong actions. However, when sacrifices or offerings are made, they are not to expiate "sin", but rather to re-establish and maintain filial relations with the spirit-world.

Keeping in mind this brief description of the African traditional worldview, as well as the information contained in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, will enable us to understand better how the traditional African way of thinking differs from that of today's Western way of thinking.

### **7.5 Comparing the pre-scientific pattern of thought of Africa with the scientific mode of thought of the West**

The following table contrasts the two worlds of thought by way of summary:

<b>Traditional Africa</b>	<b>Modern West</b>
1. spiritual powers important	material entities important
2. focus on knowledge of the spiritual world	focus on knowledge of the material world
3. power-oriented	truth-oriented
4. spiritualistic-organistic	materialistic-mechanistic
5. quest for supernatural causes	quest for physical causes
6. divination	Verification
7. magical	Technological
8. emphasis on human interaction	emphasis on non-human things
9. holistic, integral, knowledge of totality	reductionist, fragmented knowledge
10. close to concrete reality	abstract, removed from reality
11. warm, personal, individual knowledge	cold, businesslike, universal knowledge
12. pragmatic	Neutral
13. symbolic	Theoretical
14. affective	Objective

15. emotional	Intellectual
16. closely involved with object of knowledge	observes object of knowledge at a distance
17. less analytical, more synthetic	more analytical, less synthetic
18. more intuitive	more reflective
19. more experience-oriented	more experimental and technical
20. more cyclic	more linear-systematic, methodical
21. expressive	Instrumental
22. elementary distinctions	complex distinctions
23. ideas bound to events/situation	ideas bound to ideas
24. flexible and flowing	fixed and rigid
25. and – and logic	either - or logic
26. complementation of differences	duality of opposites
27. consensus important	competition important
28. past-oriented (traditional)	future-oriented (progressive)
29. more protective and closed	more critical and open
30. does not easily accept coincidence, probability, and other factors which render knowledge uncertain	accepts coincidence and probability of knowledge more easily

As noted above, there are **differences** between the pre-scientific, everyday mode of thought of Africa and the scientific mode of thought of the West, but there are also **similarities**. This clearly emerges from this diagrammatic comparison. At times the differences were very clear. In other cases it was more difficult to capture these in words or they were simply differences of degree, so that I had to speak of **more** or **less**. Even in the cases where scientific knowledge was indicated with concepts such as **analytical, intellectual, reflective, and distinguishing**, one has to keep in mind that to a lesser extent the same traits are also true of pre-scientific knowledge. Rational thought is not the prerogative of the scientist, and we do not find logic only in Western thought. We also find it in non-Western countries such as Africa - even though it might imply a different kind of logic.

Based on further research, reflection, and experience the list could therefore be either shortened or extended. What might have appeared to be differences at first glance could subsequently lapse. This diagram and its explanation do not pretend to be more than a preliminary exploration. Interesting research has already been done in this field, for instance by Appiah (1992, 1996), Du Preez (1976 and 1978), Haller (1996), Malherbe (1995), Masolo (1995), Ochieng'-Odhiambo (1995), Horton (1993, 1996) and Sogolo

(1993), but much still needs to be done. My aim is not to engage in a critical discussion with the different viewpoints of these authors, but to gain more clarity for myself and make their results accessible to an audience wider than only the specialists in this field.

The issue at stake here is what Africanisation could imply in the case of scientific practice, and what it should not imply. Stated differently: Would it be possible, on the one hand, that (pre-scientific) African thought could offer correctives to Western (scientific) thought and might it, on the other hand, possibly be that Western science could become more “friendly” or sensitive towards African thought?

Although I am not a philosopher of science by profession, I am aware of the fact that Western science, especially the positivist mode of scientific practice, has had to endure a great deal of criticism in recent decades. This criticism has emanated from Western ranks by such prominent figures as Feyerabend, Popper, Kuhn, and many others. Efforts have even been made to make adjustments to the Western scientific way of thought from Eastern perspectives. Space does not permit one to elaborate on this matter, as the focus here is on a comparison with African thought. Also, my comparative table cannot be dealt with in detail. Only certain facets will be highlighted.

#### **7.5.1 The spiritual versus the material**

Under this heading we summarize the first seven points of the comparison between the patterns of thought of Africa and the West.

Though true to a lesser extent today, Western science has largely ignored the spiritual dimension. It has concentrated on the visible, measurable, weighable, and countable physical reality. Possible “supernatural” causes were not allowed to be brought into consideration in science. Everything was explained according to natural causes and results. This focus on the material world, it was believed, also enabled science to be objective, unprejudiced, and neutral.

To put it somewhat differently, we could say that the West severed the umbilical cord between faith and science. Everything associated with faith was regarded as personal, subjective, and metaphysical. Science, however, which has the task of studying physical reality, is regarded as objective and universally valid. In this way an artificial divide was created in the West between faith and scholarship. The consequences of this division are very clear today!

I need not belabour the fact that African thought has realized for centuries that nothing - including knowledge - can be neutral. Their holistic religious orientation does not make it

possible to distinguish between the secular and the sacred, the profane and the holy, or the natural and the supernatural - least of all to separate them. For that reason, in their efforts to understand reality, supernatural causes play such an important role.

In this regard the contemporary secular scientific practice, which does not allow for faith in something or someone above the material, can learn something from Africa. Today some prominent natural scientists are of the opinion that within the near future we will understand and explain everything. Once condensed in compact formulae the world around us and we ourselves - from the big bang to the distant future - will be as transparent as glass. God is no longer needed to explain something. There is no deeper mystery on earth or in heaven.

Although Westerners (especially Christians) may not approve of the veneration of supernatural powers and ancestors in traditional African religion, it still remains a fact that Africa does not ignore the "spiritual" side of reality as the West does. Their way of thinking is therefore, in principle, richer than that of the materialist-mechanistic way of the West.

It is also one of the strong points of the Amsterdam School of Philosophy, to which I belong, that it emphasizes that science cannot be neutral. If one does not serve the true God in one's scientific endeavour, one is simply serving a substitute, an idol. Science is inherently ideologically loaded. Some kind of faith is the deepest motivating force in every science and present-day postmodernism has confirmed this.

Faith is not only the deepest driving force behind any scientific practice. It is also acceptable, from one's convictions based on faith, to seek answers to the many issues with which science is confronted on a daily basis. History, for example, is not simply a secular matter that can become transparent through the study of intra-worldly causes and effects. Historical research should be aware of the divine mystery in historical events.

On the debit side for Africa, however, one should mention point 13 in the comparison. Africa's ontology is concerned with the spiritual world and the forces that play a role in it. Put in western terminology, Africans regard supernatural causes as the explanation for almost everything. I emphasize that this is a Western way of expressing the situation, because for Africans these causes are not supernatural but natural. It would be even better to avoid using the word "natural" and simply speak of causes, because Africans do not know or accept the Western distinction between the "natural" and the "supernatural."

Symbols play an important role in the way Africa knows reality. Concrete objects, which according to the African have magical qualities, are in the first place not seen for what they



**are**, but for what they **represent** or what can be associated with them. Items and events of symbolic value refer to other things outside themselves. Dreams, for example, may represent facts. Symbols may even be dangerous. An example of older symbols may be found in the ancestors. A recent example is the removal of the Verwoerd statue in Bloemfontein, which was done by the ANC government because for them it represented **everything** that involved apartheid.

Western science makes use of pictures, images, or metaphors, but they try to pin them down or reduce them so that they lose the flowing quality of the symbol. We would rather call them signs. Through definition and precision their multifaceted meaning is reduced. In the magical-symbolic way of thinking, however, the images used are undefined. Because figures or numbers are precise signs, black students may find it difficult to cope with statistics in science. They do not think in such exact terms and do not understand why this is important. (It is probably also a reason why it is so difficult for the African to plan meticulously.)

A further negative result of this concentration on the spiritual world and the quest for supernatural causes can be found in point 30 of the comparison: Africa does not easily accept coincidence, probability, and other factors which lead to uncertain knowledge. Of course Western science can also be dogmatic about its own explanations. Yet it is more open to the possibility of multiple explanations of a phenomenon.

### **7.5.2 The human-social versus the non-human**

The African's way of thinking is strongly influenced by the community and social relationships (a communalist worldview). In contrast, as indicated in the comparative table (point 8), Western science is especially directed at non-human things, that is, it is materialistically inclined. The emphasis is not, in the first place, on the investigation of human issues. Also the person (scientist) himself, who is doing the investigation, is not important: he practically does it in a mechanistically, neutral fashion. Western scientific practice also has a strong individualistic trait: individual competition and achievement are highly regarded.

But does scientific practice not have a human and social side? If we think about this carefully, we realize that no one can practise science on his own or in isolation. Science is practised in a group context and scientific paradigms claim particular communities of thought. Most scientists are continually exchanging ideas with co-scientists. They read articles and books by others, receive criticism on their own work, and respond to others.

Social power and authority relationships also play a role in scientific practice. Knowledge is power and those who know more have greater authority and power. They can use or withhold their knowledge to manipulate people. Not only is science itself socially determined but it in turn determines social circumstances.

Is the pre-scientific knowledge of Africa, which puts such strong emphasis on human interaction (communalism), not an important contribution to take into account? Mutual cooperation and consensus building are surely as important to science as individual competition. Are we adequately aware of the social implications of our scientific practice? Answers to these kinds of questions might help to release us from a one-sided view of science.

### **7.5.3 The concrete versus the abstract**

From the comparative table we can deduce that western science is especially characterized by four actions: abstracting (10), theorizing (13), analysing (17), and systematizing (20).

Abstraction takes place in four stages. (1) It leaves the concrete, observable reality behind and abstracts especially the laws that are valid for reality. (2) It relinquishes the special, unique data and abstracts only the general or the universal. (3) From the coherence of all the aspects of reality, it further also abstracts only one aspect. In economics, for example, the economic aspect and in physics the physical, etc. (4) The scientist also relinquishes his own and other advantages and interests - science should be "disinterested."

By means of this fourfold abstraction one arrives at theoretical knowledge, which is especially characterized by an urge for distinction, analysis, or a breaking up of the abstracted "portion" of reality into components.

Finally, everything is summarized again in a system of knowledge, a process in which logic plays an important role. For that reason science is considered as logically coherent knowledge. This knowledge can often be expressed in mathematical relations (one could call this a further abstraction). Subsequently, science can be used as an instrument for the control or manipulation of reality.

Given all the steps above, scientific knowledge is actually "alienated" from concrete reality - the fullness of reality has been lost. As a result, science can never obtain a complete grasp of reality and we should not equate knowledge of reality with reality itself - although this is often done.

In contrast to this abstract scientific way of knowing, there is the more concrete mode of knowing of Africa (point 10). The African is more closely involved with the object of knowledge and observation is not done at a distance as is done in the West (point 16).

This is perhaps what Kaunda had in mind when he wrote (see Biko, 1987:44): "The Westerner has an aggressive mentality. When he sees a problem he will not rest until he has formulated some solution to it. He cannot live with contradictory ideas in his mind ... And he is vigorously scientific in rejecting solutions for which there is no basis in logic. Africans, being pre-scientific people ... experience a situation rather than face a problem. By this I mean they allow both the rational and the non-rational elements to make an impact on them, and any action they may take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation than the result of some mental exercise".

When the young people of Africa still received their education on the farm or from the local carpenter, potter, or artist, their training was not theoretical. Under the guidance of a master craftsman, their attention was directed at (1) concrete objects or situations. (2) They noted general patterns - for example in the case of the carpentry apprentice, the texture of certain woods. The generalizations they made based on their observations were not dependent on conceptual abstractions, however, but always referred to concrete things. They were not **abstract** but **concrete** generalizations. (Theoretical knowledge gains meaning within the relation in which it stands to other concepts in a conceptual system, while concrete concepts refer to aspects or characteristics that we experience as real things, events, or relationships. An example of a concrete concept is the concept "table." A mathematical system, however, is something abstract, because a mathematical problem can be solved with pen and paper or a computer without reference to any concrete thing.) (3) In the third place this type of instruction helped pupils get to know the individual qualities of things.

I therefore question the view that concrete knowledge is a more primitive form of knowledge that can be left behind as man's theoretical knowledge progresses. Concrete knowledge can be pursued with as much discipline. It is not less reliable and accurate than Western scientific knowledge either. Such knowledge is obtained by concentrating on the richly shaded details of concrete things. According to repetitive patterns general deductions are made and tested. In this way a source of knowledge is built up that can identify and understand universal patterns. It can be described in concrete, basic, everyday language.

On the other hand it should be emphasized that no training at a tertiary institution (college, technical institute or university) can occur without some measure of abstraction - even in the fields that could be described as less abstract. Even though the emphasis in colleges and technical schools might be less theoretical, knowledge of (abstract) scientific principles remains a condition.

All students, however, cannot develop the same high level of proficiency in abstract thought. Many students simply are not gifted in this way. Sound "Africanisation" should probably keep this in mind, not by accepting the deficiency, but by assisting students to master the minimum abstract scientific skills required in a specific discipline or a certain educational institution such as a college, technical school or university.

#### **7.5.4 Individual-personal versus universal-impersonal knowledge**

Western science seeks the universal, typical facets of things and the general laws that govern them (point 11). It tends to regard the unique, individual sides of things as being of less value, because they constitute an obstacle on the road to operational efficiency. The attention of pre-scientific knowledge of Africa, in contrast, is directed more at concrete, individual things. Because individuality cannot be learnt via the categories of an abstract conceptual system, Africa's focus is also on a face-to-face interaction with concrete reality (see previous point).

In Western thought itself there have been trends and schools (as for example in the reaction of Romanticism to the Enlightenment or in the case of the late Rationalism of Dilthey) that have stressed the fact that the specific or individual (against the universal), the concrete (against the abstract), and what is unique (against what is identical) should not be neglected in scholarly endeavours. A one-sidedness in Western science was noted without solving the problem of how the individual aspects of things could be given a place in scientific investigation.

We should acknowledge that everything in reality has both a universal side (pecan trees) and an individual side (the specific pecan tree in my garden). Should we get to know the universal facet of something through science, we should therefore realize that it represents only one side of it - we only have something concrete once we also know its individual facet. Individual differences can be important, as for example in the case of medical science.

### **7.5.5 More emotionally-synthetic versus more intellectually-analytical**

Western science is seen as something intellectual, in which the emotional definitely does not belong. Against this we have the pre-scientific knowledge of Africa, which is more involved, warmer, more personal, emotional, affective, and expressive. This is the contrast that emerges from points 14 to 16 in the comparative table. Du Preez (1978:76) has the following to say in this connection:

“In contrast to modern man, whose approach to life is objectively analytical and whose spirit is accordingly also divided into value, thought and feeling systems, blacks have a different approach. They do not face the world objectively and at a distance, but live in it. No object exists outside reality. They touch and are attuned to things and the earth. They experience everything intensely and are part of everything”.

It seems as if the mode of thought of Africans is closer to that of the holistic-concrete way of Hebraic thinking. Black people are more congenial to the Old Testament than to New Testament literature. This fact becomes evident if we compare the contours of Hebrew thought, as described for example by Wilson (1997:135-165), with the traditional African way of thinking summarized in the chart above.

Are these two ways of knowing completely irreconcilable? Can we really detach scientific practice from all our senses? May involvement, interest, experience, emotion, perception not play a role at all? I have the feeling that Western science has a stronger emotional side than we may think.

At the same time the Western pattern of thought is also more analytically directed when compared with the emphasis on synthesis in the African way of thinking (point 17). As indicated in point 9 above, while Western science offers analytic, fragmented knowledge (not only within the same science but as a result of the ongoing specialization also between the sciences), African thought aims at holistic, integral knowledge of the totality. (Cf. the studies by Bowden, 1984 and Buconyori, 1991.) To my mind the holistic picture which African thought offers is as important as the detailed knowledge of Western science.

A third point, which relates to the previous paragraph, is indicated in point 25 of the comparison. The logical is usually seen as the most important or at least as one of the most important characteristics of Western science. The more emotional accent of African thought, however, does not imply - as is sometimes suggested - that African thought is not logical. Even in the West there is not only one system of logic. (Aristotelian, Medieval, and Modern symbolic logic are all different.) Africa, however, uses a different type of logic.

Africa mostly operates with an **and - and logic**, as compared with the Western logic of **either - or**. In this case, too, African logic shows similarity to the ancient Hebrew "block logic" of the Old Testament (Wilson 1997:150-153). In the former case differences are seen as complementary, while in the latter case differences are seen rather as contrasting, opposing (26). African logic is more flexible and flowing, while that of the West is more fixed and rigid (24). My question would be whether these two types of logical thinking are not reflecting two sides of the same reality. Does Africa not put more emphasis on the unity of things, while the West wishes to emphasize their diversity? Should this be the case, the African way of thinking offers a valuable correction to the Western way of scientific thought.

### **7.5.6 Traditionally-closed versus progressively-open**

With this last contrast (points 28 and 29 of the table) this preliminary investigation is concluded. Although the Western ideal of progress is often absolutised the pendulum would, in this instance, swing in favour of the Western mentality, which is more receptive to new possibilities than tradition-bound African thought with a unique conception of time and history (cf. Van der Walt 1997:51-71).

This elementary comparison has, in fact, indicated that the comparison between Africa and the West has at times favoured Africa and at times the West.

### **7.6 The balance**

Before we return to the question of Afrocentrism versus Eurocentrism I first want to launch a hypothesis. Different cultures emphasize different sides of our **fourfold relationship** to God or the supernatural, to nature, to others, and to ourselves (cf. Van der Walt 1997:12-20 for a detailed explanation). My hypothesis is that because of this state of affairs, (1) different **gifts** are also developed in the different cultures. (2) These gifts enable the different cultures to **know reality** in different ways. (3) Knowledge of reality can also be **expressed in different ways**.

A common way of knowing reality and expressing our knowledge is by way of language and numbers (a mathematical way). This is typical of Western educational systems: listen, read, memorize and write. Today, however, even Western educationists realize more and more that "intelligence" cannot be limited to only these two ways of knowing. Scholars (such as Gardner, 1983) have drawn our attention to what are called "multiple intelligences." Not only people who are capable of working with words and figures should be regarded as intelligent. These are only two forms of intelligence. We should also

acknowledge other ways of attaining knowledge and other learning styles. It is, for example, also possible to get to know reality and express one's knowledge about reality in the following ways: by way of visual images, with body activity, in an aesthetic way, in a technical way, and through personal contact with others. To really comprehend the richness of God's creation, we need all these gifts and their accompanying ways of knowing.

Olthuis, as editor of **Knowing other-wise: philosophy at the threshold of spirituality** (1997), also emphasized "we know more than we can think." He quite rightly points out:

"Instead of judging that emotions are subversive of knowledge, or at best irrational urges that need to be controlled by reason, we believe emotions, as emotions, are vital and honourable ways of knowing. Feelings are themselves indispensable thermometers, signals registering how we apprehend, situate, and motivate ourselves in engaging the world. There is also tactile-kinesthetic knowing, as there is knowing a friend, and, to employ a Biblical idiom, knowing one's wife. In other words, reasoning is only one of the many ways in which we engage (i.e., know) the world ... Knowing is the multidimensional, embodied, gendered way human beings engage the world in order to situate themselves meaningfully (spiritually) and come close responsibly (ethically) to the different and other. We also know by touch, by feel, by taste, by sight, by sounds, by smell, by symbols, by sex, by trust - by means of every modality of human experience. Knowing by thinking is no better, no worse, than any of the other modalities. Each modality, according to its own style, is an important and indispensable way in which we actively engage the world. In any human act of engagement, all the ways of knowing are reciprocally interwoven, simultaneously present, even when, as the case may be, one of the ways of knowing stands out and marks that particular activity in a heightened way".

On the one hand we should never try to fit someone into only one of these learning style "boxes" as if it would be the only way in which that person could acquire knowledge. On the other hand we should not suppress a unique learning style and simply regard someone as stupid because he/she cannot express him/herself very well in, for example, language. A teacher/lecturer should be aware of the specific kind of intelligence of a student and create different kinds of learning opportunities to enable the student to use his own gifts. This also calls for a variety of evaluation methods in education.

My hypothesis is that what was said of individuals thus far might also apply to cultures. Specific gifts, intelligences, and learning styles may be more strongly developed in some

cultures than in other cultures. My guess is that the visual, active (bodily), and interpersonal (communal) way of knowing and learning is more strongly developed in Africa than in the contemporary Western world. In the West the mathematical and technical ways of knowing and expressing knowledge are perhaps better developed. Much more research, however, has to be conducted to confirm my hypothesis. If it proves to be true, we will not only have to acknowledge individual talents. The unique gifts and knowing and learning styles of different cultural groups should also be acknowledged in education. Africanisation understood in this way should not be viewed as a threat - as the lowering of standards, for example - but as a challenge and an opportunity for the enrichment of our educational process.

I would like to advocate a **mutually affirming and corrective cultural pluralism**, which implies that the cultures of Africa and the West mutually affirm as well as correct each other. This entails that one will first have to accept that one's own culture has, apart from good qualities, limitations from which it can only be freed by listening carefully to other cultures. Only then, in the second place, will one be in a position to help other cultures to accept their own limitations and weaknesses.

Such a mutually affirming and corrective approach to cultural diversity would, of course, only be possible through intense dialogue between the two cultures. It would be impossible when the cultures exist next to each other as they did during the time of apartheid. Neither would it be possible if one culture intended to force others to accept its perspective, as is the case in both the Afrocentric and Eurocentric approaches.

We can no longer cling to a Eurocentric orientation. The pre-scientific mode of thought of Africa should make us sensitive to the defects of Western scientific thought. We should seriously ask ourselves whether scientific thought should not be "broadened" to soften the cultural shock that Africans experience. At the same time it should also be emphasized that the latest trend in my country (South Africa) to approach everything from an Afrocentric perspective will not provide a solution for the encounter between Africa and the West. In spite of its limitations and defects, western science and technology provide opportunities without which a developing country like ours cannot survive.

When we are critical towards both Afrocentric and Eurocentric ideas, we will be moving closer to the ideal of a balanced, correct approach. Exactly what such an answer will look like is difficult to say at this stage. It may imply that the basic **aims** of scholarly work, the **ways** we think, and the **nature** of our scientific activity will have to change.



As was the case at the conclusion of the previous two chapters, the challenge to students and other readers of this chapter is the following: Add a third column to the right of the comparative table earlier in this chapter, mentioning thirty differences between the ways of thinking of Africa and the West. This third, new column should contain your creative proposal for a way of thinking which, while enriched by both Africa and the West, is neither Afrocentric nor Eurocentric in nature.

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## Chapter 8:

### DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICA

For the past fifty years a protracted debate was held on whether one could speak about **philosophy** in Africa (its existence) and whether it should be called an **African** philosophy (its character). Basically all trends to be discussed in this chapter tried to answer these two questions: Are Africans able to **philosophise**? And should their philosophy bear a unique **African** character?

#### 8.1 Culture, worldview and philosophy

Today such questions may sound very strange indeed. One tends to answer: Of course! But if one keep in mind the previous chapters, one will realize that these problems were a result of Africa's domination for many centuries by "superior" Western culture. The West could not imagine Africans capable of philosophical sophistication. And if they were, they would merely be able to produce a (second-rate) African philosophy.

##### 8.1.1 Culture

As soon as we use the words "**African** philosophy" we are reminded of the close links of such a philosophy with African ideas, viewpoints, ways of life, in one word: with African culture.

The question, however, is whether it is correct to speak of something like an African culture. In the light of the fact of about 800 different African languages and an estimated 2000 dialects on the continent, some would answer the question negatively. To speak about an African culture would imply serious overgeneralization.

Others, however - not only Westerners, but also Africans - are of the opinion that it is possible to identify certain cultural traits which are unique and common to the African situation. We may therefore, employ the term "African" in a similar way as we use the concepts "European", "Western" or "Eastern ". Personally I tend to agree with this last viewpoint.

As stated in the fourth chapter of this book, culture is a complex phenomenon. To try to explain it, we may use the image of concentric circles. The innermost circle represents one's deepest religious commitment. The circle next to it symbolizes one's worldview, which indicates how one sees the world as well as one's place and task in it. The following concentric circles visualize the more external and more visible facets of a culture.

### 8.1.2 Worldview and philosophy

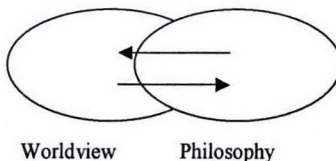
One of the key questions of different trends in philosophy in Africa for the past half a century was: What is the difference between culture (especially the core of culture, viz. worldview) and philosophy? This should be clarified at the start to enable us to understand the long debate about the possibility of an African philosophy.

For our present purpose only a few relevant characteristics of a worldview will be mentioned. (For more details, see Van der Walt, 2002: 39-55.)

- In the first place a worldview is important because it is more or less the **“soul” of a whole culture**. From its central position it determines the rest of a culture.
- A worldview contains one’s **basic ideas** about (1) God or the divine, what one regards as absolute; (2) being human; (3) community; (4) laws or values; (5) nature; (6) time and history (cf. chapter 4).
- A worldview is **something communal**, the collective consciousness of a group of people. It synthesizes and unites the beliefs of the many individuals in a community.
- A worldview is usually **uncritically** accepted. People take it for granted, because they are mostly not even aware that they think and act from a certain frame of reference.
- Lastly a worldview is **pre-scientific** in nature. It is not only the property of educated scholars, but it is the ordinary wisdom of the man in the street. An illiterate person may have more common sense wisdom than a doctor in philosophy. Note that “pre-scientific” does not mean “un-scientific”. Worldview knowledge is not necessarily **inferior** to scientific knowledge, but it is a different **kind** of knowledge.

What then is philosophy? It is an academic discipline, the oldest of all of them and also the most basic. As a scholarly discipline it does not take everything for granted but argues, criticizes and reflects. What will be the object of philosophical reflections? An elementary definition of philosophy will be that, in a scientific way, it reflects on a specific worldview (systematic philosophy) or a variety of worldviews (history of ideas).

To visualize the relationship between worldview and philosophy, we draw two slightly overlapping circles with two arrows in different directions in between them:



The arrow to the right indicates that a worldview is more basic and therefore influences the content and direction of one's philosophy. The arrow pointing to the left indicates that philosophy is "second order" thinking, it tries to acquire deep, theoretical insight into a specific worldview. Please note that the two circles are overlapping, because in practice it will not always be easy to distinguish sharply between a pre-scientific worldview and philosophy in the technical sense of the word. After all both of them strive to obtain wisdom (the Greek word "philosophy" means "love for wisdom") – they only do so in different ways.

## **8.2 Four stages in the development of an African philosophy**

We will first indicate how the idea of an African philosophy developed **historically** (Tienou, 1998:38-48). Then we will have a **systematic** look at the main types of African philosophy.

### **8.2.1 Western condescension (about 1800-1930)**

This first stage in the quest for an African philosophy actually provided only the launching pad for the following stages. It was the time when Westerners still denied Africans coherent, logical thought and intellectual development. (A clear example is the work of L. Levey-Bruhl.)

### **8.2.2 The African reaction (about 1930-1970)**

At least three reactions can be distinguished during this stage:

- W.E. Blyden and others started propagating the idea of an "African personality".
- A. Cesaire, L.S. Senghor and others emphasized **négritude**, a distinctive and universal black culture.
- P. Tempels and others proposed "Bantu philosophy", also positing the existence of general and collective African thought.

During this stage the quest for an African philosophy was motivated by the desire to include Africans in the category of rational human beings. Africans have the right to be different. Their thought, though not Western, is nevertheless rational. Their philosophy, though different and collective, is no less philosophical than the works of Western thinkers. We could call this the ethnophilosophic stage.

### **8.2.3 Challenging the reality of an African philosophy (about 1970-1980's)**

During this stage African thinkers, like Wiredu, Houndondji, Towa and Crahay, challenged ethnophilosophy because (1) it confused the two meanings of philosophy, viz. the colloquial usage (indicating religion, worldview and culture) and the technical meaning (of a scientific discipline); (2) its idea that philosophy is a collective instead of an individual enterprise; (3) it did not fully acknowledge the analytical and critical character of philosophy.

### **8.2.4 The final synthesis (1980's to present)**

During this stage there is growing agreement that contemporary African philosophies should be built on traditional worldviews, cultures and religions. Therefore African philosophies would differ from Western and Asian philosophies because of their different religious, worldview and cultural backgrounds.

These four stages clearly indicate that the search for an African philosophy is part of the much broader African quest for an own identity. The question of identity is a central aspect of all types of reflection in Africa – it is also evident in the quest for an own **theologia Africana** or African theology.

### **8.3 The quest for an African theology**

Similar to the debates about an African philosophy, the quest for an African theology is also rooted in the historical situation vis-à-vis Europe and the West (Tienou, 1998).

- First missionaries communicated to Africans what, to them, was clear universal Christian teaching, doctrine and theology. In fact it was a Western type of theology.
- Therefore, during the 1950's, a group of Westerners and Africans began consciously to wrestle with the question of a more appropriate, genuine African theology. This is roughly the same time as the emergence of Négritude, Bantu philosophy and political independence for Africa. During this phase the emphasis was on a singular African theology.
- At a later stage people, however, began to express the idea that a general or collective African theology is impossible to achieve and suggested plural African theologies to account for the cultural diversity on the continent.
- Finally a stage was reached – similar to that in the development of African philosophy – where general African characteristics are recognized without denying the need for specifics.

With this historical introduction it will be easier to understand the sometimes complex debate about the possibility and content of an African philosophy.

#### 8.4 Four trends in African philosophy

A distinction between different trends or schools of African philosophy is possible. Serequeberhan (1991:3-23) distinguished between only two basic approaches in African philosophy: the historical-hermeneutical (which is concerned with the consideration of African traditions and society on a "subjective" level) and the scientific approach (which is more rational and scientifically analytical on an "objective" level).

Orika first identified three schools, namely ethnophilosophy, the historical and the rational schools, but later on Orika (1990) added sage philosophy as a fourth school.

Deacon (1992) distinguished between the following seven schools:

The historical-hermeneutical group, including

- ethnophilosophy (e.g. Tempels, Mbiti)
- philosophic sagacity (e.g. Orika)
- négritude (e.g. Cheikh-Anta Diop, L.S. Senghor)
- the cultural-universal school (L. Outlaw)
- the national-ideological school (e.g. J. Nyerere)
- the linguistic school (e.g. K. Wiredu).

The scientific approach, including only one group, namely professional philosophy (e.g. P.J. Hountondji).

However, in a later publication (Deacon, 1998:396-7) she proposed the following classification of the different trends in African thinking:

- the **historical approach**, including the following trends (1) ethnophilosophy; (2) political philosophy and (3) négritude.
- the **hermeneutical approach**, including (1) African political philosophy or nationalist-ideological philosophy; (2) philosophical sagacity and (3) African literary philosophy.
- the **scientific approach**, including (1) philosophical sagacity and (2) professional philosophy.

Her motivation for this new categorization is described in detail in her article.



In the rest of this chapter we will, however, distinguish only between the following four schools (Van der Walt, 1997):

- **Ethnophilosophy** – a description of the religions, worldviews and cultures of Africa.
- **Sage philosophy** – the result of the wisdom of individual African wise men and women.
- **Nationalistic–ideological liberation philosophy** – the societal visions of important African leaders for their countries prior and after independence.
- **Professional philosophy** – the philosophy taught at many Western-style universities by African philosophers trained according to Western standards of philosophy.

In what follows, attention will not only be paid to every one of the “schools” separately, but something will also be said about the interaction between them.

#### **8.4.1 Ethnophilosophy**

This was the very first attempt at an African philosophy. As the original Greek word **ethne** indicates, the anthropologists, sociologists, ethnologists and philosophers of this school concentrated their studies on a people or ethnic group. They correctly assumed that a worldview is imbedded in the traditional wisdom (as expressed in proverbs, folk tales, myths), languages, institutions and behaviour of a group of people. Their task was to thrash out from these different facets of an African culture its view of the world, which they sometimes called its “philosophy”.

To my mind this was a worthwhile exercise. To describe the worldview of a group can be of great help to understand their minds as well as their behaviour.

I have, however, identified some shortcomings in this approach:

- The word “philosophy” was used a bit carelessly. They did not distinguish clearly enough between pre-scientific worldview and academic philosophy.
- The ethnophilosophers were usually satisfied with a description of the collective consciousness of a people (their worldview) without being critical about it. This tendency may partly be explained by the idea still dominant at that time, that scientific endeavor should be neutral and therefore not prescriptive.
- They tended to generalize and ignore the differences between various groups and individuals within a country, sometimes even suggesting that they had discovered the common worldview of the entire sub-continent. They did not take sufficient account of individual wise men or women.

- They often disregarded changing conditions so that they were blamed for concentrating on past conditions, which were no longer in existence.
- Questions were also asked about the authenticity of ethnophilosophic literature. Critics have even argued that, for instance, P. Tempels' "Bantu philosophy" was not the philosophy of black peoples, but the Thomistic-Catholic philosophy of father Tempels himself!

In spite of these points of critique, ethnophilosophy cannot simply be jettisoned. In fact the two following schools are – in spite of their criticism on ethnophilosophy – deeply indebted to them.

We should keep in mind the twofold aim of ethnophilosophy:

- In the first place, it was intended to revive amongst Africans themselves a respect and appreciation for their own cultural heritage.
- Secondly, it was addressed to the European public to convince them that Africans are human beings and, like the white people, also capable of philosophic thinking.

Ironically it is exactly in this respect that ethnophilosophers had to suffer heavily under the critique of the professional philosophers. The latter were of the opinion that ethnophilosophy was a kind of Eurocentrism in reverse. The Europeans regarded Africans as different (and therefore inferior). The Ethnophilosophers fell into the trap and "invented" a unique African philosophy which at the same time was radically unEuropean! As we will see later on, the same critique could, however, also be levelled against the professional philosophers. They also succumbed to Western pressure by insisting that real African philosophy should comply with the standards prescribed by Western philosophers!

A few of the most important representatives of ethnophilosophy are:

- White ethnophilosophers: P. Tempels, L. Apostel.
- Black ethnophilosophers: A. Kagame, J. Mbiti.
- African personality philosophers: E.W. Blyden.
- Négritude philosophers: A. Césaire, L. Senghor.

#### **8.4.2 Sage philosophy or philosophical sagacity**

This second trend was a reaction against the idea of a collective, communal African worldview or "philosophy" held by members of the ethnophilosophical school. This group would denote as the locus of philosophical activity, not the whole society, but individual

sages, traditional Africans generally regarded as exceptionally wise by their community. These sages should be either illiterate or have very little Western education to ensure that they are firmly grounded in traditional culture, that they are still real Africans.

H.O. Oruka, one of the representatives of this movement, distinguishes between two types of sages: folk sages and philosophic sages. The former group are individual thinkers, but they still take a "first order", uncritical attitude towards their traditional culture and worldview. The latter type of sages, however, are "second order" thinkers, because they transcend communal cultural thought. They are independent, critical thinkers who are capable of distancing themselves from the accepted beliefs and opinions of their people.

It is this last type of sages (men and women) who were interviewed by people like Oruka and Griaule, who wrote down their "philosophies".

On the positive side it was appreciated that Africa – like the West – does not only have communal worldviews, but real individual philosophers.

Negative reactions were the following:

- Is what was produced in this way really philosophy in the technical (Western) sense of the word, or is it still nothing more than the worldviews of these sages?
- Because of the long Western tradition of written philosophies, some critics were not happy with the (original) oral form of sage philosophy.
- How can one be sure that the sage philosophy written down and published is really a hundred percent the "philosophy" of the sage himself and is not influenced by the questions and interpretations of his philosophically trained interviewer?

A few representatives of this trend in African philosophy are, apart from the already mentioned H.O. Oruka and M. Griaule, B. Hallen en J.O. Sodipo.

#### **8.4.3 Nationalistic – ideological liberation philosophy**

This movement, too, arose from special needs. It developed during the time of decolonisation and independence. Its literature is therefore anti-colonial and pro-independence.

Especially after independence was granted to the different African countries during the 1960's their leaders felt the need to develop their own socio-political theories or ideologies which could unify the variety of ethnic groups in one, new nation.

In this way a great variety of liberation "philosophies" developed. L. Senghor promoted "African socialism"; K.D. Kaunda preferred "African humanism"; K. Nkrumah called his version "consciencism"; for J. Kenyatta the unifying vision was that of **harambe** (let us pull together); J. Nyerere's ideology was that of **ujamaa** (village collectivism or socialism) and D.T. Arap Moi developed a Kenyan African nationalism or **nyayo**-philosophy of peace, love and unity. In all these ideologies or "philosophies" an effort was made to restore something of the past, pre-colonial heritage of Africa, its culture and worldview.

In other cases, however, perhaps because of the Cold War (1946-1986) between the US and the USSR, more or less pure Western ideologies like Marxism or Capitalism were accepted as guidelines for future development.

An evaluation of this trend in African thought should include the following:

- An ideology has more or less the same structure as a worldview, but its direction is different. It can be called a "hardened" worldview, which is forced by politicians and economists upon a people or nation. (See chapter 12 of my book **The liberating message** (2002) for a detailed description of an ideology).
- This is perhaps also one of the reasons why the nationalistic-ideological liberation "philosophies" could succeed in liberating Africa but not in developing it after independence. This type of philosophy has more or less died out in the whole of Africa. Most African countries today have accepted liberal-democratic constitutions and opted for neo-capitalist, free market economies.
- South Africa, probably because it became independent only in 1994, is the one exception to the rule. Before liberation we had the Black Consciousness Movement (with S. Biko as leader) and many liberation theologies. After 1994 "ubuntu"-philosophy became popular for some time. Nowadays the "African Renaissance" (see chapter 19 of this book) of president Thabo Mbeki is the new buzzword. In many respects it differs from the above-mentioned ideologies of liberation, but it may still be described as a latecomer in a long list of liberation "philosophies". In this case, however, not from political but economic domination, and not for independence, but for socio-economic development.
- In conclusion we should be reminded that an ideology is not identical to a philosophy. In the strict sense of the word these different African ideologies are not part of African philosophy.

#### **8.4.4 Professional African philosophy**

This last group of African philosophers firmly believe that philosophy in the strict sense (as the West also believes) is the critical and systematic study of the claims to truth about the world (worldviews), knowledge and values. Real philosophy involves reflection, argument, criticism and systematic thinking and should also be in a written form for others to read and review. Representatives of this trend are usually identified by their credentials as doctors of philosophy (obtained from Western universities or Western-style African universities).

A second belief of this group is that philosophy has a universal character and, therefore, must have meaning to all cultures and not only to one (the African culture).

Merely from these two beliefs it is clear that professional philosophers will not have much appreciation for the ethnophilosophers. Added to it are the following points of criticism: (1) That the whole of Africa does not have the same "philosophy"; (2) that ethnophilosophy is based on oral traditions, a fact which impedes its scientific evaluation; (3) that ethnophilosophers did not identify individual African thinkers and (4) that ethnophilosophers over-emphasised past traditions without taking cognizance of contemporary developments.

The difference between the approaches of ethnophilosophers and professional philosophers may be stated in the following way. The ethnophilosophers emphasized the African character of "philosophy" at the expense of its philosophical nature, while the professional philosophers rescued philosophy (as a scholarly discipline), but lost its African character. The professional philosophers are so preoccupied with questions relating to what constitutes philosophy in Africa in general, that they basically busy themselves with a kind of metaphilosophy with very little relevance to the concrete problems of the continent.

At the beginning of this chapter we said that the basic problem which confronted African philosophers during the past fifty years was how their thinking could simultaneously be "African" as well as "philosophy", in other words real African philosophy. It is clear that neither ethnophilosophers nor professional philosophers could solve this problem satisfactorily.

Some of the professional philosophers must have realized this weakness. K. Wiredu, P.J. Hountondji, K.A. Appiah and P.O. Bondurin are clearly professional philosophers. Others, however, like C. Sumner, like to be called professional philosophers, but resemble

ethnophilosophy because they engage traditional African worldviews (Ethiopian worldview in the case of Sumner).

The professional philosophers also received their share of criticism from the other groups. We have already remarked that the predominantly Western character of this philosophy prohibits it to have relevance for the real burning problems of our continent. Other points of concern are the following:

- The professional philosophers blame the ethnophilosophers that they were forced by Europeans to develop a different “philosophy” for Africans to restore their own dignity and convince the West that they (the Africans) are also human, capable of philosophic thought (see above). In turn the ethnophilosophers blame the professional philosophers of committing the very same mistake: to allow the West to prescribe to them what philosophy in Africa should look like, namely rational, in written form and produced by individuals.
- Professional philosophy is mainly a critique of ethnophilosophy and therefore lacks a literature of its own. It can only hope to progress in the future when it switches from predominantly a protest against ethnophilosophy to a more positive study of specific philosophical issues and problems.
- Many professional philosophers in Africa are of the opinion that only real (black) Africans can produce a genuine African philosophy. I think this very narrow definition of an African philosopher should be broadened to include philosophers from other continents who are currently working in Africa or have worked here for some time and who know the relevant issues of our continent.

### **8.5 The way ahead**

This conclusion addresses the following four points: It

- explains the reactionary character of African philosophies;
- questions the dominant standards of Western philosophy imposed on Africa;
- pleads for more positive interaction between the four schools;
- encourages African philosophers to establish philosophies relevant to the many problems of contemporary Africa.

### **8.5.1 The reactionary character of much of African philosophies**

From the preceding pages we once again realize how much damage Western imperialism caused not only materially but also spiritually to the minds of Africans. Even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century people in the West still believed that Africans are not fully human. Later on Africans were accepted as **homo sapiens**, but Westerners still doubted their ability to think rationally and to produce their own worldview and philosophy.

All four forms of African philosophy discussed are different efforts to disprove this Western or Eurocentric arrogance. Ethnophilosophy tried to show that Africans have an own, unique worldview. Sage philosophy provided examples of individual, independent African thinkers. Liberation “philosophies”, in turn, proved that Africans are capable to produce their own socio-political perspectives. Finally, professional philosophers came forward to establish an African philosophy according to Western standards.

### **8.5.2 The imposition of Western philosophical standards**

We have to question the Western ideas about science in general and philosophy in particular. Should they be accepted as criteria for the whole world? Let me mention only four issues:

- Is it really necessary to require that philosophy should only be done by identifiable individuals? Could traditionally communalistic societies, like that of Africa, not be granted the right to philosophize as a group? Is this requirement, viz. that philosophy should be the product of individual minds, not simply the result of Western individualism?
- Why is it necessary that philosophy should be in a written form? The ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, is deemed of great importance in Western philosophy in spite of the fact that we do not have any written material from his pen – except for what Plato told us about his ideas. Is an oral philosophy necessarily of inferior quality? The opposite may be the case, namely that oral philosophy is more alive, direct, powerful and contextual!
- Should we simply follow the trends in Western philosophy? The danger will then be that we narrow down philosophy – as has happened in the West – to logic, epistemology and language analysis. These subjects, important as they may be, do not address the real burning issues on our continent. We need a much broader scope for philosophy. Philosophical anthropology, philosophy of society and ethics are, for instance, of much greater relevance in the African context.

- Should we uncritically accept and follow the secular character of Western philosophy? Western philosophy has broken the tie between religion, worldview and culture on the one hand and philosophy on the other. Generally speaking, Africans are still religious people. Why then should we not include in our philosophical endeavors serious thinking about religious, worldview and cultural issues as well? Philosophy of Religion and Philosophy of Culture should be important subjects in the curriculum of African departments of philosophy.

### **8.5.3 Positive interaction between the different schools of philosophy**

As will be clear from this chapter, the four different trends in African philosophy have spent much time and energy in catching flies from each other's faces. Of course the mutual critique was necessary and sometimes beneficial. I do hope, however, that in future the four schools will also interact in more positive ways, learning from each other and trying to be mutually enriched.

Professional philosophy can, for example, use the results of ethnophilosophy, sage philosophy and liberation philosophy. In this way its present foreign, Western character can be changed to make it more relevant to the African environment. This brings us to the last remark:

### **8.5.4 A more relevant philosophy for contemporary Africa**

Ethnophilosophy and sage philosophy dealt more or less with the past, with traditions that will soon be gone forever. Also the different liberation philosophies have had their time, because Africa today needs a new liberation, not from political imperialism (colonialism), but from economic domination and marginalisation (neo-colonialism and globalisation). The present type of professional philosophy is not outdated, but to my mind too much preoccupied to compete with Western philosophical models in order to be acceptable. I firmly believe, however, that there should not be a tension between excellence on the one hand and relevance on the other. One can strive for excellence and still be very relevant in the African context.

My suggestion is that African professional philosophers will in future strive for greater relevance to their African environment. One example of such an approach is the philosophy of the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Gyekye, for instance in his book **Tradition and modernity; philosophical reflections on the African experience** (1997).

For too long we have been suckling from Western philosophical bottles. The time has arrived to throw our baby bottles away and stand on our own feet. Like in many other



areas, we should get rid of the dependency syndrome. We no longer have to prove to the West that we are capable of philosophic thinking.

For the last fifty years the ground was prepared for a real African philosophy. It is time now to sow our ideas for future generations to reap the harvest.

My personal hope is that among those philosophies that will flower and bear fruit in the years to come will be a genuine Christian African philosophy. On this continent, with its growing number of Christians, we desperately need a radical Biblical Christian worldview and an inspiring Christian philosophy.

## **8.6 A request**

Because of the brevity of this chapter students/readers are advised to read at least one book representative of the four trends in African philosophy. A choice can be made from the following list:

### **8.6.1 Ethnophilosophical works**

MBITI, J.S. 1970a. African religions and philosophy. London : Heinemann.

MBITI, J.S. 1970b. Concepts of God in Africa. London : SPCK.

TEMPELS, P. 1959. Bantu philosophy. Paris : Presence Africaine.

### **8.6.2 Works on sage philosophy**

ORUKA, H.O. ed. 1990a. Sage philosophy; indigenous thinkers and modern debate on African philosophy. Leiden : Brill.

ORUKA, H.O. 1990b. Trends in contemporary African philosophy. Nairobi : Shirikon.

### **8.6.3 Works on nationalistic-ideological liberation philosophy**

BIKO, S. 1987. I write what I like; a selection of his writings edited by A. Stubbs. London : Heinemann.

KAUNDA, K.D. 1966. A humanist in Africa. Lusaka : Veritas.

KAUNDA, K.D. 1973. Letter to my children. London : Longman.

MOI, D.T Arap. 1986. Kenyan African Nationalism; nyayo philosophy and principles. London : Macmillan.

MUNSLOW, B. ed. 1987. Samora Machel: an African revolutionary; selected speeches and writings. Harare : The College Press.

NKRUMAH, K. 1978. *Consciencism; philosophy and ideology for decolonisation*. London : Panaf.

NYERERE, J.K. 1979. *Ujamaa; essays on socialism*. Dar es Salaam : Oxford University Press.

#### **8.6.4 Professional philosophic works**

HOUNTONDI, P.J. 1983. *African philosophy; myth and reality*. London : Hutchinson University Library for Africa.

MASOLO, D.A. 1995. *African philosophy in search of identity*. Nairobi : East African Educational Publishers.

SOGOLO, G. 1993. *Foundations of African Philosophy; a definitive analysis of conceptual issues in African thought*. Ibadan : Ibadan University Press.

WIREDU, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge : Cambridge Univ. Press.

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KAPHAGAWANI, D.N. 1998. *What is African philosophy?* In Coetzee, P.H. & Roux, A.P.J.; *Philosophy from Africa*. Johannesburg : International Thompson Publishing. p. 86-98.

- MAKINDE, M.A. 1988. African philosophy, culture and traditional medicine. Athens, Ohio : Ohio University (Monographs in International Studies, African Series, no. 53).
- NJOROGE, R.J. & BENNAARS, G.A. 1992. Philosophy and education in Africa. Nairobi : Transafrica Press.
- OCHIENG'-ODHIAMBO, F. 1995. African philosophy; an introduction. Nairobi : Consolata Institute of Philosophy.
- OLADIPO, O. 1992. The idea of African philosophy; a critical study of the major orientations in contemporary African philosophy. Ibadan : Molecular Publishers.
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- RUCH, E.A. & ANYANWU, K.C. 1984. African philosophy; an introduction to the main philosophical trends in contemporary Africa. Rome : Catholic Book Agency.
- SERQUEBERHAN, T. ed. 1991. African philosophy; the essential readings. New York : Paragon House.
- TIENOU, T. 1998. The common roots of African theology and African philosophy. In Ngewa, S., Shaw, M., Tienou, T. : Issues in African Christian theology. Nairobi : East African Educational Publishers. p. 38-48.
- VAN DER MERWE, M. 1998. Understanding trends in "African thinking" – a critical discussion. In Coetzee, P.H. & Roux, A.P.J.: Philosophy from Africa. Johannesburg : International Thompson Publishing. p. 52-85.
- VAN DER WALT, B.J. 1997. 'n Christelike Afrikafilosofie: 'n drievoudige uitdaging. **Die Kerkblad**, 99(3003):14-15, 15 January. Also published in Dutch in **Beweging**, 61(4):124-127, Dec. and in **In die Skriflig**, 32(3):381-388, Sept. 1998.
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## Chapter 9:

### MORALITY IN AFRICA TODAY – A SERIOUS CRISIS

Judging from the following two statements there seems to be a vast difference between traditional and modern morality in Africa: "Ethical education was the ultimate aim of education in the traditional society" (Kigongo, 1991:23). "Contemporary African society is lamenting a moral world fallen apart ... Today the African society ... seems to be in a state of near chaos in the realm of morality" (Kinoti, 1992:75, 86). This statement is echoed by many other writers. Shutte (2001:1), for instance, speaks about a "moral vacuum, something has gone and nothing has replaced it".

This sad situation will be investigated in this chapter under the following main points:

- The present moral situation in Africa;
- A clarification of the correct place of morality and ethics;
- Friendship;
- Marriage; and
- Family life.

#### 9.1 The present moral situation in Africa

Elderly people lament daily they are meeting behaviour that shocks them: sexual immorality, dishonesty, corruption, crime, violence and many other things which hasten the old to their graves. Middle-aged people lament about children they fail to control. The youth complain of lack of example from the older members of society.

One way to describe the present situation of moral decay is to contrast it with the values or virtues appreciated in traditional African society.

##### 9.1.1 Virtues and values of traditional African society

In traditional Africa a shared morality was the cement of society. This is clear from the agreement in the following lists of traditional values mentioned by different authors:

- Harmony, peace, generosity, friendliness, hospitality, respect, decency (Mojola, 1988:30).
- Charity, honesty, hospitality, generosity, loyalty, truthfulness, solidarity, respect for nature, elders and God (Kinoti, 1992:84). Elsewhere she distinguishes between

**personal values**, which helped individuals to be integrated people, like honesty, reliability, generosity, courage, temperance, humanity and justice and **social values** that helped society to remain integrated, like peace, harmony, respect for authority, respect for and fear of supernatural realities (p. 80).

- Gyekye (1997:324) mentions the following traditional African moral ideals or virtues: generosity, kindness, compassion, benevolence, respect and concern for others – in short, any action or behaviour that is conducive to the promotion of the welfare of others. Elsewhere (p. 332) he gives the following list which imposes on the individual a duty to the community and its members: solidarity, interdependence, co-operation, compassion and reciprocity. (Cf. also Gyekye, 1996:55-74.)
- Gelfand (1987:65 ff, 82 ff) not only provides a description of the cardinal values or virtues of the Shona people, but also of the vices. The most important **virtues** are: respect, love, compassion, kindness, generosity, truth, rectitude, humility, self-discipline, forgiveness, mercy, pity, sufficiency, repentance, trust, giving, strength, patience, courage, hard work, unselfishness and the willingness to share whatever one has, no matter how little it may be.

The **bad qualities**, rejected by traditional society, were: abuse, lying, deceit, stealing, adultery, drinking, violent quarrelling, pride, jealousy, covetousness, hatred, ingratitude, anger, negligence, weakness, assault, provocation and selfishness.

Gelfand also mentions different types of sanctions designed to ensure proper behaviour. One of them is public ridicule to cause shame, guilt and fear and to prevent antisocial behaviour. Kudadjie (1983:171-173) discusses the question how morality was enforced in detail and distinguishes between two main types of sanctions: religious and social.

**Religious sanctions** included the practice of cursing through magic and the fear of punishment by the ancestors and the gods – the “policemen” of traditional Africa.

**Social sanctions** included the following:

- praising and honouring the good and brave
- parental gifts to good, reliable children
- confidence between parent and children.

Apart from these **positive** social motivations, the following were **negative** social sanctions:

- Family or clan renunciation

- disinheriting
- swearing of oaths and curses
- ostracism
- public disgrace or scandalising
- execution, in the case of notorious criminals, adulterers, seducers, etc.

Before we ask the question why so many of these beautiful moral values of traditional African society have disappeared – their place taken by the bad values mentioned by Gelfand – a brief characterisation of traditional African morality is required.

### **9.1.2 The characteristics of traditional African morality**

Traditional African morality can be described in the following terms:

- communalistic
- humanistic or anthropocentric
- pragmatistic and utilitarian
- tribalistic
- this-worldly

These five catch-words imply the following:

#### **• Communalistic**

At this stage of this book there is no need any more to elaborate on the communal or communitarian character of traditional African morality. According to Kollman (1988:59) "African morality and ethics ... cannot be conceived outside of the community". Gyekye (1998:318) regards communalism not only as its outstanding but as its defining characteristic. Traditional African society was therefore characterised not by one's own rights but by duties towards others: "If I carry out a duty to help someone in distress, I would not be doing so because I think a person has a right against me, a right I should help to fulfil. I would be carrying out that duty because I consider that person worthy of some moral consideration by me..." (Gyekye, 1998:333).

Wiredu (1998:305) is also of the opinion that African traditional morality is "quintessentially social". When writing about the ideal person according to the Akan he says the following: "The communalistic orientation ... means that an individual's image will depend rather crucially upon the extent to which his/her actions benefit others rather than him/herself, not

of course, by coincidence, but by design ... an individual who remained content with self-regarding success would be viewed as so circumscribed in outlook as not to merit the title of a real person<sup>1</sup> (Wiredu, 1998:312).

This communalistic and humanistic orientation also determines the Akan's view of sex: "Because only empirical considerations bearing on human interests are admitted in moral evaluation, such unconditional proscriptions of pre-marital sex as are found in Christian teaching are absent from the moral rules of the Akans ... There is, of course, no sexual free-for-all; but still a non-furtive relationship between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman need not be restricted to hugging" (Wiredu, 1998:316).

Most of the traditional virtues or values mentioned above are also virtues aimed at the wellbeing of the community.

A communalistic ethics or morality does not only imply that all human behaviour should be to the benefit of society. Society itself is also the norm for moral behaviour. According to Mojola (1988:31) the fundamental criterion of morality is the community: "An act is right if and only if it also conforms to the rules and regulations established by the community ...". The moral norms are, therefore, not derived from the will of the Supreme Being: "... the thought is not that something is good because God approves it, but rather that God approves of it because it is good in the first place (for society)" (Mojola, 1998:31).

Kigongo (1991:24) stresses the fact that in a society – like the present African one – where there is rapid and profound social changes and fundamental conflicts in people's social experience one's ability to make choices in respect of moral behaviour is of paramount importance. Traditional morality did not prepare Africans for such choices because it emphasised conformity to the **status quo** and punished non-conformity. "Having impinged considerably on the freedom of the individual ... the traditional society left very little room and opportunity for one to make a deliberate rational choice in the realm of ethical conduct".

- **Humanistic or anthropocentric**

According to Wiredu (1998:308) African concepts of morals are generally of a humanistic orientation: "... at all stages ... morality is grounded in conceptual and empirical considerations about human wellbeing ... this is why the term 'humanistic' is so very apt as a characterisation of Akan moral thinking. At least in part, this is why it is correct to describe that ethic as non-supernaturalistic in spite of the sincere belief in a Supreme Being".

Elsewhere Wiredu concludes: "We now see that the 'gods' or even the Supreme God are irrelevant to the conceptual foundations of morality in Akan thought ... The gods are treated with respect if they deliver the goods, and with contempt if they fail ... Attitudes to the gods depend on their success, and vary from healthy respect to sneering contempt" (Wiredu, 1983:11, 12).

The anthropocentric (man-centred) orientation is clear from the following quotation: "... a human person is essentially the centre of the thick set of concentric circles of obligations and responsibilities matched by rights and privileges revolving round levels of relationships irradiating from the consanguinity of household kith and kin, through the 'blood' ties of lineage and clan, to the wider circumference of human familyhood ..." (Wiredu, 1998:311).

Mojola (1988:30) agrees that because of its preoccupation with human welfare and well-being, traditional morality was "essentially humanistic" and "man-centred".

Bujo (1990:49) also describes traditional African ethics as "fundamentally anthropocentric and humanistic", in other words only a horizontal relationship between humans.

It is clear that traditional morality is not about obeying the will of a god or pleasing him, but about obeying the will of the community and seeking the well-being of human beings.

#### • **Pragmatic and utilitarian**

Gbadegesin (1998:302) asks the important question "Why be morally good?" "It will pay you" appears to be the ultimate appeal for moral goodness in traditional Nigerian worldviews. He concludes: "Far from having a religious foundation, then, we have here a system of morality which, while it makes use of religion as a motivating factor, is clearly pragmatic and 'this-wordly' to the core". Elsewhere "... the Yoruba are very pragmatic in their approach to morality, and though religion may serve them as motivating force, it is not the ultimate appeal in moral matters" (p. 305).

Mojola (1988:32) and Bujo (1990:50) use the word "utilitarian" to describe traditional ethics. Wiredu (1998:307) uses the same word and indicates that this utilitarian attitude even applies to the Akan's relationship to his gods: "... what is good in general is what promotes human interests ... the Akans are known to be sharply contemptuous of 'gods' who fail to deliver; continued respect is conditional on a high percentage of scoring by the Akan reckoning".



- **Tribalistic**

Turaki (1997:66ff) provides the following description of what he calls Africa's tribal morality and ethics:

### **Its source or basis**

Turaki correctly indicates that the source or basis of morality is of the utmost importance. In Africa the source/basis is the ancestors, kinship and in-group. External and objective moral principles lack legitimacy and authority. This contrasts sharply with Christianity which accepts God (his will) as the source and basis of morality.

### **Moral and ethical codes**

Moral and ethical codes are derived from the ancestors and also from the ultimate interest and security of the blood-group. Even though individuals might operate under national and universal moral codes, their loyalty and allegiance are first to their tribal/ethnic groups. The difference with Christianity is again clear according to which the moral codes (like love) have universal implications and applications.

### **Right and wrong**

"What is right and wrong can only be committed against a member of the own ethnic group, race or tribe, but not against a stranger or an outsider. An outsider has no rights or protection and anything done to him has no moral or ethical value. It is an insider who has rights, privileges and protection under racial and tribal laws. Thus killing or discriminating against an outsider is not a crime" (Turaki, 1997:68). Kollman (1988:59) agrees: "The clan or tribe ... is in traditional Africa the only locus for justice ... outside of which all others are strangers and inferiors, if not enemies".

For this reason cheating, mismanagement, embezzlement etc. are not viewed as wrongs as long as it brings material benefits to one's own kinsfolk. Those are praised who have succeeded in looting a state's or company's treasury for the benefit of their group, for instance to build churches, mosques and community centres!

Again this is in stark contrast with the guidelines of the Bible which have universal implications.

### **Responsibility and accountability**

In traditional Africa, according to Turaki (1997:69), one is expected to carry responsibility in accordance with the wishes of the ancestors and the community of blood relations. One

does not live in terms of objective principles. Similarly, one is not accountable to oneself, but to one's ancestors and blood relations. Patriotism and loyalty to the state or a church therefore becomes a problem.

In Christianity responsibility and accountability are to God and all fellow human beings. It is not limited to one's own ethnic group. The scope of one's duty has been enlarged to embrace the totality of humanity, transcending tribal values and interests.

### **Sin, shame and guilt**

"Personal sense of sin, shame and guilt are always interpreted in terms of the ingroup and blood community. It is the ingroup that is wronged or sinned against ... One sins only against kinsfolk, and feels ashamed or guilty because of them. The behaviour, attitudes and practices of individuals and groups within the context of the modern state do not carry with them any strong sense of sin, shame and guilt. It is on account of this that the state's moral and ethical codes are not always adhered to or respected. They are usually considered to be of the outside world, hence they lack legitimacy and authority" (Turaki, 1997:71).

Christianity, by contrast, has developed universal norms and principles. Sin, shame and guilt are rooted in one's disobedience to God's universal moral laws.

Turaki's description of the traditional tribal morality of Africa is confirmed by authors like Kollman (1988) and Waruta (1992) who wrote extensively on the issue of tribalism in Africa. According to Kollman colonialism heightened the tribal consciousness of Africans. Also contemporary urbanisation has not neutralised but strengthened tribalism. In the urban setting the African is lost in the impersonality of today's relationships from which he takes his refuge into tribalism. Tribal identities today play an important role in the competitive struggle for all-too-scarce political and economic assets. And because the goods and services are not distributed freely and equally, but according to ethnic criteria, tribalism should be regarded as discrimination and as serious injustice.

Waruta defines and describes tribalism, gives many examples of its manifestations and its detrimental effects and also suggests some solutions. At the end of this essay he warns against a new form of "tribalism": "New groups not based on tribal relations but on class interests such as the rich, the elite, the military and so forth are now on the increase to protect their class interests. A new form of 'tribalism', the 'Wabenzi tribe' or the Mercedes-Benz car owners tribe (the rich), is now a reality posing a greater danger and threat to society as a whole than the earlier tribalism" (Waruta, 1992:134).

- **A this-worldly morality**

This last characteristic of African traditional morality indicates the fact that it does not believe in any judgement of our moral behaviour in life after death. Beyond death there is only the ancestors who continue to live as they used to live in this world. There is no final judgement by God which can encourage one to live a morally good life here on earth. Bujo (1990:61,62) quite correctly addresses the following question to traditional African morality: "Why so much effort and pain, why such an obsession to avoid wrongs and practice virtue, if, in the end, all turns into nothing? ... If all ends with the tomb, or certainly does not change after death, then treachery and loyalty, torture and justice, drunkenness and temperance, war and peace are all the same ..." If there is no expectation of a new creation, as promised by the Bible, there is no reason either to live a morally good life in this world already.

As the only way to correct this situation Turaki (1997) emphasises the idea of human dignity, but a dignity that transcends the tribe, the state and all other human institutions. "Human dignity cannot be rooted in the historical consciousness of man or in some sort of value forged out of man" (p. 96). And elsewhere he says: "This common phrase one hears across Africa: 'Man in Africa has no dignity or worth'. For this reason, the moral status, dignity, worth and sacredness of man must be well established and grounded in truth which transcends humanity, otherwise man will be treated no better than a beast by his fellow human beings" (p. 103).

The norm that transcends humanity is, according to Turaki, God's commandment of love: "Love your neighbour as yourself" Nthamburi (1992:112, 113) agrees: "The basic principle of Christian moral life is love to the neighbour ... Love takes the first place among all other values". The same is emphasised by Eitel (1986:98, 99): "Love ... is one of the most powerful motivators in Christian living. It serves as the major, controlling factor in the moral life of a disciple. God's love for man draws out man's love for God which, in turn, spawns love for others".

Bujo (1990:66) is correctly of the opinion that "in morality it is neither the majority nor the minority who should dictate what has to be done; only the validity of principles counts". According to him a morality based on the Gospel goes far beyond what even the highest African, Marxist or Hindu morality is able to give. God's law of love is not culturally or ethnically determined with only limited application – it is a transcultural law with universal application.

### 9.1.3 Inherent weaknesses of traditional morality

From our exposition of traditional African morality it will already be clear that it contains inherent weaknesses which should not be ignored. People sometimes tend only to blame present circumstances for the moral bankruptcy of Africa while they idealise traditional morality.

In the preceding pages I have deliberately given the word to Africans themselves and have quoted extensively from what they have to say about traditional African morality, including its weaknesses. It is interesting to see how these weak points are in line with what a Westerner, like Steyne (1989: 186-198) has to say. According to him animistic ethics is characterised by the following:

- Man is in charge, he has to take care of himself. He can acquire everything he needs for life by manipulating the spirit-world successfully.
- The spirits respond to the correct rituals, not to a good moral life. Man does not merit anything by being moral.
- Man's will and desire is supreme – it is a totally anthropocentric morality.
- Man himself does not have to change to be morally good. He can live as he pleases as long as he can acquire power through manipulation of the spirit-world.
- There is no basis or standard for moral action outside man. The norm is the securing of power for the individual. This can be acquired by any means, good or bad. The end justifies the means.
- In spite of the emphasis on the community, traditional morality is always about personal gain or advantage – it is a self-centred morality.
- Because the motivation is to be successful above and over one's fellow-men, abuse and mistreatment of the less privileged and exploitive attitudes towards outsiders by a small elite, which live at the expense of the poor masses, are tolerated if not fully approved. There is no need for universal social concern.
- The neighbour is narrowly defined as the in-group, while all others may be deceived and exploited as fair game. Justice applies only to the in-group, and even injustice to the own group can be covered with the right means, namely a specific ritual for the spirit-world.

- Man's relationship with an untrustworthy god and spirit-world (both good and bad may issue from them), have a negative effect on social life. If man fails to exercise power over events, someone else is to blame and should be punished. The community, the ritual performed or the spirit-world could be guilty. In spite of the strong community spirit – or perhaps because of that? – man will not hesitate to blame his close kin for natural or normal physical problems or calamities.
- Moral guilt is therefore not accepted by the individual. Similarly man's actions is not his own responsibility. Responsibility is shifted onto the community or the spirit-world.
- Guilt is also not related to an offence against the will of a God. There is no objective standard to measure guilt or "sin". Relativity reigns. If the right ritual is performed, such as making an appropriate sacrifice, man can circumvent all the consequences of his moral misbehaviour and remove his guilt. In this way, should he be caught, the spirit-world can be appeased.
- For an outsider the traditional African virtues mentioned above (like fidelity in marriage, hospitality to strangers, love and respect for relatives) seem praiseworthy and commendable until their deeper motivation is understood.

They are motivated by fear. Fear because of the fact that the spirits are unpredictable and can never be fully trusted, but frequently respond to whim and fancy. Fear of not performing a ritual accurately enough to motivate the spirit-world. Fear of fellow-men – even those very close to oneself – who can cause one harm. Fear of not acquiring enough power to protect oneself.

What therefore appears to be objective standards for morality does not arise out of love or altruism, but is motivated by fear that you will be the loser. The question is whether a sound moral system can be built on such a pervasive feeling of fear.

Elsewhere Steyne (1989:183) characterises animist beliefs and morality as (1) anthropocentric (man exists for himself), (2) humanistic (everything from, to and for man), (3) self-centred and (4) utilitarian (everything must serve man). This shows remarkable similarity to our own description on previous pages.

#### **9.1.4 Uncertainty and confusion as characteristics of present-day morality**

Eitel (1986:1) describes the present African as a man between two worlds: unable to part with the old and not yet of the new world. In a limbo between these two worlds a dichotomy permeates his moral behaviour.

Kinoti (1992:73) draws attention to the same phenomenon by way of the following folk tale. A hyena was following the general direction of the aroma of meat. But when his path forked into two he was not so sure which one would lead him to the meat. In his uncertainty he put his legs astride the two paths and tried to walk along both. He ended up splitting in the middle! Many other people have written in similar ways about the "divided soul" of Africans.

This uncertainty is evident when Oruka (1990:105, 106) lists the types of values which form the roots of contemporary Kenyan culture: (1) the pure traditional; (2) the pure Christian (or Muslim); (3) the traditional-cum-Christian; (4) the secular West; (5) the secular traditional and (6) the unspecified culture in transition. "The first is a cultural root which results in a cultural attitude which does not go beyond the values of a given ethnicity. The second is a commitment to Christian values ... in defiance of any other values. ... The third is a category which caters for those who believe partly in African traditions and partly in Christianity. The secular West is an unreligious attitude ... The secular traditional is an unreligious and unmagical belief in traditional culture. The unspecified culture in transition is the culture of the urbanised youth in Kenya today – it is what others have begun to refer to as the **sheng culture**".

### **9.1.5 Reasons for the contemporary moral vacuum**

The internal causes are not sufficient to understand Africa's moral degeneration. The following external reasons should be added.

- **The influence of Western secular culture, especially Western individualism and capitalism.**

According to Mwikamba (1992:86) whereas in the past Africans were much more community-centred, today they are becoming more and more ego-centred.

Bennaars (1993:23) expresses agreement in the following words: "In traditional Africa morality was always intrinsically linked to the community ... the sole criterion of goodness was the welfare, the well-being of the community ... Any form of individualism was seen to have a negative value; it was seen as a potential threat and thus regarded as intolerable". But today the situation has changed: "Individualism in various forms is increasingly evident in daily life. Education, religion, culture imposed from outside have all contributed, not to speak of economics and politics. Today, African individualism has largely replaced communalism, as both individuals and nations struggle for survival ..." (ibid.)

Oruka (1990:103) draws attention to the influence of colonialism. For a society so seriously disturbed by the invasion of a foreign culture to come back to cultural normality it needs at least to pass through five generations or a hundred years!

There can be no doubt about the fact that the influence of the West uprooted the cultural, social, political, economic and moral systems of traditional Africa and restructured them to meet the needs of the West (Nthamburi, 1992:108). This was not only the case during colonial times, but it is continuing up to the present.

- **Materialism**

One of the clearest influences from the West is the growing materialism in Africa. (cf. Mwikamba, 1992:102, 103). Money and material well-being have become a semi-god. Economic activity, success, material gain have become ends in themselves. People are subordinating and exploiting others for economic purposes. Materialism and consumerism erode both traditional and Christian morals. Hedonism (seeking only my own pleasure) has the upper hand. The idols which the African youth imitate are the business, sex, music and football idols from the West. Human sexuality becomes a "tool" to be used and discarded, sexual violence and rape are increasing.

- **The mass media**

Another strong influence is the mass media, especially television and videos. Most of the programmes are imported from the West, especially the United States. They propagate the secular moral values of the West like materialism and free sex. Especially young people in Africa become die-hard worshippers of Western ideals because they are considered to be "modern".

- **Education**

Western education, is another agent of cultural change (Mwikamba, 1992:94), reinforcing alienation from traditional morality. Initially schooling was Christian-orientated (mission schools), but after independence it became secularised state education. The new morality fostered by this education was materialistic in outlook. Above all, such morality was very private – it allowed the individual to pursue his own interests without much regard for the welfare of others (Bennaars, 1993:25). Education, furthermore, often only provided intellectual or professional training without any moral "education for life". (See Kigongo, 1991 for more moral weaknesses of the Western educational system.)

- **The influence of Christianity**

A number of authors express the opinion that Christianity did not always have a beneficial influence on the moral life of the Africans.

Richardson (1996:129) is of the opinion "that the Christian understanding of ethics and the moral life, which has been shaped almost entirely by Western culture, has seriously impoverished itself by not appreciating and learning from the customs, concepts and time-honoured wisdom of Africa". The Christian ethics propagated in Africa was strongly influenced by Western individualism, secularism and dualism (p. 135-139). Traditional African ethics is of great relevance for Christian ethics today because of its emphasis on community, religious rituals and **ubuntu** (p. 137-140). Christian ethics should therefore look to Africa for guidance and inspiration.

According to Bujo (1990:40, 41) Christianity in two ways did not help the traditional African who accepted the Christian faith.

Christianity was too often preached as "dos" and "donts", a catalogue of sins – the virtues being for the most part only briefly mentioned. The negative (sins) were more important than the positive (virtues)! Morality was often transformed into a catalogue or code of dry laws, not leaving room for the love Christ came to bear witness to among humans.

Christian morality, in the second place, tended to concentrate on the sixth commandment ("You shall not commit adultery"). "Immorality" was in the first place understood as **sexual** immorality, while Christian morality consists of much more than only sexual morality. The Bible is far too rich to let itself be reduced to a lesson in sexual shortcomings!

A third weakness of Christianity in Africa is mentioned by Bennaars. Christianity waged a constant war against African traditional morals. Such a warfare had serious, negative consequences for the African because his moral traditions was an integral part of communal life in Africa. If an African refused to reject the traditional morality – as was required from Christians – it implied a refusal to reject traditional social life in its entirety, the value system included. "The African Christian became thereby a displaced person, who had substituted for traditional social ethics a foreign kind of personal ethics" (Bennaars, 1993:25).

This is a very important point mentioned by Bennaars. The individualistic, pietistic kind of Western Christianity transferred to Africa was very much worried about **personal** morality (lying, drinking, smoking, cheating, adultery etc.), but it did not provide a new **social**



Christian ethics to take the place of the rejected traditional social ethics. There was nothing to guide converted Africans in socio-economic political life.

The same point is taken up and emphasised by other authors as well. According to Mwikamba (1992:86) beliefs and morals were not private matters in traditional societies. In fact there was no distinction between private and public morality. However, with the advent of Western culture and Christianity, life has been compartmentalised into private and public sectors. Today we have a growing trend in Africa to claim that what one believes and does in private is a private matter.

An example is when a corrupt politician is welcomed in the church and even given a prominent position. The church seems to give credence to the view that one can remain in good standing with the church – and even be saved – and yet continue to enrich one-self by paying poor wages to one's workers. In this way the church preaches against individual sins, but condones social sins – which are not less sinful in the eyes of God.

Nthamburi (1992:107ff) also rejects this dangerous distinction between private and public morality "Morality does not only concern the individual's behaviour but the whole of society" (p. 110). He also traces the origin of this idea back to the kind of Christianity proclaimed by missionaries who tended to overemphasise personal sin and salvation and neglected social or structural sins and the need of social renewal. By condoning the **status quo**, they have also condoned social sin and injustice. His urgent plea is that "Christians have to extend their witness from the personal so as to have an impact on political, social and economic systems" (p. 117).

Haselbarth (1989:67ff) and O'Donovan (2002) are two of the few authors, writing on Christian ethics in the African context, who took up this challenge by dealing in their books not only with sex, marriage and the family, but also with urbanisation, labour, industry and politics.

- **A variety of other causes for moral decline**

Because it is impossible to go into detail in one chapter a few other reasons for the present moral vacuum will only be mentioned: (1) The disintegration of traditional religion, society and culture removed important religious and social structures and sanctions (see above) against immoral behaviour. (2) The disintegration of marriage and especially (extended) family life – the place where young people learned how to behave correctly – worsened the situation. (3) Urbanisation disrupted traditional ways of life and commercialisation – not only of agriculture but nearly everything – resulted in a materialistic way of life. (4)

Increasing poverty and the struggle for survival also played its role. (5) It should also be kept in mind that today the people of Africa are encountering all kinds of new problems to which traditional morality cannot provide the answers. (6) Last – but not least – we should remember that all of us – including contemporary Africans – are sinful beings. Because of our inherent sinful nature we simply do not want to live a personally and socially moral good life!

### **9.1.6 The challenge**

Few if any will disagree with the conclusion of Mwikamba (1992:104): "The urgency of moral reforms both in theory and in practice are of paramount importance. The reforms must be radical at all levels: the churches, individuals and society". But these few words pose a formidable challenge: How is the radical moral reform to be achieved? I will have to leave the practical side and concentrate on the theoretical aspect mentioned by Mwikamba. Theories are, after all, not impractical by nature, because they have practical implications.

It seems to me that the essence of the problem we are dealing with is this: From where can we obtain reliable norms to guide moral life in contemporary Africa? I fully agree with Bujo (1990:66) when he says: "Ethics ... by definition has to formulate ... norms of human behaviour, without any concession to human weakness, otherwise ethics would renounce its guiding function".

What people today need in Africa, more than anything else, is guidance, which direction to follow in the daily choices they have to make. Like the hyena in the folk tale they are confused because they have to choose between two different kinds of roads, indicated by two different norms. As was the case with the hyena they cannot simply combine the two. The one road is that of traditional African morality and norms and the other is that of modern Western morality and norms.

### **The traditional African road**

If we take this road the following should be kept in mind: (1) That not everything black is beautiful – the impression created by a book like that of Broodryk (2002). Traditional African morality contains many weak and even questionable aspects (cf. Bujo, 1990:102-111). (2) To a great extent we have already missed the opportunity to save many of the good African moral traditions from disappearance. (3) We are confronted today with many new problems, not considered by traditional morality.

If we follow this road we will therefore have to listen carefully to the still living traditions in Africa which have withstood the savaging deluge of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and Western Christianity and which are still pulsating in the hearts of Africans. At the same time we should be self-critical and not simply accept everything because it is "traditional". Tradition cannot be accepted wholly without careful discrimination.

### **The modern Western road**

The opposite, but identical danger exists in this case: To accept European moral values wholly and treat them as the only standard for being "civilised" and morally good, while castigating anything African as "backward". It should also be strongly emphasised that "Western" cannot be identified with "Christian". Christianity in the past played a significant role in the formation of Western morality, but its influence has steadily declined since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **A third way**

The most important reason why we have to look for a third way out of the dilemma of the hyena is because of the **wrong conceptions of the origin of moral norms** in both Africa and the West. As we have indicated, moral norms, according to traditional Africa, are derived from the community. For this viewpoint I have coined a new word "communomy" (from **communitas + nomos**). In the West moral norms have their origin in the individual. To describe this viewpoint, I use the word "autonomy" (from **autos + nomos**), meaning "I am my own law (giver)".

In actual fact there is not much difference between the two viewpoints. In both cases **moral norms have their origin in the human being** – in one case the community of humans and in the other the individual human being.

Simply from their practical results it is clear today that neither the norms of the group (majority) nor that of the individual can be reliable guidelines to a full human life. From the Bible it is clear what the reason is: Man cannot be his own law, but is subjected to a law **outside** himself or themselves. We call this viewpoint "heteronomy" (from the Greek **heteros + nomos**).

The God of the Bible has not only created us. He has also given us clear guidelines of how to live in order to experience life in its fullness. We have to obey these guidelines or laws. They are the real origin of reliable norms.

This ethical theory is called "theonomy" (from the Greek words **theos + nomos**), which implies that God's laws are the origin of our moral norms. This perspective will be elaborated in the following section of this chapter. I am convinced that it can provide a new vision, a vision which can rescue African morality from the present morass – and solve the dilemma of the hyena!

## 9.2 What morality and ethics are about

There is no clarity on the question what exactly morality and ethics are about. When people use the words "morality" or "immorality" they usually do not define what they have in mind – it can mean nearly anything! Because of this confusion we need to reflect on the issue in a principal way.

### 9.2.1 Morality viewed in a broad perspective

To determine the place of morality, as an introduction, we should distinguish between the following steps or levels:

- Firstly, every human being is either committed to the true God, who revealed himself to us in the Bible, or a substitute god or idol. This is the **religious** step.
- Secondly, human beings themselves look more and more like the god they serve, they reveal its image. This is the **anthropological** step. (It can also be called the worldview step, because one's view of being human is one of the important components of one's worldview).
- Thirdly, human beings create a community or social life according to their own image of being human. This step is called their **view of society**.
- Finally, humans live according to the guidelines provided by the previous three steps and they also treat other human beings accordingly. This can be called the **moral** or **ethical** step. It may be subdivided into personal morality (individual behaviour) and social morality (moral behaviour between people).

From the foregoing it is clear that morality should neither be confused with other areas of life, nor does it exist independently on its own, but is determined by our (1) religion, (2) worldview and (3) philosophy of society. The obverse is also true: The (4) way we behave morally or immorally (individually and in relation to others) reveals (1) our philosophy of society, (2) the contents of our worldview and (3) finally whom or what we regard as our absolute authority or god / God.

Further elaboration will illustrate what this perspective implies.

- On the **religious level** the only choice is between the real God or an idol in his place. Because there is only one true God, not serving and obeying Him always implies the absolutisation of something from His creation, elevating something creational to the status of a god. And because of the great variety in creation, many things can be worshipped in the place of God. If it is money (Mammon), material wealth would be our final authority to be obeyed.
- On the **anthropological** (worldviewish) level we have the task to reflect the image of God (as revealed in Christ). In the case of a non-Christian, however, His image is deflected, replaced by the image of an idol. If, for instance, one is committed to the service of the god of money, one's whole being would reflect obedience to the commands of this god by acquiring more and more wealth.

Because of the diversity in creation, many views about being human are possible. Man/woman can be viewed as a social being (traditional Africa), an individual (the modern West), a rational, emotional, biological being and even as a (physical) machine. Being human implies a rich variety of aspects (see later on in this chapter). Wo/man is a multi-dimensional creature. All the mentioned anthropologies, however, try to reduce this richness to only one aspect. They are one-sided, one-dimensional, reductionistic views of being human.

- On the **social** level human beings create a society according to their own image or ideal of being human. An individualistic anthropology inevitably leads to an individualistic view of society. Societal relationships are viewed as mere contracts between individuals who are always in competition and who regard their own will as the law (autonomy). In the economic field this leads to a capitalist society, according to which everything is commercialised. The result of a communalistic and a collectivistic (socialistic or communistic) anthropology would be a society in which the will of the group or people has the highest authority.
- Finally on the level of **morality** people's behaviour (personally as well as communally) reveals the choices made at the preceding three levels. Examples are the following: Individualistic presuppositions would result in an egoistic or hedonistic morality, according to which personal advantage and pleasure are the criteria for "good" conduct. A morality which emphasises equality and brotherhood would be the consequence of communalist/socialist starting points. An economic (e.g. capitalist) approach would not only view human beings as mere "commodities", "production

factors” or “consumers”, but would treat them morally as such. When man is viewed as a “biochemical machine”, medical ethics would regard – and treat – him as a malfunctioning mechanism. An ethics which does not distinguish between man and animals would lead to the animalisation of humans. An utilitarian ethics – the result of pragmatism – measures moral behaviour by results and utility and not by the norm of love.

From the above it is clear that (1) a wrong view of god, (2) a one-sided anthropology and (3) a distorted view of society finally leads to (4) wrong, one-sided, distorted personal moral behaviour (individual ethics) as well as treatment of others (social ethics). On the other hand: Worship of the true God, a correct view of being human and society should lead to moral behaviour which enhances human life, both personally and socially.

From this wide perspective already it is clear that not everything can be called “morality”. Morality has to be distinguished from other areas of life, it is something limited. In what follows morality will be demarcated even more precisely.

### **9.2.2 Morality and ethics**

The word “morality” derives from the Latin word **mores** (plural) which means the customs and conventions of a social group or community. It usually also includes the norms or standards that guide and regulate good or acceptable behaviour.

The word “ethics” is from the Greek word **ethos**, indicating the conventions and customs of an **ethne** or community. Because of their similar original meaning “ethics” has often been used as a synonym for “morality”. We will, however, distinguish between the two concepts in the following way: Ethics is the **study** of morality. Ethics, therefore, requires enquiry, reflection, it is an intellectual pursuit, an academic exercise. It studies the moral or immoral behaviour of individual people and groups.

### **9.2.3 Different viewpoints of the field of investigation for ethics**

There is no agreement about what “morality” includes or excludes and therefore also very little agreement on exactly what the field of investigation of ethics should be. From its long history the following viewpoints could be mentioned. Ethics should study:

- The principles, norms or values which guide human life;
- Different aspects of human life, like customs, character, behaviour, virtues, etc.;
- Practical (and not intellectual) life;

- Human conduct;
- Relationships between people;
- Only relationships of love between people.

None of these viewpoints are satisfactory or acceptable because they are too vague and too broad. If everything is ethical, nothing is specifically ethical! If, for example, ethics has to study principles or norms, it would have to study our entire life – no area of life is not guided by norms and values. The same applies to the other mentioned viewpoints. Ethics would become an all-encompassing science, while every science should have a clearly demarcated field of study. The consequence of such a totalitarian ethics would also be that the variety of life (see below) is not recognised, but everything – even religion – becomes moralised. Life, however, is not only about morality, but also about politics, economics, religion, art, etc. Thus the need to specify and demarcate clearly the field of investigation for ethics.

#### **9.2.4 The correct field of investigation**

Like every other science, ethics focuses on only one aspect, abstracted or taken out of the fullness of concrete reality. The following example serves as a clarification. A theologian, ethicist, jurist, aesthetician, economist, sociologist, linguist, historian, logician and psychologist are asked to watch and analyse the same event, let us say a beer party. Each one of them will be interested in different aspects or facets of this event. The theologian may be interested in the different religious convictions expressed by the group of beer-drinking men. The ethicist may note the strong bond of friendship between them. The jurist will ignore the religious and ethical aspects and concentrate on the legal implications of the serious fight in which the party culminates. The aesthetician, again, will be delighted by the play of light, shadow, colour, shape and sound of the whole "picture" in front of him. The economist will only focus on the amount of money spent and the profit of the pub-owner. The sociologist, in turn, will concentrate on the intense social interaction, while the linguist may be fascinated by the different, interesting dialects spoken. In terms of what is being discussed (say a coup d' état) the historian realises that this is not an ordinary binge, but a historical moment in time. The logician will carefully analyse the fallacies or sophistry one of the men is using to convince the others to accept his plan to overthrow the government. Finally, the psychologist may not be interested in any of the foregoing aspects, but rather in the different feelings or emotions (like anger, fear, joy etc.) accompanying the drinking and discussion.

From this simple example it is clear that ethics - like every other science – has a limited field of investigation, viz. only the ethical aspect of human actions and institutions.

### **9.2.5 The place of the ethical**

Reformational Philosophy distinguishes the following aspects of reality:

14. Pistic (faith, firm assurance).
13. Moral (love towards fellowmen and rest of creation).
12. Juridical (retribution and restitution).
11. Aesthetic (the beautiful).
10. Economic (frugality in managing scarce resources).
9. Social (social intercourse).
8. Lingual (symbolic meaning).
7. Historical (formative power).
6. Logical (distinction).
5. Sensitive or psychic (feeling).
4. Biotic (vitality or life).
3. Physical (energy).
2. Spatial (extension).
1. Arithmetic or numerical (quantity or number).

A stone reveals the first three aspects; a plant (a living being) 1-4; an animal 1-5 and a human being (the richest of God's creatures) participates in or reveals all fourteen aspects. As the example above indicated, we can also distinguish all fourteen facets when analysing a human event, like a beer-party. The same applies to human institutions, like marriage, family life, a church, business, the state, etc. Let us take the family as an example:

14. Faith – family devotions.
13. Ethical – family fidelity (members can depend on each other).
12. Juridical – parental authority, guidance.
11. Aesthetic – typical family styles.



10. Economic – family budget, finances.
9. Social – family relationships, entertainment,
8. Lingual – family (nick)names, expressions, idioms.
7. Historical – family planning, upbringing.
6. Logical – family opinion, discussions.
5. Psychical – family feelings, nostalgia for home.
4. Biotic – blood bonds, paternal / maternal “instinct”.
3. Physical – family traits (son looks like father).
2. Spatial – house (space) in which family lives.
1. Numerical – family unity.

In spite of the fact that all societal relationships participate in all fourteen aspects, they are still different. Why? Because of their qualifying (or leading) and founding aspects, or their two points of orientation. In the case of the family the leading aspect is the ethical (bond of fidelity) and the founding aspect the biotic (bond of blood).

Two other social relationships, friendship and marriage, are also ethically qualified or ethical relationships. Their founding aspects, however, differ from that of the family. The founding function in the case of the friendship relation is the social, while in the case of marriage it is also biotic in nature, but not in the sense of a blood relationship but of sexual unity.

Other human relationships or structures are differently qualified. The state is a **juridical** institution; the church an institution of **faith**, a business is **economically** qualified, etc. But, as the example of the family illustrates, all these institutions participate in or reveal the fourteen different aspects. In spite of the fact that they are not ethically **qualified** they still have an ethical **aspect**. A business, for example, is not a purely money-making institution, but also has an ethical responsibility. Justice (the task of the state) cannot be isolated from the ethical. The same applies to religion in the case of the church – it cannot be divorced from ethical considerations.

### 9.2.6 Ethical norms

Each of the above-mentioned fourteen aspects is accompanied by specific norms or values, for example:

- faith – godliness, devotion, reverence;
- ethical – integrity, fidelity, trust;
- juridical – justice, lawfulness, respect for authority;
- aesthetic – creativity, expressiveness, beauty;
- economic – stewardship, frugality, compassion for the poor;
- social – kindness, humility, forgiveness;
- lingual – truth, meaningfulness, authenticity;
- logical – clarity, validity, discernment;
- psychical – sensitivity, self-control, perseverance;
- biotic – wellness, vitality, respect for life;
- numerical – accuracy, responsible use of numbers and statistics.

It is clear that we have a variety of norms or values. Norms cannot be identified with the ethical aspect of life only. Typical ethical values are the following: truth or fidelity, reliability, integrity, genuineness, loyalty, honesty, solidarity, faithfulness, trustworthiness, steadfastness and dependability.

These ethical values reveal different norms for our ethical behaviour: One should be reliable, loyal, honest, faithful, etc. in one's dealing with others. Stated in Biblical language: "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man" (Proverbs 3:3).

Ethics should therefore study human relationships (personal and structural) which comply to these norms (=morally **good** behaviour) or disregard them (=morally **bad** behaviour).

### 9.2.7 How norms are determined today in the West

History has produced many kinds of ethics, each emphasising different leading ideas, like the following: happiness, pleasure, utility, perfection, the common good. Accordingly, the different ethical theories were described as eudaemonistic, hedonistic, utilitarian, etc. In most of these cases the norm for ethical life has been replaced by the goal (of happiness, pleasure, utility etc.) I want to propose a **normative** ethics. The important question which then arises is: From where do we get these ethical norms? Different solutions to this very important question are offered nowadays.

- **The ultimate objective decides**

On the surface this looks like a good proposal. It is, however, a dangerous viewpoint. The Biblical way is that our principles or norms should determine our goals and not vice versa. One cannot cherish objectives which have not been tested by norms derived from God's laws. An objective-directed ethics has the implication that the end goal becomes the guiding principle. For that reason many people today argue that the end justifies the means. If dishonesty, violence, corruption or whatever are necessary to reach our objectives, they are legitimised! However, the means we apply should also be tested against clear norms.

- **The circumstances decide**

Norms have to be applied in different circumstances. The obverse, however, is not true, viz. that circumstances determine norms. This viewpoint is called "situationism", where the situation creates the norm.

- **Your individual insight, feeling or conscience decides**

The idea that as an individual I have the right to decide on what is ethically good or bad as already indicated, has become very popular in Western individualism. Man's own insight, however, cannot decide on norms, because man is not an autonomous being (his own law), but subjected to God's laws. The Bible is very clear that we are not allowed to follow our own will, but have to be obedient to God's will. Neither can personal feeling or even our conscience, be above the law, but they remain subjected to God's laws, and can therefore not pass final judgement about norms.

- **The majority decides**

Instead of one person (I myself), in this case many people decide on the direction of our ethical behaviour. As already indicated, this was usually the case in the communalistic culture of Africa. It has also become common in Western democracy. If, for instance, the majority is in favour of abortion upon request it is accepted as legally and ethically correct. Apart from the fact that the majority is not always correct, we should keep in mind that ethical norms cannot be quantified or determined in terms of numbers - the numerical is a different aspect of reality, as indicated above.

### 9.2.8 The correct way to determine norms

Norms are of the greatest importance in our entire life. They are both criteria for judgement and guidelines or directions on how to act. They indicate the route to a meaningful life.

Norms are our human response to something or someone we regard as authoritative. In the above examples the individual human being (the West) or the human community (Africa) is regarded as the highest authority. The Christian, however, regards God as the ultimate authority towards whom responsibility is required. He requires that we should respond obediently to His will which He gave in the form of laws and commandments.

These guidelines for our life He revealed in creation (the correct behaviour of different creatures in nature), in the Scriptures and in Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate.

For human beings all God's laws are summarised in one, central, fundamental commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40).

This commandment of love is not only **constant** and **foundational** or basic in what we do, but it is also **comprehensive**, it includes everything we do in relation to God and in relation to His creation (material things, plants, animals and humans). Because it has to be **applied** to every aspect of life, love always acquires different forms. This already became clear when we explained that every aspect of reality is accompanied by specific norms. In our life of faith we have to "concretise" our love towards God in **devotion**. Our ethical life should reveal **integrity** in our behaviour. The form in which love should be revealed in politics is **justice** to everybody. Love in economic affairs implies careful **stewardship** of scarce resources. In all these different ways by formulating different norms, we are responding to God's commandment of love. All our norms are different shapes, figures or forms of how we try to apply God's love commandment in the diversity of life situations.

It will now be clear that our norms are not to be identified with God's will as formulated in his laws, for example the Ten Commandments or the law of love. Not we, but God is laying down the law or order for life. We can only discover it, respond to it in obedience or disobedience. Divine laws are **infallible**, human norms are **fallible**. God's will does **not change**, human norms **may change**, because of our deficient or even faulty

understanding and formulation of God's will. Or because God's will has to be embodied differently in different times and circumstances.

God's written Word is not culture-**conditioned**, because the Word itself conditions every culture. Neither is it culture-**bound**, since it transcends every culture, it is trans-cultural. It is culture-**related**. God's universally valid Word was revealed concretely in the local and temporal-historical particularities of Israelite and early Christian habits. But embedded in these changing conditions are enduring motifs which still lay their claim upon us today.

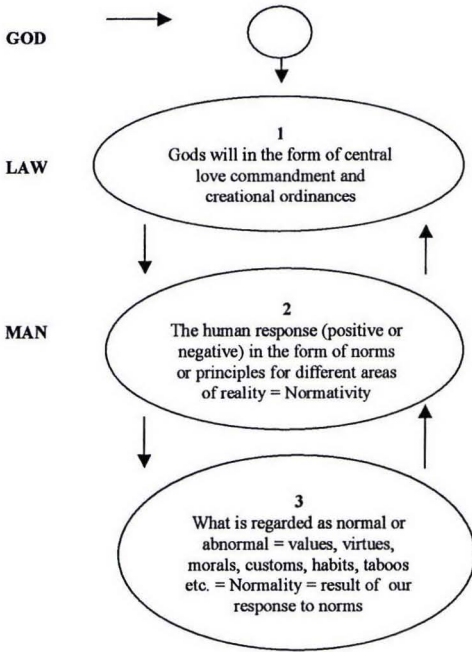
Spykman (1985:47) therefore distinguishes between the "then-and-there **form** of obedience and the here-and-now **norm** for obedience". Elsewhere he says: "Abiding norms come to us in Scripture couched in the historical-cultural forms of the day. This is nothing to regret. Nor may we play the contingent off against the permanent, neither absolutising its forms, nor relativising its norms" (Ibid:53). In our altered situation the formal aspect of a certain law may no longer be relevant. Yet it also has a normative aspect which carries an abiding validity.

Because Christ, for example, instructed his disciples to wash one another's feet (John 13:14), it does not imply that we today have to do exactly the same. In His times and circumstances (dirt roads, long walks, open sandals) it was necessary. In our times (tarred roads, travel by car and wearing a different kind of shoe) we, firstly, have to acknowledge the different context. Secondly, we have to determine what Christ's will is that transcends the specific context. And, in the third place, we have to recontextualise His will of humble service for our own times, we have to formulate it as a norm for our own specific circumstances.

Both **absolutism** (the idea that norms are supra-historical entities, valid for all times and places) and **relativism** (the denial of any constants to guide us) should therefore be rejected. Because norms are **human responses** to God's will at a certain time and place, absolutism cannot be accepted. And because we believe that norms are applications or positivisations of **God's will** for life, relativism should be rejected.

Our explanation of how to arrive at the correct norms for our behaviour can be visualised and summarised in the following diagram:

**The difference and relationships between divine laws, human norms and values**



This diagram, distinguishes clearly between (1) God’s **law**, (2) humanly formulated **norms** as an obedient response to His laws (normativity) and (3) **normal** human conduct in agreement with the formulated norms (normality). We should, therefore, not – as some of the theories mentioned above – regard human (normal) behaviour (3) as normative or norms (2). Neither should we confuse our fallible human norms (2) with God’s law (1) and in this way regard norms as divine, having absolute authority.

The diagram indicates clearly that the route to be followed is from (1) to (2) and then to (3). This is indicated by the arrows pointing downwards. At the same time the diagram indicates (by way of the arrows pointing upwards) that we continually have to test what we regard as normal (3), including our norms (2), against God’s law (1) as formulated in His central commandment of love.

## 9.2.9 Living according to ethical norms

I have devoted much space to explaining what norms exactly are and how they are acquired, because they are basic to moral life as well as the discipline of ethics. However, everyone of us knows that **knowledge** about the correct norms and **living** accordingly can be two quite different issues. To which areas of life do our ethical norms (that we should act in a trustworthy, loyal, reliable, honest way) have to be applied?

We will follow the current distinction between personal or individual and communal or social and accordingly distinguish between individual ethics and social ethics. The first is the study of individual moral/immoral behaviour and the second the study of the morality/immorality of a group of people in a specific societal relationship. We accept this distinction in spite of the fact that, as everyone knows, the individual cannot be isolated from society and vice versa.

### 9.2.10 Individual morality and ethics

Individual morality (studied by personal ethics) is about the moral character of a person and his/her **direct** moral relationship with others. Social morality (studied by social ethics) is about the **structured** moral relationships between a number of people in a societal relationship, institution or organisation.

Every individual act has an ethical/moral dimension. Whether you attend a worship service, sell goods at the market or play football, you cannot ignore its ethical dimension or the need to obey the ethical norm. It is not enough to obey only the religious, economic or recreational norms in the case of the three examples. The ethical – and all the other norms (see above) – has to be obeyed simultaneously. Too many people think – and behave – as if the ethical norm is a mere afterthought. For example, the business man who first, by any means, make as much money as possible and then afterwards – to console his troubled conscience – donate one percent of his profit to a charity organisation to assist the same workers he has previously exploited!

Issues which are usually called ethical issues, like abortion, euthanasia, pornography and prostitution are not necessarily ethically **qualified** problems. They also have religious, economic, juridical, psychological, biotic and other dimensions. Real ethically qualified acts in personal ethics are those in which trust, loyalty, integrity and fidelity are directly involved. When someone shows loyalty in difficult situations, he/she is behaving in a morally good way. When another person cannot be trusted, he/she behaves immorally or in a morally bad way.

What should be emphasised in personal ethics are the different ethical virtues. Virtues and values are the result of obedience to ethical norms, they indicate normal behaviour. Previously in this chapter we have mentioned some of the important virtues which were appreciated in traditional African culture. The Bible also emphasise a virtuous life. Examples are Matthew 5:3-10 (the beatitudes), Galatians 5:22,23 and Philippians 4:15. Again, not all of them are **ethical** virtues.

### 9.2.11 Social morality and social ethics

As indicated already, social morality can be defined as the moral dimension of all kinds of social institutions. Not only an individual human act but also the way society is structured in the case of economics, politics, sport, etc. contains an ethical element. This ethical aspect is investigated in a scholarly way in a variety of ethics: theological ethics, business ethics, political ethics, sports ethics, labour ethics, media ethics, ecological ethics, medical and other types of professional ethics, etc. Chapter 15 will discuss an aspect of business ethics, namely corruption. Apart from that we will not be able to deal with this wide range of issues.

Our emphasis in the rest of this chapter will be on those societal relationships which do not only have an ethical **dimension** but which are ethically **qualified**. There are three of them: friendship, marriage and the family. As indicated above, they are different societal structures because their founding or grounding dimensions are not the same. In the case of friendship the founding function is in **social**; in the case of marriage it is **sexual**; in the case of the family it is the **blood relationship** between parents and children.

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.

These three are the basic societal relationships: healthy friendships, marriages and families are the keys to a healthy, morally sound society. They provide opportunities for personal growth and also good experience of how to live together morally as a community. Therefore, to rebuild the shattered, disrupted African society, serious attention will have to be paid to these three basic relationships.

Later on in this book (cf. chapters 10-13) different aspects of another societal relationship, the state, will be discussed. Chapter 15 will only touch on corruption in business, but in chapter 18 business, as another societal relationship, will be explored in detail.



### 9.3 Friendship

Friendship used to be an important part of traditional African societies. People of the same blood brotherhood, warrior group, age group or initiation group were usually close friends. However, in our contemporary world, friendship - true friendship - is increasingly becoming a rare phenomenon.

#### 9.3.1 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. 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. (Proverbs 18:24 clearly distinguishes between companions and real friends). 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 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 would not be able to experience the love and loyalty of others either. 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.

### **9.3.2 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. As already said, Proverbs 18:24 teaches that a friend my stick even closer with one than a brother . 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 would 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 set aside 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 would 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. Compare for instance the love between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18-20 and 2 Samuel 1). Christ Himself said that "the greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them" (John 15:13).

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.

#### **9.4 Marriage**

Everybody naturally wishes 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. (cf. Van der Walt, 1990:2-33 for an exposition of Genesis 24, John 1:1-12 and the Song of Songs). 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 gives the secret right at the outset - in its second chapter. "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). 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 look at what the three concepts together mean, let us have a look at what gave rise to the revelation of this secret.

##### **9.4.1 The prelude**

God has given Adam a lovely **paradise**, 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 form, 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 was 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.

Our problem today is that not only one but many Adams and Eves are available. How can one be sure that you have chosen the correct one? Going through the different stages of

a relationship (dating, courtship and commitment) both partners should seriously ask the following questions: (1) Are we really good friends? (2) Is he/she trustworthy, a person of integrity? (3) Do we share the same faith? (4) Is there mutual sexual attraction? (5) Do we really know each other and long enough? (6) Can we communicate? (7) Do we have common interests? (8) Are we willing to accept each others' weaknesses? (9) Are we both ready for a life-long commitment? (10) Will he/she be a good father/mother to my children? (11) Are we more or less of the same age and from the same culture?

The following will be **wrong** motives to enter into marriage: (1) only physical and sexual attractiveness; (2) only wealth and financial security; (3) status; (4) sympathy; (5) because the two got used to each other; (6) consolation after the failure of a previous relationship; (7) fear to end the relationship; (8) only looking for emotional security; (9) pressure from parents / family to get married; (10) only the desire to have children; (11) because your fiancée is expecting a baby.

But let us return to the three keywords: **Leave, cleave** unto and **be one**.

The first keyword is:

#### **9.4.2 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 being a member of a 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! Polygamy – both simultaneous (Africa) and serial or consecutive polygamy (the West) – is excluded.

If we keep in mind what has been said about the different aspects or facets of reality (cf. 2.4 above) – according to which we have to analyse every societal relationship – it will be clear that the "leaving" entails even more.

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 - often the situation in Africa - they will render their children very unhappy.

#### **9.4.3 Cleave unto**

Our sex-obsessed times will probably cause us to interpret this "cleaving unto" ("uniting" in the Good News Bible or "united" in The New International Version) 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 fidelity. And fidelity 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 fidelity is promised to each other in public. And this is a promise for a lifetime. Only death or unfaithfulness can bring an end to it. (The only ground for divorce in the Bible is fornication, e.g. breaking the mutual promise of truth.)

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 **fidelity**, 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.

#### **9.4.4 Being one**

In a certain sense the **cleaving unto** already implies **being one**. If one cleaves unto the other, loves him/her, has 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.

This, however, does not imply that premarital (or even extramarital) sex is acceptable. Some of the practical arguments used today to condone premarital sex are the following: (1) The two people have to know each other sexually also before they can decide to get married. (2) It is not healthy to suppress one's sexual desires. (3) The man has to be sure that his fiancée can bear children. (4) We cannot wait till we have finished our studies and obtained employment. (5) Contraceptives prevent undesired pregnancy. (6) The media and the public opinion encourages sex prior to marriage.

Some of the practical arguments against sex before marriage are: (1) such a relationship offers, especially to women, no security (2) emotional harm is caused when the relationship is broken (3) feelings of guilt can be the result as well as (4) loss of self-respect and a good name while (5) there is also the danger of venereal diseases and AIDS.

More important, however, than these practical arguments against premarital sex is the biblical viewpoint. 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 truth may, therefore, according to God's commandment, never be separated. Sexual intercourse without truth 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. It is not the be-all and end-all, however. The "sex appeal", the physical attraction, may disappear, but 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 (compare again the different aspects of reality, mentioned under 2.4 above, for a complete picture):

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!

Much of the tension in married life sometimes arises because of quarrels about who of the two are in charge, who is the "boss" with the final say. In the past it was generally accepted that the husband had authority over his wife. It was the case in traditional Africa and also amongst Christians who based their viewpoint mainly on the biblical injunction that the wife should obey the husband as her "head".

Today this has changed, not only because of the emancipation of women, but also because it became clear that the Bible does not teach a vertical kind of relationship of authority (with the husband on top and the wife below) in the case of marriage, but a horizontal relationship (both on the same level). Not only the wife should be submissive to the husband, but there should be **mutual** submissiveness (Ephesians 5:21). It also became clear that the word "head" can have more meanings in the Bible than only indicating someone in authority. It can also mean "source of strength". Rather than

dominate his wife, the husband should be a source of strength to his wife. In marriage to ask the question "Who is the boss?" is therefore a wrong question, because this societal relationship, consisting of only two persons, is different from others like the state, business, church, etc. where a clear distinction is made between those in authority and those who have to obey authority.

The most important facet of unity in marriage is: unity of faith in God. It is this deepest unity in faith which will carry our marriages through every possible crisis. Even when marital truth 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.

#### **9.4.5 A threefold mystery**

This then is the threefold secret of a happy marriage given by God Himself when He instituted this relationship: **leaving, cleaving unto and being one**. Without the leaving it is not possible to cleave unto each other, because then one remains bonded to one's parental home. And without the cleaving unto (reciprocal fidelity) 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 fidelity. (The reason why marriage is an **ethically** qualified societal relationship.)

What a privilege that we do not have to enter marriage not knowing - like so many other couples today in Africa - 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 live according to this secret, God Himself will bless us together and our cup of happiness will always run over.

These basic biblical guidelines have to be applied in the complex African context of today. To assist the reader to do so, a number of books by African Christian writers on different aspects of married life on the continent is included in the (second part of the) bibliography at the end of this chapter.

#### **9.5 The family**

Broader society has a strong influence on the family life of a nation or a country. Many of the serious problems African families are experiencing today are caused by economic,

social, political and other factors "outside" the family. 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.

### **9.5.1 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 clear distinction was drawn between the household and extended family.

According to Kinoti (1985:5) the family is the most important feature of traditional African society: "It is the foundation of the African society. Being so fundamental, it has been the most integrating element of African society. Before the disruption of African culture, the family gave the individual an identity, a sense of belonging and security. Families were the basis of the cohesion and the integrity that characterised African people". The family was also the centre of both informal and formal education.

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 come into being, each with its own field and its own tasks.

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!

On the other hand, however, we can have nostalgia for the closeness and stability of the earlier family life in Africa 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. (Some of the reasons for the disintegration of the African family are discussed by Mapitse, 1998).

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. Single parent families are no longer the exception, but are becoming a general phenomenon. 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.

### **9.5.2 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 would not be completely incorrect. However, we would like 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.

### **9.5.3 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.

The characteristics of a true community 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.

### **9.5.4 The family as a 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. 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.

#### **9.5.5 The family is a distinctive community**

In our vision of family life, it is essential to distinguish clearly 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. (The generally inferior position of women in Africa can not be discussed here, but see the last section (4) of the bibliography at the end of this chapter for material on this issue.) 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 other's 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.



### **9.5.6 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 may 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 not all that can be said about family unity either. 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. Under point 2.4 above 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 historic-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.

### **9.5.7 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 expressed 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 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 exercise 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 would not know what responsibility entails if there were 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 line 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.

#### **9.5.8 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. (The family is **qualified** by the bond of love and **based** on the bond of blood.) Mutual love qualifies and leads this societal relationship. Without love and trust between parents, between children and parents, and between children mutually, one could hardly speak of a family.

We have already indicated 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 realise 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 - love in friendship and marital love, in which mutual truth 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 both the greatest lovingness and the greatest 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.

#### **9.5.9 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 African Traditional 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 of Christ do not indicate that love of God cancels 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 in Africa. 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 really 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!

#### **9.5.10 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 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).

These basic guidelines about family life have to be applied in the contemporary African context, described in the first part of this chapter. To help the reader in doing so, a few books on family life from a Christian perspective are listed in the (third part of the) bibliography.

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## **Chapter 10:**

# **THE SACRALISATION AND DESACRALISATION OF AUTHORITY AND POWER**

In the first and second chapter of this book it was indicated how authority and power – especially political authority and power – was misused in the past and is still abused all over Africa to oppress the people. Our continent experiences a very serious crisis of leadership. This chapter takes up the issue again to answer two important questions in this regard: **Why** is it happening? and **How** can the situation be changed? We will, first, deal with the sacralisation of power and authority and secondly, with their desacralisation in the light of the Bible.

When we deal with the secularisation of authority and power the following two current viewpoints can be distinguished: the hierarchical and the egalitarian. The main emphasis will be on the first.

### **10.1 The hierarchical perspective**

This viewpoint is encountered in both traditional and modern African societies. It is also still very popular amongst Christians.

#### **10.1.1 The traditional African viewpoint**

The traditional African's 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. (Cf. Gyekye, 1996:109-124 for African political values.)

This is clearly illustrated by different leadership traditions in Africa. Mazrui and Tidy (1984:184-193) distinguish these different leadership traditions in Africa before and after independence, indicating which of these styles (or a combination of them) were most prominent in the leadership of political leaders. I am of the opinion that the models they identify are not only practised in politics, but also apply in other areas of life. We should have a closer look at them - not as models to be imitated, but as a warning that they should be avoided.

The different styles often overlap (as will become clear from the examples mentioned), but the following five could nevertheless be clearly distinguished.

- **The paternalistic elder tradition.** The original first presidents of African countries were usually regarded as the real father, commanding filial reverence, intertwined with traditional African reverence for old age and wisdom. Examples are: Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, first president of Kenya and Kwame Nkrumah, first president of Ghana.
- **The sage tradition of the leader as the ultimate teacher.** Ideology as a way of transmitting his ideas becomes a monopoly of the centre and attempts are made to ensure substantive responsiveness. Usually alternative schools of thought are not permitted. Examples are: Lèopold Sèdar Senghor, poet-president of Senegal and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, who is the example par excellence of the sage ruler.
- **The warrior tradition of liberation fighters and military rulers.** They believe in the "myth of discipline", which can compromise intellectual freedom and rely on intimidatory leadership based on fear and instruments of coercion to assert authority. Examples are: Mu'ammar Gaddafi of Libya and Idi Amin, the "second Shaka" of Uganda.
- **The charismatic style of the inspiring personality.** With their personal charismatic qualities they inspire their followers with devotion and enthusiasm. They capture the public with a kind of mystique surrounding their names, warmth of personality, personal magnetism or immense personal presence. When, however, the charisma declines, this type of leader often becomes a despotic, uneasy and certainly an undemocratic strong man. Mazrui and Tidy mention as examples here again the names of Kenyatta, Nyerere and Amin.
- **The monarchical style.** Here we find (1) a quest for aristocratic effect like splendid attire, large expensive cars, conspicuous consumption, symbols of power, etc. - the cult of ostentation. (2) The leader is viewed as a redeemer - the personality cult. (3) The glorification of the leader as a hero - the sacralisation of authority. Nkrumah is also mentioned as an example in this case: he was called Osagyefo, the Redeemer, a quasi-monarchical title.

#### 10.1.2 The traditional Christian viewpoint

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 its accountability upwards!

### **10.1.3 Making human authority divine**

Both the traditional African and Christian viewpoints make the same basic mistake: they do not distinguish between human and divine authority. A brief word about each of them to explain.

#### **• Traditional African view**

When a **Newsletter** (no. 9, July-December 1991) of the Akrofi-Christaller Centre in Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana discusses the issue of politics and religion, it has the following to say: "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 a 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" (1991:6).

For a detailed description of how the religion and ancestral practices of the traditional Africans influenced their concept of a ruler, leader or chief, see the booklet by Osei Safo-Kantanka: **Can a Christian become a chief? An examination of Ghanaian ancestral practices in the light of the Bible (1993).**

African politics 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. It did not realise that leaders who liberated the continent were not necessarily the best leaders to administer their countries!

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.

- **Traditional Christian view**

The basic error in the Christian hierarchical view on authority is the same: 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. Unless we 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"? (Rom. 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 would 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 13:2: "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.

A man like archbishop Tutu, who had to struggle against a totalitarian South African government has the following to say:

- In the first place we should learn the difference between morality and legality. When something is legal, people think that it is also morally right, which is not always the case. To obey an immoral law it so be guilty of immorality (Tutu, 1994:142).
- Secondly, the Christian tradition teaches that when laws are unjust they do not oblige obedience. Obedience to God takes precedence over obedience to human beings (Acts 4:19; 5:29) (Cf. Tutu, 1994:151-3).
- Thirdly, the authority of governments is not absolute. "They themselves also stand under God's judgement as his servants ... The ruler is God's servant to do the subjects good (Romans 7:4). The ruler rules for the benefit of the ruled ... The corollary is that you must not submit yourself to a ruler who subverts your good". (Tutu, 1994:152.) (Cf. Also Tutu, 1982:30.)
- Lastly, God has definite expectations from a ruler: "May be judge the people with righteousness and the poor with justice ... He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight" (Psalm 72).

## 10.2 The egalitarian perspective

In reaction against the older hierarchical view, based on elitism (only certain people fulfil an office and exercise authority and power), the new tendency is egalitarian, based on the doctrine that all people are equal. The modern (mass) democratising spirit tends to wipe out all rank and order in society - between rulers and citizens, teachers and students, parents and children. While the old idea of authority resulted in an absolutisation of the office, this viewpoint easily results in a lack of respect for office and authority - it may even develop into anarchy.

The interesting fact is, however, that neither of the two viewpoints - not even the egalitarian - provides any guarantee against authoritarianism and even totalitarianism. In the first case society is dominated by the elite and in the second case it is dominated by the masses - in spite of beautiful words like "democracy".

It is fairly easy to see how hierarchical elitism can be totalitarian, dictatorial, authoritarian, absolutistic and repressive. To recognise the idolatrous character of egalitarian democracy is more difficult - the danger of deception is greater. Democracy should simply be a method of arriving at consensus decisions in a pluralistic society. But instead of preserving the plurality of ways of life, democracy tends to become the way of life to unify society into one nation. Pluralism is ousted from the "public square" and only refers to "private opinion". State propaganda establishes the "democratic way of life" as the official doctrine. Its total claim finally results in totalitarian "democratism". The democratic way of life becomes an idol - finally resulting in a democratic way of death!

The reason for the totalitarian results of both viewpoints is that, in spite of their differences, they commit the same basic error. Both regard office and authority as something undifferentiated and consequently ask a quantitative question: How much authority, instead of the correct qualitative question: What kind of authority belongs to the office?

The answer to the question what kind of authority (and power) is in my viewpoint threefold. Firstly, it is human and therefore fallible - not divine. Secondly, its nature will depend on the specific societal relationship in which the authority is exercised. (The authority of a government in the case of the societal relationship of the state, will be of a different kind than that of church officials or the parents of a family.) Thirdly, none of the different kinds of authorities in any societal relationship should be encompassing or totalitarian in nature - they are all limited.

The first point calls for our immediate attention. (The second and third will be discussed at a later stage).

### **10.3 The desacralisation of office, authority and power**

Kwame Bediako of Ghana wrote an excellent essay on the desacralisation of political power and the contribution Christianity can make in this process. In it he proves that the suspicion that Christianity is alien and unhelpful in questions about African politics is unfounded.

He first indicates the reasons why Africans tend to sacralise authority and political office. The African ruler is considered to be the symbol of unity, the embodiment of the essential values of the nation. Because the traditional belief is that the well-being of society depends upon the maintenance of good relations with the ancestors, the ruler fulfils an important function as intermediary between the living and the ancestors. He is more than a secular ruler. He is the one who "sits on the stool of the ancestors". Accordingly, the authority of the ruler in the traditional political system is, strictly speaking, the authority of the ancestors.

Beyond sacralising the office of the ruler, the whole realm of politics and society itself is sacralised, since the traditional worldview makes no sharp distinctions between sacred and secular. All political and social institutions acquire a sacred character through their association with the ancestors who are regarded as a part of society.

By regarding the authority of the living rulers to be that of the ancestors, every challenge to political authority was also regarded as an attack upon the sacral authority of the ancestors on whose goodwill and favour the community's prosperity and future are purported to depend. This sacralisation of authority and power continued after independence of the African countries. The justification of one-party rule, the fact that unpopular rulers continue to cling to power, the fortunes of political dissenters, the honorific titles and praise-names, etcetera, can be explained by the fact that the ancestor did not cease to reign from the spiritual world. President Nkrumah, for instance, adopted the title "Osagyefo," meaning "saviour" or "redeemer". He approved of being accorded supernatural status. For all practical purposes he became an ancestor-ruler in the old sacral sense.

The conclusion which Bediako draws from this is that, if Africa is to change in the direction of genuine democracy, the solution will not be the mere adoption of the external trappings of democratic reform. Africa will need new conceptions of (political) authority and power.

The Biblical message is clear: kings and other rulers are mere mortals among fellow mortals and can be summoned to account before God. This is illustrated in the case of Pilate's claim to have the power either to free or to crucify Christ. He sacralised the political power of the Roman Empire. Jesus' response was: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." Authority truly belongs only to God. Pilate's authority, like all human authority, is "delegated". Because Christ Himself is the source of all authority, the tables are turned and Pilate is judged by the One whom he judges!

The new, unique concept of power which Christ introduced is not that of dominating power but of a serving authority and power. This perspective can truly liberate politicians and rulers to be humans amongst fellow-humans in service of God and their fellow-men. Without such a concept of authority and power as Jesus held, taught and demonstrated, the hope of achieving real democracy in Africa will remain an illusion.

What Bediako indicated in the case of Africa is, albeit in a different way, also applicable to secular Western democracies. They also idolise - a secular way of sacralisation - authority and power. They also have to be desacralised.

To achieve this we will have to return to the building blocks of a philosophy of society, the four basic concepts of office, authority, power and responsibility. What would a Christian perspective on these key concepts look like? (Cf. Fowler, 1993.)

#### **10.4 Office, authority, power and responsibility in a biblical perspective**

To be able to understand the biblical idea of office a brief introduction will be necessary on its idea of religion, man as the image of God and as steward.

##### **10.4.1 Life is religion**

Life as a whole, life in its entirety is religion. The way we live our lives - however that may be - is our religion. It is the way we walk before the face of God - whether obediently or disobediently or, as mostly happens, a mixture of the two. To be religious is the inescapable situation of every human being - it is only the direction of his/her life that differs. Religion is not a separate sacred or holy "part" of life. It is also more than a church creed, a set of beliefs, a theology or a standard of morals, though it does not exclude these. Religion is our response - in all activities of life - to God.

##### **10.4.2 Human beings are the images of God**

This all-embracing view of religion is rooted in the biblical teaching that man is the image of God. It should not be thought of in ontic categories (some ontic quality in man which

corresponds with a similar ontic quality in God), but as a religious relationship. Imaging God means obedience, affirmative response to his Word. It is not a static characteristic but a dynamic interaction between two covenantal partners. Therefore we should avoid the idea of being image-bearers, because it conveys an external connotation, whereas being images of God is integral to our being human.

After the fall, human beings did not lose some of their faculties. It was not an ontic, substantial, structural loss, but a religious, directional, orientational loss. (Like somebody losing his way in a dense forest.) From our original state of imagers, we became "de-imagers" and in Christ we are restored to be "re-imagers" of God.

Imaging basically means answering our calling in this world, fulfilling our creaturely tasks, exercising "dominion" in creation, fulfilling our office. Stated differently: Imaging God means being his servants in the midst of his world, guardians of the well-being of our fellow human beings and stewards of the other creatures over which we have been appointed as caretakers.

The biblical idea of man as the image of God is therefore not something abstract, far removed from our day-to-day life. Augustine already indicated the following three steps: (1) all human beings serve the true God or a god or some gods; (2) they are transformed into the image of the God/god/gods they serve and (3) they proceed to shape life around them (their social, economic, political, educational institutions) in their own image which, in turn, reflects their ultimate commitment.

#### **10.4.3 We are God's stewards**

From this very rich concept of man being the image of God, different aspects could be worked out in more detail. One of them which, to my mind, are of the utmost importance for our contemporary world - and also for Africa - is that of steward or manager. In summary it includes the following:

(1) God is the creator and owner of the whole of creation. It does not belong to us. (2) God appoints man and woman in a very high office: the managers of his entire property. He entrusts his whole creation to us. (3) The human being has no absolute rights over any of God's creatures. He has to rule over creation in the way God Himself would have ruled. God sets the norms, laws which man has to obey. (4) Man has a double responsibility: towards God for whom he has to fulfil this mandate, and towards creation over which he has to rule. A steward does not have less responsibility than an owner - as we often think - but rather has a greater responsibility. (5) 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, to protect it against all the terrible results of the fall - especially against man's own evil heart. He should only use creation for his real needs and not for his selfish desires. (6) Stewardship implies service to our fellow human beings and all our other co-creatures. Animals, for instance, are valuable and precious in God's eyes. He did not create them only for the benefit and service of man. We should not regard and use them as "objects", "raw materials" or "laboratory apparatus". (7) In the economic field stewardship is not concerned with the gathering of possessions, but with relationships amongst people. The limited use for our own needs and the help to others in need should be emphasised.

With these few flashes we have merely scratched the surface of the deep and rich meanings of religion, image and steward in the Bible. It is, however, sufficient as a background to what we have to say about office.

#### **10.4.4 Every human being is an office-bearer**

What has been said about religion and image may also be stated in another way by saying that man is an officer of God. Like the concept of imaging God, it is a relationship-position between God and creation. The concept of "office" is nowhere to be found explicitly on the pages of the Bible. Yet, the idea is implicitly present everywhere.

However, during the history of Christianity the biblical idea that each individual is the holder of an office (being a servant of God, custodian of one's fellowmen and stewards of creation) was stripped of its fullness of meaning and gradually replaced by an elitist notion. Common Christians were "disenfranchised", robbed of their sense of standing in office. The idea of office was changed as to apply only to authorities in church and state. The sixteenth century meant a recovery of the original biblical idea of office. Luther emphasised the universal priesthood of all believers and Calvin developed the idea of office more fully.

#### **10.4.5 God's will is a variety of offices**

Apart from the general divine calling to mankind to execute a universal office, there are also specific calls and therefore a variety of offices. Everybody is called to service, but not everybody is called 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 call to office is specified in a specific societal sphere or relationship.

The history of Israel, for example, shows how its tribal way of life gradually disintegrated. When Israel was travelling through the desert under the leadership of Moses they already

had a well-organised government, not identical to that of tribal chiefs anymore. Also the independent office of prophet and of priest were instituted. The office of king was added when Israel became a kingdom under the rule of Saul. In contrast to the other despotic kings of the East, Saul had only limited power, status and wealth. The same applied to the priests, while the prophets did not have royal or priestly responsibilities. When kings transgressed these limits set to them by God and took over the responsibilities of the priests, for example, of offerings to God, they were severely punished by God Himself. God clearly wants a variety of offices, each with its own task, responsibility and limits.

This could be explained in yet another way. God's central commandment of love is not something abstract, it takes on different forms in the different spheres of life. Love gets defined in real terms by the sphere in which it is exercised: as fidelity in marital and family relationships, as justice in political life, stewardship in economics and industry, compassion in neighbourly contacts, etc. Love is a relational concept and acquires different "colours" in different societal relationships.

#### **10.4.6 Office-bearers have a four-fold task**

Office-bearers have the following tasks: (1) 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; (2) to protect and promote their calling; (3) to struggle against evil because all human beings are sinners, and (4) 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.

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.

#### **10.4.7 Exercising an office requires authority**

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, as in all things human, imperfect and fallible. Man can only lay claim to authority to the extent in which he has insight into and shows obedience towards the divine norms which apply to the relevant situation or societal relationship in which he finds himself.

In a family a believing child may 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. 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.

According to this biblical view of authority the automatic or direct connection between authority and office 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, in jest, that some commanders have their authority by virtue of their rank (the pips on their shoulders) and power rather than by virtue of their insight (their intelligence and integrity).

Because man's insight is limited and his obedience imperfect, we should always say: to the extent to which somebody has insight, to the extent that he acts in obedience with that insight into God's norms, to that extent he has real authority. All this may sound very abstract, but in concrete political situations it can be a harsh reality. For instance, in South Africa where Tutu (1994:176) had to tell the apartheid government that it may have the power but not the authority to do what it did.

#### **10.4.8 Authority is recognised and allocated by a specific community**

The important question to be asked here, is about the origin of authority. Many Christians still believe that human authority is derived from the authority of God or is delegated by



God. In this case human beings will exercise authority in the name of God or as substitute for God. Nowhere does the Scripture, however, teach that God delegated his authority - except to Christ. The danger of this viewpoint is also that the distinction between divine and human authority becomes blurred, and fallible human authority is regarded as divine and therefore above any criticism.

The correct viewpoint is that God has ordained authority in each societal relationship. Human beings should recognise the fact that positions of authority are necessary in every societal relationship. Anarchism is not a biblical viewpoint! This clarification, however, still leaves us with the question of how a person can, in the correct way, acquire a position of authority.

We should 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 capacity, but the community might not recognise and acknowledge it. On the other hand a person might not have the ability, but might because of popularity and assumed 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 insight.

In practice this has the following implications:

- Before Christians elect a person to an office, they have to ensure that such a person knows God's will for the specific sphere of life, and they should also be certain that he is willing to obey it. Friendship, politics or other considerations may never determine who is elected.
- 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 grow in insight and obedience on a daily basis. Otherwise they will be unworthy office-bearers without true authority.

Does the above imply that a person without insight cannot possess authority? The answer to this question is to be found in two distinct senses of the word authority: (1) Authority which is granted by law, whether by state law or by the internal legal organs of non-state bodies. This is the legal or juridical sense of the word. (2) Authority in the sense of personal qualities or insight into the task or office. For example: "The lecturer spoke with authority." This is the Biblical-religious meaning. Authority in this sense is not primarily juridical, but has a much wider connotation such as the biblical concepts of stewardship and responsibility.

However distinct, these two senses of the word are also related. "The lecturer spoke with authority", could also mean that the teacher was authorised by law (e.g. internal regulations of the tertiary institution) to say what he said.

Lack of insight does therefore not deprive a person in office from legal authority. Insight is not a prerequisite for the possession or exercise of legal authority in either the sense of personal authority (attached to the office of individual persons), or communal authority (attached to communal authorities such as a university council, a board of trustees or directors, local government etc.). From a biblical perspective we may, however, still be critical about authority without insight - even if it is legal.

#### **10.4.9 Authority is limited and subject to control**

As a result of the sinfulness of man one of the greatest problems that office-bearers often have, is that they no longer know 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, 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 channels of communication open. 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 courting rebellion. (Think what might happen if there were not the necessary openness and communication between parents and their 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!

Any office is therefore subject to control. This control can be exercised in two different ways: 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 implement rules 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 specific group of people and justice towards others is 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 citizen in such a case can no longer accept the exercise of power and authority of 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 recall the government to its real calling.

#### **10.4.10 To fulfil his tasks an office-bearer needs power**

Power should not be separated from authority. It should be based on authority, e.g. correct insight and subsequent action. While authority is the right to render service in a specific societal relationship, power is the ability to serve.

Power as such, is therefore not wrong or bad, for no societal relationship can function properly without the necessary power of its office-bearers. (It is, of course, wrong when obtained through physical power or another form of violence.)

Power - like authority - is unique in each societal relationship. Government has the power of the sword, which is not permissible in any other relationship. In a family context one does not have the same kind of power as, for example, in the state, and it is also exerted in a different way. The powers of a church council are again totally different from that of the family, because the former is of a religious nature. The power of lecturers at a university are different again, as it is academic by nature.

Both authority and power aim at empowering the members of a specific societal relationship to fulfil their divine calling. The power entrusted in authorities is not intended for themselves, but for the sake of their subjects. This being the case, then power is used in a responsible way. If not, power is abused. Abused power results in violence - the illegal, unnecessary, destructive and excessive use of power.

Therefore the power with which an office-bearer is endowed should not be too great, but at the same time not be too slight, because then the office cannot be effectively exercised.

What has been stated so far is of great importance because everyone of us knows that the possession of power leads to a constant temptation to abuse it. Power tends to corrupt - and absolute power corrupts absolutely. In the world around us power is regarded as something to be grasped and held on to. Power struggles are at the root of many conflicts.

Fear of the loss of power is an important reason for oppression.

Usually people want power in order to gain personal advantage. But it may also be that they don't want it for selfish reasons, but in order to correct the wrongs of society. Whatever the motive, however, to view power as a prize to be seized and held on to, is not what the Bible teaches - it contradicts the Gospel. The desire to have and to hold on to power - whatever the underlying motives - always destroys human relationships.

A famous Kenyan politician, Oginga Odinga correctly distinguishes between two attitudes towards power (cf. Oruka, 1992:48): The first is to see power as an end in itself. People who are victims of this attitude wish to grab power and once in power they forget about the people who elected them. The second (correct) attitude treats power as a means only: "Power is power to do something. Power is never power to be enjoyed as an end. A leader, a genuine leader, must always have the goals he wishes to achieve with power.

Only if he has goals other than power itself, is power meaningful both to him and to his followers”.

Does the Gospel then present powerlessness as desirable? No, it guarantees us more than enough power to achieve the fullness of human life. (Cf. Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 1:17-19 and 2 Timothy 1:7). But this power is not a prize to be sought - it is a gift of God's grace to be accepted in a responsible manner. It is righteous power, a power that empowers and builds up human life. It is the power of a servant, not that of a master. When we exercise power - of whatever nature - as a servant, we do not guard our power jealously and cling to it desperately, fearful that others may acquire greater power than ours. On the contrary, we rejoice when, through the correct exercise of our own power, others become more powerful. That is also the reason why we don't serve by doing things for others, but by empowering them to act for themselves.

Our supreme example in this is Christ himself. He emptied Himself, humbled Himself, taking the form of a slave. Exactly for this reason He was exalted to our sovereign Lord (cf. Philippians 2:5-11).

#### **10.4.11 Nobody should be in office and exercise authority and power without responsibility and accountability**

Office bearers are responsible to God and to the members of the societal relationship who appointed them for the manner in which they execute their authority and power. Responsibility is always oriented, normative and structured.

- In the first place responsibility presupposes an orientation point, an address. For the Christian this is 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 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 accountable 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 for the different societal relationships 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 become stranded on the rocks. They are the tracks which will keep the train running smoothly.

- In the third place responsibility is always structured. It has its own character in each societal relationship. In the biblical 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 not be collectivised either, as in the case of communalism which over-emphasises community responsibility and under-emphasises individual responsibility.

#### **10.4.12 Office implies service to our fellow human beings**

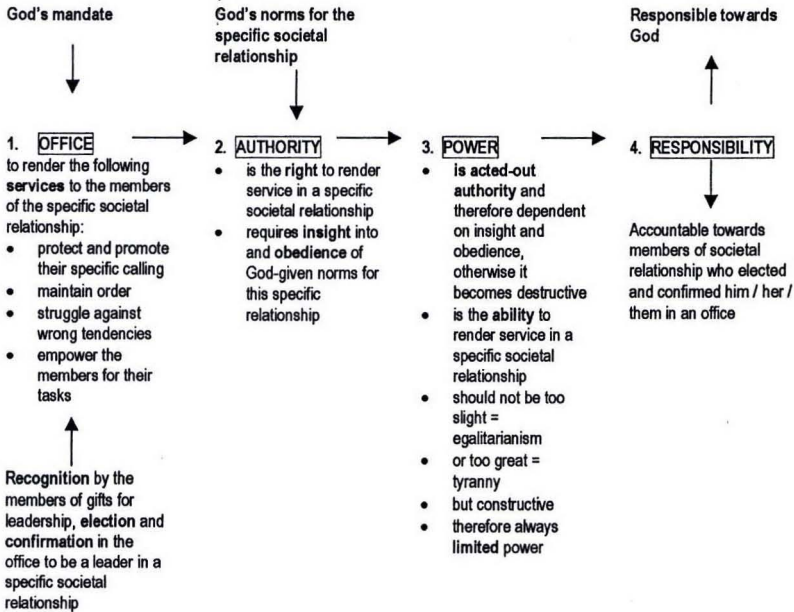
This last thesis will already be abundantly clear from the preceding pages. In conclusion, however, it should be emphasised again. This key biblical concept of service is not something common among officers!

An office are not simply 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 which prove that leadership does not entail status, position and domination, for it is heathen leaders who dominate, while Christian leaders are called to serve their fellow-men: "An argument broke out amongst the disciples as to which one of them should be thought of as the greatest. Jesus said to them: 'The kings of the pagans have power over their people, and the rulers claim the title 'Friends of the People'. But this is not the way it is with you; rather, the greatest one among you must be like the youngest and the leader must be like the servant. Who is greater, the one who sits down to eat or the one who serves him? The one who sits down, of course, But I am among you as one who serves'" (Luke 22:24-27; cf. also Matt. 20:26b-28 and Mark 10:42-45).

Tutu (1994:236) has the following to say about the Christian perspective on office or true leadership: "... in John 13 authority and power and glory are linked very closely with service, with a pouring out of the self for the sake of others, and how that in turn is connected fundamentally with suffering, passion and dying. Authority, power, leadership, glory, in Christ's understanding and his living out what he taught, have everything to do with service, with being a servant, with being the least, with serving and not being served, with giving one's life to be a ransom for others. Is that not what He says in Mark 9 and 10 ... and Philipians 2?"

Office, authority and power which are not borne by the service motive become monsters - but in the end self-devouring monsters. When a person or an institution such as the state becomes too proud of its authority and power (be it of an economic, military, technological or even religious nature) it has already arrived at the threshold of powerlessness and destruction.

The following diagram visualises and summarises what office, authority, power and responsibility entail:



### 10.5 Africa in need of a Christian philosophy of society

The concepts of office, authority, power and responsibility are important building blocks for a philosophy of society. They are, however, not sufficient to provide a **complete** Christian philosophy of society.

Turaki (1991:9,10) correctly emphasises that a complete philosophy of society needs to consider the following four components: (1) individuals, (2) relationships, (3) structures and (4) values. These components of society influence each other reciprocally.

Elsewhere (Van der Walt, 2002: 259-335) I have discussed in detail the difference between a Christian (or pluralist) view of society and the two other dominant perspectives

on society, viz. individualism (or liberalism) and socialism (or communalism). This is compulsory reading to understand a genuine Christian perspective on society. It also provides foundational perspectives for a correct view on the different societal relationships or structures, like the church, state, marriage, family, school, business etcetera (Ibid: 400-525).

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For books on Christian leadership see the Bibliography of chapter 2 as well as the Bibliography in Van der Walt, 1995:98-101.

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## Chapter 11:

### RELIGION AND POLITICS

What should be the correct relationship between religion and society in general and religion and the state or politics in particular? This is a question of vital importance for every African, because Africans are religious people – whether they are adherents of Traditional African Religion, Christianity or Islam.

This chapter will first discuss the relationship between religion and society in general. Then it will pay attention to the relation between religion and politics. Finally it will focus on the question how a specific religion (the Christian) can influence political life.

#### 11.1 Religion and society

Many believers still think that their religion can only have a beneficial influence on society. However, it has become abundantly clear that religion may also have a detrimental influence on society.

Religion is our response to God or what we consider as absolute or divine. It is a fully human activity such as eating, sleeping, buying or selling. Therefore it is also fallible, it can be disobedient to God. We should, therefore, not trust in our own religious activity - only God is worthy of our absolute, unconditional trust. Even if something is adorned with biblical texts it can be totally unbiblical!

Studies on the impact of religion on socio-economic-political change confirm the following: (1) that religion is only one determinant of a variety of interacting factors in such changes; (2) that the influence of religion (as well as of other factors) is not absolute or constant, but depends on the particular context, the interplay of certain conditions; (3) that the weight of religion (and the other determinants) cannot be measured according to strict scientific analysis, and (4) that religion can be both the **cause** or the **result** of socio-economic-political life. This last point can also be stated differently in that religion can help to **structure** social life, but can also be **dependent** upon it.

If we acknowledge this fact, it is not difficult to realise that religion can function as criticism of the **status quo**, but can even function (as an ideology) in support of a wrong and unjust **status quo**. It can even do both at the same time, depending on the aspect of life on which we focus our attention!

If we are aware of this, we will not fall into either the one-sided viewpoint that religion (something human and fallible), can change everything to a better world. Or - the just as one-sided perspective - that religion makes no difference at all in our everyday lives.

Religion, therefore, has definite consequences for social, economic and political life. Stated differently: religion inescapably has political, social and economic dimensions!

This is the case because religion is fundamental, integral to our lives. We cannot divide our lives neatly between a so-called religious and a secular part. It applies to all religions. Everyone - even the so-called secularist - is a religious being.

We now first take a look at some of the positive and then the negative functions of religion in society (cf. Verbeek, 1991).

### 11.1.1 Positive functions of religion

I mention only the following:

- Religion can contribute to the stability of society by giving content to a value system. Without a minimum of consensus about some fundamental values, societal coherence and co-operation would not be possible.
- Religion can prevent society from falling apart because it provides people with motivation and inspiration to achieve individual and common goals.
- Especially during periods of rapid social change religion plays the vital role of establishing a group mentality and identity. It can give a new content to worldviews and create new community forms which could influence the emerging new society.
- The social function of religion of integrating society does not preclude its prophetic function, its potential to challenge, criticise and even shake society on the basis of the values which the religion proclaims. Religion not only legitimises the **status quo** - it can also legitimise protest, resistance and even rebellion. From the Bible it is clear that apart from kings (figures of authority in the state) and priests (leaders of religious life), a third **independent** office, that of the prophets, played a vital role in bringing God's message to both political and ecclesiastical leaders.

Religions can fulfil these positive functions on many levels:

- On the **spiritual level** religion can inspire people to transform the world in which they live.

- On the **intellectual level** it can provide a coherent worldview and a set of values for commitment and action towards socio-economic-political change. Declarations and statements of churches or religious leaders are important, since their silence may be interpreted and even exploited as signifying their approval of the existing order.
- Closely connected to this is the function of religion on the **educational level**, improving the knowledge of its members about the world in which they have to act.
- **Exemplary actions** of religious leaders and institutions are also of great importance. Acts which, by themselves, do not produce great results, may have great symbolic value. Examples are the lifestyles of individual members, sharing communities, care for the weaker by the stronger members, etc.
- **Action on the economic, social, political and other areas** should be the result of the preceding points. A society is not transformed merely by declarations. People must **work** on the structures of society. They should organise themselves, form pressure groups and work towards change.

In many instances people of different religious convictions should take hands and work together towards a common goal. But I also believe in confessional pluralism. This implies that African Traditionalists, Jews, Muslims and Christians should be allowed, if they wish, to have their own youth groups, women's organisations, schools, political parties, etc.

Confessional pluralism should, however, never be used as a smoke screen for tribal or racial segregation. A Christian political party, for instance, should be qualified by its **Christian** perspective on politics and be open to **all** Christians, irrespective of race or ethnic affiliation.

In summary we could say that inspiration and motivation could be considered as the primary role of religion in societal change.

Let us now have a brief look at the possible negative effects.

### **11.1.2 Negative effects of religion**

The contribution of religion to maintaining the social order and harmony in society can also have detrimental effects when its prophetic role is neglected. It can, for instance, contribute simultaneously to the legitimization of the power of the privileged and to the

subservience of the unprivileged. The following are a few expressions of the negative functions of religion:

- Legitimising the **status quo**, consequently hampering the necessary adaptations in changing situations.
- Sanctioning or sacralisation of totally wrong norms or the adaptation or wrong ranking of norms, resulting in the fact that real fundamental values are not adhered to.
- The creation of a collective mentality which over-stresses (group) discipline resulting in the killing of individual initiative. This can lead to passivity and even fatalism.
- Neutralising criticism of dysfunctional, unjust and undemocratic societal structures.
- Leaders, suppressing protest against themselves because of vested interests in the existing order.
- A disintegrating effect in the case of religious fanaticism in a pluralistic society.

An example is the history of Christianity in relation to freedom. It is true that at times the institutionalised church has fought bravely for the liberation of the oppressed. Often, however, it has itself become an instrument of oppression because of its vested interests in the political, economic and cultural structures of a country.

Let me now concentrate on my own religion and say something briefly about Christianity's critical role in social analysis, but also towards itself.

### **11.1.3 External criticism towards society**

In acting together with other religions - as the conscience of society - Christianity should do the following:

- Accepting the relativity of any social order, including a so-called Christian one, and the need for protest against deviations.
- No unconditional alliance to any existing order, neither to any theory or action aiming at change. Critical support - not alliance - even to any economic, political or social system which aims at increasing human dignity and well-being.
- Denouncing a deterministic view in the case of societal systems and structures.
- Acknowledging co-responsibility for the emergence and existence of societal relationships.

- Careful analysis (if possible with the assistance of different experts) of the political and socio-economic processes, in order to understand the dynamics of these processes and to uncover the underlying values determining their nature and actions.
- Signalling and questioning structural oppression and violence exerted by social systems which may also be legitimised by religion. Examples are an unholy alliance between church and state, imbalances in education, oppression of the economically weak and domination by different interest groups.
- Stimulating individual Christians to organise themselves into properly functioning societal institutions, organisations or pressure groups to achieve different aims and provide in a variety of needs. Such a well-organised "civic society" can play a vital role between the macro-bureaucracies of the state and the micro-structures of small communities.

Apart from criticism of society at large, the Christian community and the churches should, however, also engage in serious introspection.

#### **11.1.4 Internal self-criticism**

From a very long list, let me mention only a few examples:

- Being aware of the possibility that even the Gospel and a Christian worldview can easily - even without Christians being aware of it - be converted into a dangerous ideology which does not promote full human well-being but results in a distorted, one-sided view of what life is about. In the past African governments argued: "Seek first the **political** kingdom and all other things will be given to you as well" (Kwame Nkrumah). Today we have a new ideology: "Seek first the **economic** kingdom". We should never forget Christ's commandment when he spoke about our worries about clothes, food and drink (economic life): "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you - as a gift - as well" (Matthew 6:33). If service in His all-encompassing kingdom is our priority, we will try to be obedient to Him in all areas of life and not become captives of one or other misleading, one-sided ideology.
- Neutralising the tendency towards a sterile distance with respect to the real world or an eschatological escapism from reality instead of becoming involved in the concrete issues of the day. Too many Christians still think politics is dirty and should be avoided by Christians!

- Indicating the relevance of the Bible and the contents of the Christian faith for the actual situation of human beings in their specific socio-economic-political circumstances.
- Increasing the church's and believers' understanding of the intricate and complex issues of Africa to ensure that its critical position is accountable and meaningful.
- Developing a dynamic concept of the Christian community and the church, willing to serve the wider local, regional and national communities.
- Lastly, our **confidence** in the truth of the Gospel should be accompanied by **humility** and therefore with **tolerance** of other viewpoints and religions. If we clearly distinguish between the infallible Word of God and our own fallible and sinful human responses to it, we as Christians will be open to learn from other viewpoints.

#### **11.1.5 Religion and worldview**

It should be kept in mind that religion influences society via one's worldview. In the Christian religion also different worldviews can be distinguished (cf. Chapter 19 and 20). In 19.2.5 an example is given of how five Christian worldviews view the relationship between the Christian religion and politics quite differently. The basic reason is that not all Christians view religion biblically as something integral, encompassing the whole of their lives, but regard it a part or compartment of their lives.

Because Tutu can assist us to understand the biblical meaning of the Christian religion for society correctly, his insights will be shared with the reader.

#### **11.1.6 The biblical view on religion and its relation to society**

##### **Religion**

Tutu (1984:160) derives his view of religion from what Augustine of Hippo said about being human: human beings are created by God, like God and for God. "Like God" means that God created man/woman as his representative, viceroy or ambassador to rule over the rest of creation on God's behalf. The human being has to serve God in this creation.

Religion is our response to God. "We all have the need to worship – to worship something or someone greater than ourselves, to whom we wish to dedicate our lives unreservedly ... nothing less than God can ever really satisfy our hunger for God St.

Augustine of Hippo, the great and learned African saint, once said, 'Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee' (Tutu, 1984:146).

### **Encompassing**

Because God is Lord of all life, He takes the whole of human life seriously – the so-called spiritual and material, sacred and profane (Tutu, 1984:154). Therefore the Scriptures and the main stream of the Christian tradition know nothing of the dichotomies so popular in our day. Our whole life is religion, an all-encompassing response to and service of God.

"We are Christian not only in church or on Sunday. Our Christianity is not something we put on, like our Sunday best, only for Sundays. It is for every day. We are Christians from Monday to Monday. We have no off day. We are Christians at play, at work and at prayer. They are all rolled into one. It is not **either** worship **or** trying to do all the good in our community. It is both" (Tutu, 1984:148).

### **The individual as well as the social**

The agreement with the Bible, Tutu again and again emphasises that according to the integral character of the Christian religion, we cannot separate our relationship with God from our relationship to our fellow human beings. If we are turned Godwards, we of necessity have to be turned manwards. "Our so-called vertical relationship with God is authenticated and expressed through our so-called horizontal relationship with our neighbour" (Tutu, 1984:85). "Our love for God is tested and proved by our love for our neighbour" (ibid:147. Cf. also p. 175 where he refers to 1 John 3:15-18; 4:19-21 and James 1:27; 2:14-17).

We can therefore never say that God is concerned only about individual salvation and has no interest in the redemption of the socio-political and economic matrix in which individuals live. We can never say that what happens in the market place, in the courtroom or in parliament is of no particular religious significance (Cf. ibid:38, 39).

### **The social implications of the Gospel**

From different parts of the Bible Tutu substantiates his viewpoint. He has the following to say about Israel's exodus from Egypt: "Exodus was not spiritualized and etherealized out of existence. For the Israelite it was a tangible action, datable, happening in human history ... It was a thoroughly political act by which God was first made known to the Israelites. Nothing could be more political than helping a group of slaves to escape from



their bondage. For the Israelite, therefore, the liberation of Exodus was not just a spiritual or mystical experience ... But it also had to do with the religious and spiritual dimension of forging relationships with God ... The Exodus had to do with their whole lives – political, social, economic, personal, corporate ... the liberation was total ... It embraced both the spiritual and the material, both the secular and the sacred. The Israelites would not understand our obsession with dichotomies ... since He was Lord of the entire universe and Lord of all life” (Tutu, 1984:55).

Also in the New Testament the liberation proclaimed by Christ is comprehensive and total (Cf. *ibid*:56-59). It includes soul and body. Real Christianity is not concerned for man's soul only. That would be a travesty of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth who healed the sick and fed the hungry.

### **Affirmation of life and not escapism**

Because God did not reject his creation, we are not permitted to do so either. The Christian religion may never be used as a form of escapism. “Precisely because it worships such a God it must take seriously the world he has created and which He loved so much that He gave His only begotten Son for it” (*ibid*: 84).

Instead of an otherworldly attitude the Christian should display a life-affirming attitude as was the case in the life of Christ: “Jesus was splendidly life-affirming. How else could you explain His concern for the sick, to feed the hungry, etc., when He could have said, ‘Let us pray about it, and it will be okay upstairs when you die’? He forgave sins, to relieve God's children of all that was unnecessarily burdensome. And He celebrated life and the good things that His Father had created. He rejoiced in the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. He knew that it was all created good, very good according to Genesis. He was often depicted attending dinner parties and weddings, and had provided wine once at a wedding when supplies ran out ... He declared by this His open and welcoming attitude to life, that all life ... belonged to God, came from God and would return to God. Many religious people think that long, sulky faces somehow are related to holiness – they often look as though they have taken an unexpected dose of castor oil and find it hard to laugh in church, being somewhat sheepish when they do ... He, Jesus, celebrated life and He declares all wholesome things good – we are meant to enjoy good food, glorious music, beautiful girls and lively men, attractive scenery, noble literature, refreshing recreation – they are part of what life is about” (*ibid*:142, 143).

## Conclusion

Let us conclude with a last quotation from Tutu (1984: 176, 177): "Our religion is concerned about the here and now ... All life belongs to God ... We declare that we believe in the resurrection of the body and not in the immortality of the soul. The body, according to St. Paul, is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Christians are not dualists who believe that matter is intrinsically evil, and therefore all God's created universe, material and spiritual, counts for us. The whole of life is important, political, economic and social, and none of these aspects is untouched by religion as we understand it".

From his other publications (eg. Tutu, 1982 and 1994) much more could be added to Tutu's biblical view about the relationship between Christian religion and society. However, the basic message of the Bible is clear: We have to serve God in **all** areas of life – including politics.

### 11.2 Religion and politics

Our focus for the rest of the chapter will be on the relationship between religion and a specific societal relationship, viz. the state.

#### 11.2.1 Basic agreement on the fundamentals

In spite of the different interpretations of the Bible a few basic biblical political principles will nevertheless be accepted by most Christians. On both "elements" of the state (government and citizens) the Bible at various places provides clear guidelines.

About **government** the Bible has the following to say:

- God ordained that in the state office-bearers (the government) should be elected to serve the citizens according to His will and, apart from being accountable to the citizens, they are also accountable to Him.
- The government (as a shield) has the **task** of ordering public life and helping the citizens to fulfil their political calling, as well as to oppose what is wrong or stand in the way of this fulfilment.
- The **norm** according to which this task should be executed is that of justice towards all (public justice).

- The government may not unnecessarily interfere in the spheres of other societal relationships (marriage, family, school, business, etc.) or suppress the basic human rights of its citizens and in this way assume for itself **totalitarian** authority.
- For the exercise of its authority the government has received special power from God - the **might of the sword** - which should, however, be used in such a way that it promotes and does not destroy public justice.
- Should a **government neglect its calling**, or forget about it, its citizens or other societal relationships, such as the church, should remind it first in a peaceful way but, if this does not succeed, nothing else remains but civil disobedience.

The Bible is also very clear about the **responsibilities** or **duties of the citizens vis a vis their government**:

- Obedience, but not without criticism.
- Respect, even though it may be unjust.
- Payment of government taxes.
- Prayer for those in authority.
- Being examples of love and reconciliation, non-participation in violence.
- Assistance for the poor, oppressed, rejected, marginalised and exploited of society.
- Never forgetting his/her prophetic calling towards the government, addressing the authorities if they do not comply with God's central norm for the state, e.g. justice towards all its citizens.

In spite of the fact that most Christians would agree on these points, there are many unanswered practical questions about politics (defined here as all human activities related to the state). Let me mention a few:

- There are questions about religious plurality, equality and freedom. For example, the question whether the government will, apart from personal religious freedom, allow freedom of religious expression also in institutions like schools, universities and different organisations - even if they are subsidised by the state.
- What is to be done if the religious and moral viewpoints of Christians clash directly with laws promulgated by the state? This is the broad area of all kinds of moral issues

such as abortion, pornography, gambling, homosexuality, prostitution, capital punishment, etc.

- A next question is about the Christian and corruption, lawlessness, crime, robbery, etc. If the government cannot protect its citizens from these evils, should Christians try to defend themselves and what will the consequences be?
- The lack of tolerance between Christians of different political convictions, intimidation, violence and even murder is another serious problem.
- A last question is that about the correct mutual relationship between the state and the church.

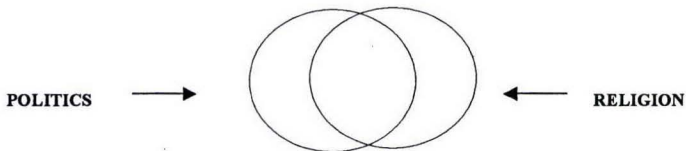
In a certain sense all these questions boil down to the very basic question of the relationship between religion (in this case Christianity) and politics. Let us therefore have a principal look at the question of the relationship between religion and politics.

### 11.2.2 Religion and politics

Religion (also the Christian religion) is always **radical**, **central** and **integral** in the life of a human being. Nobody is really an unbeliever – only the contents and direction of people's beliefs differ. Religion therefore influences everything we do, including our political activities.

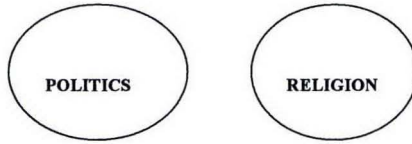
There are three basic viewpoints about the relationship between religion and politics:

- **Identification or a too close relationship**, with the consequence that it is expected of the state to propagate a specific religion. This attitude was one of the important reasons for the religious wars of the past. If we mix politics and religion, then it is easy to reach the stage where support for Christianity means support for the political establishment. Or: support for the political **status quo** implies support for Christianity. Furthermore: If you don't support the politics of the day, then you are betraying the Christian faith. Or: If you are not a Christian you don't have any future in politics!



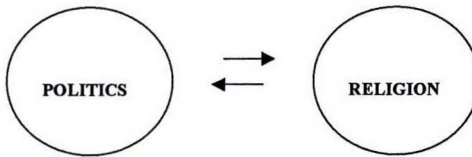
In this viewpoint religion is overemphasised. It results in a **religious state**.

- **Total separation or even opposition**



In this viewpoint the power of religion is underestimated, because it ignores the fact that every human activity depends on and is influenced by one's religious commitment. The result in this case is a **secular state**. No religious influence is permitted in the governing of the state and Christians regard politics as **such** as bad. The simple fact, however, that secularism is also a religion, illustrates the fact that religion and politics cannot be totally separated.

- **Distinction without identification or separation**



We should distinguish the two without dividing or identifying them. The question, however, remains exactly **how**? To say that politics has to do only with **outward, external matters** (the public arena), while religion has to do with **inner matters** of the heart (the private arena), does not really solve the problem. It may still imply that the state is secular, has nothing to do with Christian religion while Christians should pietistically confine themselves to personal spiritual matters and have nothing to say to politicians.

Personally I am therefore of the opinion that Christians should

- not **adapt** themselves to a state policy, either actively (by identifying themselves with the goals of the state) or passively (by abstaining from any statement on activities of the state);
- neither **distance** themselves from the state - they are part of the citizenry, but they should

- **engage** in a critical-constructive way (so-called critical solidarity) with the state, evaluating in the light of the Gospel its decisions, programmes etc. This attitude may sometimes even necessitate resisting and opposing the state - not with a destructive intention but to serve the state, including both government and citizens.

Tutu never tired to emphasise two things: (1) that religion is concerned with politics and (2) that we as Christians should therefore be critical about every government.

"If we are to say that religion cannot be concerned with politics, then we are really saying that there is a substantial part of human life in which God's writ does not run. If it is not God's then whose is it? Who is in charge if not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?" (Tutu, 1984:170).

"... we cannot afford to be co-opted to become this or that (political) party at prayer. We must have a critical solidarity but have the space to be the church, able to say prophetically: 'Thus saith the Lord' ... for those who may be popularly and democratically elected are still but mortals who may succumb to the blandishments of power, so that yesterday's oppressed become tomorrow's oppressors" (Tutu, 1994:238).

In this regard Tutu draws our attention to an interesting fact from his own experience, but which cannot be confined only to the South African situation: "Is it not interesting how often people and churches in South Africa are accused of mixing religion and politics – almost always when they condemn a particular social political dispensation as being unjust ... Why is it not being political for a religious body or a religious leader to praise a political dispensation?" (Tutu, 1984:170).

Elsewhere he says (Tutu, 1982:9): "It is interesting that when a religious leader should support a particular political system he is hardly ever accused of dabbling in politics. But woe betide the religious leader when he has the temerity to criticise a particular political status quo ... it is not our politics that determines our attitudes and actions. It is quite firmly our Christian faith which determines our socio-political involvement. We ask: is such and such an action, policy or attitude consonant with our understanding of the teachings of Jesus Christ? How does it square up to what he called the summary of the Law – loving God and loving one's neighbour; the two sides of the same coin? So the Christian must always be critical of all political systems, always testing them against Gospel standards. Does the system usurp the place of God? Does the state require absolute loyalty, a loyalty that deifies it? The state should be obeyed when it remains in

its legitimate authority, but there are circumstances when it forfeits the allegiance of its subjects. The Christian's ultimate loyalty and obedience are to God, not to a movement or a cause, or a political system. If certain laws are not in line with the imperatives of the Gospel then the Christian must agitate for their repeal by all peaceful means".

This last, correct viewpoint about the relationship between religion and politics (distinction between the two without identification or separation) implies that it is not possible to have a religious (**in casu** Christian) state.

In the first place, it will not be possible to have a Christian state, because we today live in a multi-religious world. The task of the state is public justice which, in this case, implies that it will guarantee the freedom of all religions. It would violate its central task of justice for all if it favours Christianity or any other religion.

In the second place, it is the task of the church to promote the Christian faith and not that of the state. The task of the state is different, viz. public justice. A state which has fulfilled this responsibility, has fulfilled its God-given task. Many Christians still don't understand this, because they do not distinguish between the different God-ordained tasks of the different societal relationships. (The task of the state, the church, the university, the business, marriage, family, etc. are all different.)

### **11.2.3 Confessional pluralism**

In each societal institution 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 non-exchangeable rights and duties. No societal structure should dominate another, and/or use its authority or power to the detriment of another. This viewpoint is called **structural pluralism**.

Apart from structural pluralism, we should also adhere to **confessional pluralism** or freedom of religion.

Freedom of religion does not only mean the right one has as an **individual** to practise his/her religion. It also implies that one should be allowed to give expression to one's faith **in a structured manner in public**. Any faith can assume structural shape. Examples of this would be a Hindu political party, a Muslim school, a Christian trade union or a Jewish Synagogue.

The standard response to this viewpoint that official recognition is given to 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.

Confessional pluralism, however, does not advocate sectarianism or religious intolerance. The right that we would like to grant to Christians, for example, should also be extended to other faiths. The whole community's interests have to be served. This principle 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 suppress it with the definite result that religious convictions and differences will be smuggled into the public arena in various disguises.

Usually when the question is asked how Christians should influence politics only two options are mentioned: (1) **Individual Christians** should be present in political affairs like salt, leaven and light. (2) **Churches** have a limited but definite political calling, e.g. to equip their members with clear Biblical norms for their political responsibilities.

There is, in the light of the principle of confessional pluralism, a third, most important possibility: (3) Christians could co-operate trans-denominationally in **Christian political organisations**. In my opinion this last possibility deserves much more attention than it has received thus far in Africa. Seeing that many Christians in Africa are still having the opinion that only the individual or the church should change society, I plead for Christian organisations. It is a pity that Christians in Africa are still very poorly organised in political terms.

As Christians we should, therefore, not propagate the ideal of a Christian **state** but a Christian **perspective** on the state and politics. This is the task of Christian political parties and other organisations. In order to proclaim a Christian perspective on the state, such organisations will need a Christian philosophy of society. Starting from such a philosophy of society, the rest of this chapter will provide a Christian perspective of the state to assist our brothers and sisters in Africa to think biblically and clearly about their political calling as Christians.

### **11.3 A Christian perspective on the state**

The following seven points will be dealt with:



- The best form of government.
- The state consists of both government and citizens.
- The government receives its authority neither from the people nor from God.
- The state should have limited authority and power.
- It has qualified authority and power.
- Society should be depoliticised.
- Real justice requires more than only human rights.

### 11.3.1 The best form of government is democracy

Different types of states could be distinguished: (1) a common religion state; (2) a common language state; (3) a nation-state, where one dominant ethnic group comprises the citizenry and rules the country; (4) a welfare state, where the state is viewed primarily as the provider in all the needs of its citizens, and (5) a power-state, where the possession of power condones whatever the government wishes to do.

A nation-state will not be possible in Africa; neither a common language nor a single religion-state (already rejected earlier); nor a welfare state either. What then about a power-state? Isn't politics, after all, about power? Many people today still believe so in Africa. With political power struggles they want to solve political problems. Power, however, is like fire. Properly controlled, it could be a great blessing (we use it for cooking, warming etc.). But without proper control it could be a most destructive force. We should remember that all of us - government and citizens - are sinful people.

Therefore, some Christians think power as such is wrong. This is not correct. God calls people to offices where they need power to apply their authority (see previous chapter). We do not **reject** power, because the implication could be **anarchy**. On the other hand we do not believe in **unlimited** power and authority, because that would imply **totalitarian** rule. The solution is **limited** power so that it cannot be abused.

Democracy is such a means to limit the power of government. It presupposes the idea of popular sovereignty: the power of the government stems **from** the people, must be exercised (directly or indirectly, through their elected representatives) **by** the people **for** the benefit of the people. Elaborated, it contains **inter alia**, the following basic principles: (1) equality of voting rights; (2) free, fair and regular elections to appoint the

representatives of the people (modern states are too large to have everybody directly involved in the ruling of a country); (3) proportional representation (in the case of a multi-party system); (4) a negotiated constitution based on the consensus of all the people (5) interpreted by an independent judiciary; (6) a clear distinction between national, regional and local government, etc.

Democracy should be welcomed as long as it is not a kind of euphoria and people see it as a kind of magic solution – democracy **as such** is good and everything else is bad! There is no country in the world where democracy **as such** guarantees good government – it is only a **means** towards good government. The right to vote, for example, is certainly an **element** of democracy, but does not automatically imply democracy. The reason is that sovereignty in many of today's democracies lies not with the people, but with organised private and international (commercial and other) interests. In such cases democracy becomes a myth.

History has not only proved that Christianity was not always a very democratic religion. The obverse also holds true: Democracy itself is not necessarily a Christian position either. To the extent that 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 the abuse of power, it is important that we as Christians do not accept uncritically every form of democracy.

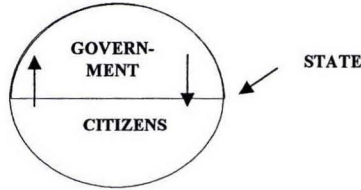
### **11.3.2 Neither government nor citizens should be identified with the state or with each other**

Because the state consists of both government and citizens, it cannot be identified with any one of them. The consequences of such an identification could be disastrous. If, for instance, the government would say "I am the state", it would lead to tyranny. If, on the other hand, the citizens would regard themselves as the state, it would lead to anarchy. Government and citizens each have their own responsibilities.

Therefore we should not confuse the government with the citizens or **vice versa**. A government identifies itself with the citizens by arguing "We are simply executing their will", instead of continuously consulting with its citizens. On the other hand, the citizens may not say: "We have voted the government into power and can now relax until the next election". (If this is their attitude there may not be a next election!)

The following diagrams explain, first, the correct view and then the wrong views:

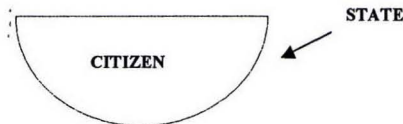
Government and citizens **together** comprise the state - the state is not to be identified with only one of the two:



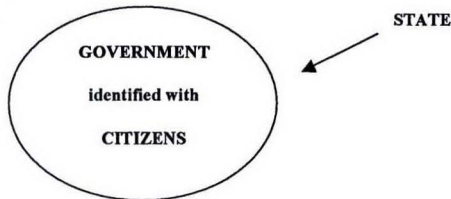
If government is identified with the state, (for instance, in socialism) and ignores its citizens, the result will be **tyranny**. (Expect everything from government, passive citizens)



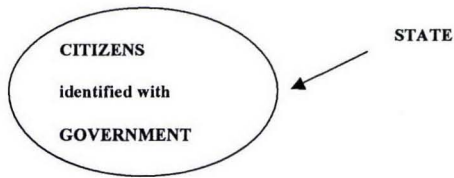
If citizens identify themselves with the state (for instance, in liberalism) and ignore government, the result will be **anarchy**. (Expect everything from citizens).



Government should not identify itself with the citizens in the sense that, once elected, they can simply continue to rule as they like, without continuously consulting the citizens. ("We simply execute their will!")



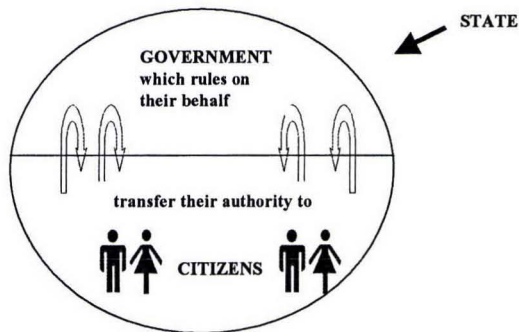
The citizens should not identify themselves with the government by becoming passive after an election, leaving everything to their elected government. ("The government will see to it that our will is done!")



### 11.3.3 Authority is delegated to government by neither the people nor by God

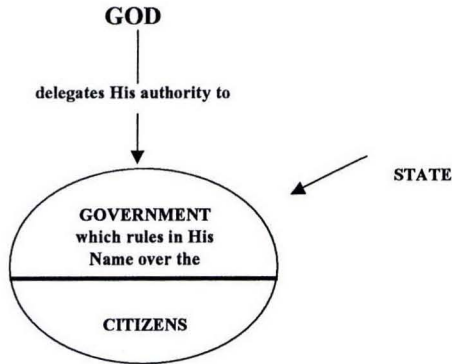
What is the ultimate source of the government's authority? Does it reside in the will of the people? Do they **transfer** their autonomy after an election to the government to rule over them? This is the well-known liberalistic-individualistic position which in practice may imply majority rule.

Stated in the form of a diagram this egalitarian perspective looks like this:



Another more popular answer amongst Christians, is that not the people, but God **transfers** or **delegates** His authority to the elected government. However, nowhere does the Bible teach that God transfers his authority to human beings - only to Christ. The danger of this viewpoint is that humans - who can have only human, fallible authority - may regard their authority and power as divine, above the critique of the citizens.

Given in the form of a diagram this hierarchical viewpoint looks like this:



The correct viewpoint is that God has determined **where** there will be authority and **how** it should be executed. He has ordained that the government will have authority in the state, the parents in the family etc. and also **how** it should function. If one rejects this (by propagating anarchism) one rebels against God. However, it does not imply that God has condoned a specific government. It therefore does not imply that one does not have the right to resist a bad government, as it would imply rebellion against God Himself (the way many conservative Christians still interpret Romans 13: 1-3).

#### 11.3.4 The state should have limited authority and power

If a human being smells power, she/he usually also wants to taste it. Lord Acton has warned us: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Emil Brunner agreed: "To possess power is a constant temptation to abuse power". The crucial question, therefore, is: What constitutes a proper control on the exercise of state authority and power?

The commonly accepted – modern – answer is that it is popular consent. The state may do whatever the majority of its citizens agree to. Even many Christians accept this viewpoint, yet its roots are deeply embedded in modern secularism. Previously, people believed that all authority is derived from God. A king, for instance, ruled in the name of God. This was replaced in modern times by the idea of human autonomy. Authority and power resides in man himself. This is regarded as absolute authority and every individual possesses equal authority. Those who control the power of the state are subject to no other law than their own will!

The will of the people, however, does not guarantee righteousness any more than does the will of one ruler. Hitler might have had the consent of the people, but that did not justify his cruelties.

A major flaw in the modern idea of democracy is therefore that it rejects the absolute authority of a single ruler, but not the idea of the absolute authority of the people. It simply transfers the authority! Absolute authority is now vested in the government – provided that it is elected by the people. In reality the sovereignty remains with the rulers (plural). The only difference is that the citizens have some say in the choice of the rulers. However, simply giving everyone a vote does not ensure a single right or freedom. Unless the authority of a government is **limited in principle**, democracy will only guarantee a tyranny of the majority worse than that of a single dictator.

The tyranny of the majority remains tyranny because the exercise of power is subjected to no law or authority other than the will of the majority. And it is no less tyranny than when the will of the minority is imposed on the majority. The number of those consenting to an act does not change it from evil to something righteous! Murder, rape, abortion, prostitution are and will remain evils no matter how many consent to them!

Our conclusion is that there can be no effective safeguard against tyranny unless it is accepted that human power is not autonomous (man being his own law), but exercised in subjection to the constraint of a law that is independent of the will of those in power. This not only applies to authoritarian rulers, but also when this power is deemed to be held by the people.

A well drafted constitution is an important safeguard against tyranny. It may constrain those who hold legislative and executive powers. Nevertheless, it will also remain inadequate while there is no recognition of an ultimate authority other than the will of the people. (It could be argued, after all, that the constitution is the will of the people, who may decide whether to obey it or not or even change it.)

In the final instance, the only proper control on the use of state power is the recognition of the **limits** placed on the exercise of that power by God, whom the state - knowingly or unknowingly - serves. The state is a servant not only of the people, but finally of God. Therefore it is subjected to his Word in the exercise of its power. God alone has absolute, unqualified authority. To ascribe such authority to a democratic state is an act of idolatry. The will of the majority, or even the consent of all the citizens, cannot

authorise a government to do everything or anything that it considers to be for the good of society. To exceed the limits placed on it by God on any ground whatsoever is an act of rebellion against God Himself!

The other side of the coin, however, is that, if government acknowledges and respects its limits, it will obey God.

#### **11.3.5 The state has qualified social authority and power**

**Limited** authority implies **qualified** authority - qualified by God himself. The usual question "**How much** authority/power should the state have?" is wrong. The correct question should be: "**What kind** of authority/power should it have?"

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 and power is the most comprehensive. Its comprehensiveness, however, does not legitimise a claim that its authority is superior or absolute. As is the case with all other societal relationships (family, school, business etc.) its authority is qualified. It should be a servant, and as a servant it has a qualified mandate.

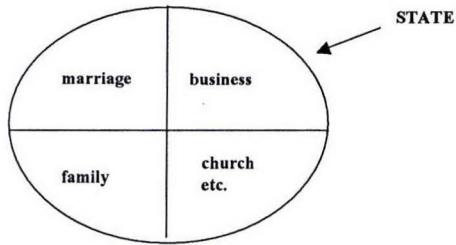
It should not be the servant of the rulers or favour sectional tribal or private interests, but the whole public community or the **commonwealth**. This does not imply that the state should be responsible for all social good - then it should have absolute authority. The government only serves the commonwealth in as far as it is directed to the end of public justice. The ideas of justice and commonwealth qualify each other.

The state is the "balancing wheel" in society. Public justice is the balancing of the private interests of the political community so that all may have a share in the available resources and also share in the costs of maintaining the public order. It should use its coercive power to restrict the activities of the more powerful interest groups in order to protect the weaker ones. It should function as both a guard and a shield.

#### **11.3.6 Reject statism and depoliticise society**

This is the next principle we should adhere to in order to be able to achieve real democracy in Africa. Many people think of society as a unitary political organisation under a supreme government, with the smaller social units (marriage, church, industry etc.) seen as mere sub-units of the encompassing state.

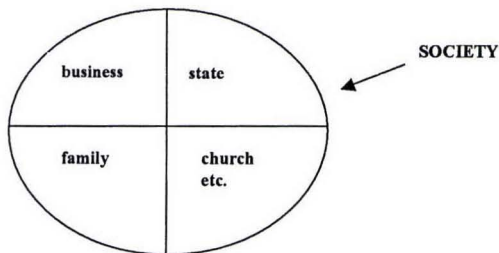
Explained in a diagram:



Even if we have a democratic state, democracy will not survive if we adhere to this viewpoint. We have instead to think of society as a complex of diverse kinds of communities, each having its own internal sovereignty, tasks and norms it should obey. Public justice (the task of the state) does not merely apply to the rights of individuals, but implies that the state should be a societal relationship which provides an environment in which a diversity of other societal relationships can flourish harmoniously independent of the state.

The political order is therefore only one component of the much larger social order. It cannot be identified with the social order. The political order arises from the broader social order which is more basic than the political order and not **vice versa**.

Explained in a diagram:



This sharp distinction between the social and political order is a necessary condition for the growth and development of all kinds of societal relationships from below. Such structures are necessary, because they give people power over their own lives. Popular sovereignty - the heart of democracy - can never be a reality in a politicised society, within



a structure (the state) imposed from above - even if it is imposed by those viewed as representatives of the people and with the consent of the people.

This radical depoliticisation of society will not be an easy task. It is, however, the key to genuine democratisation. State control of the whole of society will inevitably lead away from the practice of democracy by concentrating power in a bureaucratic elite. Democracy - as the original word indicates - requires power to be exercised by the people. It can therefore only be achieved by empowering the people at the grass roots to take control over their own lives. The state should merely be an empowering - and not a dominating - servant of the whole social order.

### **11.3.7 To achieve real justice, we should move beyond human rights**

The task of the state, we have repeatedly said, is justice. Public justice, because if justice is not justice to **all** it cannot really be called justice. Justice has to secure the rights of everybody.

However, again I have to stress that as Christians, we will have to look deeper and say more. For us the advancement of justice and rights cannot simply be something of a social or political nature as in secular, liberalistic humanism. It is something deeply religious.

Public justice for a Christian should be more than giving each his/her due. According to the Bible it means restoration of the power of the weak through the sacrifice of the powerful. The privileged have the obligation to extend their privileges to the hungry, weak, poor, ill, oppressed and underprivileged.

Public justice, therefore, merely viewed as the restoration of rights, is far from enough. Justice is a matter of rights, but at the same time also exceeds rights, because it includes also a duty or obligation to others. Justice should not only give other people their due, but also requires much from ourselves. It requires our conversion and repentance, the fruits of which must go beyond their rights: acceptance of our responsibility towards the other as a full human being. Rights is a minimum restoration. Full restoration requires the acceptance of the other as the one in whom God meets me. Rights and equality may still leave me where I am - it does not force me to go out of my way to seek the other in need.

It is therefore not "unrealistic" to plead for **more** than legal justice, because it is biblical. Rights which do not include the potential for the restoration of people to their full humanity, miss the point. Rights are not enough, because it can keep intact a system of privilege and protection. When a constitution and laws merely create equal opportunities, it does not guarantee the availability of such opportunity or the ability to avail oneself of it.

This is the reason why it is so important that African constitutions not only consist of first generation but also of second and third generation rights. First generation rights are the classical-liberal rights of the West which define the relationship between the state and the citizen, not allowing the state to interfere in one's private life. Second generation rights are socio-economic rights which allow the state to interfere (as was done in socialistic countries), because freedom of speech and the right to vote means nothing if a person cannot read, does not have a job, water, a house, healthcare, etc. Third generation rights have their origin in the "Third World", which realised that the liberal or individualistic rights doctrine entails nothing if you don't have the right to develop.

To summarise: Real social justice according to the Word of God demands from us to move beyond rights and to accept responsibility for our fellow human beings; to distance ourselves from our power and privileges and to make ourselves available as servants. And we can trust that God will bless us when we risk such a vulnerable existence to do justice.

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## Chapter 12:

### HUMAN RIGHTS – A SERIOUS DUTY

To discuss the abuse of human rights on our continent would amount to the carrying of coals to Newcastle or beer to Munich – it is general knowledge. More appropriate in the context of this book would be to try and provide a Christian perspective on the issue of fundamental rights.

This chapter endeavours to do so under the following headings: (1) Human rights are important, but can be overemphasised. (2) Christian reactions to human rights. (3) The Bible on human rights. (4) Human rights in a Christian philosophy of society. (5) We need more than fundamental rights for a just society.

#### 12.1 Human rights are important, but can be overemphasised

The formulation and application of human rights are without any doubt of great importance. Because the rights of all South African citizens during the time of apartheid (up to 1994) were not constitutionally guaranteed, gross human rights violations as those uncovered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (see chapter 13) during the last three years (1996 - 1998) - about 31 000 serious cases - could occur. In other African countries the situation may even be worse.

At the same time one should never be so naive as to believe that the mere acceptance of a Bill of Rights would instantly bring about paradise on earth. More than fifty years after the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10th Dec. 1948), we today have serious violations of human rights in more than a hundred countries worldwide. While at the beginning there were high expectations and optimism about human rights, today disappointment and even cynicism reigns. During the past few years, we have experienced, also in our own country, that a Bill of Rights is only the **beginning** and definitely **not enough** to prevent robbery, rape and murder. To prevent any unrealistic expectations about human rights (as an introduction) a few negative results of human rights wrongly conceived or absolutised are mentioned.

The basic aim of human rights is to regulate relationships between individuals, between individuals and societal relationships and between different societal relationships. The irony of a wrong overemphasis on rights is that the opposite is achieved: instead of

resulting in a strong societal bonding, society disintegrates! The reason is not merely the difficulty of implementing human rights, but also some inherent weaknesses of current human rights theories. A few of the dangers are the following:

- **Human rights may divide or atomise society.** Current human rights ideas mainly emphasise **individual** rights. In spite of this, their ultimate aim is to ensure a good, strong and stable society. Excessive emphasis on individual rights, however, may stimulate the natural (sinful) human tendency towards a kind of individualism according to which one is only concerned about one's own rights and not about those of others or one's duties towards them. Rights are simply (mis)used to safeguard one's own interests!
- **Human rights may result in a legalistic attitude.** In this case everything is expected from the correct laws, the efficient functioning of the legal system and the enforcement of a legal code. We need laws for everything and every conflict should be solved according to the letter of the law. People sue each other for the most trivial issues! If one is right from a legal point of view, nothing more is required. Retaliation and punishment becomes much more important than restitution or reconciliation. Many Biblical values like fairness, tolerance, solidarity, compassion - love towards one's neighbour - are no longer considered to be virtues. Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) teaches something totally different than the 50-50 ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth") principle of retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42). One has to be willing not to give one's tunic but also one's cloak, not only to go one but two miles! A society without a legal code is terrible. But a society based on nothing else than legal rights is less than worthy of man!
- **Human rights may result in a situation where personal and communal responsibilities are neglected.** Rights can become so important that mutual responsibilities and duties become of less importance. However, as we will soon see, rights and responsibilities are - like the two sides of the same coin - inseparable, they always go together. A one-sided emphasis on rights distorts this mutual dependence and cannot bring about a healthy social life.
- **Human rights may promote the process of secularisation.** The modern, secular idea is that the individual has the right of freedom of religion in his/her private (devotional and church) life. Religion should, however, be kept out of public life, because it clashes with the rights of individuals from other religions. This is unacceptable

because secularism is also a religion. Why should it be the only religion which has a say in the "public square", excluding all other religions?

- **Human rights may, instead of advancing justice, undermine it.** When human rights are considered to be more fundamental than justice, their roles are reversed. Justice is the real foundation for a healthy political-social order. The enforcement of human rights is only one of the expressions of the ideal of justice (the basic norm for state and politics) and not the reverse. The development of human rights should, therefore, always be subordinated to the basic norm of justice. When human rights are overemphasised, they will not advance justice, but hamper and obstruct it.
- **Human rights (in its secular forms) offer no sure foundation.** One of the most basic problems in human rights theories is its ultimate foundation. In the secular traditions reference is made to natural law, the will, reason or conscience. The human being is therefore regarded as the ultimate ground or norm. God and his laws do not fulfil this role any more. The consequence is subjectivism. The human subject, which has to obey God's commandments, is elevated to the status of law - man becomes a law unto himself! Because of man's limited insight and his sinful nature, there will, however, be little chance that people will agree on the demands of human reason or conscience. Without the sure Ground or Anchor of justice (God and his laws), we build our ideas about human rights on sand!

Our South African Constitution grounds its Bill of Rights (chapter 2) on the following three key concepts: dignity, equality and freedom. What exactly is meant by these concepts? **Dignity** is extremely difficult to define. As far as **equality** is concerned, the important question is: equality of what? Opportunity, access, action, results? Also **freedom** can have different meanings. Is it freedom **from** (negative), freedom **towards** (positive) or both? It becomes even more difficult when one asks about the relationship between these three concepts. Which of them is the most important? Does the one not often exclude the other? Equality may, for instance, imply the restriction of freedom or **vice versa**! (We will return to this issue.)

These six problems illustrate the fact that, no matter how important they may be, human rights should never be overestimated, because then - as in the case of everything which is absolutised - they will miss their goal.



## 12.2 Different reactions of Christians

We will not be able to go into the history of the development of the human rights idea (cf. Kudadjie & Aboagye-Mensah, 1991:64ff; Marshall, 1983 and Spykman, 1983:16-70). History testifies to an ambivalent attitude of Christianity towards human rights. On the one hand research has revealed that Christians from the beginning not only protected certain basic rights, but also have had significant influence on modern (secular) human rights theories. On the other hand the church has also contributed towards and participated in the violation of rights. Well-known examples are: the crusades against the pagans, the inquisition, the religious wars amongst the Christians themselves and colonial imperialism and slave trade in Africa condoned by prominent Christians. However, we skip this sad and bloody history to concentrate on the attitude of contemporary Christians. Two viewpoints can be mentioned.

### 12.2.1 Uncritical acceptance

This viewpoint simply accepts secular human rights theories without even trying to criticise or adapt them. It sees no **difference** but **continuity** between contemporary human right philosophies and the Word of God: what we have today was already taught in Scripture 2 000 years ago!

Such uncritical accommodation, according to my mind, is unacceptable. As we will see, the Bible not only teaches **more**, but it also **corrects** certain aspects of present-day human rights ideas.

### 12.2.2 Overcritical rejection

According to this position, Christians cannot learn anything from the contemporary human rights discussions. To substantiate their viewpoint, arguments such as the following are advanced:

- **Human beings do not have rights but only duties.** It is true that over against God we can never have any rights, but (because of his grace) only privileges. But in relation to each other, human beings definitely have rights. Human rights could be described as a way of protecting the privileges (like life, freedom of religion etc.) which God granted us.
- **Sinful human beings (all of us) cannot have rights.** It is argued that because the human race participated in Adam and Eve's sinful nature, it has forfeited its claim to

any rights. The opposite, however, is true: Precisely because human beings are sinful and by nature inclined to violate the rights of others, human rights are important and should be protected.

- **Human rights will simply be used for one's personal advantage.** Our answer to this objection is that, instead of rejecting human rights **as such**, we should rather guard against their **abuse**.
- **We do not find the concept in the Bible.** Against this fundamentalistic, Biblicistic argument (which wants to prove everything from Bible texts) our reply is that thousands of modern concepts (like television, computers, pension funds, speed limits, antibiotics) will indeed not appear in the Scriptures written more than 2 000 years ago. This, however, does not imply that the Bible has nothing to say, provides no guidance on this issue.

Let us deal with the first argument above in more detail, viz. That human beings have not rights but only duties and responsibilities. Many people in Africa still do not see their rights correctly, they underestimate their value. If something comes their way, they are grateful. If not, they are disappointed but not angry, because they think they don't deserve it. They don't realise that a right is not a gift or charity and that we should claim our rights.

This wrong viewpoint is often the result of an incorrect, hierarchical view of authority. According to this view only God has rights, but He delegates them to bearers of authority in the different societal relationships like family, church and state. Those subjected to their authority (children, members and citizens), however, do not have any rights, but only duties and responsibilities towards their "superiors". History bears witness to the detrimental consequences of this viewpoint: Many in a position of authority became authoritarian because of their supposed absolute, divine rights and suppressed, exploited and ill-treated their "subjects".

We cannot isolate rights from responsibilities. Where there is a right, there usually is a counterpart obligation, and vice versa. If there were no rights, there would not be obligations either (cf. Wolterstorff, 1998).

Obligations not acknowledged, lead to **guilt** from our side. But we cannot stop at this point, because rights not acknowledged lead to a **wrong** done to someone else. We therefore cannot simply stick to our own obligations or duties, ignoring the rights of others. Then we only see our own guilt or neglect and do not realise that we may also have

wronged someone else! If we do not acknowledge the existence of rights, it will furthermore not make any sense to confess that we have wronged a fellow human being and to ask for his/her forgiveness.

In the case of obligations not fulfilled, **disappointment** will be an appropriate reaction. But in the case of rights not respected, **anger** is more appropriate. In the case of obligations, **appealing** or even **begging** is appropriate - like asking for a gift or charity. But rights are not gifts. We can therefore **claim** them or **insist** that they are acknowledged.

An example from my own daily experience would be the case of a test written by two students. The one got 75% (a distinction) and the other 40% (he failed). Student A (75%) has the right to pass with distinction. I have the obligation to let him pass. He doesn't have to beg me to do so! If I don't do it, he will not be disappointed, but angry. I would be guilty, because I am not fulfilling my obligation. And I would also be wronging the student. Student B (40%), however, has no right or claim to pass the test and I have no obligation to let him pass. He may be disappointed (in himself) but not angry (with me). I would not be guilty of doing any wrong to him.

### 12.3 The Bible on human rights

When we try to use the Bible as a textbook to solve all kinds of technical problems about human rights, we are expecting **too much**. We should, however, also not expect **too little** from the Word of God. We may look for broad perspectives to guide and direct our thinking about human rights. The real question is not **whether** the Bible has something to say in this regard, but **what** it has to tell us, **how** it approaches the issue. (Cf. Spykman, 1983:94-125; Spykman, 1990:31-55; Velema, 1980:28-48 and Wright, 1979.)

#### 12.3.1 Rights are not based on human qualities

The first perspective to be derived from the Scriptures is that human rights are not dependent on any kind of human quality.

- According to the Bible, human rights are not a matter of **charity or goodwill**, but because of God's command they are (viewed from my side) a duty or obligation to others, and (viewed from their perspective) they are rightful claims. The Bible, for example, clearly teaches that the poor have a **right** to be helped - they do not simply depend on the **kindness** of others! (Spykman, 1990:13.)

- According to the Bible human rights should not be made dependent on what humans **deserve** either. If this was the case, we could easily argue that some people do not merit any rights! When the Bible declares that God maintains the rights of the poor, widows, orphans and many other people, He is not passing judgement on their superior moral virtues or piety in comparison to others. Here again, their rights are based on God's will alone. We may, therefore, never argue: "Poor people have only themselves to blame. I am not responsible for their poverty. They do not deserve to be assisted." According to God they have the right to be helped (Spykman, 1990:14).
- Neither can human rights, according to the Bible, simply be viewed as a kind of **inalienable quality** which resides in mankind (so-called inherent or innate rights view) for instance his dignity or nobility. I therefore also disagree with Christian scholars who argue that the only basis for human rights is man's creation in the image of God. The deepest, only sure foundation of human rights is God's demands.

Both the idea that people should be helped because they are (inherently) good and that they should not be helped, because their conduct is not good, are a wrong ideas. An example of the latter is Cain, the murderer of his own brother. God gave him a sign (Gen. 4:15, 16) to prevent him from being killed in revenge!

The above clearly indicates that human rights according to the Bible should not be grounded on the wrong foundations. We can now have a look at the positive, the real foundations for human rights from a biblical perspective.

### **12.3.2 The relationship towards God**

The first thing that always strikes one about the Bible, is that it does not discuss anything apart from one's relationship to God. Neither does it view the human being as separated from his community of fellow humans.

This is very clearly stated in the central and fundamental commandment of love given in the Old Testament and repeatedly stated in the New Testament: I have to love God with my whole being and I have to love my neighbour as myself (Matt. 22:37-39). Love of myself, my fellow humans and God are inseparably bound together. **In** my love for my neighbour - not **apart from** it - I love God!

We may call this the three-dimensional perspective of the Bible. On the one hand: (1) my responsibility to others, (2) their responsibility toward me, (3) both subsumed under our

joint responsibility to God. In other words: (1) my rightful claims upon the other, (2) his/her rightful claims upon me and (3) all of which are subservient to God's comprehensive claim upon us all (cf. Wolterstorff, 1998). We are under an obligation to God for all our fellow human beings!

### **12.3.3 Human rights are realised in social relationships**

From the preceding it has already become clear that human rights are not something individual or abstract. They are realised in concrete, human relationships. This occurs in inter-individual relationships but especially in the different societal relationships. In every societal relationship (family, school, church, factory, state) we have people in authority and those members who have to obey their authority (parents and children, teachers and pupils, church council and members, management and workers, government and citizens). Those subjected to authority do not only have **responsibilities** towards the authorities, but also **rights** - to safeguard them against the abuse of authority. The Bible provides many guidelines in this regard.

### **12.3.4 God's laws, ordinances and decrees presuppose rights**

Apart from the core commandment of love, we also have the Ten Commandments in the Bible, which are an elaboration (into ten different commandments) of this fundamental law of love. And apart from that, we find many statutes, ordinances and decrees of the Lord in the Bible. If we read them carefully, we will realise that almost every aspect of God's law has a bearing upon one or other human rights issue. "You shall not steal" indicates the right to property. "You shall not murder" presupposes the right to life, and "You shall not commit adultery", aims at ensuring the right of a sound marriage.

And it not only applies to books such as Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The prophets (like Amos and Isaiah) can be regarded as a running commentary on almost any conceivable human rights violation. Even a book like the Psalms, usually regarded as a devotional book, is full of human rights perspectives. For instance, it emphasises the close relationship between acknowledging the rights of especially vulnerable people and the blessings or punishments of God. If people's rights are not acknowledged, there will be no peace in the land!

In the New Testament this line is simply continued: The righteousness of man is related to the righteousness of God. Because of our righteousness in Christ, we are called to make things right in the world. Special attention is again given to vulnerable and marginalised

groups like the poor, shepherds, sinners, women, Samaritans, pagans and other outsiders. What God justly lays upon one person as a command of love towards another, is simultaneously a right which the latter holds over the former! God loves us and wants us to flourish and, as human beings, to experience freely and fully what being human really means. An important way to achieve this, is good human relationships. And no such relationships can be achieved in the absence of both duties and rights.

### **12.3.5 We are only stewards, not owners**

The Bible does not adhere to the modern individualistic idea of ownership. It clearly teaches right from the beginning (Gen. 1:26) that man is not the owner of God's creation but only his representative, trustee or steward. As a trustee, he has the **right** to enjoy everything God created. But he also has an **obligation** to use it according to God's directions. And one of God's directions is that one should share it with others who - for one or other reason - have less or are in need. Failure of the wealthy to share with the poor, is not a lack of **charity** but **theft** from the poor. They have a **right** to eat and live. We do not **possess** our own wealth, but **received** it from God and God demands from us to share it with the poor.

### **12.3.6 Obligations and rights are inseparable**

Our **obligations** are grounded in the **will** of God. Our **rights** are grounded in the **love** of God. **Obligations** consist of some good **required** of us. **Rights** consist of some good to which we are **entitled**. The dark side of obligations (when they are not fulfilled) is **guilt**. The dark side of rights (when they are not acknowledged) is that someone is **wronged**. The Bible says over and over that the wealthy and powerful are **guilty** because they do not fulfil their **duties** and that the poor, widows, orphans etcetera are **wronged** because their **rights** are not acknowledged. We always encounter both parties: those who do wrong and those who are wronged (Wolterstorff, 1998).

Toward those who do wrong, God's response is **anger**, because to cause harm and injury to a fellow human being is to wrong Himself, to be disobedient to his law, to violate his love. But towards the wronged, God's response is **sympathy, compassion**. God's solution for the wrongdoers is that they should repent and confess in order to be forgiven by those they have harmed and for God to wash away their sins. His solution for those who were wounded is giving them his love, binding their wounds, consoling their hearts.

### 12.3.7 Dignity, equality and freedom

Let us, in conclusion, say something from a biblical perspective, about the three central values of our South African Constitution mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 2: dignity, equality and freedom.

We can, in the first place, learn something about the **dignity or worth** of people from the Bible. Rights do not merely have to do with specific goods a person should be able to enjoy, like food, clothes, shelter, a job, etcetera. We should also acknowledge and respect each other's worth as persons, and especially the worth of a poor person, a disabled person, a woman, a black or a white person. From the fact of the unity of the human race (Acts 17:26) we also deduce the equality between humans and their (equal) dignity. Because our human dignity is not dependent on ourselves but given by God, we should never measure the value of a human being according to his/her race, achievements, intelligence, sex, faith, social position, wealth, etcetera.

One of the reasons why in the old apartheid era black people were deprived of all kinds of rights (good medical care, education, housing, jobs, etc.) was exactly because of the failure from the side of the whites to fully acknowledge their worth or dignity. One of our major tasks in the new South Africa will therefore be to follow God by accepting that all of us should be valued and respected, not for what we **have**, but for what we **are** - his creatures, his image. This applies to every other country in Africa.

Let me add that the worth of a person is closely connected to what (s)he values. A few examples are his/her language, culture and religion. When our Constitution emphasises human dignity and intends to protect it in a Bill of Rights, it should be consistent and also protect these aspects of being human. To mention only one example: The worth and therefore rights of (cultural) groups should also be acknowledged. (We will return to this issue.)

In the second place, the Bible can also teach us something about **equality**. God and Jesus Christ treated all human beings equally. Christ flattered no one, neither the rich nor the poor. Among us humans, we find either flattery of the rich and scorn for the poor, or sympathy with the poor and abuse of the rich. Christ convicted **both** of their sins. But - and here we also have to follow his example - when he corrected the poor, He did it much more gently. When He called the rich to account, He used much harsher words.

In a similar way the state in its task of executing justice should not treat some as if they are less equal than others. But at the same time it should keep in mind that the disadvantaged and marginalised need special protection and encouragement.

In the third place, something about **freedom**. The Bible emphasises that, as sinful human beings, we are not free at all. We are the captives of the devil, too willing to do what is wrong, not willing to fulfil our obligations or to respect others' rights. We have to be freed **from** this terrible bondage (the negative) in order to be free **towards** obeying God's commandments (the positive). Real freedom, therefore, is not to be free from all restrictions - even from God's law - but it is **responsible** freedom. It is a freedom which enables us to respond obediently to God again in caring for our fellow human beings.

The Bible has helped us on our way to understanding what fundamental rights are about. Especially that we should never isolate our discussions about human rights from God or from our Christian religion. Rights are founded in his love, duties in his will. He is the only absolute, secure Basis and not the shifting sand of the human intellect or will.

At the same time we cannot stop at this point. We have to fit what we have learned from God's Word into the total perspective of a Christian view of society, a Reformational social philosophy. Rights, we have seen, are not abstract, individual qualities, but they have to be realised in concrete societal relationships.

#### **12.4 Fundamental rights in a Christian philosophy of society**

A right cannot be inherent in a single **individual**, because it always implies a **relationship** between more than one person. Rights exist in social life. To understand rights, we therefore need a philosophy of society. And to understand rights as Christians, we need a Christian societal philosophy. (I therefore disagree with theologians who are of the opinion that we can construct a complete Christian theory of human rights on the idea of man as the image of God alone.)

But before we provide the outlines of such a societal philosophy, let us first have a look at two other dominant Western views of society. This will help us to see how a Christian philosophy of society differs as well as underlines its importance. They are: individualism and socialism (cf Spykman, 1983:16-26).

They both originated in secular Western thought which believes in the autonomy of the human being. However, they became each other's rivals because the one (individualism)



overemphasises the individual, while the other (socialism or collectivism) puts too much emphasis on society. Individualism emphasises **popular** sovereignty, while socialism emphasises **state** sovereignty.

According to individualists, free and sovereign persons are the fundamental units or building blocks of society. Associations of people are but the aggregates of self-interested and self-determining individuals who band together to secure their concerns and shared purposes. Of primary importance is the safeguarding of the inalienable rights of free human beings. The state is a constant threat to individual liberties and can only derive its power from the consent of the individual citizens (popular sovereignty).

Collectivists, on the other hand, want to consolidate authority and power in a single institutional megastructure (usually the state), making its interests and prerogatives the ultimate standard for the rest of life. All rights are vested in an all-encompassing institution and individual persons and other associations are regarded as its sub-units, which have to support it. Human rights are absorbed into - or suppressed by - this totalitarian super-institution. Human beings and other associations do not **have** rights, but the state may **grant** them specific rights. As indicated in previous chapters there is not much difference between Western collectivism and African communalism.

The interesting fact is that not only collectivism or socialism (as well as African communalism), but also individualism finally ends up with a totalitarian, bureaucratic state. While the collectivists move towards a totalitarian state quite directly, smoothly and consistently without any reservations, individualists do so more indirectly, reluctantly, hesitantly and with great reservations.

Neither individualism nor collectivism is therefore a true friend of human rights. The former is usually long on personal liberties, but short on justice and equity for all. Collectivism, on the other hand, is generally long on regimentation and order and the equal distribution of goods, but notoriously short on safeguarding human freedom and responsibility. Stated in a simplified way: individualism one-sidedly emphasises individual **rights**, while collectivism is as one-sided, because it stresses communal **duties**.

A Christian should be critical in both directions. On the one hand he should reject liberal individualism with its emphasis on individual rights and punishment or retaliation in the case of a transgression. On the other hand he also rejects the one-sided emphasis only on duties towards society and restitution in case it is violated. According to the Bible the

human being is neither an individual nor a communal **being** - he only has an individual as well as a social **aspect**.

Over against both individualism (liberalism) and socialism (or collectivism) we propose a third, alternative view on society: pluralism. This societal philosophy cannot be elaborated in detail in this chapter (cf. Van der Walt, 2002:259-294), but I will try to explain its basic characteristics. According to its name (**pluralism**), it emphasises diversity, as will become clear from the exposition below. (See also chapter 10.)

#### **12.4.1 God is the absolute Sovereign**

God is, according to the Bible, neither part of creation, nor separated from his creation. He is (ontologically speaking) totally different from his creation, but (religiously understood) intimately related to it. He furthermore has absolute authority over every single part - humans included - of creation. He has the **right** to rule over everything and He does so by way of his laws.

#### **12.4.2 Our whole life is religion, service unto God**

Man does not exist for himself, but for the sake of serving and glorifying God. Every human being lives directly in the presence of God. Real Christian religion excludes every human mediatorship (like ministers, priests, saints, ancestors) between man and God. No (wo)man can appear before God on behalf of another. We have only one Mediator!

Religion is also not partial, but has to embrace the whole of our being and life. We have to serve God with our emotions, intellect, our bodies, our whole being. We cannot confine religion to the secret chambers of our individual hearts or limit it to our devotional or church life. Life as such - the whole of life - is religion, including our economical, political, cultural, social, artistic and academic activities.

To serve God in everything we think and do is our most fundamental **obligation** or **duty**. It is also our most basic **right**. Nobody - not even the state - can either grant it or take it away from us. It cannot grant it, because this right is not "owned" by the state. And if it should take it away, we would be forced to obey God rather than man (cf. Acts 4:19 and 5:29).

### **12.4.3 We should also serve God in public life**

Because the Bible teaches that every human being lives and works in the direct presence of God, we cannot accept the idea that the church supervises and dominates all Christian activities. We believe in the freedom, not only of the individual, but also of different societal relationships like marriage, family, school, church and state to be in the direct, immediate service of God.

Liberation from ecclesiastical domination, however, does not imply that the rest of (public) life should be regarded as secular, having nothing to do with our relationship to God. The unique characteristic of a real Christian philosophy of society is that we can and should serve God in business, politics, arts, science, etcetera. We reject secularism, which teaches that religion is something private and personal and should not play any role in society at large. We also unmask it as a religion in itself - sometimes a very intolerant religion. We claim our most fundamental **right** (see previous point), viz. to be God's servants not merely in our private lives, but also in the "public square".

### **12.4.4 A variety of vocations**

In line with the preceding, the Bible also teaches that God calls human beings in different areas of life to serve Him and their fellow humans. It is wrong to reserve divine calling for special people like ministers, priests and prophets with so-called holy offices. Ordinary jobs are also divine callings or vocations from God! **All** of us, no matter what kind of work we do, are in full-time service of the Lord. And the service we render is not less holy than that of a minister of religion. Because my job is a calling from God, it is both an **obligation** and a **right** I have.

### **12.4.5 A variety of social relationships**

Our calling by God does not only have an individual, personal side, but also an institutional one. God calls us to be office bearers in a specific societal relationship. Let us first say something about societal relationships before we return to the idea of office in these relationships.

Usually people only distinguish between the state and civic society. A pluralistic view of society rejects this distinction of social life into only two compartments. Social life is much richer, revealing greater diversity.

God instituted marriage (Gen. 2:24) and family life (Gen. 1:28 - the command to multiply). Later on in the history of Israel we learn about forms of worship (the church) and government (the state). Today we have schools, colleges, universities, businesses and many other institutions and organisations. All these different entities we call "societal relationships".

According to a Christian philosophy of society human beings are equal in God's eyes (see above). Also the different human vocations (jobs) are equal, the one is not more important or holier than the other (see above). The same also applies to societal relationships: the state, church, family, academy, etcetera does not exist, the one **below** the other, but **next to** each other. No one of them is **subordinate** to another, either a "holier" (e.g. the church) or more powerful (e.g. the state) sphere of society. There is no super- or mega-structure like the state which encompasses all the others, reducing them to mere sub-units of the state. A Christian philosophy of society is basically an anti-totalitarian viewpoint!

The basic idea of the **equality** between the different societal relationships, also implies that the one should not **interfere** in the internal affairs of the other. Rights are not confined to individual persons. The school, church, college or sports club has the **right** to manage its own affairs. No one is permitted to prescribe to the other how its specific, unique calling should be fulfilled.

In the Old Testament already, we can see how God strictly protects the sovereignty of each sphere. Priests were not supposed to rule and kings were not to usurp the role of the priests. When king Saul did not obey this divine rule and, in stead of waiting on Samuel to offer to the Lord, did it himself, God punished him severely.

But apart from a **right** to manage its own affairs, every societal relationship also has a **duty** to work together with all the others. It is like the cogs in a machine: every one of them turns around its own axle in its own sphere, but simultaneously they interact - otherwise the machine will not work. Likewise society cannot function properly if there is no co-operation between all the different societal relationships. (As will be explained later on, the state has a special role in this connection.)

#### **12.4.6 A variety of offices**

Let us now take a look at the offices to which God calls us in these different societal relationships. In every societal relationship we should distinguish between those in office or those who have authority and those who have to follow, who have to obey the authority.

(The state, for example, consists of government and citizens. We should not identify the state with either government or citizens – see chapter 11.)

In the Old Testament already we read about priests, judges, kings and prophets. Today society has diversified: One can be a parent, the other can be the headmistress of a school, manager of a factory, member of the local or provincial government, chairman of the board of a church and many more.

Office is basically a mandate of God. And its aim is to be of **service** to the members of a specific societal relationship (Luke 22:24-27). Not many people in office today realise how important this is. They think an office implies status, they dominate the members of the relationship and even enrich themselves! Stated differently: they regard it as a **right** to be used for their own or their group's benefit and not as a **duty** to serve others.

How should they serve the members of the specific societal relationship? We have indicated above that God calls all of us to serve Him and our fellow humans. However, He does not call all of us to the same task. He calls the one to be a teacher, another to be an accountant, the manager of a firm and so on.

Also in the case of office bearers of societal relationships there is a great variety. Every one of them has the task to protect and promote the **specific** calling of the specific societal relationship. The headmaster of a school should, for instance, see to it that his teachers teach and his pupils are educated. He has to empower all the members of the school for their tasks. To enable him to do so, he should maintain the necessary order and oppose wrong tendencies.

Office, however, is not only a mandate from God. In the everyday life of a democratic society the members of a specific societal relationship elect and confirm their officers. We, for instance, have to elect a government for our own country every five years.

This is a basic **right** in a democratic society. But it is also a great **responsibility**. We should not simply vote for or elect the most charismatic, most influential, most senior, most popular or powerful person, but the one who has both leadership qualities (who knows what the specific calling of the specific societal relationship is) as well as the willingness to serve the members of the specific relationship to enable them to fulfil their specific divine calling.

### 12.4.7 A variety of norms

How should a person in office know what the specific task is of the societal relationship in which s/he holds an office? (This requirement also pertains to the members of the societal relationship - because God is calling them to a specific task.)

The answer is to be found in God's central norm mentioned earlier in this chapter: All of us have to love God and our fellow humans. The two sides of the command are closely related. For example, I do not love God and **in addition** I also love my wife. No, by loving my wife, I also love God!

But we love God in a variety of ways. As the rays of sunlight are broken up into all the beautiful colours of the rainbow, so love is also diversified into different forms of love in the various societal relationships: fidelity in marriage, care in the family, brotherly/sisterly love in the church, stewardship in business and justice in the state. These are the norms which indicate the various tasks of the different societal relationships and which also distinguish the one from the other.

A person with an office in government should know that the norm and task of the state is (public) justice, otherwise s/he will not be able to fulfil her/his office. And the citizens who select people in government, should also make sure that those they vote for, will govern justly and not misuse their positions.

Here again we see that justice - not rights - is more fundamental. Justice is not "brought about" by the statesman, but it existed (as God's norm) **before** any notion of justice crossed his mind - he can only approximate it in a Bill of Rights or in the formulation of laws.

Justice is, furthermore, not the opposite of love - as many people think - but is the specific way in which we have to love God and our fellow humans in politics. Politics is not something "dirty" or "secular", having nothing to do with our Christian religion. In political life we are also responding, answering to God's basic love commandment!

### 12.4.8 A variety of authorities

Up to this point we discussed different callings, different societal relationships, different offices and different norms (forms of love). The next important perspective is that the authority which office bearers in the various societal relationships have to execute are also different in kind. We should distinguish between political authority (the government of a

state), parental authority (at home), kerugmatic authority (of the preacher in the church), the pedagogical authority (of the teacher at school), vocational authority (of the manager of a factory) and the technical authority (of the research leader in a laboratory). Every one of us knows intuitively that parental authority will miss its aim when conducted in a military style. Or that the confessional authority of the church cannot be executed with the same powerful means as used by the state - no one should be forced to believe!

Authority is a **right**, the right to render service (not to dominate - see above) in a specific societal relationship. From the preceding it will, however, be clear that such a right cannot be identical in all the societal relationships. Authority rights are different. It is therefore wrong to ask **how much** authority government should have. You should rather ask **what kind** of authority it should have. The answer to this question will also determine what kind of right it has.

The point to be emphasised is this: Because authority **differs** (according to the different spheres of life in which it is executed), it is always **limited** authority. No societal relationship (like the state) and no human being - not even the state president - has absolute or total authority, but always specific and therefore limited authority.

Authority (the right to serve the members of a specific societal relationship) should not be inherited or based on seniority or popularity. To have authority, one needs **insight** into the norm for the specific societal relationship (see above). To be a member of parliament, one has to know what justice entails. Being a good parent, requires insight into the norms for nurturing children etcetera. Apart from insight, real authority also requires **obedience** to the God-given norms for the specific relationship.

According to the same norms, those who have to obey, have the **right** to judge the authority of their "superiors". Many people may **legally** be in a position of authority, but in reality they cannot execute their task, because of a lack of insight and obedience. (You will be able to mention examples from your own experience.)

Rights take form in the mutual determination of authority and the concomitant responsibility. An important characteristic of a Christian philosophy of society is, therefore, the place it accords to accountability and responsibility. The fact that I do not only have rights, but also responsibilities or obligations as a person, also applies to different societal relationships. Those in authority do not only have the **right** to an office.

They have the **obligation** to serve the members of that societal relationship. And more: they are **accountable** to the members as to how they conduct their servant leadership.

In a Christian philosophy of society we may not even stop at this point. Because we have indicated (above) that God calls us to an office and that we live directly in his presence, we have to add that, in the final instance, **every** office bearer (not only those of churches or other Christian organisations) is responsible towards God Himself. He is the final Judge of how we used or misused our right of authority. To wield authority is serious business indeed!

#### **12.4.9 A variety of powers**

To be able to execute your authority, you need power. Power is the **ability** to render service in a specific societal relationship. Like fire, power can be misused and therefore can be dangerous. But, like fire, it can also be used correctly. (Power as **such** is not something wrong.) The powers given to people in authority should therefore not be **too great**, because it may lead to domination and tyranny. But they should also not be **too slight**, because then it would not be possible for a person in office to fulfil his/her task. Power should always be used constructively - even in the case of the use of violence by the state. It should be a means to empower the members of the societal relationship to fulfil their calling.

The nature of the power in the various societal relationships will also be different. (State power is, for instance, totally different from the power of the church.) For this reason power - like authority - should always be **limited**. Many societal relationships, therefore, have one or other kind of constitution which specifies the power and responsibilities of their office bearers.

This is especially important in the case of the state which has coercive powers. The constitution of a state is the basic law of a country. And the aim of the constitution is to describe the relationship between government and citizens. It describes, on the one hand, the authority and power of government. On the other hand, it guarantees the rights of the citizens against abuse by government. (According to a pluralist view of society both government and citizens have rights. It differs from individualism with its heavy emphasis on the rights of the citizens, as well as collectivism which teaches that only the government [identified with the state] has rights.)



Because the state is the only societal relationship which includes all the people in a country, it has a very important task to fulfil in society. As has already been indicated, it does not have an all-encompassing task. We cannot expect - as many people still do - almost everything from the state. Its guiding norm is public justice or justice for every citizen. It has to treat all of its subjects equally and fairly. It has to see to it that every human being has the right (freedom) to fulfil her/his divine calling. One citizen should therefore not be permitted to dominate or exploit another. The same applies to societal relationships. Both persons and societal relationships should therefore enjoy their rights and also fulfil their mutual obligations.

The state is not the proprietor of every kind of right and therefore does not create or grant them. But it has to acknowledge, protect and promote the great variety of rights. Because, in real life situations, different rights are often in competition or even in conflict with each other, the state (through its government) will have to carefully weigh and balance the different claims to rights. We could call the state the fly-wheel or balancing wheel of society. It does not create all the rights, but it has to balance them. And the way in which it balances them, will determine whether justice is achieved. It is not an easy task at all, but that is what public justice entails!

#### **12.4.10 A variety of religions**

What we have described thus far may be called **structural pluralism**: how the different societal structures in society should relate to each other and how rights fit into the whole picture. Such a philosophy of society offers real liberating perspectives for a just society.

But does it also offer a solution in the case of a multireligious society such as that of South Africa and many other African countries? As we have seen, a secular constitution (like our own) permits private religious freedom, but it tends to limit religious expressions in public.

Against this I have already strongly argued that it is one of the most fundamental rights of a Christian to serve the Lord - not only in his/her private life but also in public. Am I then advocating a "Christian state" (sometimes called a theocracy)? No, I am in favour of **confessional pluralism**.

Confessional pluralism means that one's religious commitment should be allowed (or has the right) to express itself in the different societal relationships outside one's private life and one's church. But the right to do so should not be confined to Christians only, but should be granted to each and every religious group.

For example, the Muslim as well as the Christian should have the right to establish distinctively Muslim or Christian schools. Only in this way could freedom of religion be guaranteed. Such "private" schools should also qualify for state subsidy. (Muslims and Christians are also taxpayers!) I regard it as a violation of a most fundamental religious right when the state forces people to send their children to so-called secular schools. "Secular" schools are not neutral or a-religious - they are the expressions of a (religious) choice not to serve God in education.

#### **12.4.11 A variety of cultures**

For people adhering to an individualistic philosophy of society, individuals are all that exist. Groups are in reality only collections of individuals. All supposed group rights therefore ultimately boil down to individual rights. The way to protect the culture of the Tswana or Afrikaans people, will be by protecting the language rights of the individual Tswana or Afrikaner.

Not only our own, but almost any country in the world is culturally heterogeneous. As we have seen in previous chapters, especially in Africa tribes or ethnic groups are still a very important factor to reckon with. Cultural or ethnic groups are not just private arrangements or purely incidental matters. They are important not only for personal but also for public life. Sometimes group claims and demands are simply a cover for racist goals. However, the dangers of group identity should not drive governments to futile repressive attempts to eradicate it from human rights issues. It needs to be recognised and accommodated in political life and to be dealt with responsibly and justly. Numerous examples could be mentioned from different parts of the world where governments recognised group rights. We cannot assume that all group claims are necessarily valid. But neither can we accept the view that no group right is valid. Group rights may sometimes even override individual rights and should therefore be given priority (cf. Marshall, 1996c).

#### **12.5 More than human rights are needed**

Special emphasis was given on the preceding pages to the following:

Christians cannot simply accommodate or reject contemporary human rights theories.

The Bible can help us to become more critical about current human rights theories.

A Christian view on human rights cannot be separated from our basic Christian convictions. The acknowledgment and promotion of human rights is part of our Christian calling.

A complete perspective on human rights cannot be built upon a single biblical concept (like man as the image of God) or a few Bible texts, but should be developed as part of a Christian philosophy of society.

Because there are so many societal relationships in which human beings live together, there is a great variety of rights. Chapter 2 of our South African Constitution (about twenty pages!) is an example of how government and citizens should relate to each other in the state. Rights and duties should, however, not be confined to the political sphere.

Because of this variety of rights, it is not easy to define exactly what a right is. My preliminary effort is the following: In a situation of competing claims, human rights are the recognition of the freedom which must be allowed and the resources which must be protected for each person and each societal relationship to fulfil his/her/their divine calling in a responsible way.

In conclusion we return to our introduction which emphasised that human rights are not the **alpha** and **omega** to obtain a just society. They can be overemphasised with detrimental results. We now want to add that for a good society we need even more than rights.

Justice is **inter alia** a question of the codification and acknowledgment of rights. Fundamental rights, however, are only a **starting point**, merely a **minimum requirement** for a just society. The Biblical idea of justice requires more. According to the Bible justice is not simply to see to it that each of us receives his/her due. Justice is also not merely an economic, social or political concept. It includes a deeply religious dimension.

The following example will explain it. A bill of rights may create equal opportunities. But it will still not be possible for everyone to utilise these opportunities because of a lack of, for instance, education or finances. It would therefore be wrong to argue that we have the same rights and if people do not make use of them, they only have themselves to blame. In this way we would be hiding behind a bill of rights to commit injustice!

Real, genuine justice often requires that one should be willing to sacrifice one's own rights and privileges on behalf of others - the many poor and weak people without a house, job or education. This requires - like God's Word - a greater emphasis on duties than on

rights. Christian people living according to Christ's sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), will not in the first place stand up for their own rights, but for the rights of others!

When we are assured of fundamental rights, it should be applauded. But the Bible indicates an even higher, better way: that of love (1 Cor. 12:11 ff.).

To live according to such a lofty ideal will not be easy. At the same time it is a way in which we, as Christians, can provide a unique example and can erect small signposts of God's kingdom of justice and peace. We can also be assured of God's blessing: "Whoever holds on to his life (read: rights) will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39).

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## Chapter 13:

### THE FIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR RECONCILIATION

At the moment a number of African countries, like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Angola and Zimbabwe are negotiating for peace. These and others African countries, where the hope for peace is still a future dream, can learn much from the successful reconciliation process in South Africa during the last decade of the previous century. In the case of the Republic of South Africa the peace process did not stop with the first democratic elections of 1994. It was afterwards continued in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This Commission followed a unique way. Normally when countries move through the difficult transition from oppression to democracy, they deal with the past in one of two ways. Either the leaders of the old regime are put on trial or dealt with summarily, or previous events are swept under the carpet and the suffering of those subjected to violence is ignored. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission follow a third way. To those who had committed gross violations of human rights, it offered amnesty in exchange for the public disclosure of the truth about their crimes. To the victims it gave the unusual opportunity to be heard as well as hope for reparations. (For details see Tutu, 1999:24-35.)

Apart from the results of this Commission (see end of chapter), a wealth of other material is available today which can help leaders of fighting parties and factions in Africa in their negotiations for peace (cf. Adeyemo & Ayee, 1989; Borraine *et al.*, 1994; Fowler, 1993; Overdulse, 1995; Turaki, 1993; Van der Walt, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998).

This chapter has a limited focus. It outlines a few basic biblical requirements necessary for genuine reconciliation and peace. The original text (written in 1996) was rewritten for this book, but it still clearly reveals the South African context. However, its biblical message is universal and applicable to every country where Christians obey the command of their Lord to act as peace-makers. Furthermore, if the South African flavour of this chapter was removed completely, it would be very abstract while reconciliation always occurs in real, concrete situations.

The leading idea is that reconciliation requires reformation or transformation which includes both demolition and reconstruction.

The second part of this chapter will discuss six steps of this process of reformation: (acceptance of) responsibility, conversion, confession, forgiveness and restitution with reconciliation as the final result.

### **13.1 Reformation: demolition and reconstruction**

The biblical concept **reformation** includes two facets: breaking down or demolishing and rebuilding. Two examples from the Scriptures may be used by way of illustration.

#### **Biblical examples**

In Judges 6:25-26 Gideon receives a double – and dangerous - instruction from the Lord: To demolish his father's altar for Baal and in its place to erect a new altar for the true God. This brave man (verse 12) first tries to extricate himself (verse 15), but is finally equipped by the Holy Spirit to carry out this difficult task - which would definitely not have gained him popularity among his people.

Jeremiah (1:6) is hesitant at first, but finally has to execute a similar breaking down and rebuilding command. This reformer too had to suffer at the hands of his own nation and the false prophets. He is suspected of treason and jailed (37:13) and is even dumped into a muddy cistern (38:6), from which he is saved by a black man who did not belong to his own nation.

Down the ages reformations have often been started by an individual who had a calling and who, man/woman alone, fearless and with great courage, went to stand at the side of God and his Word. This was usually somebody who had met God anew and who had a new understanding of his Word. It was someone who, for the sake of the Gospel of Christ and the kingdom of God, was willing to relinquish family, possessions, compatriots, popularity and even his/her own life.

Reformational work is difficult work, because both the demolition of the old and the building of the new are not simple or easy.

#### **Demolishing and rebuilding are difficult and complicated**

Demolition is difficult not only because of resistance. **What**, for example, should be demolished? There are things which are clearly against God's Word and will and which should be **rejected**. There are also things, however, which should be **reformed**. And then there are things which are not inherently bad, and which can simply be **improved**. This is linked to the next question: **How far** should the demolition go? This in turn evokes



a further question: **How** should the demolition be done? Should this be done in revolutionary fashion, more damage could possibly result.

During the apartheid era I personally believed that it was far more difficult to eradicate the wrong than to do the right thing. Now, however, it emerges that it is equally difficult to accomplish reformatinal reconstruction. The dubious moral and religious basis of apartheid made it an easy target for criticism. Far more complex than the demolition of the wrong (pointing out the evils of apartheid) is the construction of that which is right. A clear example of how difficult it is to be constructive is found in the first chapters of the book Nehemiah. It was quite a battle to get the Jews of the time so far to say (2:18) "Let us start rebuilding!"

What complicates matters even more, is the fact that the processes of demolition and rebuilding cannot be separated from each other. It is not true that demolition first has to be completed before reconstruction can begin. The two go hand in hand. While we are building, we discover that something else first has to be broken down before we can continue building. The two actions cannot be separated, because one can only build on the foundations laid by the demolition. A new phase in history is always tied irretrievably to something in the past.

At the dividing line of the old and the new in South Africa, I would therefore like to pause for a moment beside the old - not to rake over old coals, but to ask the question as to whether the coals had not been doused prematurely.

To ask a question like this one today, is a risky business, because very few people nowadays feel excited about the past. The attitude of many - especially white - South Africans is: "Let bygones be bygones", "Let us please forget about the past".

Those of us who quickly want to bury the past, have to take note of the fact that it will stay with us for so long as we have not dealt with it in the proper way. And the only correct way for a Christian is God's way.

### **13.2 God's demands for dealing with the past**

My question is the following: Have we really complied with the demands that God makes in terms of how one should deal with the past in order to be able to enter a new future?

If I understand God's Word correctly, He has at least the following six demands: (1) acceptance of responsibility, (2) repentance and conversion, (3) confession of wrongdoing

to God and to the people, (4) receiving forgiveness, (5) setting right the injustice - to the extent that this is possible - which should (6) lead to real reconciliation.

Tutu (1999:71) correctly says that words like "confessing", "forgiveness", "reparation" and "reconciliation" are derived from the religious sphere. In political life it is more normal to demand satisfaction, to pay back in the same coin, to believe in a dog-eat-dog world. But without these so-called spiritual aspects no future is possible.

Tutu (1999:72ff) openly confesses that his Christian convictions (he calls it his "Theology") helped him a great deal in his work of chairing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (Interestingly very few people objected to the spiritual and Christian emphasis of the Commission.) Two illustrations are the following:

"Theology helped us in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to recognise that we inhabit a moral universe, that good and evil are real and that they matter ... there is no way that evil and injustice and oppression and lies can have the last word. For we who are Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are proof positive that love is stronger than hate, life is stronger than death, that light is stronger than darkness, that laughter, joy, compassion, gentleness and truth, all these are so much stronger than their ghostly counterparts" (ibid:76).

Elsewhere he says: "Theology reminded me that however diabolical the act, it did not turn the perpetrator into a demon. We had to distinguish between the deed and the perpetrator, between the sinner and the sin: to hate and condemn the sin whilst being filled with compassion for the sinner. The point is that if perpetrators were to be despaired of as monsters and demons then we were thereby letting accountability go out the window by declaring that they were not moral agents to be held responsible for their deeds" (ibid:73, 74).

But let us return to the different steps towards reconciliation.

More will be said about some of these six "steps" than about others. I would also like to direct my remarks in the first place to my fellow-whites, who consciously or unconsciously had a share in discriminatory apartheid or in any event profited by it. This message is not directed only at whites, however, for without wholehearted forgiveness from those who had suffered we cannot lay the "old" to rest.

A final introductory remark is that the steps numbered above do not necessarily follow each other chronologically. Should there, for example, first be forgiveness before restitution can be made, or precisely the obverse?

It is not easy to comply with God's demands as outlined above. For that reason one can expect resistance. By way of example, I would like to mention some of the avoidance tactics which I personally encountered. From what ensues later in this chapter, it will emerge clearly that not one of these arguments can be sustained in the light of God's Word. Some of the reactions, for example, were the following:

- Apartheid was simply the result of the corruption and brokenness of the world in which we live.
- We only obeyed the laws of the country as they existed.
- It was the fault of our ancestors - who had, after all, meant well - and we cannot confess guilt on their behalf.
- Why should we specifically focus on the guilt of apartheid? - we have to confess all our sins.
- We have buried the past, and are already working positively on the future.
- Will a confession of guilt be accepted/able?
- We confess guilt to God and not to people.
- Confession of guilt is something personal and a group of people cannot confess.
- An institution or a societal relationship (such as a church or a university) cannot commit a sin and therefore cannot be expected to confess.

To my mind some of the reasons for this kind of arguments can be found in the following: (1) a lack of humility; (2) a lack of moral and religious courage; and (3) the inability to accept how totally wrong, humiliating and unjust the apartheid system had been.

Let us subsequently see what the six steps involve, beginning with the acceptance of personal responsibility.

### **13.3 Acceptance of responsibility**

Before you can confess to wrongdoing, it is essential, of course, to realise that you have been responsible for the evil done to another person. The problem facing us in South

Africa at present is that people refuse to accept responsibility for the injustice which apartheid did to millions of people. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, however, will force them - or some of them - to do this. This is a pity, because especially Christians should not have to be forced to acknowledge their complicity and guilt but should do so voluntarily (Ouweneel, 1995:18).

### **Everybody is complicit - nobody is responsible?**

At present in South Africa we are encountering something of a similar nature to that which happened in Germany after the Second World War. Nobody wanted to accept responsibility for the murder of close to six million Jews. Except for Adolf Hitler, each German had had a superior from whom he took orders, and could thus reason that "Befehl ist Befehl" (Orders are orders) or "Wir haben nicht gewusst" (We didn't know what was going on). In his turn Hitler could reason that he simply did what the German nation had wanted him to do. It thus became a never ending, vicious circle: they were all accomplices, but none would accept responsibility.

The same is true in South Africa: Each individual had simply acted on orders from a superior, and government in turn only acceded to the wishes of the (white) electorate who had put them in power.

Responsibility, however, means that each individual owes an explanation of how he/she responded to somebody's orders. He/she has to account to his fellowmen, the government, a Truth Commission, and finally also to God Himself. I do not think that one can ever say that one is not responsible simply because one has executed the orders of a superior. Of course those higher up in the power hierarchy have **greater** responsibility, but this does not mean that those lower down in the hierarchy have **no** responsibility. Normal, adult, sane people in possession of all their faculties, are **always fully** responsible for their deeds - also in the execution of the orders of those "above" them. It is only small children and mentally retarded adults from whom full responsibility cannot be expected.

### **The Christian's attitude towards human commands**

What should the Christian's attitude be when, for example, he is instructed to "remove" a political opponent? The answer to this is very clear in Acts 4:19 and 5:29: "We must obey God rather than men." Two remarks: (1) The text should not be used simply to ignore commands which you might not like, and (2) it is not always easy to determine whether

the execution of a specific human instruction brings one into conflict with God's commands. In the case of the apartheid ideology it was even more difficult because churches justified the ideology by recourse to God's Word. Even this, however, should not be used as an excuse: Each believer remains responsible for his own deeds before God, and may not hide behind the ideological seduction of his church.

Added to this, of course, is the fact that there had been people who, in the execution of their "orders" went much further than their orders had intended. (The obverse, fortunately, was also true: I knew many people who believed in apartheid, but who, in their personal contact with people of so-called colour, always acted correctly and with respect.)

### **We all have a share in apartheid**

Am I relishing in what might happen to some people when they have to testify to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Not in the least. I think it is important that we should realise that all whites in South Africa - myself included - in one way or another shared in apartheid. Some people like to make a distinction between the **oppressors** and the **privileged**. The former are those people who purposefully created the apartheid structures and/or used them in order to commit injustices against others to their own advantage or the advantage of their group. The latter are people who had not necessarily played a role in the establishment and/or maintenance of unjust structures or who had not consciously used them to their advantage. There is not much point in such distinction, however, because it was the responsibility not only of the conscious oppressor but also of the person enjoying its advantages to reject and to end the injustice. And in this, most of us failed tragically.

Apart from our **collective** guilt, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had the extremely difficult task of identifying **individual** guilt. They had to determine who had committed crimes against humanity during the years of apartheid. Without doubt, those who have erred, should be punished. Many people have, however, already voiced their doubts about the Commission (cf. Van der Walt, 1996). The reason for their hesitance was not necessarily that they wanted to cover up the past. They asked questions like the following:

### **Questions about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

- Could the **real, objective, balanced truth** ever be attained? Truth means different things to different people, groups and political parties.

- **Who will be judged?** Will it only be the approximately 3 500 policemen who applied for amnesty shortly before the 1994 general elections, or will it also include the approximately 10 000 ANC freedom fighters in exile who were granted a **priori** amnesty lest the struggle would have continued? Will the first group not have an **priori** handicap, because they were "inhuman", while the erstwhile freedom fighters will go free because their cause was a "just" one?
- **Who will be the judges?** Will they really be neutral, without any party political or ideological bias?
- **Against what/who's norms or measures** will the crimes be judged?
- What **purpose** will the whole process serve? Will it really uncover the truth to bring about reconciliation? Or is a measure of retribution and correction at stake? Basically this will not be wrong, but the whole process can easily degenerate into a witch-hunt, which could torpedo reconciliation rather than promote it.

Kistner (1994:6,7) admits the presence of a minefield of sensitive issues and mentions the following:

- Must all people who defended, supported or tolerated the apartheid system be treated as criminals?
- Can offences that were committed in the struggle against apartheid (a crime against humanity) be judged on the same level as those offences which were committed by people controlling a formidable defence and security force in defence of that system?
- Could amnesty possibly inflict new wounds on the victims on both sides, instead of healing wounds?
- How can the fears of retribution among those who have upheld the system for so long be allayed without an amnesty?
- Would an unconditional amnesty not undermine the sense of justice which is necessary if reconciliation is to be achieved in South Africa?
- What would therefore be the conditions for the granting of amnesty?

## Questions surrounding amnesty

According to Kistner the question is not whether or not amnesty should be granted. The real issue is: How can an amnesty be envisaged that serves the purpose of promoting **reconciliation** in South Africa without impairing the sense of **justice**.

The aim of amnesty is primarily to relieve the burden of past offences which rests upon the shoulders of both offenders and victims. It is an official, permanent conditional or unconditional reprieve of punishment granted to an offender by the highest representative of the state.

The word **amnesty** is derived from a Greek word meaning **to forget**. There is, however, a clear distinction between **amnesty** and **amnesia**. Amnesia pertains to the loss of memory or the deliberate or unconscious suppression of the memory of the offender of the offence which was committed. Amnesia inhibits the process of healing in the offender and can also cause bitterness in the life of the offended. It can stimulate acts of retribution and even violence. In the case of amnesty, a distinction is made between the offender and the offence. The offender is forgotten, but the offence is not allowed to be forgotten. The memory of the offence is retained in order to avoid its repetition in future.

The granting of amnesty (a particular form of indemnity) should, therefore, be guided by certain considerations. Kistner (1994:32 ff) gives, inter alia, the following important guidelines:

- that perpetrators of politically motivated offences be encouraged to report on their involvement voluntarily;
- that no amnesty should be granted without the acknowledgement of the truth by the offender;
- that more emphasis is placed on the disclosure of politically motivated offences and on acknowledgement by the offenders than on punishment and reparation to the victims;
- that the prosecution of offences be limited to the most serious human rights violations such as hit squads, third force activities, etc., whereas the disclosures should be far wider;
- that punishment should only take place in the case of the most serious instances, such as killings, torture, etc. and that it should be accorded primarily to those who gave the

orders, although those who carried out the instructions also have to be held responsible;

- that the time set aside for disclosure of politically motivated crimes should be limited to a specific period in order to allow people and communities to build relationships of trust again;
- that compensation be envisaged as far as such compensation may contribute towards reconciliation.

Kistner (1994:34) also emphasises that the society which shaped the minds and the attitudes of the offenders shares in the responsibility for politically motivated crimes. Amnesty should therefore be supplemented by measures which can contribute to the healing of wounds in society. Churches, for example, should create opportunities for encounter between the perpetrators and the victims and assist them to exchange their experiences and fears during the apartheid regime with the view of mutual acceptance and forgiveness.

Dullah Omar (1995), then Minister of Justice, explained the aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as follows:

- **To deal with the past**, because it impacts on the future. There is a real danger that we try to reconcile the past with the future with the result that the new South Africa will be no different from the old. We need to be honest about the past and make a clear break with what happened then.
- **To establish accountability for human conduct**. Even the state committed crimes in the past for which it was not willing to take responsibility.
- **To establish the rule of law**. We did not have respect for the law in the past. We now need to inculcate respect for the law, a law which promotes human life.
- **To build a human rights culture** in which there will be respect for life, property, human dignity and mutual caring.

According to Omar, one way of dealing with the past is the granting of amnesty. The main aim of amnesty should not be settling scores with the **past**, but to build a **future** which is different from the past. Its major focus should be the creation of accountability. Therefore there will be no automatic amnesty for everybody - especially in the future. It will send the wrong message to the people of our country, e.g. that human life is worthless, that killing



and torturing people pays, that one can get away with horrible crimes as long as one has the power, because they will soon be forgotten.

Omar, *inter alia*, mentioned the following rules applicable in the case of amnesty:

- individuals have to apply;
- a full disclosure of the wrongs that were done is necessary;
- the crimes must have been committed with political objectives - not simply out of malice or personal gain;
- the crimes have to be recorded - even if they cannot be solved;
- recommendations will have to be made - to make sure that something similar does not happen in the future;
- special attention will also have to be given to victims - nobody or only a few have heard their story and nobody has apologised to them or their relatives.

Tutu (1999:47ff) discusses in detail the question whether amnesty has not being given at the cost of justice being done.

Following these few remarks about responsibility, we will now listen to what the Scriptures teach about repentance and conversion.

### **13.4 Repentance and conversion**

Repentance presupposes the acknowledgement that what you have done was wrong. It presupposes a "broken heart and a humbled spirit". We would like, however, to concentrate here on the biblical concept **conversion**, because conversion is often viewed as individualistic (the individual separated from his fellowman), spiritualistic (it only affects the relationship between God and the "soul"), emotional (a particular experience) and occurring only once.

#### **Biblical conversion**

The biblical concept of conversion, however, is totally different. Conversion means a new relationship with both God and our fellowmen. It is vertical and horizontal.

Furthermore, it is not only an inner experience. It also involves public obedience, service to others.

Conversion further does not only affect the so-called spiritual side of our lives, but the whole of our humanity. Selective conversion, or conversion only with regard to certain issues - usually those which we find the easiest to relinquish - is one of the most deadly dangers, because in that way we do not hoodwink God but we only bluff ourselves. True conversion always has to do with the things we cherish most, without which we believe that we will never be able to survive, for example, the (apartheid) ideology in which we believed with our whole heart. Conversion is nothing less than self-negation, self-denial.

The Bible also teaches daily, ongoing conversion - it is not something which happens once and is then forgotten.

Conversion is not only an assignment to the world, to the unbelievers. It is especially, and in the first place, the task of the church, of each individual believer.

Conversion therefore has its origin deep in one's heart. (The heart of reformation is the reformation of the heart!) However, should your conversion not result in the reformation of life around you, it is half-hearted and incomplete. A Christian who does not begin with himself, does not really begin at all. However, a Christian who ends with himself, will find that the impact of his Christian belief also ends there.

### **Structural evil**

One's deepest religious convictions are not limited to one's heart, but are given concrete shape in the societal structures which one establishes. The sin which lurks in one's heart can therefore also assume shape in society. This is called structural evil.

God condemns all sins, both personal sins (such as drunkenness, sexual sins, lying, stealing, idolatry) and sins committed within the social sphere (oppression, exploitation, social injustice). In God's eyes there are no "big sins" or "little sins". To rob one's workers of a just wage is as bad as robbing a bank. Even the distinction between individual and social sins does not always hold. For example, suicide - one of the most personal transgressions of God's law - has social implications for those near and dear to the person committing such an act.

Yet for three reasons it is necessary to focus attention on structural evil in particular.

In the first place, because we have not been made adequately aware of this form of sin against God and our fellow human beings - probably because we still understand the

Gospel too individualistically. We have to realise that sinful structures are just as reprehensible to God. (Read books such as Isaiah and Amos.)

In the second place, social evil affects more people. Many more people suffer, for example, when a societal relationship such as the state does not see to it that rights are restored and justice is done. (Naturally the **gravity** of evil, apart from its **scope** - the number of people affected by it - is also important.)

In the third place, structural injustice - like individual evil - often occurs in a very subtle fashion. One should be made aware of this, otherwise you may not easily notice it - it has, after all, been legalised! It is often not direct oppression - those in authority and those who are prosperous simply neglect the duty which they have towards the oppressed and the poor.

On the one hand, some Liberation Theologies narrow and impoverish the biblical truth when they maintain that to know God, means nothing more than to seek political justice. On the other hand, some Evangelical Christians prefer simply to remain silent about social justice. They piously talk about eternal life. They forget that knowing God is inseparably bound to an honest quest for social justice. If we neglect to help those who suffer, then we do not have God's love, regardless of what we say (cf. 1 John 3: 20-21).

There is no point in having a pure biblical doctrine about incarnation, the two natures of Christ, his resurrection, ascension and his second coming, while ignoring other parts of the Bible where God says that He wants to have nothing to do with our religion because we do not practise justice (cf. for example, Amos 5:21-24). Such a one-sidedness in our faith is just as heretical as having a wrong vision of, for example, the two natures of Christ.

### **Recapitulation**

From the Bible the following recapitulatory notions about conversion can be deduced:

- Such conversion should be preceded by the awareness of sin and a realisation that one has harmed others.
- Conversion involves a complete turn-about, a total change of direction, a radical break with what is wrong, and a return to a life of obedience to God's will.
- It is a process which is effected deep in one's heart by God's grace.
- It is born out of a new insight about what is right.

- It has consequences for the whole of one's life, all activities that one is engaged in.
- It is therefore something concrete, which affects specific things in our lives.
- The call to conversion goes out to individuals, institutions (societal relationships), nations, believers and unbelievers.
- It should culminate in penitence and confession of guilt - our next point.

### **13.5 Confession of guilt**

We are know how difficult it is for most of us to admit that we have being wrong. In almost every language the most difficult words are "I am sorry". According to Tutu (1999:217) the following strategies are rather employed: (1) deny that it has happened, (2) feigned ignorance about what has happened or (3) passing the blame to others.

Confession of guilt also implies asking for forgiveness, and both asking for and giving forgiveness can be risky. If you ask another person for forgiveness, the one you have injured may refuse to forgive you. The risk is even greater if you are the injured party, wanting to offer forgiveness but the culprit may not be ready or willing to apologise or to ask for forgiveness.

The Bible, however, is very clear about the need to confess our sins: "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them, finds mercy" (Proverbs 29:4). And: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The concern here, however, is not with confession of guilt of more personal sins (such as lack of belief) toward God, but of (1) sins committed against one's fellowmen, (2) on behalf of one's group or nation, and (3) the confession of the guilt of a group of people or a whole nation.

With regard to the first, the Bible says in James 5:16 that we honestly have to confess our sins towards each other.

#### **Confession of a whole nation and also on behalf of one's nation**

Nehemiah 1:6-7 (where Nehemiah confesses the sins of his own family and his nation) is an indication of the fact that one can confess on behalf of other members of one's group or nation and their ancestors. Daniel (9:4-11) was not even in Jerusalem himself, but he associated himself with the sins of his people and confessed them in the sight of God.

There are also biblical examples of the confession of guilt of a whole nation. Ezra 10 describes in moving terms how Ezra himself (on behalf of the nation) and then those who had married foreign (pagan) wives confessed their guilt in the sight of God, sent away their foreign wives and children and undertook henceforth to live in accordance with God's laws. Nehemiah 9 describes how the whole nation of Israel, during a special fasting day, donned mourning clothes, poured soil on their heads, and confessed their own sins and the transgressions of their forefathers (verse 2). Once the law of God had been read out, they confessed their sins again (verse 3) and then a promise followed to live in accordance with God's commandments in future.

From this it is clear that God expects not only of individuals but also of groups to confess their (collective) guilt. Naturally this should not be compulsory but voluntary and should not be done out of opportunistic considerations (for example, merely to gain the favour of a new government), but should emanate from the heart. Someone who feels that he is innocent cannot make such a confession, and should not do it either. (**Acknowledgement** of guilt is a prerequisite for **confession** of guilt.)

Such a confession need not necessarily be made only by Christians - people who do not believe in Christ, can also have a sense of guilt towards their fellowmen. Yet, here I would like to direct my remarks directly to white Christians. Through confession they can both humble themselves before God and acknowledge their guilt towards their neighbour. Although I would not like to limit this to the churches, the churches should provide guidance and assist their members. Confession, however, can be done in other areas of life as well, as in the academic and economic field.

Lastly, one should also confess on behalf of one's predecessors (Cf. Tutu, 1999: 225-6).

### **A difficult instruction**

Naturally the admission of guilt does not come easily to anyone. Our first ancestors in Paradise already tried to shift the blame onto somebody else. Eve blamed the serpent (Genesis 3:13) and Adam blamed Eve - and even God! (Genesis 3:12). Confession requires that you humble yourself, and go down on your knees.

In spite of the fact that confession of guilt is difficult, it is the only way to rid oneself of the burden of guilt. There is no other way to be relieved of the burden, and truly breathe freely again.

Confession of guilt is one of those characteristics which distinguishes Christianity from other religions and ideologies. Idols, also in the form of the idolatry of ideas (ideologies) do not demand confession. They do not know the concept of guilt, but only demand unquestioning, blind obedience – as was clearly illustrated in the case of apartheid. Besides, sinful man is not so stupid as to erect gods for himself who would demand something as humiliating as the confession of guilt - idolatry is an easy religion.

For someone like myself who has seen only a little (without having experienced it spiritually and physically) of what apartheid really was and did to people (humiliation, heartbreak and suffering), it is no longer a question of whether an individual and communal confession is urgently needed.

Confession should not be half-hearted (by, for instance, pleading for mitigating circumstances or still trying to blame others), but wholehearted and unconditional. Then only can we expect wholehearted, unconditional forgiveness.

Examples of concrete confessions of guilt can be found in Alberts & Chikane (1991) and Van der Walt (1997) and Van der Walt & Venter (1998).

### **13.6 Forgiveness**

As already mentioned, each of the steps in the process of reconciliation is very difficult. It is not easy to ask for or to grant forgiveness. It is only human to repay good with good and evil with evil. (Because of our sinfulness we even repay good with evil.) What God really wants from us, however, is to repay the evil done to us with what is good!

#### **The Bible on forgiveness**

Forgiveness according to God's Word involves far more than saying: "I am not angry with you anymore." It includes the following five important notions: (1) It involves the taking away of an unbearably heavy load from the guilty person - his guilt towards God and his fellowmen. For that reason forgiveness is often, in the Bible, placed on one continuum with the healing of real physical suffering. It almost has the same meaning as liberating someone. (2) It opens up the way to a new relationship with God and one's fellowmen. (3) God's forgiveness does mean that the **guilt** of sin is taken away, but not necessarily its **effects** or results. (4) His forgiveness never entails revenge - it is unconditional. (5) Although forgiveness should be unconditional, it presupposes that the person who has been forgiven will not commit the same sin again.

It is important to emphasise the fact that the biblical teaching about forgiveness does not allow one to say "I will forgive, but will not forget". Or: "I will forgive, on condition that..." And **nowhere** does it permit revenge instead of forgiveness. What the Scriptures teach can be briefly summarised as follows:

- Our task is to forgive each other. Joseph forgave his brothers that which they had done to him years before when they sold him into slavery. Saul did say that he regretted the harm which he had inflicted upon David. In spite of the fact that Saul was not sincere, David forgave him. Christ taught us to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). We have to forgive each other (Ephesians 4:32) - not only once, but seventy-seven times (Matthew 18: 21,22)! If someone asks for forgiveness, it should not be refused. If it is not granted, God Himself will punish the unforgiving person (Matthew 18: 34-35).
- The Bible prohibits any form of revenge (Cf. Romans 12: 17,19; 1 Thessalonians 5:15 and 1 Peter 3:9.) The reason for this is that, as human beings, we are blinded by sin. Revenge, therefore, is the prerogative of God alone (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30.) He alone knows all the facts and is in a position to judge fairly and impartially.
- The Word of God not only prohibits revenge, repaying evil with evil, but positively commands us to do good unto our fellowmen. (Proverbs 25:21 and Romans 12:20.) One has to do unto others what one would have them do unto oneself (Matthew 7:12). Christians have to bless those who have wronged them! (Romans 12:14, 1 Peter 3:9.) One must even love one's enemies (Matthew 5:44). The essence of the matter is that one should not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).
- Such a forgiving attitude is founded in God's incomprehensible forgiveness of our sins. He forgave us even while we were his enemies (Romans 5:10). We have to forgive each other **just** as in Christ God forgave us (Ephesians 4:32). If we don't do this, we are not really his followers.
- Our confession and conversion of sins is not the **basis** on which we **earn** forgiveness. Christ has **paid** for our sins to earn God's forgiveness. But, in spite of the fact that forgiveness is not given **on the basis** of our repentance and conversion, it should **become visible** in a converted way of life.

Something similar should be the case in the relationships between us as human beings. Those who have been wronged, should not make their forgiveness **dependent** upon confession or compensation. It should be unconditional.

Tutu (1999:220) correctly states that the victim does not depend on the culprits contrition and confession as a pre-condition for being able to forgive: "There is no question, that, of course such a confession is a very great help to the one who wants to forgive, but it is not absolutely, indispensable. Jesus did not wait until those who were nailing Him on the cross had asked for forgiveness. He was ready, as they drove in the nails, to pray to His Father to forgive them and He even provided an excuse for what they were doing. If the victim could forgive only when the culprit confessed, then the victim would be locked into the culprit's whim, locked into victimhood, whatever her own attitude or intention. That would be palpably unjust".

At the same time those who have wronged others, should realise that **without** a redressing of the wrongs of apartheid, good relationships for the future cannot be expected. Forgiveness cannot honestly be expected as long as injustice continues. Forgiveness, therefore, is not cheap. God requires from people who have harmed their neighbours or robbed them of their possessions in one way or the other to make restitution.

From his experience as chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Tutu (1999: 218-220) has the following valuable advice about what forgiveness should not be:

- "Forgiving is not about pretending that things are other than they are".
- "In forgiving, people are not asked to forget. On the contrary, it is **important** to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again. Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what has happened seriously and not minimising it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence".
- "Forgiveness is not being sentimental. Forgiveness means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss which liberates the victim ... In the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that caused us the wrong".



### **13.7 Restitution**

If repentance, conversion and confession are not accompanied by what should follow them, then it is nothing but hypocrisy. It should, if done sincerely, culminate in an improvement of one's behaviour and the circumstances of those in whose unjust treatment one played a part.

One of the well-known examples in the Bible that conversion and confession is followed by restitution is Zacchaeus, who promised the Lord that if he had cheated anybody out of anything, he would be willing to pay back four times the amount (Luke 19:8). However, The Old Testament is already very clear about God's demand for restitution. Exodus chapter 21 and 22 provides many examples. (Cf Exodus 21: 19, 26, 27 and 34 and 22: 2, 5, 6 and 7.) What is important is that God does not only require compensation in the case of deliberate acts of stealing, violent behaviour and other forms of harm. Repayment or redressing is also compulsory in the case of negligence and carelessness.

#### **The implications of the Year of Jubilee**

Apart from the necessity of reparation for different forms of harm done to one's fellow human beings on a more personal level, the Old Testament also provides a mechanism for restitution on a more structural level. It is described in Leviticus 25 and called the Year of the Jubilee. Its aim was to protect the smaller landowners from the loss of their land and permanent enslavement to the bigger landowners. The big landowners tended, because of their privileged position, to accumulate more and more land, power and wealth.

We do not have the space here to discuss this important institution in any detail (cf. Schrotenboer, 1973, Wittenberg, 1978 and especially the excellent study of Brouwer, 1978). It deals with two very important issues: land and people. It has economic and social implications: it offers economic restoration and personal liberation.

Concerning the land, God commanded in the first place that every 50th year (immediately after the seventh in a series of seven sabbatical years) the land had to rest. Israel had to refrain from planting and harvesting and had to eat from what they had stored and from that which had grown of its own accord. (A primitive kind of soil conservation.) They had to trust that the Lord would feed them - as He had fed their fathers for forty years in the desert.

In the second place, the land has to be returned to its original owners. Ownership was restored to what it had been when Joshua parcelled it out at the time of conquest. There was, in Israel, no absolute ownership of land by any man - not even the king - but only a holding-in-trust for the sole and permanent owner, viz. God, who gave to every family its share (cf. verse 23). When a piece of land was bought or sold, the transaction therefore was valid only until the year of jubilee - no land could be sold in perpetuity. Its value was also determined by the number of years remaining until the jubilee: the more years, the greater the price. No one could really buy land - one could only buy a number of harvests!

The economic and social implications of this arrangement was obvious. It meant that there would be neither permanently poor people nor very rich people. The jubilee gave all the underprivileged another chance. Misfortune, sickness, accident, the death of a breadwinner, inequality of ability and many more factors could have been reasons why a person was forced to sell his/her land. However, none of those factors should ever have led to permanent poverty and made people dependent on hand-outs. The year of the jubilee was a great equaliser or economic and social leveller.

Apart from restoration, the second main aim of the jubilee was liberation. The type of slavery that was tolerated in Israel, was alleviated by the jubilee: no man could be sold in perpetuity. Actually, one could never buy a man, but only his labour for a limited number of years - those remaining until the jubilee. When the priest sounded the horn on the tenth day of the seventh month, there were no longer any slaves among the people of Israel!

In summary we could say that the jubilee was an institution which effected both justice and mercy.

Unfortunately the Scriptures make no mention that this important economic and social institution was ever kept. The opposite seems to be the case: Israel went into exile so that the land might enjoy a Sabbath of seventy years - to compensate for all the Sabbaths the land had missed!

Although the jubilee never functioned as it had been intended, the idea was never forgotten. Jesus referred to Isaiah 61:1, 2 when He began his public ministry (Luke 4:18-21). In ancient Israel the jubilee year began on the day of atonement, when the annual sacrifice for sin was made. In Christ's death, the year of jubilee was fulfilled. Salvation in

Christ is, however, not limited to the life of the soul and the hereafter. Economic justice and social liberation are part of our liberation in Christ and must be embodied in civic legislation. Today we are still confronted with the enslaving force of sin - not only personal but also corporate and systematic. Civil legislation cannot prevent sin, but it must outlaw the results of sin that obstruct justice and thwart mercy in society. It is God's wish that preference be given to the poor. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, with the others suffering in poverty, is clearly not God's will.

The principle of the periodical restoration of economic imbalances enshrined in the jubilee tradition, is very important also for today. It combines, for instance, private property with social justice - something which neither capitalism nor socialism was able to achieve. The original jubilee legislation was, however, intended for the agricultural society of ancient Israel. How could such a principle be made applicable to a modern multi-sector economy like the one we have in South Africa? - apart from the fact that economic units of production prohibit the division of inherited land into even smaller portions?

The basic principles of justice and mercy may, however, not be changed if we want to be obedient to God. (These principles should not be applied only once every fiftieth year, but every day of our lives!) B. Goudzwaard (1975:19) correctly stated that people not only make confessions for themselves individually, but also communally. Therefore our socio-economic life is also a kind of confession in the sense of making known - or even unconsciously betraying - what a society's life is all about, what a community lives for and where the meaning of a people's life lies.

### **The example of Germany**

Apart from what the Bible teaches we can also take examples from what happened elsewhere in the world. A good example is Germany. The Western occupying powers enacted the first laws restoring property confiscated by the Nazis to the original owners. If restoration was not possible, compensation had to be paid. For more than four decades now the Federal Republic of Germany and individual German states have been trying to make good inside and outside Germany, the history of injustice during the Hitler regime. Eighty billion marks have been paid in compensation already. As late as September 1991, Kohl compensated Polish forced labourers who had been compelled into slavery in Germany. With the collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989 the same

process started. Land expropriated and confiscated by the former GDR regime had to be returned and, if this was not possible, compensation had to be paid.

It is not my task at the moment to spell out the implications of the above for the new South Africa (cf. Tutu, 1999:221). There are indications that some white South Africans are not yet willing to redress the inequalities and injustices of the past. Slowly, however, more positive voices are heard (Cf. De Villiers & Gous, 1996).

Apartheid did irreparable damage, such as, for example, loss of life. Fortunately there are things which can, to some extent, be recompensed. Let us at least try to do that - and be willing to make sacrifices in that regard. For those who are concerned about this issue, there will be enough to do in their immediate surroundings to try to compensate for the injustices of the past.

We have now arrived at the last step in the process of reformation:

### **13.8 Reconciliation**

It is important to realise the following: (1) The six steps form an **integrated whole**. Therefore one cannot speak of reconciliation without involving all five previously mentioned elements in the process. (2) Reconciliation comes at the **end**, it is the **result** of a whole process. One cannot, therefore, **begin with** reconciliation. Reconciliation **presupposes** that one is honestly and openly confronted with the past; that one acknowledges the injustice that one has committed; that one has the intention of making restitution for the damage as far as possible (for example, through judicial investigations, financial compensation and restitution of ownership of land); that one has received forgiveness from the other party and that, in this way, alienation, hostility and hatred between groups have been eliminated.

Some years ago - during the death throes of apartheid - reconciliation gatherings were common, especially among churches and Christians. I participated in some of them myself - amongst others, the National Initiative for Reconciliation. More often than not I left such gatherings with a sense of unease, however, because it soon became clear that we achieved little, if anything. After the Bible studies, prayers and much talk, the different parties once again went their own ways.

## **Wrong notions about reconciliation**

One of the reasons for the failure of such meetings was undoubtedly the fact that different parties had different conceptions of what reconciliation meant.

On the part of the whites there was often the idea that reconciliation had the following meaning: Peace has to be maintained at all costs. Reconciliation means that one should not be "difficult". Let us pour sand over the past and forget it. Let us love each other! This meant, of course, that nothing regarding the apartheid situation changed - while it was precisely this political socio-economic situation which was creating enormous tension and therefore necessitated a process of reconciliation (cf. Nürnberger & Tooke, 1988).

It also became clear to me that the brown and black people who participated in such meetings had very different notions of what constituted reconciliation. Sometimes they could not support this from the Scriptures, but they clearly felt that reconciliation unaccompanied by a radical change of the situation was not possible. Some of them were not taken by the "Christian" idea of reconciliation, which postulated that one should remain silent and humbly accept the **status quo** - because it would be your "Christian duty". This was abuse of the Gospel as will emerge clearly when we subsequently ascertain what the Bible really teaches about reconciliation.

## **Reconciliation according to the New Testament**

We begin with the New Testament, because it is expected that it will contain far more about the topic than the Old Testament does. In fact there are many places in the New Testament where reconciliation as a result of the reconciliatory work of Christ indicates a new relationship between **God and man** (cf., for example, Luke 8:13; Romans 5: 10, 11; 11:15; 2 Corinthians 5: 18-20; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1: 20-21; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 1:9 and 2:2.) The term is used only twice, however, to indicate a new relationship **between people**. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ suggests that one should be reconciled with one's brother before making a sacrifice at the altar (Matthew 5:23-24). In 1 Corinthians 7:11 Paul recommends that husbands and wives should rather become reconciled with each other than divorce. According to Kittel (in his well-known **Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament**) reconciliation means that one should try to ensure that the person who is angry, and who does not seek reconciliation, renounce his/her enmity. If somebody is angry with you, you should take the initiative (cf. Matthew 5:23). It is therefore a concrete deed which suspends the enmity. In both cases

however, the concern is with reconciliation between **individuals** and then also individuals who stand in a close relationship to each other (bonds of blood and fidelity). Does this same kind of reconciliation apply to **groups and nations**? To find an answer to this, we have to revert to the Old Testament.

### **Reconciliation in the Old Testament**

At first glance the Old Testament would seem to be as disappointing as the New Testament: Mention is only made of reconciliation between God and man and nowhere between people. A closer perusal of the Old Testament however, reveals that in the broken relationships between people something else has to be done before reconciliation can be achieved.

One example makes this very clear: When Israel is oppressed and exploited in Egypt, God does not send Moses with a message of reconciliation - neither to the Israelites nor to the Pharaoh. He brings, rather, the divine command that Pharaoh should release his subjected people.

We find the same in the case of the Old Testament prophets, where mention is made of the rich and the powerful who exploit the poor and the weak. There is no mention anywhere that the prophets should call either the impoverished nation or the rich and the wielders of power (who exploited them) to reconciliation. No, they rather consistently expose the unjust system according to which the poor are exploited. They judge the rich in no uncertain terms and demand that they should ensure that rights are restored and justice triumphs. (Cf. for example, Isaiah 1: 10-17; 5: 8-10; 56: 1-7; 58: 6-12; Hosea 12:8; Amos 5: 7-12; 8: 4-7 and Micha 3: 9-12.)

In these relationships the primary emphasis is on the restitution of rights and justice and not on reconciliation at all - especially not reconciliation in the sense of the mere entrenchment of injustice. Stated differently: Should there be any thought of reconciliation, of the healing of broken human relationships, this can only be effected on condition that justice and right be done. Such a deed should suspend the injustice and reinstitute the rights of the humiliated, oppressed, exploited and bereft individuals - so that enmity can be overcome in this way.

Apart from the fact that reconciliation therefore can never be effected by ignoring injustice, by covering it up or by using kind arguments, one can never simply say that it is a thing of the past. This is not permissible, because we are still left with the fruits of the past. Even

though the structures of apartheid which caused the injustice have been eliminated, we are still confronted daily with the results of it, such as poverty and unemployment. Reconciliation cannot be genuine unless it works constructively towards doing something about such issues.

### **A long and difficult road**

Cheap "reconciliation " is quickly effected but of little value. Real reconciliation is difficult, as it is a radical process and may take many years before it is completed.

True reconciliation is difficult because it is based on restitution of rights and justice. It therefore affects man in his deepest nature - nobody readily admits that either he or his ancestors were at fault!

Reconciliation often has more to do with man's non-rational sub-consciousness than with his rational consciousness. This does not only include the individual sub-consciousness but also the group consciousness or the collective memory, which had been formed in the course of many generations and even over many centuries of history. Because the concern here is with issues which are mostly not only rational in nature, but which also have an emotional character, reconciliation can probably not be effected only by means of reasonable argumentation. Arguments tend to remain a defence of one's personal position. Reconciliation is therefore rather hindered than promoted.

How does one succeed in having two entirely different "emotive worlds" coming together, so that people can begin understanding each other? It is only by empathising with the other - even an apparent enemy. As a white person you have to attempt to feel how the black man is disposed towards you, what the image is that he has of you. Obversely , the black man, the so-called coloured and the Indian should place themselves in your position and try to determine what you see and how you feel as a white man, deep in your heart. You have to be able to defend the "cause "of the black man - and he has to defend the white position! It is only by means of this "feeling from the inside out" that one can break open roads into each other's hearts.

I doubt whether we as South Africans - even Christians and churches - have reached this point. Perhaps I am not too far wrong when I maintain that this radical, far-reaching process has not even begun in South Africa. In the event that it does not happen, however, we will all have to be willing to live with the unpleasant consequences of our tardiness at a later stage. The consequences may be more serious than only unresolved

feelings of guilt which will continue to haunt us. Two recent examples of how unresolved hatred and injustice can simmer for centuries and then boil over in a terrifying manner, are the processes of genocide which we have been witnessing in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia.

### 13.9 A complex process

In retrospect, I have to state that the above process which I have described by means of six steps is far more complex than it has been represented here. An example of one critical question is whether reconciliation comes at the **end** of the whole process. In other words, can reconciliation only occur on the **basis of restitution** to others for what they have suffered? Should affirmative action, for example, be a **condition** for true reconciliation?

As already indicated above, Christ does not forgive us **on the basis** of conversion from our sins - then one would fall into the doctrine of meritorious works - but also not **without** it. Would one in an analogous way (because we are dealing here with two different issues) not be able to say that reconciliation should not be effected **on the basis** of righteous and fair restitution, but equally that it cannot be effected **without** justice being done?

This might perhaps resolve the problem as to **how much** has to be recompensed. In some cases, for example, in the case of Germany after the First World War, so much was claimed by way of restitution of damage that it was simply impossible to comply with it. The demand for restitution could also easily become a matter of retribution or revenge - the opposite of true reconciliation. There might even be cases where restitution cannot really be effected. How does one, for example, recompense somebody who has died, or somebody who has lost a loved one during the freedom struggle (at whatever end of the spectrum)? Financial compensation or the support of dependants cannot really pay for loss of life.

My problem comes down to the following: Should there not also be - at least in the case of Christians - something such as **unconditional** reconciliation once the struggle has been completed? (Compare my argument above for **unconditional** forgiveness.) I do not mean that justice should not take its course and that those who are guilty of misdeeds should not be punished. Particularly in the church, which is not a juridical institution, restitution should not be the one and only, the **sine qua non** for reconciliation. Christ



should be our example. He reconciled us with God when we were still his enemies (Romans 5: 1 0).

The solution most probably does not lie in attempting to create an **order** in which the process of reformation should be effected (first restitution and then reconciliation), but that all six steps in the process should be addressed **simultaneously**, because they are all **equally important**.

This conclusion does not try to water down God's radical demands or to make the issue less serious. I remain convinced that this is a process that we will all have to work through individually and collectively if we really want to have a new future. Going on to a new dispensation is not as easy as it is to exchange an old garment for a new one!

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The work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has ended. (For an evolution of the whole process, see Tutu, 1999: 184ff.) However on the grassroots level it will have to continue for many years to come. The reports will have to be studied and implemented.

Also to those Christians – as well as people of other beliefs – who are trying to achieve reconciliation and peace in other African countries, I would like to recommend the reading of these publications. They contain a wealth of information. A few of them are: the official Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report of 3 volumes (1998) as well as the impressions of its Chairman, Tutu (1999), some of its other members, like Borrairie (2000) and Meiring (1999), and people from the media, like Krog (1998).

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As the Israelites were liberated from the cruel oppression of the Pharoah in Egypt, we are now liberated from the oppression of apartheid. As was the case with the Israelites, we are on our way to a promised land.

For the Jewish people it was a long and difficult journey through the desert until they finally crossed the Jordan into Canaan. It could have been different. Because of their stubbornness and disobedience to the Lord they had to wander through the wilderness of the desert for forty years and suffer unnecessary hardships. Most of them died before they reached the promised land.

May this be a warning to us. If we don't obey the demands that God makes of how we should deal with our past, we may also be punished for many years to come. George Santayana correctly said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". The bright future which we envisage, will remain an illusion on the distant horizon.

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## Chapter 14:

# RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, EQUALITY, FREEDOM AND TOLERANCE

Most people today have to live, if possible, peacefully in a multireligious society. They are asking questions like the following: Are all religions equal? How should religious freedom be viewed? Is it really possible to tolerate other religions and how should it be achieved?

Questions like these are not of abstract, academic nature. They are asked because of everyday experience. In chapter 2 we have mentioned that in Africa the encounter between Islam and Christianity can be violent and destructive. The Jews and Muslims in Israel and Palestine are at the moment waging war against each other. In the West we still have clashes between different Christian groups, like the Catholics and Protestants in Ireland. Western countries, furthermore, have to accommodate more and more Eastern religions. And so we can continue. Marshall and Gilbert recently wrote about contemporary religious persecution in their book: **Their blood cries out; the worldwide tragedy of modern Christians who are dying for their faith** (1997).

### 14.1 Growing religious diversity

The interesting fact is that finally secularism – thinking and living as if God does not exist or does not matter – did not leave us with a post- or areligious world.

On the one hand it would seem as if we are living in a post-religious world, but on the other hand there is a large scale resurgence of religious awareness. On the one hand there is less or no god (he has been declared dead) and on the other hand more god, or everything is god: god in nature, in oneself, in one's fellowman, in other religions - everywhere!

After Western Christianity had, in alliance with Western culture, dominated the world for centuries, it has begun to fall into decadence. The "mature", non-religious European has emerged onto the scene since the Enlightenment. The centres of gravity of Christendom shifted to other parts of the world, the so-called Third World. Europe's dominant direction-giving position as model for the whole world has waned.

The process of secularisation of the West, however, only resulted in a religious vacuum for a short while. The empty space of Christendom is at present rapidly being filled by a variety of religions. Europe and the USA who used to be exporters of (the Christian) religion, are at present the importers of a variety of religions!

The reason for this phenomenon is the following: Secularism is a religion, but it is an "empty" religion, and this vacuum calls out to be filled by all sorts of old and new religions.

In the Western world one would be able to distinguish the following six types of religions – many of them also present in Africa:

- **World religions**, in their more or less pure form, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity.
- **Adjusted Eastern religions and cults**, such as Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, etc.
- **New Age movements**.
- **Neo-Paganist religions** which were driven out by Christianity in the past, but which are now reviving again, such as the old Celtic and Germanic paganisms and occultist cults.
- **Implicit religions**, meaning that specific facets of reality (for example, success or wealth) or certain values (for example, individuality) are absolutised. They are called "implicit" because their adherents will normally deny that they are religions.
- **Vague superstitions** indicate "religions" which have not been defined properly, such as, for example, people who believe that there will be life after death, but who have no certainty about what this would entail.

Stated differently, we find the following types of religions: monotheism (e.g. Islam, Baha'i), monism (e.g. Vedanta-Hinduism and New Age), pantheism (other forms of New Age and also neo-Paganist religions), polytheism (other forms of Neo-Paganism and Hinduism), henotheism (many trends, according to which the own god is regarded as the highest, but who also accept the existence of other gods), atheism (many secular movements) and materialism (as an example of an implicit religion).

What Christ said in Matthew 12:43-45 has become true in the history of the West: When an evil spirit is exorcised from somebody, it seeks another abode. When the "house" that it

has deserted remains empty, it will, however, return to it and bring with it seven others - worse than itself. At the end such a person is therefore worse off than before.

Western man has thought that he could drive out all gods, including the God of the Bible. This would seem to have been a misconception, however. The West is also no better off today than it has ever been. This emerges clearly from the strongly pantheist trend already mentioned above. Pantheism means that everything is god/divine (or that god is all). It is only a small step, however, from the next: Nothing is god/God is nothing!

Now that something of the large diversity in religions has been described, the subsequent issue can be addressed, viz. that of the equality of religions.

#### **14.2 All religions are not equal**

There are many statements in the Bible which indicate Christ's uniqueness, such as, for example, his "I am" statements: "I am the truth and the way and the life" (John 14:6); "I am the true vine" (John 15:1); "I am the bread of life"; "I am the light of the world". In Acts 4:12 we read that "Salvation is in no one else, for there is no other Name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." In 1 Timothy 2:5 it is said: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus ...."

W.A. Visser 't Hooft wrote a book called **No other name** nearly forty years ago (1963). Fifteen years ago (1986) Paul Knitter, however, put a question mark when writing a book with a similar title: **No other name?** Within Roman Catholic thinking about this topic we also see a clear shift from salvation through the church alone (ecclesiocentrism), to salvation in Christ alone (Christocentrism), to salvation through faith in God but not limited to Christ (theocentrism).

The questions which will be addressed here are: (1) Is only Christianity true and all other religions false? or (2) are all religions at least partly (or wholly) true? or (3) are they all possibly untrue?

##### **14.2.1 Four possible views**

If we say that the Christian faith is the only true one, we have to remember that it is not other faiths which say this of Christianity, but Christians themselves - and the testimony which one gives about oneself is normally not impartial.

The simplistic view that all other religions are the work of Satan is definitely not biblical. Scripture clearly teaches that God, through his creational revelation, also talks to the pagans. On the other hand, it is also unbiblical to deny the work of Satan in non-Christian religions - Satan even works within the Christian religion.

What is really the difference between Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and traditional African religion? What is the difference between the Bible, the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita and African religious myths? Is it not so that if you were to be born in India, the chances really are that you would be a Hindu; in Egypt you would probably be a Muslim; in Sri Lanka there would be quite a probability of you being a Buddhist, and in Africa you would probably be a Christian, a Muslim or a supporter of Traditional African Religion?

Are all forms of religious worship not probably true in the sense that they travel by different routes, but in the end they reach the same destination - various routes to the same mountain peak? Are they not simply different expressions, in terms of different cultures, human types, temperaments and intellectual predilections? Do the different religious trends not represent the different experiences and perceptions of and responses to the same unlimited "transcendent, divine reality"? (The differences are then merely superficial as a result of the differences in mentality and cultural background.) Or does such a viewpoint bring us perilously close to the quicksands of relativism and even scepticism?

The third possibility: If all religions could not be true - even if everybody thought that his were true - it is of course also possible that none of them is true.

Or are we on a wrong track by trying to make the question of truth applicable to religions? We do not, after all, ask this question when it comes to cultures, and do not, for example, ask the question as to whether American culture is less true or more true than, for example, Japanese culture. We do not say, either, that Japanese culture is totally untrue.

#### **14.2.2 A survey of the different viewpoints**

M.S. Heim, in his book **Christ the only way?** (1985) divides the different viewpoints into two main groups (pluralism and particularism), which are then sub-divided into three groups each.



## **Pluralism**

- **Parallel pluralism**

Christ is the only mediator for **Christians**. Other faiths, however, can yield much the same results as Christianity. (For example, Ernst Troeltsch: **The absoluteness of Christianity and the history of religions.**)

- **Jigsaw puzzle pluralism**

Each religion contains a fragment of the full and final truth. It is our task to link up the pieces. There is no communal core in all religions, but they should all flow together ultimately. The strong point(s) of each religion should be brought together in a mansion of faith for all nations. (E.g. John Hick: **God and the universe of faith and God has many faces.**)

- **Gradual pluralism**

Some religions bring the final truth to stronger expression than others. The Christian faith is true in the sense that it is the best, because Christ towers above other religious leaders. He is, in a sense then, the highest peak in the mountain range! (For example, Schubert M. Agden: **The reality of God.**)

## **Particularism**

As opposed to pluralism, the particularists teach that God works in a determining way for the whole world through the person of Christ. They therefore reject - to a greater or lesser extent - the relativism to which pluralism gives rise.

- **Magnetic particularism**

This movement views Christ as a magnet which attracts all other religions and fills them with his magnetic power. Nobody is saved without Christ, but they can be saved as Muslims, Buddhists or Hindus. Salvational knowledge of God is therefore possible without the revelation of the Bible. The grace which flows from Christ orients man - even unknowingly - towards God. His power flows through all religions and turns them into instruments of salvation when their adherents respond in a believing manner. (For example, Karl Rahner: **Foundations of Christian faith.**)

- **Healing particularism**

The image here is of a life-saving vaccine which could heal anybody - even those who have died. (It is often asked what happens to people who never had the chance to hear about Christ, or those who died very young.) This view is almost the same as the old "second-chance-theory" after death. It differs from the preceding vision (which teaches that the meaning of Christ can be channelled through other faiths) in the sense that its full effect is dependent on direct and personal knowledge of God. (For example, Karl Barth: **Church Dogmatics**.)

- **Imperial particularism**

Christ is the only source of our salvation, and conscious confession of Christ in this life is the only way along which we can hope for salvation. (For example, Leslie Newbigin: **The finality of Christ**.)

Heim's overview is of course a simplification and cannot possibly do justice to the many and growing visions on the issue of Christ's relationship with other "saviours". He also does not treat clearly enough the question as to what will happen to those who never heard the Name Jesus Christ. Not that I think that this is a question which can be answered. (Will we be able to give a biblical answer to this while it is a question which did not interest the writers of the Bible?) Shall we let it suffice that God is a just and impartial Judge and will therefore judge everyone in accordance with the light that he/she had? Might we say that for children who die young God's love in Christ is full and completely applicable? Or are we going too far in saying even this?

#### **14.2.3 Imperialist arrogance?**

The particularists regard the pluralists as relativists, and finally as sceptics. (It is a small step from "All religions are true" to "No religion is true").

The pluralists in their turn regard the particularists as exclusivists. They are seen as arrogant, intolerant, imperialist and even fanatic.

I do not, however, regard a person who believes that his faith is the true one of necessity as arrogant. He can, without relinquishing his convictions, acknowledge his own fallibility, as well as appreciate the perspectives of others. Especially if he is a Christian, he should not be arrogant at all, because he should acknowledge that the knowledge which he has of God and Christ is not the result of his own cleverness or piety, but has come about

precisely because of his own weakness. It is a result of the grace of God. And if a Christian feels impelled to share his faith with others, this need not be a sign of arrogance or religious imperialism, but it can also be viewed as a sign of a humble desire that others should also share in the saving Truth.

This brings us back to the big question:

#### 14.2.4 Are all religions equal?

We will try to answer this question by briefly comparing two world religions (as examples) with Christianity. These two are Islam and Buddhism.

We will compare their views on (1) God, (2) the world and (3) man. As regards man, we will indicate what, according to each of these, is (4) wrong with man, as well as what they suggest (5) by way of therapy. (What is viewed as the way to salvation.)

The result is as follows:

	<b>BUDDHISM</b>	<b>ISLAM</b>	<b>CHRISTIANITY</b>
1. GOD	The All, Absolute	Allah, Judge and Ruler	Father (the Compassionate), Son (Saviour) Holy Spirit (the Comforter)
2. World	Maya (illusion)	A determined universe	God's creation with an open history under his guidance
3. Man	A divine spark	A cog within the plan of Allah	A free and responsible person, created in God's image, that is, in a religious relationship with the Creator
4. Diagnosis	Caught in matter and therefore suffers	Lack of submission to Allah	Sin, rebellion, disobedience to God's laws
5. Therapy (Road to salvation)	Don't cling to the earthly, let go of the material, become ONE with the Absolute by way of the "eightfold route"	"Five duties" to come to submission	Accept Christ's offering in faith
6. Core difference	Man "ascends" and disappears into the Absolute	Man "earns" salvation	God comes (in Christ) to man and offers salvation through grace

I would like to direct attention specifically to no. 6 in the three columns (the core difference between the three religions). Although the differences emerge clearly at all the other points (1-5), the core difference has been summed up in no. 6. All non-biblical religions are dominated by the question: What should I do to gain salvation? Or: What should I do to find god (or the absolute, should the particular religion not accept a deity)? In Christian religion this is exactly the opposite: Salvation need not be earned by myself - God gives it to me through grace in Christ.

From the simple diagram it emerges that the differences between religions are not simply **relative**, but **essential**. Religions are therefore **not equal** in the sense of **being the same, of the same value**. The Christian faith, based on the Word of God, is a **unique** road to salvation not found in any other religion.

### **14.3 Religious freedom**

The fact that I do not wish to put Christianity on a level with other religions (other religions also regard themselves as unique) does not mean that I reject freedom of religion and that I support the idea of Christian imperialism. The argument is often stated that one can only support religious freedom if one accepts the idea of the equality of all religions. It has already been stated, however, that there is a big difference between religious equality and religious freedom.

#### **14.3.1 Religious intolerance – a general phenomenon but unacceptable**

The need of religious freedom is clear from the fact that lack of religious freedom and religious intolerance have in the course of history drenched the earth in suffering and blood. Every religion has the tendency to regard its own form of worship as the only true and salvational and not to acknowledge other religions - to the point even of persecuting their adherents.

- One could mention the religious wars between **Christians** themselves, and the crusades, during which the Christians wanted to overpower the Muslims by the power of the sword.
- The obverse would also be true: wherever **Islam** obtains the power of state, there is a trend to degrade Jews and Christians to the level of second-hand citizens and only barely to tolerate their religions.

- Although **Hinduism** reveals a striking religious tolerance, there is a fierce intolerance when a Hindu converts to another religion, because in this way he/she affects the social unity of the community.
- **Buddhism** also reveals a special willingness to listen to other convictions, but when Buddhism and nationalism are linked, a break with Buddhism is regarded as treachery against the country.
- The erstwhile intolerance of **Communism** - also a form of religion - towards Christianity in Eastern Europe, Russia and other places where it had become the official state ideology is well known.

From all these examples it clearly emerges that the danger of religious intolerance appears again and again when no clear distinction is made between religion and the state or politics, when an unholy alliance is entered into between them.

Today the constitutions of most countries guarantee the freedom of religion, belief and opinion. Religious freedom can be motivated or founded in different ways, for example:

- On the basis of religious **relativism**, already discussed above;
- **indifference** with regard to the demand for truth;
- even simply as the result of a **need for peace** among different religions.

#### **14.3.2 Biblical grounds for religious freedom**

Christians will want to know, however, whether the Bible supplies grounds for religious freedom, and what exactly these grounds are. They will be considered briefly.

- **The Bible reveals that each person has been created in the image of God** (cf. Genesis 1:27; 9:6 and James 3:9), and that God imparts to each individual certain rights and responsibilities (Genesis 1:28). God leaves room for people to seek Him - and to serve Him - He even allows people and nations to go their own way (Acts 14:16). He gives to each person freedom of conscience (Romans 2). We cannot therefore discriminate against anybody on the basis of his/her religious convictions.
- **The God of the Bible is a good, long-suffering God.** He lets his sun rise and set on good and evil alike; He lets his rain fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He is also patient and long-suffering and gives people an opportunity for conversion (John

4:2; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9 and Acts 14:17). God's patience does not mean that He will approve of evil and inhumanity, but that He offers people the opportunity to be converted. The final judgement about what is true and what is false does not lie with man, the church or a government, but with God alone (Romans 12:19).

The most important ground or foundation for religious freedom, therefore is not **man's** tolerance but **God's** tolerance or long-suffering. In the same way that God deals with man, people also have to act towards each other (cf. Luke 9:52-56).

- **The Gospel is not disseminated through violence or force** but through persuasion and conviction (1 Corinthians 1:17 ff; cf. Zechariah 4:6). The battle is fought, not with weapons of the flesh, but of the Spirit (Matthew 26:52; 2 Corinthians 10:4). The Gospel comes in peace, not in force (John 18:36).

Although the church is represented as a militant church (Ephesians 6:12), and also as a persecuted church (John 15:20; 2 Timothy 3:12) and a pilgrim's church (Hebrews 11:13) which has no special privileges, it is an institution which wages a spiritual struggle (Ephesians 6:12) and which does this with the weapons of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 10:4). It therefore cannot use political favouritism or even force to promote the kingdom of God.

#### **14.3.3 Questions of Christians**

Some of the questions which have been raised are the following:

- **Does religious freedom not imply religious equality?**

This has already been denied. It should also be kept in mind that religious freedom is primarily a juridical concept, which indicates that the government in a religiously plural society should protect all religions and treat them equally. The right to free religious practice should be protected against possible contraventions by government.

- **Does this not imply that the faithful (Christians) have to pull in the same yoke with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)?**

The concern in this text is with the church, and not with the state. The prohibition applies to the church, but not to the domain of the state.

It is important to remember that church and state each has its own God-given terrain and task. The church is a community of believers, and the state a public juridical community.

Therefore the task of the state is not to promote one or the other form of religion, but to see to it that justice is done to all citizens in the country. In this sense the state is not "neutral" - it has received a specific task from God which should be executed.

This brings us to the next question, which is:

- **Does religious freedom not imply state neutrality?**

Until the Sixteenth Century Reformation Christians still believed that the state had to be "Christian". This meant inter alia that the state had to promote the Christian religion actively and even had the power to punish and to persecute those who were not Christians. (The Old Testament idea of a theocracy was made applicable to the state as well, instead of only to the church.)

The following four factors served as motivations why this viewpoint was later relinquished: (1) It led to violence and the persecution of non-Christians, because there was no freedom of conscience or of religion. (2) The realisation dawned that man's ideas and the convictions of his heart could not be changed through force of government. (3) It also became clear that large-scale degeneration and superficiality occurred when (as during the reign of Constantine and thereafter) Christianity became a state religion. (4) Christianity abused the state (politics) and, obversely, Christianity could easily be used by the state for its own purposes - even to justify repression (the phenomenon of "civil religion").

The answer to the question above is, therefore, yes, the state in the case of a multi-religious society has to be "neutral" to guarantee public justice.

#### **14.3.4 The correct interpretation**

It is important to state clearly what exactly is meant by religious freedom. In the light of what has already been said in this chapter, it could also be interpreted (wrongly) as meaning that the Christians' right to practise their own religion and to disseminate it, is denied in the name of religious freedom!

Neither does religious freedom for the Christian imply (as already emerged from the preceding, but which has to be reiterated to prevent misunderstanding) any of the following:

- neutralism;

- relativism;
- indifferentism or
- tolerance of simply everything.

It does not therefore imply that all values of society can simply be thrown overboard so that injustice, lies and evil can triumph. But when religious freedom is formulated in such a way that the Christian – and all other believers - can practise their religion unhindered, publicly and privately, and the church can function without restraint, then it is acceptable and not in conflict with the Word of God.

#### **14.4 Religious tolerance**

Religious pluralism has its beneficial side. It impels one, for instance, to self-criticism; a reassessment of one's own viewpoint; a healthy relativising of one's own position on the one hand and respect for other viewpoints and tolerance of other lifestyles on the other hand. The correct kind of pluralism will not lead to relativism either. Pluralism is not only directed by wrong motives. Legitimate motives, for example, such as people who want to know more about other religions, can also be present. In this chapter, however, we will not deal with healthy pluralism in the first place, but with unhealthy pluralism.

In this new pluralistic attitude norms, values and traditions are at stake. Morality has become a purely private affair. Parents and teachers no longer know if and how they should transmit values to the younger generation. People have difficulty to stand up for their convictions. Institutions and organisations founded on a specific worldview, for example, Christian schools, colleges, universities and political parties are experiencing problems in holding to their identity. Pluralism has created a cultural and moral vacuum and even collapse as well as religious scepticism and cynicism.

Because this chapter may, if not read carefully, give the impression that I am against dialogue with other religions, it should be stated clearly at the beginning that this is definitely not the case. I am of the opinion that inter-religious discussions are necessary to understand each other. On the one hand, dialogue should not simply be a disguised way for the Christian to force others to accept his/her religion. On the other hand, if a Christian feels compelled to share his/her faith with others, this need not be a sign of arrogance or religious imperialism.



#### **14.4.1 Reasons for religious pluralism and tolerance in Western history**

By religious pluralism I do not mean merely the existence of a plurality of religions side by side and the protection of such diversity by the state (religious freedom). Religious pluralism is understood here as religious equality, e.g. that many or all religions are equally valid.

- **A Christian understanding**

Let us start our historical review at the end of the seventeenth century. After many years of violent conflict between the different Christian churches, Europe eventually adopted a policy of toleration (for instance in Britain the Act of Toleration - 1689). People realised that authoritarian tyranny could not serve the cause of Christ. Tolerance was born of confidence in the ability of the truth of the Gospel to vindicate itself without state coercion. We could call this the Christian understanding of tolerance.

- **The rationalistic viewpoint**

Very soon, however, other secular viewpoints emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It was argued (e.g. by J.S. Mill) that it is not possible to evaluate religions on rational grounds and decide which one is true and which ones are false. Everyone, therefore, had the freedom to choose the religion she/he wanted.

In the mid-eighteenth century, G.E. Lessing illustrated this viewpoint with the following parable. A father had a magic ring which only one of his three sons could inherit. Since he loved them all and did not want to be accused of favouritism, he made two extra imitation rings. The result was that each son thought his own ring was the magic one and the other two were not. They disputed their claims in the presence of a wise man who offered the following judgement: "Let each think his own ring is true and in the meantime show forth gentleness and tolerance".

The parable clearly indicates that religious truth is not verifiable - in spite of the fact that, in theory at least, it still accepts the existence of an absolute truth (there is only one real magic ring). One could "think" one's religion is true, but not prove it. Religion was henceforth limited to the private domain. Tolerance was the only reasonable attitude since one can't prove one's religion to be right and one's opponent can't prove it to be wrong. This idea of tolerance and religion being a private matter became typical of the liberal

humanist tradition. Accordingly it was held that any influence of religion should be barred from the public sphere.

- **An irrationalistic turn**

In the late twentieth century we witness a major shift: I can no longer be certain that my ring is the only magic one. Perhaps all "rings" are equally magical!

A good example of this viewpoint is the New Age Movements with their pantheistic monism which denies the distinction between truth and error. All religions are the same. Tolerance, according to this view, is demanded not because the right path is indistinguishable from the wrong ones, but because all paths are right - all religions finally lead to "God"!

To summarise: Tolerance, which began in the seventeenth century as an expression of Christian confidence in the self-evidence and self-authenticating power of the absolute truth of the Gospel, has at the end of the twentieth century become an expression of profound uncertainty, even agnosticism, regarding an absolute truth. Many deny its accessibility and many even its objective existence.

- **The two phases described in more detail**

The developments subsequent to the viewpoint of the Puritans of the seventeenth century could also be divided as follows: (1) from exclusivism to inclusive relativism and (2) from inclusive relativism to pluralism. Viewpoint (1) only implies mild relativism, while viewpoint (2) advocates radical relativism. The tendency towards relativism already started in rationalistic philosophy, while its full development became very clear in irrationalistic thought.

The first development can be illustrated with the image that other different religions are simply different footpaths climbing a mountain - finally they reach the same mountain top. Or the image of a wheel: the religions of the world are like the radial spokes of a wheel which all find their common focus in the same central hub, viz. "God". Another image is that today we live in a supermarket of religions and worldviews - just as we can choose from a range of painkillers for a headache. Faced with such a dazzling range of products one can easily argue: "They are all just the same under different labels - everyone is as good as the other"! Accordingly, all religions are complementary paths to God. It is not so much that the doctrines of Christianity are false; rather the other faiths are equally true.

The second movement (from inclusive relativism to radical pluralistic relativism) is of the opinion that the universalist inclusivism did not go far enough. Ultimate truth cannot be defined in rationalistic either-or distinctions. Religion is a universal experience which transcends rational analysis. The cognitive content of faith is irrelevant; it is the authenticity of our religious feelings that is important. It does not matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere! Inclusivism has given way to relativistic pluralism.

The two grounds for religious tolerance advocated in Western history were, therefore, the following: (1) Rationalistic agnosticism (of the 18th and 19th century): it is not possible to know which path to God - if any - is the correct one; therefore every individual must be free to select his own path. (2) Irrationalistic pantheism and mysticism (of the late 20th century): all paths lead to God. Therefore it does not matter which road the individual selects for his/her spiritual journey. The final consequence of radical relativism is indifference.

The third step - our next main point - is the development from pluralism to intolerance. Not only old style mild relativism, but also new style radical relativism is basically intolerant.

#### **14.4.2 From pluralism to intolerance**

Contemporary religious pluralism (as described above) has the following consequences:

- (1) It places religious belief above any criticism. It is possible, however, that one can be very sincere (like the worshippers of Moloch who burned their own children), but still be totally wrong!
- (2) Pluralism is guilty of disguised dogmatism in spite of the fact that it fights against all other kinds of "dogmatism". If, for instance, it insists that God did not reveal Himself clearly as the only true God, this categorical denial is also an absolute truth. Is this not intellectual hypocrisy?
- (3) The most dangerous consequence of relativistic pluralism, however, is its implicit threat to liberty of conscience or religious freedom. A religious variety of political correctness is emerging today. School teachers and Christian academics who wish to express a commitment to Christianity are viewed as fanatics who try to brainwash their pupils and students and may find it hard to achieve promotion. It becomes a sin when you feel a calling to convince people from other religions to accept the biblical faith. Not only Christians but also Muslims and Jews, who refuse to abandon the absolute truth

claims of their holy scriptures, find themselves labelled as particularistic, exclusivist, fundamentalist, divisive, intolerant, imperialist and militant!

It seems as if pluralism will eventually destroy the very freedom which its so-called tolerance was intended to defend!

This ironic consequence cannot be denied. Humanistic agnosticism and New Age monism both are inherently inimical to religions like Christianity. The reason is that pluralism is not simply an example of democracy in a multi-faith society. It is not humble about its claims at all - it is an arrogant, absolutist religion itself.

Modern pluralism in fact therefore does not prevent religious persecution, but it may well foster it. And this will not happen for the first time in history. The Roman Empire was a pluralistic society which tolerated all religions or "superstitions" - except Christianity, because the Christians were not prepared to add Christ - their exclusive Lord - to the Roman pantheon. Pluralism will not generate a neutral, secular society at all, but a neo-pagan and therefore anti-Christian one. Pluralists will only tolerate fellow-pluralists and will be intolerant towards those who refuse to subscribe to their "creed".

#### **14.4.3 The biblical alternative**

If our conclusion is that secular Western thought has failed to offer solid grounds for religious tolerance, what about the Bible? We know that Christianity does not have a good track record in this regard. (Cf. the previously mentioned religious persecutions in the name of Christianity in the 16th century). If, however, we listen carefully to the Bible again, is it possible for the Christian to defend an attitude of tolerance towards other faiths and at the same time to affirm the truth claims of Christianity? My answer to this question is affirmative. It is not only possible to do so, but it is also of vital importance for the preservation of religious liberty. And - what is important - it is not motivated on the basis of either religious relativism or indifference with regard to truth, or simply the practical need for peace amongst different religions.

On what biblical grounds can the Christian on the one hand practise tolerance towards other contradictory faiths, and on the other hand have confidence in the non-negotiable nature of the Gospel? Summarised: how is tolerance with conviction possible? Let us have a brief look at each one of them.

## **Tolerance**

From the Bible we receive the following guidelines:

- **God respects the freedom of human beings**

As already mentioned, God leaves room for people to seek Him and to serve Him - He allows people and nations to go their own way. He gives to each person freedom of conscience.

We cannot therefore discriminate against anybody on the basis of his/her religious convictions. The freedom of choice of every human being must be respected, because God respects it. As responsible beings, created in the image of God, people may refuse the Gospel. And if they do, the Word of God does not allow Christians to circumvent that refusal by strategies of manipulation or intimidation. To pray for the fire of judgement is to fail completely to understand the purpose of the Gospel (Luke 9). Jesus commands his disciples only to shake off the sand from their feet in protest against unbelieving people. In the same way Paul never conducted his proclamation of the Gospel by any other method except candid proclamation (2 Cor. 4:2). The opposition may be silenced by courageous argument and/or testimony (Acts 4:14) and admonished by public protest (Acts 18:6), but intolerant techniques are prohibited - the human dignity of the unbeliever must never be held in contempt.

- **The God of the Bible is a good, long-suffering God**

As already mentioned, he lets his sun rise and set on good and evil alike; He lets his rain fall on the just and the unjust. He is also patient and long-suffering and gives people an opportunity to be converted. God's patience does not mean that He will approve of any evil and inhumanity, but that He offers people the opportunity to be converted. The final judgment about what is true and what is false does not lie with man, the church or a government, but with God alone.

The most important ground or foundation for religious freedom, therefore, is not man's tolerance but the long-suffering, patience, grace and love of God - His "tolerance". (I am putting the word **tolerance** in inverted commas, because I am not quite sure whether we should use this modern word in describing God.) In the same way that God deals with man, people have to act towards each other.

- **As mentioned above (in the case of religious freedom) the Gospel is not disseminated through violence or force but through persuasion and conviction.**

It was the folly of the crusades and the inquisition as well as the conquistadors and the persecutors of the Anabaptists (16th century) to think that coercion could serve the Gospel.

Tolerance (patience towards those whose opinions and practices differ from one's own) is approved in dealing with disputes among fellow-Christians (cf. Mark 9: 38-48; Rom. 14: 1-13 and 2 Cor. 2:4-11), but it is clearly condemned in dealing with sin, evil and error (cf. 1 Cor. 5: 1-13; 2 Cor. 6: 14-18; Mark 9: 43-48 and 2 John 10,11). It should be kept in mind that the Christian cannot simply tolerate anything!

### **Confidence**

The viewpoint that the different religions are equal (and therefore have to be tolerated) is problematic. The dogmatist pluralistic viewpoint about their equality simply sweeps the deeper problems under the carpet without really answering them. This becomes clear when one dares to ask a few simple critical questions like the following:

- According to what or who's criteria should the different religions be compared?
- Are we not, also in the case of religions, permitted to make judgements and characterise them as good or bad?
- How should it be determined whether something is genuine religion? Should we simply accept anything? Does this include the different cults which were, in the last few years (cf. what happened recently in Switzerland, the U.S. and Japan) responsible for religious mass murders and suicides?

The wheel theory of religion (see above) cannot in any way be accommodated to the basic teaching of the Bible. The Old Testament repeatedly warns against the possibility of false witnesses. Idolatry was prohibited. A very clear example is the confrontation between Elijah and the worshippers of Baal (1 Kings 18). Elijah refuses the wheel theory propagated by King Ahab. Ahab had been permitting an increasing pluralistic religious attitude which confused the people of Israel to such an extent that they worshipped Yahweh and Baal alternately. Elijah, however, refused to accept that the two religions could be complementary routes to the same "God" and insisted upon a choice: "If Yahweh is God, follow him; if Baal is, then follow him".

It is true that the New Testament church is not permitted to slaughter pagan priests like Elijah did. But this does not imply that the New Testament has a less exclusivist stance.

Take, as an example Paul at Athens (Acts 17). Is he more tolerant of pagan idolatry than Elijah was? No, his spirit is provoked and in his subsequent address on the Areopagus he makes no concessions to the pluralism of the Greek pantheon. He insists that there is only one God. This God may perhaps have been worshipped in ignorance by those not knowing biblical revelation. But now he is urging them to abandon their idols and turn in repentance towards Christ.

Paul makes no attempt to purge Athens from idolatry with the sword. But this is not done because he believed in our contemporary secular theories about tolerance. The task he sets for himself is very clear from a text like 2 Corinthians 10:4,5: "to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (the negative side) and "to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (the positive). Because he was absolutely convinced about the universal and exclusive truth of the Gospel, dialogue for Paul was aimed at persuasion. It was not a Socratic dialectical quest for a still to be discovered truth. Dialogue for him was a means to proclaim the Good News.

As Christians we cannot **prove** by way of logical argumentation that the Bible is God's Word. At the same time it cannot be **disproved**. It has to be **accepted** - or **rejected** - in faith. Belief definitely has a rational side or facet, but it also surpasses our rational faculties (more correctly: it **underlies** our rationalisations).

Of course our understanding of Scripture is never perfect but limited and sometimes even incorrect. We may therefore never absolutise our personal understanding of the Scriptures. We should, furthermore, always keep in mind the radical difference between, on the one hand, our subjective understanding of Scripture (our religion) and, on the other hand, his Word and God Himself. Religion – also the Christian religion – is always a fallible, human response to God and his Word which is infallible.

It should also be added that the Bible is not the only way in which God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself in a **non-lingual** way in nature, culture and history (his so-called general revelation), in a **lingual** way in Scripture and in a **personal** way in Christ. This explains why other religions, like African Traditional Religion (through God's revelation in nature and culture), knew about God long before the missionaries arrived with the Gospel. Because of sin, however, our understanding of God's creational revelation is incomplete

and distorted. We also need the Bible. (It is like spectacles assisting our affected eyesight or hearing aids which help us to hear his voice clearly again.) Non-Christians can therefore learn much from God's creational revelation - often more than Christians - but without the Bible and Christ their knowledge cannot be complete.

#### **14.4.4 Conclusion**

Tolerance in the biblical sense therefore, is not the same as relativistic indifference. It is always accompanied by confidence.

Authentic Christianity is in favour of religious freedom and welcomes dialogue with those who disagree with it. This one should do with self-control, setting an impeccable example in this regard. But we should be tolerant without being mealy-mouthed about our faith. We should be aware of the peril that under the subtle pressure of the spirit of our times, we present the Gospel as mere subjective experience rather than the revelation of God. Pre-scientific religious truths are different from scientific and other truths, but basic logic cannot simply be thrown overboard. We can speak falsely or truly about the Truth, Jesus Christ.

As Christians we are emphatically in favour of a free-market of ideas. But when tolerance is defended with relativistic, pluralistic arguments which deny the accessibility or even the very existence of ultimate truth, it becomes an enemy of the Gospel - and we must not be afraid to say so. If we capitulate to contemporary secularistic pluralism we will in the end also have to surrender to the intolerant tyranny that goes with it.

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## Chapter 15:

### CORRUPTION: A MANY-HEADED MONSTER

The prevalence of corruption poses a serious threat to our continent. This chapter intends to investigate, apart from the various forms of corruption and our reactions to them, the causes of and the possible cures for this evil in our society.

#### 15.1 Prevalence of corruption

Despite the fact that corruption is universally abhorred, it afflicts traditional and modern societies, rich and poor countries, developed and underdeveloped nations.

In **traditional** (pre-colonial) Africa it was a common feature to offer gifts to people in authority or in some respectable position in society (social, political or religious). Some of these "gifts" were bribes in anticipation of a reciprocal favour. **Post-colonial Africa** is undeniably one of the worst victims of (political) corruption. Despite great assets, Africa makes slow progress because of the slow bleeding of the festering wound of corruption. According to experts corruption is the greatest and most serious disease of governments in Africa.

Corruption is more wide-spread or pervasive in some countries than in others. In the Third World it consumes from 30%-70% of the national budget! It also produces more devastating effects in some nations than in others. In the rich North it will not as easily cause people to suffer because of a lack of basic needs (education, medical services, housing and food) like in the poor South.

#### 15.2 A definition of corruption

Because of the numerous forms of corruption – bribery is not the only form – it is difficult to provide a **general definition** which covers all of them. Each kind of corruption should be defined separately. For example: in the words of K. Gyekye (1997) **political corruption** may be defined as "The unsanctioned, illegal, unethical and unauthorised exploitation of one's political or official position to use public resources or goods for personal gain, that is for non-public ends". This form of corruption implies wrong-doing against the state and generally involves reciprocities between the (public) official and another beneficiary.

Corruption, however, is not only rampant in the case of state assets, but also in business. It can also move from the public to the private sphere and vice versa.

### 15.3 Many forms of corruption

There have been many unsatisfactory efforts to distinguish between different types of corruption, for instance: (1) **Small and big corruption:** small corruption is for instance bribery to escape a traffic fine, to buy a place on the plane, not to pay customs duty, receiving the pension of your mother who passed away long ago, etc. Big corruption can be ascribed to situations where millions or billions of rand are involved, like big arms deals, large building projects, etc. (2) **Active and passive corruption:** a person tempts an official to be corrupt (active) and the official is willing to be corrupted (passive).

- **Bribery**

Corruption is not confined to bribery but it includes the following: stealing public funds; false documents; disappearing of important documents; extortion; a second job – which you do in the office hours of your “first” job; using unlicensed video tapes, pirated computer software and many more.

Bribery can be defined as payment, which may be money, favours or gifts, to influence a decision. Bribery takes place, *inter alia*, to receive favours in turn; facilitate fast delivery of goods; gain an unfair advantage; avoid legal prosecution or to supply substandard products or services.

The following comparison further clarifies what bribery implies: **bribery:** the giver initiates the corruption; **extortion:** the receiver initiates corruption; **gifts:** a legal and healthy cultural habit for building personal relationships and expressing gratitude; **tipping:** an expected reward above normal wages for a job well performed.

Bribery can be regarded as wrong because it creates an unjust advantage, distorts justice, creates expectations and binds the receiver to the giver's agenda. Furthermore, it prevents normal authority structures, it maintains the perverted structure of extortion, and provides only a short-term solution for a personal need. Bribery also benefits the rich and disadvantages the vulnerable and poor and provides no motivation for a person to do what he should do anyway.

Some causes for bribery are the following: low wages – people cannot survive; limited resources and shortages; the lack of an open market; cultural reasons (gift-giving) and lastly the attitude of “everyone has to do it – to get something done” or “it is necessary for business”.

The only solution is: Never pay nor accept bribes, ever!

- **Political corruption**

The following are well-known examples of political corruption: graft, fraud, nepotism, kickbacks, favouritism, misappropriation of public funds or goods. Instances of political corruption may include the following situations:

- A head of state who stealthily and fraudently takes huge sums of money from the state and deposits them in foreign banks.
- A public official who receives a bribe from a prospective employee to ensure that he be given a job.
- An official who favours a less-qualified relative for a position, rejecting the candidate with better credentials.
- A policeman who abandons the charge against an arrested person after receiving a bribe.
- A customs official who illegally reduces customs duties.
- A clerk who deliberately miscalculates the tax of a rich business man in return for some kickbacks.
- A magistrate or judge who prevents the course of justice in favour of an individual who offers him a bribe.

From this list it is clear that (political) corruption can infect a whole society – from its lowest to its highest ranks.

- **Categorising corruption**

From the above examples it is also evident that because corruption has so many faces, it is extremely difficult to divide these examples into watertight categories. Apart from political and business (economic) corruption the following kinds of

corruption can be mentioned: emotional, lingual, social, aesthetic, juridical, moral and even religious corruption.

#### 15.4 Wrong reactions to corruption

The following incorrect reactions to corruption are very common today:

- **“Everyone does it”** (e.g. bribing a traffic officer). The assumptions in this case are that something is not wrong if everyone else does it. Or: Even if I stop doing it, it will not make any difference.
- **“This is a minor offence”** (e.g. cheating on income tax). The assumption in this instance is that a major offence is of such magnitude that a minor offence has to be redefined as a non-offence.
- **“The biggest crooks are in government”** (usually used to justify shady business deals). The underlying assumptions are the following: Because the people in authority are the foremost law-breakers, there is effectively no law and by definition no law-breaking. And: One might just as well keep the money (income tax) than to hand it over to thieves.
- **“It’s a stupid rule anyway”** (e.g. lying about your age to get a driver’s licence earlier than allowed). The assumption is: I have the right to decide which rules are sensible and which not – and to disregard the latter.
- **“I have no choice”** (e.g. in obtaining the necessary services). The assumption behind this reaction will be more or less the following: Under ideal circumstances I would obey this rule or law, but obedience to this law will cause unacceptable inconvenience and suffering. My need therefore justifies making an exception.
- **“I was treated unjustly”** (e.g. I was not paid a fair salary, therefore I may help myself).
- **“I did it for a higher purpose”** (e.g. if I did not steal, my children would have died of hunger). This is the well-known argument that the end justifies (any) means.

- **“He is a bad guy” – therefore my deed is not wrong.** By blaming others, portraying them as enemies or as bad (**ad hominem**-argument) you are projecting guilt away from yourself.
- **“I did not steal from a person, but from the (impersonal) state”.** Personal distance makes it easier to be corrupt. Like the father who reprimanded his son who stole a pen at school, because he (the father) could have “taken” ten pens from his workplace.

The above are only a few wrong reactions to corruption. What could the correct answer be? Is it correct, for instance, to argue that, because everyone does it, oneself may also be involved in corruption? What are the deeper reasons for this wrong argument? The false belief that the majority decides on what is right and wrong? Group pressure? Fear to blow the whistle? An easy way of evading personal responsibility?

### **15.5 The causes and consequences of corruption**

A few of the many possible causes are the following:

#### **The political systems of the state**

As possible examples the following can be listed:

- **The way a political system operates**

When a government is too soft on bigtime tax evaders, too cozily tolerant of kleptocrats, unable to enforce its own laws, or the successful candidate in an election has to reciprocate with appropriate “rewards” (jobs, contracts, etc.) to cronies, members of his/her own family or ethnic group the whole political system is corrupted.

- **Weak political leadership**

Another example of corruption is the inability to persecute wrongdoing and clap to jail those who happen to be close to the centre of power. Because leaders are dishonest themselves, they have compromised their own integrity and moral authority and cannot discipline others, but rather infect them with the virus of corruption. As leaders set the moral tone of society, a nation will not rise above the level of those who have authority over them.

- **A certain perception of the state**

Even in post-independence Africa the (Western concept of) state is still regarded as an alien institution – from which one should try to get as much as possible without getting into trouble.

### **Socio-cultural causes**

Both individualist and communalist societies are prone to corruption. At first glance we may expect that individualistic (Western) societies would be more vulnerable to corruption. Different authors, however, confirm that communitarian (African) societies are just as easily infected and in fact often riddled with even more frequent and scandalous levels of corruption. Communalism seems unable to make a distinction between private and public funds. Examples in traditional African culture are the following:

- A person has the onerous duty to care not only for himself, his wife and children, but for all his relatives and kinship relations (tribalism) which makes it impossible to survive financially.
- The responsibility to find jobs for extended family leads to nepotism.
- The traditional system of the giving of gifts, especially to elders, public officials and other “big men” results in bribery.

### **Economic reasons**

The argument is often heard that Africans are corrupt because Africa is poor. Africa is poor indeed. On average 45%-50% of sub-Saharan Africans live below the poverty line – a much higher proportion than in any region of the world, except South Asia. An estimated 40% of Africans live on less than 1 US dollar a day. Also the extent of poverty – that is how far incomes fall below the poverty line – is greater in sub-Saharan Africa than elsewhere in the world. But the presumption that the eradication of economic inequality (and the installation of equality) will help eradicate corruption has to be questioned.

Poverty definitely plays a role, but more wealth would not change the nature of the individual human heart – even of the poor. Besides it is not the victims of corruption who are the most corrupt because they do not have access to the centres of power.



Corruption also occurs in very wealthy countries and among the financially well-off top public officials of poor countries (the so-called "untouchables").

However, not only public officials have to be blamed, but also the corrupt behaviour of other members of society tempting them into corruption.

### **Legal causes**

This implies a lack of an adequate legal and institutional framework or controls that makes our laws unenforceable and the rendering of justice impossible, like inadequate laws; inadequate institutional checks; ineffective law enforcement agents and processes; inadequate legal sanctions against culprits and weak civil service regulations.

### **External causes may be the following:**

- Political intervention from the West in Africa (e.g. coups).
- Economic exploitation by the West (e.g. debt burdens).
- Africans imitating the ostentatious life-style of the West (e.g. expensive houses and cars – "the Mabenzi-club").

### **Decline of moral standards**

In the arsenal of techniques advocated for fighting corruption the ethical causes are often ignored or are mentioned only in passing – as if they are peripheral to the phenomenon. To my mind a more fundamental cause (than the socio-economic-political) is the lack of moral character of both officials and members of the public who seek favours. My first justification for this statement is that mere knowledge will not necessarily solve the problem. Corrupt people **know** they are doing wrong – that is why they are not doing it openly.

The second justification is that political systems may improve, economic situations may become better (e.g. increased salaries), legal institutions updated (e.g. strict law enforcement and severe punishment), but it will merely reduce corruption, its effects will only be limited. Corrupt officials will still take advantage of existing loopholes. People cannot be compelled to be honest. No law is fail-safe against human rot. Therefore the therapies usually prescribed by sociologists, politicians and economists are not enough. Moral corruption lies at the core of all other kinds of corruption. To

counteract it, we have to recover virtues like responsibility, integrity and honesty to replace graft and greed.

Two false – and dangerous – distinctions require our attention: the one between private and public morality and the other between religion and morality.

### **The separation between private and public morality**

Moral issues (not only about sex) involving government officials are considered non-issues, because the common line of thought is that the private moral proclivities of leaders have nothing to do with their public function. An example is the horrid public statement of the Filipino president a week after the former US president Bill Clinton had publicly confessed his inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky: "Clinton and I have sex scandals – he has the scandals and I just have sex". Private and public morality is, however, an artificial dichotomy put up conveniently by those who do not wish to be accountable to others for their personal behaviour. A morally upright person is moral – in the bedroom and in the boardroom. Moral principles are not jackets to put on or to take off depending on the weather (occasion).

### **The separation between religion and morality**

This phenomenon is as old as the history of Israel in the Old Testament. Israel had little trouble with the cultic aspects of God's law, like offering sacrifices or celebrating feasts. But they had difficulties with those aspects of the law that had to do with day-to-day life, like doing justice to one's neighbour and using honest scales in business. Similarly we today lack an ethical dimension in our religious behaviour. No matter which religion we confess, it is a split-level Christianity, Islam etc., a kind of schizophrenia. We still think – like old Israel – that religious rituals could substitute for simple obedience to the ethical demands of the law. This is something which already the Old Testament prophets railed against (Isaiah 1:11-17, Micah 6:8).

The consequences of corruption are far-reaching:

- Greatly gifted countries (in terms of natural and human resources) fail miserably and become derelict. As righteousness makes a nation, corruption can break a whole nation.
- The effects of corruption are more disastrous among poorer nations – ordinary people suffer.

- Corruption has a tendency to spread rapidly and to grow in intensity because of its strong lure.
- When it has infected a whole society (its moral fabric has collapsed), it is very, very difficult to fight. People who fight against it may not only pay with their jobs, but also with their lives.
- This monster, cancer or virus has many consequences (economic, political, social) and there is a close relation between them. A country economically ruined by corruption cannot survive politically or socially or vice versa.
- Corruption, we should realise, is not to the advantage of anybody.

### **15.6 Prevention and elimination of corruption**

I will limit myself to ethical/moral prevention only.

Different viewpoints about the field of ethics are occasionally stated, inter alia the following: ethics should study, for instance, practical life; humanity (its character, customs, behaviour, virtues, duties and pleasures); the principles/values/norms that govern human behaviour/choices to decide what is good or bad; relationships between people or more specific: only relationships of love between people. To my mind all these definitions of the field of ethics are too vague and too broad. It may result in an imperialistic ethics, the moralisation of the whole of life. Its field of study needs to be clearly demarcated or specified. (For more details, see chapter 9.)

Love is a fundamental/central commandment. We should love one another (positive) and should not do to others what we would not want them to do to us (negative). Love, however, acquires different forms in different relationships, like fidelity (marriage), care (family), justice (politics) and stewardship (economics).

#### **The ethical side of love relationships**

Ethical **values** can be expressed in words like truth, reliability, genuineness, integrity, loyalty, respect, honesty, scrupulousness, solidarity, faithfulness, steadfastness, trustworthiness, dependability, reliability, dedicatedness, etc. Ethical **relationships** are relationships in which these words are the key concepts. The ethical **norm** will therefore be that one should be true, loyal, honest, etc. in one's dealings with others. The **science of ethics** should study specific human relationships which either

comply to these norms (ethically good behaviour) or which do not comply, like false, disloyal, unreliable, untrustful, dishonest conduct (the ethically bad). Some human relationships, like friendship, marriage and family are **ethically qualified**. All other social relationships, are differently qualified (e.g. a business is economically qualified), but they all have an ethical/moral **aspect** or **facet**.

### **Business: definitions**

A business enterprise does not simply imply a workplace where efficient means of production are fused together in order to make a profit in the market. My attempt at a broader definition is that a business is an independent community of people (management and workers) that, in reciprocal co-operation and with the aid of available means at fair remuneration, provide meaningful labour as well as rendering goods and services to the community at reasonable prices. (See chapter 18 for more detail.)

A business reveals many **internal** and **external** human relationships: between management and employees; between employees mutually; between the business and its clients, rivals, shareholders, suppliers, consumers; between business and government; between business and other societal relationships, such as the marriages and families of employees; between business itself and its natural environment (raw materials, etc.) and between business and the international (global) markets. All these relationships reveal an ethical or moral facet.

### **Business ethics**

Business ethics is not merely concerned with skills, methods, efficiency and results. Daily businesses have to make choices – sometimes very difficult ones. This cannot be done without clear norms, principles or values. Not only economic, but also other norms like the ethical have to be applied. (A business is not ethically **qualified**, but has an ethical **facet**.) We should **simultaneously** realise **all** these norms, because norms cannot be separated from one another, but form a unity. The application of ethical norms is therefore not simply an afterthought (when business can afford it) or a little salve for one's conscience. Compliance with the juridical norm of justice may sometimes be even more important in business than profit.

Stewardship (the norm for economics) is about **service** in the first place. It should play a decisive role in inter alia the following spheres: our vision and mission

statements, our code of conduct, our labour relations, profit policy, marketing strategies, advertising and promotion activities and our so-called social responsibility.

### **Where do we get these ethical norms from?**

One of the main reasons for the "moral vacuum" (President Mbeki) that presently threatens South Africa is that we have lost the firm ground of the religious and worldview foundations of our values. We need a "moral revolution", that is, a radical and fundamental change. Two examples of such a moral revolution include the following:

- **Muhammed in the Quran**

In pre-Islamic Arabia virtues like generosity and hospitality existed, but they were narrowly conceived – they did not extend beyond the confines of the own tribe or kinship. Muhammed extended them to **all** people. He eliminated retaliation and replaced it with forgiveness and compassion.

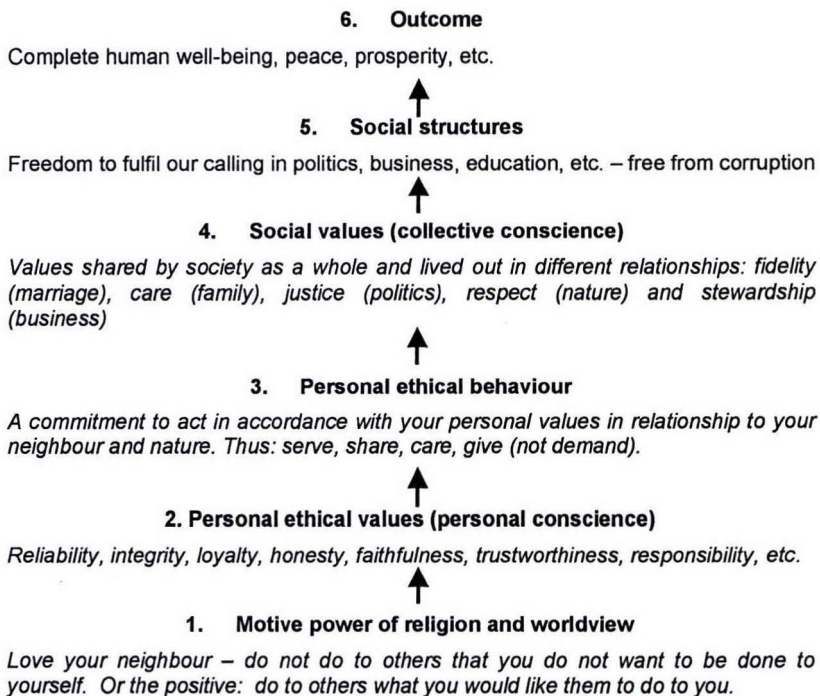
- **Christ in the Bible**

He also replaced the old Judaic morality of vengence, retribution ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth") and other expressions of hatred towards one's enemies with **universal** love, mercy and forgiveness. A concept like loving your friends and family and hating your enemy (like other tribes) was replaced by something substantially new: loving your enemies and even praying for your persecutors. The **old** morality of doing good to someone in expectation of a good return, was replaced by a **new** morality of doing good to **everybody for its own sake**, that is without expecting something in return.

### **Why it is so difficult to apply these norms**

**Knowledge** of the correct norms does not automatically lead to **acting** accordingly. Being **rational** is different from being **moral**. Therefore morality (in the sense of moral behaviour) cannot be legislated. (Especially if those who have to enforce the moral laws are corrupt themselves.) What is needed is the will, a commitment motivated by our conscience. But sometimes people really have problems to **apply** the moral norms in concrete situations and should therefore be assisted in doing so.

The following diagram offers a summary: the positive power of religion and worldview can bring about human well-being, peace and prosperity. (Read the diagram from the bottom upwards)



### 15.7 A few practical hints

Only a few practical steps to prevent or eradicate corruption will be mentioned. One of them, viz. whistle blowing will then be discussed in more detail.

To challenge the many-headed monster of corruption we need a comprehensive approach:

- **Individual integrity:** e.g. refuse to give or accept bribes. However, because the monster is so big, individual action will not be sufficient.
- **Get leaders on board:** utilize proofs of integrity among people in power.

- **Start with small islands of integrity** which will gradually (like yeast) influence society.
- **Careful selection, proper training and the fair remuneration of civil servants** and business leaders can counteract corruption among officials.
- **A free press** – to investigate and report corruption.
- **National anti-corruption campaigns** involving civil society as a whole (schools, universities, the media, etc.) is a must. Anonymous reporting (whistle blowing) at easily accessible offices and immediate prosecution of culprits are important. Big business has to sign agreements promising not to be involved in corruption. An important contact address for advice is: Transparency S.A., P.O. Box 32065, Braamfontein 2017 (telephone: 011-4034331).
- **Regional and international action:** For instance SADEC countries and Transparency International; the coalition against corruption in international business transactions. Head office: Heylstrasse 33, Berlin D-10825, Germany.

### **Whistle blowing**

Let us, in conclusion, have a look at this method of counteracting corruption in more detail. Whistle blowing implies the deliberate leaking of information about injustice, illegal conduct, unethical practices (e.g. preferential treatment, sexual favours, theft, unsafe products or other kinds of corruption) that have occurred or is going to happen.

Forms of whistle blowing are the following: (1) Anonymous; (2) openly; (3) internal: from **inside** the organisation to the outside (media, police, etc.). This method is preferred above (4) external whistle blowing: initiated from **outside** the organisation (e.g. the media).

Wrong and correct motifs for whistle blowing should be clearly distinguished. Wrong whistle blowing is in essence egoistic, like revenge, done for advantage or financial gain, ambition for power or need of acceptance – all causing harm. Correct motives have a positive aim, are directed at the well-being of an organisation, its co-workers and the public. Correct motives are also directed at the prevention of (further) corruption.

Stumbling blocks (in the way of internal whistle blowing) may be the following: When confidentiality is overemphasized, for instance absolute loyalty towards one's organisation – which results in the cover-up of corruption; group pressure not to blow the whistle; a need to be accepted by management, to be popular among one's own group; rationalisation – transgression of one's own values explained away, and ideological blindness: the twisting of values, no distinction between right and wrong, no feeling of guilt.

Important conditions to be considered are the following:

- Whistle blowing should be the last resort – after trying other ways.
- Correct motives (e.g. not negative but positive intentions) should be the reason to blow the whistle.
- Correct procedures should be followed.
- If possible, there should be certainty about facts – it should not merely be based on suspicions.
- One should be prepared to lose (e.g. be willing to make sacrifices, like being unpopular) in order to gain something of greater importance for others.
- If your own value system differs radically from that of the organisation, it may be better to resign than to try whistle blowing.
- Internal whistle blowing should be preferred to external whistle blowing.

Sometimes it can be very difficult to decide which course should be taken when blowing the whistle, because it may have both bad and beneficial results.

Negative effects may be the following: The whistle blower is portrayed as disloyal, a traitor, a villain. She/he is rejected by colleagues and friends. Retaliation by his/her employer may occur, like demotion, questioning of his motives, attacking of his character (emotional instability and unreliability, trouble maker, making issues about nothing, looking for publicity, etc.), harrassment of family and friends, discredited with loss of his good name and reputation. The organisation's image and business may also be ruined.



Positive effects can, however, be the improvement of individuals' conduct in a company and the organisation as a whole. It is therefore of vital importance to determine as far as possible beforehand whether the reaction will be positive or negative.

Possible reactions to whistle blowing include the following: Negative reactions like denial, shifting the blame, excuses, justification and discrediting the whistle blower. Positive reactions can be acknowledgement, introspection, self-evaluation and correcting injustice. In the latter case remedial action will follow, like the protection of the whistle blower; protection of the witnesses; correcting the wrongs; the creation of a better ethical climate and the taking of measures to prevent the future need for whistle blowing.

As prevention is always better than the treatment of an illness, the following measures can be taken:

- Organisational and structural changes that make external whistle blowing unnecessary.
- Facilitating internal whistle blowing by e.g. a confidential questionnaire, hot lines, an open-door policy, an ombudsman, an ethical committee and guaranteed protection of whistle blowers.
- Strict disciplinary measures against corruption.
- Strengthening personal ethical consciences.
- The creation of a collective ethical conscience, an ethical climate, and an ethical code – facets that are difficult but very important.
- Assisting people to bridge the gap between ethical values and daily practice in the workplace.

If we have the will and the commitment, corruption – the many-headed monster devouring Africa – can be challenged and overcome!

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## Chapter 16:

### STEWARDSHIP OF OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

In the traditional African worldview respect towards nature was the norm. (See chapter 4 where traditional Africa's view of nature was discussed as one of the six components of its worldview.) This, however, has changed as already indicated in a previous section of this book (chapter 2). Apart from all its other problems, Africa is also faced with an environmental crisis. This is not only the result of natural disasters. A number of factors have contributed to the situation, but the environmental crisis is largely man-made.

Care for our environment is, however, of vital importance from both a principial and practical point of view: (1) It is God's creation of which we are the appointed stewards and (2) without a healthy natural environment economic and social well-being will not be possible on our continent.

This chapter is written from a principial point of view – the basis of our practice.

With the word "natural" or "nature" I have in mind that aspect of God's creation which the interference of humans has not yet totally changed. Most of us today live in a more or less "cultivated" nature. Even our nature reserves - with their fences, roads and waterpoints - are no longer completely natural. I will leave detailed distinctions and even permit myself the freedom sometimes to use the words "nature" and "creation" as synonyms.

What I am going to emphasise is that apart from our task of **ruling over** and using nature, we also have to **protect, appreciate** and **enjoy** it. Above all we have to **praise** God for what He has given us in nature. In a nutshell: **the meaning of our existence is that we are members of a great cosmic choir singing the glory of its Creator.**

We will concentrate on the following four main points: (1) the usual attitude of Christians towards nature; (2) the deeper, worldviewish reasons for such attitudes; (3) what the Bible teaches about creation and our relationship to it and (4) in conclusion a few practical hints to promote greater appreciation for and joy in God's creation.

#### 16.1 Current Christian attitudes towards nature

Depending on their theological orientation it is possible to distinguish the following attitudes amongst Christians.

### 16.1.1 Some Christians are only interested in the origin of creation

They reject any suggestion that the earth as we know it today has evolved through millions of years. Evolution (not only evolutionism) to them is totally unacceptable.

However, they are not very much concerned about the **present** state of nature. It seems as if they are not worried about a rare plant, bird or mammal appearing on the red list of endangered species. They are not involved in action against industrial development, mining activities, a new residential area or a golf course which endangers the habitat of species. We could compare them with parents who were very happy when their child was born, but who neglected the child afterwards!

### 16.1.2 Other Christians overemphasise biblical prophecies about the final destination of creation

According to them the present creation will be annihilated in fire before the consummation. (This is based on a particular exegesis of certain verses from the Bible). They argue that, if God, in the end-times, is going to destroy this present creation, why should we take all the trouble to protect it?

Neither of these two viewpoints are interested in the condition of the **present** creation. The first overemphasises its **origin** and the second its final **destination**. Both viewpoints do not (1) **appreciate** nature, (2) experience **joy** in it or (3) take the necessary trouble to **protect** it. A close correlation exists between these three: If one does not appreciate God's creation, one will not enjoy it and also not protect it. The reverse is also true: When creation is not cared for and protected against exploitation, at the end there will be nothing left to appreciate and to enjoy.

The Word of God teaches something quite different.: To appreciate, enjoy, protect and use God's creation is an **inherent** part of our calling as Christians. Furthermore the Bible has much more to say about our **present** task in creation than about either its **origin** or **end**. These two viewpoints amongst Christians are therefore not based on the Word of God but on their own biased interpretation of Scripture.

Nowadays we are also strongly influenced by Western culture and worldview. In spite of the fact of growing concern for nature (for instance, Green Peace), the majority still views nature as an object that has to be exploited for the benefit of human needs and desires. Modern technology also estranges us from nature. We are living more and more in an

artificial world. Like plastic flowers taking the place of fresh, real flowers, imitations of nature are replacing real nature.

## 16.2 The worldview reasons for the current attitudes

We will distinguish five different reasons:

- Incorrect philosophic-ontological starting points
- One-sided emphasis on salvation
- Anthropocentrism
- A spiritualised idea about salvation
- A wrong idea about the human being's place as ruler over nature.

### 16.2.1 Incorrect philosophic-ontological starting points

The way we view the relationship between God and his creation also determines our own attitudes towards creation. Without a biblically-based philosophical ontology we will be unable to view these relationships correctly.

In Western culture we encounter the following two viewpoints: **pantheism** and **deism**.

- **Pantheism** denies any real difference between the divine and the creational. Creation is divine. Many ecologically-sensitive people today adhere to this viewpoint. Even Christians are attracted by this perspective. They don't realise that pantheism can be regarded as a "friendly" form of atheism, because **if everything** is divine (God), **nothing** is really divine, God disappears!

As in the case of animism (the worldview of some traditional Africans who believe that everything is animated, full of spirits), pantheism will revere creation - instead of worshipping its Creator.

- **Deism**. While pantheism does not **distinguish** between Creator and creation, but identify them, deism **separates** them from each other. If a deist happens to be a Christian, she/he may still accept that God created everything at the beginning. At present, however, He is not concerned about it. Creation can do without Him. He will only "interfere" in a real crisis. As indicated in chapter 3, this is also a common viewpoint amongst Africans.

- In spite of the fact that in **theory** (for instance in their confessions and theology) Christians would vehemently deny that they can be described as deists, in **practice** many of them think and act like deists. The reason is that according to them God are not really concerned about natural things (matter, plants and animals) but only about the spiritual life of humans.

What then is the correct viewpoint?

- **The biblical viewpoint**

Scripture clearly teaches that God is **close** to His creation, but at the same time **different** from creation; there is a **relationship**, but also **difference**. How should this be understood?

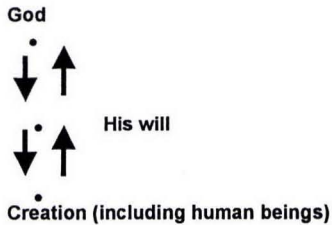
I do not think we will ever be able to give a rational explanation to this mystery. The spatial aspect is a facet of created reality - it is not applicable to God. Therefore He can be present **in** His creation, but should at the same time not be **identified** with creation.

Without solving the mystery, we could at least try to bring more clarity by using the correct terminology. **Religiously** speaking, God is present in creation, He is involved in its governance daily. **Ontologically** speaking, however, He is totally different from His creation. Both perspectives should be maintained against the errors of pantheism and deism. The Bible is very clear about a **close relationship** between Creator and creation.

This relationship is so intimate that it surpasses human comprehension. Usually we try to imagine how God can be simultaneously different from and present in creation. Perhaps we should rather think in the opposite direction: Creation exists in God, from moment to moment it is sustained by His Spirit (cf. Psalm 104:28-30).

It is obvious that deism denies this intimate relationship. The same, however, also applies to pantheism: When God and this world are identified, one can no longer speak about a relationship which can only exist between two different entities.

The biblical viewpoint may be visualised in the following diagram:



Some of the most important deductions from this diagramme are the following: (1) **God exists** in relation to His creation (the downwards arrows); (2) **human beings** and the rest of creation exist in relationship to God (the arrows pointing upward); (3) we have to serve God **in His creation**; (4) this has to be done **according to His will**.

We get to know God's will through his threefold revelation: in creation (without words), in Scripture (in a lingual form) and in Christ (incarnated as a human being). In God's **one** revelation we distinguish between creational revelation, word revelation and incarnated revelation. Keeping in mind that in Scripture (human language) and Christ (as human being) God also revealed Himself through creation, we realize how very important creation really is. God does not speak to us in a supernatural way, but in and through His creation!

Up to now we have discussed the philosophic-ontological reasons for the little attention nature receives amongst Christians. Four more reasons for this sad state of affairs should be mentioned:

### 16.2.2 One-sided emphasis on salvation

History for the Christian has the following phases: creation, fall, redemption and finally consummation or recreation. Different types of Christianity and different theologies tend to emphasise one of these phases above the three other. Some forms of Calvinism overemphasise the fall. More charismatic groups may overemphasise redemption or consummation. The interesting fact is a general tendency amongst Christians to put such a strong emphasis on redemption that creation is more or less neglected. However, according to the biblical message, fall and redemption are rather intermezzo's between creation and recreation or consummation. A one-sided emphasis on redemption, neglecting creation, is wrong, because it is **creation** which has to be redeemed. God wants to liberate and renew **this world**. He loved it so much that He sent His only Son to do so!



Christians spend so much time praising God for the **cross** of Christ, that they forget to glorify Him for **creation** which is redeemed through Christ's sacrificial suffering on Golgota. Redemption is not for **the sake** of redemption, but a **means** by which we are enabled to love God again and to serve Him **in creation**.

### 16.2.3 Anthropocentric views about creation, fall and redemption

- The story of **creation** is read in an anthropocentric or man-centered way. Everything created prior to Adam and Eve was only a preparation for the human being for whose service matter, plants and animals were created.
- Similarly the **fall** is also interpreted. Sin is regarded as something which is done only against God and fellow human beings. Sin against God (transgression of the first four commandments of the decalogue) is regarded as **religious** in nature, while sin against other human beings (the last six commandments) is viewed as **moral** in nature. Very seldom we hear about **ecological** sin against nature (matter, plants and animals) which also implies disobedience against God. We try very hard to live correctly religiously and morally, but we forget our ecological responsibility - an inherent part of our religious service of God!

The reason is perhaps that not enough attention is paid to the fact that the fall (the result of man's disobedience) also affected the rest of creation. We too easily forget Romans 8 verse 19-22 about the groaning creation, about the ecological consequences of the fall.

- Also redemption acquires an anthropocentric nature: redemption is about the salvation of human beings. Christ died for us and not for the entire creation. He is not a **cosmic** Saviour, but merely a Saviour of human beings!

### 16.2.4 A spiritualised viewpoint about salvation

A tendency amongst many Christians is to narrow down the biblical soteriology (doctrine about salvation) to include only man's soul, which is regarded as the most important "part" of his being. The "material part", the body, is not of much importance. In life hereafter, we will be more or less like disembodied angels living in heaven. The Bible, however, clearly teaches that our final abode will be a renewed **earth**. As will become clear later on in this chapter, the biblical eschatology is much more down to earth, much "greener" than the kind of otherworldly existence many Christians are hoping for.

### 16.2.5 A wrong idea about the human being's place as ruler of creation

The last incorrect viewpoint is about God's command to us to **subdue** the earth and **rule** over it (Gen. 1:28 and Gen. 9:1-3). As stated already, this command is understood by many Christians to imply that the rest of creation only exists to be used and exploited for the purpose, benefit and need of human beings. "To rule" implies to dominate. Matter, plants and animals have to serve us. However, as will soon be indicated, exactly the opposite should be the case: Man's authority over the rest of creation does not imply domination but service!

Our conclusion is that many - Christians included - do not really enjoy, respect, and protect nature or praise its Creator. The reason for this kind of attitude cannot be based upon Scripture. It originates from an incorrect worldview and theological starting points which colour the way in which they read the Bible. We have mentioned five such viewpoints. We are ready now to listen to what the Bible really has to say about this very important issue.

### 16.3 Perspectives from the Word of God

The main points in this section will be the following:

- God's relationship to creation;
- Creation's relationship to God;
- The human being's place in this relationship.

The aim of this section is to encourage Christians to give creation its rightful place again in their thinking and acting. In 1985 A.M. Wolters wrote a book on the Reformational worldview with the significant title **Creation regained**. More recently (1998) the great importance of creation in a Reformational worldview was again underlined by P. Marshall (together with Lela Gilbert) in his book: **Heaven is not our home; living in the now of God's creation**.

This Reformational emphasis on creation is in agreement with some of the oldest confessions of Christianity. The Confession of Nicea (the Apostolic Confession of Faith) starts with: "I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, the **Creator** of heaven and earth".

It has also to be noted that the theme of creation in the Bible is not confined to Genesis 1 and 2. It is dealt with in many other places in Scripture, like John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16-17, Hebrews 1:2, 10 and Revelation 4:11. Scripture is concluded with Revelation 21 and

22, which clearly reminds us of creation at the beginning as described in the first book of the Bible.

### 16.3.1 God's relationship to creation

We have already stated that, in spite of the fact that God, in an ontological sense, is totally different from creation (there is nothing divine in creation and nothing creational in God), in a religious sense He is close to his creation, intimately involved in everything of this world. This becomes clear from the following:

- **God Himself is the Creator of the universe** (Gen. 1:1). He had great pleasure in creating it.
- **What He created was good.** This is repeatedly stated in Genesis 1 and the chapter is concluded with: "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good." This "good" should not be merely understood as religiously or morally good, but in a variety of senses, like ecologically, esthetically, economically etc.
- **He blessed what He had created.** God's blessing is not confined to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28), but even before they were created He blessed the birds, fish and animals (Gen. 1:22). The highest privilege - divine blessing - belongs to the whole of creation! Therefore, when Christ (at his ascension) lifted up His hands in blessing (Luke 24:50,51), He did not only bless His disciples, but the whole groaning creation for which He had died.
- **He enjoyed His creation.** When it is stated (Gen. 2:2,3) that God rested from His work, it does not imply that from then on He did nothing. He continued to sustain His creation and govern it through his laws. Neither does it imply that He had to rest, because he was tired. It rather means that He could sit back and enjoy what He had created. He does not only love creation very much, but also has great pleasure in it. Psalm 104:31 says: "May the Lord rejoice in his works."

Of course after the fall God was grieved that He had made man (Gen. 6:6-7), but already in Genesis 3:15 (cf. also 9:11) He proclaims a message of hope. He will not grieve forever, but keep loving the works of his hands.

- **God values every creature.** While we as humans may think that minerals, plants and animals only have value to the measure that they may be useful to us, it is clear from Scripture that, apart from what value they may have for us, to God they are inherently

valuable. He appreciates them simply for what they are.

• **Examples of God's concern about non-human creatures are the following:**

- The **land** had to rest every seventh year to prevent its total depletion (Ex.23:10 and Lev. 25:1-7).
- **Plants** have to be cared for. For example, in Deuteronomy 20:19 God forbids that trees should be destroyed. The trees of the field are not people that they should be besieged!
- Also **birds** have to be treated with respect as is clear from Deuteronomy 22:16.
- The same applies to the **animals**. It is noteworthy that God did not only care for the animals in Noah's ark, but that He also included them in the covenant with Noah and his people (Gen. 9:8-11). On the Sabbath animals should also enjoy rest (Ex.20:10). According to Jonah 4:11 God was not only concerned about the 120 000 people of Nineveh, but also about its cattle!

In summary: lifeless ground, mute plants and animals without reason have more value to God than they usually have to us. They not only have value because they may be of some use to us as humans. We don't have the right to decide according to our values that some of God's creatures are of less value than others. Two examples as illustration are the following. Trees do not merely exist to provide oxygen, firewood, furniture and paper to us. Chickens should not be degraded by confining them their whole life in small batteries and simply regarding them as white meat with a few inconvenient feathers!

In the Reformational philosophy (of D.H.Th. Vollenhoven, H. Dooyeweerd and their successors) a very valuable distinction is made between different modalities or aspects of life. It helps us to distinguish between minerals which are physically qualified, plants which are biotically qualified, animals which are sensitively qualified and humans which are much richer in nature. In spite of that, something physical, like paper, may have different (object) functions in the human sphere. For instance, an aesthetical function (as a painting) or even a religious function (as a hymnbook). Ordinary physical things can therefore be very rich in meaning!

In conclusion it should be stated that God does not prohibit the use of land, plants, birds and animals, but their **misuse** or **abuse** is forbidden.

Thus far we have explained God's relationship towards his creation. We now have to look at the reverse relationship:

### **16.3.2 Creation's relationship to God**

God does not only show joy, love and concern for his creatures. Creation has to respond to God. The deepest meaning of creation lies in its response to its Creator.

One of my teachers in philosophy was Prof. H.G. Stoker. Like other Reformational philosophers he emphasised that in everything we do, we stand in a religious relationship to God. Unlike his co-workers in Christian philosophy, however, he also stressed the fact that the rest of creation (matter, plants and animals) also exists in a relationship to God which he called not a religious but a **theal** (from **theos** = God) relationship.

#### **The song of creation**

According to our narrow anthropocentric perspective only adults gathered in church can sing to God's glory, because they can speak. The Bible surprises us when it reveals that not only children, but even infants (who cannot speak) praise God. Even more surprising is that also "mute" nature praises Him continuously. We could call this the "song" or "choir" of creation. In spite of the fact that it is not done in human language or music, creation has a "voice" and "speech" (Ps. 19:1-3).

In different places in Scripture we are therefore told that the desert is glad, the wilderness rejoices and shouts for joy, (Isa. 35:1,2), the mountains sing and the trees clap their hands (Isa. 55:12). Usually such expressions in the Bible are regarded as poetic, anthropomorphic metaphors that should not be understood in a literal sense. According to some new Bible commentaries this is not necessarily the case.

Psalm 148 is a very good example, in which the poet acts, so to say, as the leader of a cosmic choir, calling the entire creation to sing to the glory of God. The "praise the Lord" at the beginning of the psalm is the English translation of the Hebrew words **Hallelu Yah**. It is not an emotional call or an indicative but an imperative, a command to join the cosmic choir to the honour of God. It not only includes heaven and its inhabitants and the heavenly bodies, but also the earth and its inhabitants (verse 7-10). Only in the last place (vers 11,12) humans are encouraged to join this universal choir!

Why should we regard this call addressed to angels and humans in its literal meaning, while interpreting the previous part as figurative or poetic? If we as humans cannot hear

the choir without (human) words of minerals, plants and animals, it does not imply that it is not real - or that God cannot hear it and does not appreciate it. Also from other parts of the Bible (like Job 39 and 40) it is very clear that wild animals, like hippo's, which were then of more or less no use to humans, caused joy to their Creator.

### **The cosmic song should not be silenced**

The cosmic choir will be incomplete if only one element is used up, one stream is dried up, one plant or animal has become extinct. (This situation could be compared with a symphonic orchestra missing one instrument or a choir without one soloist.) Even if only their number decreases, the praise of the Creator will diminish. We as humans, therefore, cannot simply be spectators of the abuse, pollution, poisoning and destruction of nature.

### **The song of the groaning creation**

Because of our human influence creation is not only shouting with joy, but also groaning in pain according to Romans 8:19-22. It sometimes sings a song of sorrow. Or do we only have eyes for our own human pain and suffering?

Paul most appropriately uses the image of creation groaning as in the pains of childbirth. A woman giving birth experiences simultaneously pain and joy. Because God is faithful to his promise of a new creation, creation can wait in eager expectation. The Greek verb **apokaradokia** literally means "to stretch one's neck" in order to see better. Creation is, so to speak, standing on its toes, awaiting the time when the song of the groaning creation will be turned into a song of pure joy again. This hope for a better future is present in every singing bird, babbling stream, spring blossom, the birth of a new day or living creature, the sparkle of a far-away star ... Do we as humans support this hopeful expectation or do we rather deepen the pain and suffering of a groaning creation?

### **Expectation of an earthly future**

That which the creatures are looking forward to is not something vague, spiritual or otherworldly. Scripture reveals quite a lot about the renewed creation - even when we have to keep in mind that it will be much richer and more wonderful than even the biblical prophecies could put into words. We will provide a few flashes from the book of Isaiah.

- **Isaiah 2:4** prophesies about peace between nations. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks!

- **Isaiah 35** uses the dry, barren desert as a symbol of the earth under God's curse. This chapter, however, prophesies about water that will gush forth and streams in the desert. There will be no animals of prey. The eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy.
- **Isaiah 65:17-25** starts with the announcement that the Lord will create a new earth where the entire creation will shout with joy. Amongst the animals there will be peace (verse 25). There will also be peace between humans. The sounds of weeping and crying will be heard no more. An infant will not live for only a few days. People will not toil in vain, but live in their own houses and eat the fruit from their own vineyards.

Prophecies like these have different horizons, like different mountain ranges. They are not only prophecies about the restoration of Israel and of the coming of Christ, but also about the new earth at the end of world history. In this respect it is interesting to note the similarities between Isaiah and Revelation 21 and 22 (cf. Isaiah 54:11,12 and 60:11,19,20). There is, however, not only a close relationship between Revelation and Isaiah, but also between Revelation and Genesis 1 and 2. In Revelation we again hear about the river with the water of life, the tree of life, etc.

It is clear that the biblical perspective on the future - different from what many Christians believe - is a very concrete and earthly perspective. We were created for this earth and will be recreated for the same renewed earth. Our destination is not a shadowy, angelic existence in heaven. Also viewed from this eschatological perspective the importance of the present creation is once again affirmed.

Our first main point was God's relation to his creation. The second was creation's relationship to God. Now we move to the third section.

### **16.3.3 The place of human beings in the relationship between God and creation**

There are many books available today on the vastness of the universe. Nobody knows exactly how big it really is, but if we compare the size of the earth with the calculations of scientists about how immensely large the universe is, this earth on which we live is reduced to an insignificant speck. Human beings - often so proud and great in their own eyes - are even more insignificant, merely dots of dust!

In spite of the fact that he did not have the scientific knowledge available today, David

already wondered about the significance of humans: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps. 8:3-4).

### **God's representatives**

To this question David provides a surprising answer. Referring back to Genesis, his answer is that man and woman were created in the image of God. (Ps.8:5) to rule over his entire creation (Ps. 8:6-8). In different places in Scripture it is stated that man is created in God's image without explaining what exactly this expression means.

It cannot have the meaning that humans look (completely or even partly) like God. On preceding pages we have already emphasised the radical difference between God and his creatures, including human beings. The best way to understand "image of God" is that men and women are God's **representatives** on earth. "Representative" does not mean **master** but **steward**; not **ruler** but **deputy**; not God's **substitute** but his **manager** or **trustee**.

In order to be a good steward, man has to know creation well. Genesis 2:19 tells us that God brought all the living creatures to Adam so that he could name and know them.

To be the image of God therefore does not imply to be like God (divine), but to care for creation in the same way as God does. God does not rule over creation like a despot, but like a father.

### **Christ as our model**

From the life of Christ, **the** image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15 and Hebr. 1:3) - according to Whose image we also have to be renewed - we can clearly see what kind of authority and power should be exercised over creation. According to Philippians 2:5-8 Christ made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. To **rule** like Christ did, implies to **serve!** The same message is very clearly stated in Matthew 20:25-28: "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve ..."

Christ not only teaches the message of servant leadership. He also practised it himself. According to John 13:1-17 he took upon himself the task of a slave and washed the dirty feet of his disciples. What He did should be an example for us to follow (verse 14-17) because "a servant is not greater than his master".



If God in Christ serves his creation, even more so we as humans. To rule over God's creation, is to serve. This is exactly the opposite of the anthropocentric viewpoint that creation has to serve us!

### **The meaning of "to work" creation and "to take care" of it**

According to Genesis 2:15 God put man in the Garden of Eden **to work** it and **take care** of it. **To work** is the same Hebrew word which is elsewhere in the Bible translated as **to serve**. **To care** is the translation of a Hebrew verb which is elsewhere in the Old Testament translated as **to protect** or **to guard**, for instance in Numbers 6:24 (**to keep** in English translation) or Psalm 121 (**to keep** and **to watch over** in English translation).

We may therefore conclude that the **rule** of Genesis 1:26 is qualified in Genesis 2:15 as **work** and **care** or **serve** and **protect**. It indicates how we should rule over creation. As God's **representatives** or stewards we do not have less responsibility than we would have being **owners**, but greater responsibility. Perhaps our problem is that we do not fully realise the magnitude of our responsibility.

We should not immediately narrow down this responsibility to something spiritual or ecclesiastical. God does not command Adam and Eve to organise a worship service or to build a church. Quite correctly this very first task given to mankind is called God's **cultural** mandate. **Culture** should be understood in a comprehensive sense - including cultic life. It may be called our religious calling which includes our entire life. This cultural task is therefore not to be regarded as something secular compared to the preaching of the Gospel.

An important reason for the little attention Christians pay to God's creation, may be the fact that they are no longer aware of this all-encompassing cultural mandate. They are only aware of Christ's missionary command in Matthew 28:19, 20 to which they limit or narrow down the whole Gospel. In fact, the "great commission" of Christ is simply a repetition of God's original command in Genesis. This is evident from the fact that Christ charges His disciples to teach the nations to obey **everything** He has commanded them. Christ taught them what the Old Testament, including Genesis 1 and 2, taught!

### **En route to a new paradise and a new song sung by the entire creation**

It is interesting to note that the Bible itself, as we often imagine, does not call the Garden of Eden **paradise**. The word **paradise** is only used three times in the Bible to indicate a

**future glory.** The reason why the Garden of Eden is not called **paradise**, is perhaps because of the presence of evil (Satan) in this first "paradise". The final outcome of its presence was that our first parents fell into sin. Instead of being proud to be the image of God (**imago Dei**), they wanted to be like God (**sicut Deus**) - gods themselves!

Instead of a song of praise with the rest of creation to God's glory, they used the trees to hide themselves from God (Gen. 3:8)! God had to ask: "Where are you?" Of course God knew where they were. His question had a much deeper meaning: "What has happened to your calling, the meaning of your life to serve and praise Me in and together with the entire creation?" Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden and cherubim prevented them from entering again.

When Christ was born to redeem Adam and Eve and their descendants, again humans are not singing. (We only hear about Mary's song **before** His birth). A multitude of angels sing (Luke 2:13,14) - not in heaven but on earth. In the first place they sing to the glory of God, but secondly also of peace to **men here on earth.**

When Christ died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). This curtain hung in front of the most holy part of the temple. It was embroidered with cherubim (see Ex. 26:31). The most holy place in the temple was a reminder of paradise. And the cherubim on the curtain reminded of the cherubim who guarded the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had been driven out by God (Gen. 3:24). When Christ died and the curtain was removed, it was a sign that through his death the erstwhile closed paradise was opened again!

Real paradise, however, will only be realised on the new earth (see Revelation 21, 22). This is the reason why songs of praise have such an important place in this last book of the Bible. A **new** song is sung. The choir includes angels, humans, animals, plants and matter - the entire creation!

In Revelation 4:7-11 we read about the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (representatives of humanity) singing day and night to God's glory **because He created all things.** Revelation 5:9-13 tells us not only about the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, but also of millions of angels and **every** creature in heaven and on earth singing a new song unto the Lord. Again in Revelation 7:9-12 we hear about angels and a great multitude of human beings from every nation, tribe and language crying out in a loud voice the honour and glory of God. Finally Revelation 14:1-4 prophesies about a crowd of

144 000 (indicating its completeness) on Mount Zion, singing a new song before the throne of God.

It is clear that the cosmic choir singing God's glory will reach its climax on the new earth. It is no longer - as we are used to in this dispensation - a subdued song, often interrupted and mixed with groanings.

How magnificent are the perspectives from God's Word! But how can we put them into practice here and now? How can we really become part of the cosmic choir singing God's glory? That will be the focus of the last part of this chapter.

#### **16.4 A few practical hints**

The following are merely examples, intended as stimulants to assist you in producing more original ideas. Let me first mention three of the most obvious things to do, followed by the role which the church and Christians in general can play.

- Usually when our ecological responsibility is discussed, practical steps like the following will come to our mind: recycling of paper (to protect our trees) and plastic (to save oil) as well as the thrifty use of other renewable and non-renewable materials and forms of energy. Furthermore the protection of endangered plants and animals is mentioned. Because concerted efforts are necessary, a Christian should join wildlife organizations and ecological movements.
- We can, however, start with our own families. Family holidays or hiking trips in an unspoilt natural environment, which is still possible on our continent will not be the privilege of people all over the world. We should anyhow try to get as close as possible to nature with as little as possible artificial stuff which may draw our attention away from God's creation. Our aim should be to learn more about nature, to appreciate it, enjoy it and praise God for its existence and its marvels.
- I want to emphasise that we should **know** more about the wonderful creatures around us as it is impossible to enjoy and appreciate something one does not know well. How can we become the "conductors" of the cosmic choir and translate its "voices" without language (Ps. 19) into words praising its Creator if we do not know the individual members of the choir? In this regard small children can be an example to adults (Ps. 8:2). In amazement they will watch a tiny insect or flower, asking many questions to know more about it.

- Let us now think for a moment about how the efforts of churches could be directed towards the physical-biological aspects of creation.
- In the first place, we gather in semi-dark church buildings, behind thick walls and stained glass windows, separating us from nature. Why not large, transparent windows, allowing God's sunlight to enter and enabling us to see at least something of creation? What about a worship service early Sunday morning at sunrise? Careful study of the tabernacle of Israel (Ex.26) as well as Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:29-35) reveals that these "churches" were intended to remind the people not about a heavenly abode somewhere above the earth, but about the Garden of Eden. The interior of Solomon's temple was decorated with palm trees and open flowers!
- In the second place, Sunday is not only a day to commemorate salvation in Christ and his resurrection from death. Originally the Sabbath was introduced as a day of rest, because the Lord himself rested on the seventh day after He created everything (Ex. 20:11). As we have indicated previously, God's "rest" implies that He enjoyed his creation. Therefore, on Sunday we should not only celebrate our Salvation in Christ, but also God's creative act at the beginning. Furthermore we should look ahead in anticipation of a renewed creation at the end of times.
- In the third place, creation and recreation should be accorded a much more important place in our liturgies. Usually we commemorate and celebrate the main events from the life of Christ, like his birth (on Christmas), death and resurrection (Easter) and return to heaven (Ascension Day). Of course it is not wrong, but our liturgy may be enriched by some of the feasts mentioned in the Old Testament (cf. Lev. 23) which were closely connected with the seasons of the year, especially the time of harvesting. Why should we not celebrate God's faithfulness during the different seasons of the year?
- In the last place - but very important - also in our sermons we definitely need much more emphasis on the fact that we as Christians should both enjoy and care for - serve - creation.

To summarise: Our church communities should become more friendly towards and open to creation. We should become much "greener"!

A last word is to Christian scholars. The aim of Christian scholarship should be to investigate and to understand God's creation in order to know both how to develop and to protect it. But also - don't forget - how to appreciate and enjoy it. Because academic study

has to do with every aspect of nature, in real Christian scholarship amazement about the infinite richness of God's creation should flourish. Christian scholars and Christian tertiary institutions should therefore be the real leaders of the cosmic choir **soli Deo gloria!**

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## **Chapter 17:**

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT**

Development can be regarded as one of the greatest obsessions of the last fifty years of the previous century. For Africa it became a magic word. But we may at the same time call development one of the greatest failures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Seldom has so much effort produced so little. Most of Africa and the rest of the South remain underdeveloped. Poverty and deprivation are ubiquitous.

The African continent has become more or less irrelevant in the world economy. It is not even any longer considered a cheap source of raw materials. Two thirds of the less developed countries of the world are in Africa. Investment in education has dropped by 25% in the last ten years and health care services by no less than 50%! About 10 000 children die daily because of malnutrition. Africa's foreign debt has increased faster than any other region on the "Third World": from 6 billion US dollars in 1970 to 300 billion US dollars in 1993. In South Africa – one of the "rich" countries on the continent – more than 40% of the people live below the poverty line.

We, therefore have reason enough to take a critical look at the idea of development as such. How should it be changed to bear more fruit in the future?

#### **17.1 The origin of the idea of development**

The concept "development" is of Western origin - most non-Western languages do not even have such a word. The word is first mentioned in 1944 in one of the sub-committees, which drew up a constitution for the United Nations. The concept acquired official status in the inaugural address of President Harry Truman on 20 January 1949. Part of it reads as follows: "We (the US) must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available to the improvement and growth of the underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism - exploitation for foreign profit - has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concept of democratic fair dealing". In the late fifties and early sixties, when decolonisation reached its climax, the word "development" became part of the popular and academic vocabulary.

The following brief remarks are necessary:

- While up to 19 January 1949 a great variety of countries existed, the very next day all of them were divided into only two types: "developed" and "underdeveloped".
- From that day onwards there was only one solution for the "underdeveloped" world: it had to be "developed" according to the Western model. Initially it was done according to the Marshall Plan, which was effectively applied in Western Europe after World War II. It was not realised that Western Europe only needed capital, because it already had the knowledge, expertise and skills. The rest of the world lacked more than just capital (in the form of development aid).
- In spite of the difference between Western capitalism and Eastern Europe's socialism, their ideas about development were basically the same: the repetition of the European success story of large scale industrialisation. The whole idea was built on Western cultural values. These were *inter alia* man's belief that he could control and improve his natural environment, the idea of progress, economic growth and man's ability to take care of his own salvation. Development, therefore, was not something purely economic or neutral. Those who opted for development, had to accept "superior" Western culture as an inherent part of such a programme.
- Furthermore, "development" may mean many different things to different people. "Underdeveloped", "developing" and "overdeveloped" are relative concepts. One should ask **in what respect** a people or country is developed or underdeveloped. It may, for example, be economically highly developed, but at the same time poorly developed in terms of human relationships.
- In the light of this many authors today emphasise the fact that the West did not develop the rest of the world, but rather retarded its development - the underdeveloped state of the non-Western world today is not the **beginning**, but the **end result!**
- When we discuss the motives for the West to develop the rest of the world, it will become clear that they cannot be separated from Western imperialism. Development provided a reason for the West to continue involvement in the rest of the world (economically, politically and military) - even after decolonisation. However, because "development" sounded like an open and more promising concept, it was accepted by the non-Western world.



- Two reasons explain why the concept of development was socially and culturally more disastrous in Africa than in the far East: (1) Colonialism was applied more harshly and effectively (see chapter 1); it had a much deeper impact on the African continent than in the East. (2) The East, like Japan, never regarded Western civilisation as morally superior to theirs. They only desired to master Western science and technique in order to rectify their comparative backwardness in these specific fields. Since Japan escaped colonial subjugation, it was able to transform its own social order from within, to meet the changing circumstances found in the 19th and 20th centuries. The result was not a replica of modern Western society with a Japanese flavour, but a modernised Japanese society, shaped by Japanese history and tradition.

I do hope that the preceding flashes dealing with the Western idea of development serve the purpose I have in mind: to encourage a more critical attitude towards the idea of development and greater sensitivity to its consequences. A look at the real motives behind the concept will strengthen a discerning approach.

## **17.2 Motives behind the Western developmental mania**

We should not altogether deny that different humanitarian motives played a role in the development of the underdeveloped world. But we should also keep in mind that altruism very seldom has a place in international affairs, dominated by selfish political and economic interests. Usually so-called "justifying beliefs" validate the real motives, for instance that African countries needed freedom and democratic government.

I mention only a few of the most important motives:

- The belief in the so-called superiority of Western civilisation and the supposed inferiority of Africa, regarded as uncivilised, backward, childish and even barbarian.
- A guilty conscience because of centuries of slave trade and nearly a century of severe colonialism, especially in Africa.
- After decolonisation the existing world order, controlled by the West, was threatened. Development (aid) was chosen as a means for carrying out a strategy to preserve that order.
- While the USA portrayed itself as the champion of liberty and decolonisation, it in actual fact also intended to eliminate the European colonisers in order to obtain the valuable raw materials and markets of the "Third World" for its own benefit.

- During the Cold War between the USSR and the USA, both superpowers tried to win the poorer, southern countries for their respective ideologies. This they did by providing development aid.
- As will become clearer in the course of this chapter, all these motives combined are still not sufficient to explain the élan with which the West, not only outside but also in Western countries, has pursued development as a sacred duty. We can only fully understand this zeal when we realise that development acquired a quasi or completely religious character. **It has become a secular form of salvation!**

### 17.3 Different developmental models

This is not the place to discuss the different developmental paradigms of the past fifty years. It has been done in numerous publications. It started in the fifties with economic growth. In the nineties it was realised that limitless growth (especially in the West) is not possible **ad infinitum**. "Sustainable" development, therefore, became the latest fad. In between 1950 and the end of the century many other aspects were emphasised, like basic needs, job creation, poverty relief, etcetera.

Development fads change with a rapidity equal to - if not surpassing - the changes in women's fashions. Development thinking is a series of improvisations and borrowings, zigzagging through time. It is not quite the fixed edifice that both adherents and opponents tend to claim. "Development" changes along with cultural tides and currents.

This perhaps also explains why some carefully planned development projects failed, while others that should have failed, are success stories. Our understanding of how and why development sometimes succeeds and sometimes does not, is often more anecdotal than comprehensive. We are still far from being able to determine **beforehand** the eventual success of any given project.

In spite of a recurring emphasis that development should have a more "humane face", in practice still boils down to the provision of infrastructure (roads, buildings, electricity), institutions (hospitals, clinics etc.), products for consumption, capital, job opportunities, etcetera. In other words: improvement of economic circumstances. The one-sided belief that economic development is the key to full human development is still strong.

What is the correct relationship between the two?

It is a fact that human development can also result in economic development. Is the obverse also true, viz. that economic growth implies human development? Because human life is holistic, economic development is necessary for development in other areas of life, like providing food, health and education. Without economic development people suffer. This we clearly see in Africa today.

Several authors (like Max Neef and Bob Goudzwaard) have, however, indicated that economic growth contributes towards broader cultural development at a **diminishing rate**. When economic growth is overemphasised, it becomes cancerous, “devouring” itself and its broader beneficial effects. Healthy economic development has to stop growing (like a tree) in order to bear fruit in all the other aspects of life. If economic life is subjected to clear norms, it will know when to stop. We should therefore never identify human **welfare** (economic progress) with human well-**being** (life in its fullness).

#### **17.4 Development as cultural interaction**

The older theories in this regard could be described as theories about “development **and** culture”. In the oldest ones, non-Western cultures were regarded as a stumbling block in the path of development. In more recent ones, traditional, indigenous cultures are viewed as something positive, which may aid Western development projects. Nevertheless, the basic viewpoint was not changed. Culture and development are still viewed as **separate** entities. In the first theory they have to be separated and in the second you have to stir them together to get effective development.

Followers of more recent theories have realised that culture is not a facet of development, but rather that development is a facet of culture. I call this the theory of “development **as** culture”. This realisation that development is a **part** of culture enables us to be much more critical about different development paradigms. It assists us *inter alia* to view development as an encounter and interaction between the competing interests of different cultures; as the cultural intervention of one culture in another; as cultural transfer, change and even the destruction of the “receiving” culture. It finally brings home the truth that “development” is a relative concept. It has diverse meanings in different cultures.

Examples of how various Western developmental models have different consequences for the receiving culture, are the following:

- The **imperialistic model** (e.g. colonialism) **forces** change. It results in cultural homogeneity, damage or even the extermination of an indigenous culture.

- In the **modernisation model** (e.g. megaprojects), change is **planned**. The results are individualism and materialism.
- In the **charity model** (e.g. relief work and humanitarian aid) change is **given**. Indigenous cultural survival strategies are affected and people become dependent on outside help.

The following are but a few possible reactions to the intervention of an alien culture:

- If a people have the freedom to do so, they can resist the interference by, for instance, trying to strengthen or revive their own traditional culture.
- They can accept domination of the foreign culture; start imitating it (the "copy-cat mentality") and finally become dependent on it in a variety of ways, including mentally (colonialisation of the mind).
- They may accommodate the foreign invader-culture, simultaneously trying to maintain their own. This results in a kind of schizophrenic existence or the phenomenon of a "divided soul".
- Finally, they may interpret the foreign culture in terms of their own.

In real life it is not always possible to distinguish these four reactions clearly from each other.

When we apply the above to the issue of development in Africa, we have the following options:

- Many Africans believe that development could only be achieved through the revival of traditional African culture. They don't see anything wrong with their own culture. Some Westerners also regard Africa as an exotic continent and Africans as "innocent children of nature", or "noble savages". They are therefore of the opinion that Africa should not be developed.
- At the opposite extreme we have Westerners who regard Africa as uncivilised and Africans as an inferior, subhuman race. Consequently they see no future for the continent if it does not accept superior Western culture - lock, stock and barrel - and is developed accordingly.
- The third option (a schizophrenic culture) does not have the ability to release the necessary generating power for development.

- The solution for real, healthy development, in my opinion, lies in the direction of a **careful** accommodation (acculturation) of **beneficial** aspects of Western culture (without becoming schizophrenic). It implies an interpretation (inculturation) of Western culture in terms of African culture. In this way the own, African culture will be enriched and new developmental potentials opened.

For two reasons this is not an easy option. In the first place every culture forms a unity. It is therefore not so easy – sometimes perhaps impossible – simply to select the beneficial aspects, leaving out what is not good. In the second place we have already indicated that any aspect of a culture can have both good and bad effects, being a “mixed blessing”. For instance using a telephone can save much time, but it can also cause many interruptions which wastes valuable time!

Especially when something is transferred from one culture to another, damage can be caused. The introduction of running water from taps can, for instance, affect the ways rural women communicated when they had to fetch water from the fountain, well or river. Perishable foodstuffs could not be stored for very long in traditional societies, it was shared with their neighbours. When fridges became available to store the surplus, it was no longer necessary and mutual generosity declined!

Many researchers today emphasise the need for a clear, cultural identity as a **conditio sine qua non** for development. (One could also reverse the statement, saying that real development implies cultural identity.) The reason is that cultural identity provides the necessary self-respect, self-esteem, confidence, values as well as a purpose in life. Lack of cultural identity has the opposite effect: poor self-respect and self-esteem, little confidence and few aspirations. It results in a dependent, inert, static “culture of silence”.

### **17.5 The result of development according to the Western worldview**

The general conclusion today – after 50 years of development efforts all over the world – is that the expected results did not materialise. Failure is not only a fact in the non-Western world, but even in the West itself. Because the capitalist economy believed in the fairness of the “free” market, it could not alleviate poverty. Because it emphasised production, it could not value human labour. Because it viewed nature as a commodity to be exploited, it contributed towards ecological damage.

Goudzwaard and De Lange (1994) list the following six paradoxes we have to face today:

(1) **the scarcity paradox:** unprecedented abundance, but at the same time greater

scarcity than ever; (2) **the health paradox**: improved medical care, but the simultaneous increase of all kinds of diseases; (3) **the time paradox**: more and more time-saving devices, but less time to get through schedules; (4) **the poverty paradox**: increasing wealth alongside dire poverty; (5) **the labour paradox**: a greater need for jobs, but at the same time growing unemployment, and (6) **the care paradox**: increased possibilities and facilities of care for man and his environment, but concurrently also decrease and deterioration.

The West today experiences a growing feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. In the non-Western world people suffer from a loss of identity and self-respect. In both cases Western development (based on the Western worldview) may have improved human **welfare**, but not human **well-being** or human **dignity**.

One of the basic reasons for this failure is the one-sided emphasis on economic-technological development, as well as the belief that "more is better". We have already indicated that economic growth may up to a certain point improve quality in other aspects of life. If growth continues beyond this point or threshold, the quality of life does not increase any longer, but decreases. It is madness then, to believe that "more of the same" will solve the problem!

It has also become evident that Western technology (a part of Western culture) cannot simply be "transferred" without damage to another culture. If technology is separated from its original cultural milieu, it plays havoc, following the laws of its own making. When transplanted to another culture, it threatens the receiving culture, finally replacing it. (An example is the interference of England in the traditional Hindu cotton-industry of India.) Technology should not simply be "transferred".

More and more experts have reached the conclusion that, instead of the "giantism" of contemporary Western technology, the economically underdeveloped world needs small-scale, affordable (cheaper), self-help, intermediate technology. The latter does not necessarily destroy the existing indigenous techniques, but rather link up with and improve them.

Today instances abound of irreparable damage done in the name of "development". The many and expensive mega-development projects (huge irrigation dams and hydro-electric power stations) erected by the West all over the non-Western world serve as examples.

Most of them were not only economic failures, but proved to have disastrous human and environmental consequences.

What we need today is not speed, quantity or size, but a normative evaluation of development. The pain, suffering and damage caused to humans and the environment are red warning lights, s.o.s. calls, asking us to reconsider the values of the Western worldview.

In my research I discovered a growing number of publications from different religious orientations that query the Western worldview and values underlying Western development programmes. They include Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and adherents of Traditional African Religion. (Unfortunately space does not permit me to indicate how the Western worldview clashes with all these non-Western worldviews.)

Some of them bluntly reject the Western idea of development as an alien religious-cultural invasion. Others moderately bemoan the fact that the non-Western world tends to borrow the wrong aspects of Western culture. In the case of capitalism, they borrowed the profit motive, but not the entrepreneurial spirit; the West's consumption patterns, but not its techniques of production; its acquisitive appetite, but not its creative spirit. They like to parade in display, but do not advocate discipline; they use Western gadgets, but don't have workshops to maintain or repair them; they wear a wristwatch, but not necessarily to watch it in order to be punctual!

### **17.6 Cultural reasons for Africa's underdevelopment**

There are many reasons for the underdevelopment of the African continent. Some of them – usually not acknowledged by the West – came from outside the continent, like Western political imperialism (colonialism) in the past or present-day Western economic imperialism (globalisation). Others are internal factors, like political instability, corruption, etcetera. One should neither ignore nor deny these various factors, but the aim of this chapter is to focus on the cultural factor: What role does it play in underdevelopment?

"Underdevelopment" is here to be understood in the sense of **economic** underdevelopment. As already indicated, Africa may in other respects even be more highly developed than the West.

The term "culture" should also be specified: **which aspects** of African culture will retard and **which** will enhance economic development? I cannot agree with the following three viewpoints often encountered in literature on this issue:

- **Everything** in traditional African culture is a stumbling block towards development and should therefore be eliminated (a common Western viewpoint).
- **Nothing** can be wrong with traditional African culture. Economic development simply has to be fitted into the existing culture (a viewpoint amongst many Africans).
- A third group, in favour of a **relativistic viewpoint**, rejects both Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. This viewpoint may contribute towards the appreciation of different cultures. However, relativism almost inevitably tends to encourage traditionalism and conservatism. It contributes to an uncritical endorsement of the **status quo** and a high degree of complacency. If all cultures and worldviews are deemed true and correct, there is no need to change, but rather to defend the old, the existing culture!

There is, however, a fourth approach: Some Africans acknowledge that specific aspects of their traditional culture may be stumbling blocks in the way of economic development. After an extensive search of the scarce literature on this issue, I did find a few Africans who are critical about their own culture (cf. Van der Walt, 1999:126-136). From all the sources consulted, I compiled the following list of African worldview traits that may retard economic development. (For details see previous chapters, especially chapter 2-6.)

- **Religious orientation**

Belief in the spirit-world causes fear and a fatalistic attitude of "we can do nothing to improve our fate". Ancestor "worship" wastes valuable time (spent on different kinds of festivities) and money (to pacify the ancestors). It destroys personal responsibility, because blame for misfortune is always shifted onto someone else.

- **Normative approach**

The **law of kinship** results in nepotism, tribalism (only concerned with the advancement of one's own group), jealousy and even ethnic wars.



- **View of man and community**

African communalism suppresses individual initiative. It does not allow the development of personal responsibility, a necessary prerequisite for any work ethic. This is aggravated by a paternalistic and hierarchical view of authority.

Wealth should be shared, not only with the extended family, but also with the entire society. It should further be displayed to the community (exhibitionism). Social prestige becomes more important than individual achievement.

Children are important (as a security “policy” for old age and to remember one when one passes away). Therefore little family planning is done. Not enough finances are available to provide for the education of all children.

Women in Africa are still second-rate citizens, suppressed by men and therefore unable to develop to their full potential.

Consensus decision-making is time-consuming, delaying urgent matters.

- **Concept of time**

Because Africans allow too much time for social interaction, time is not used economically. They spend too much “free” time on their own enjoyment. Due to a limited future perspective, little planning is done. Thus management, organisation and maintenance suffer. Africans’ nostalgia for the past does not provide a stimulus for development.

From these examples mentioned by Africans themselves, it is clear that a head-on clash between African and Western worldviews is imminent. This cultural collision is one of the main reasons for Africa’s economic underdevelopment. Africa may be highly developed in human relationships. If, however, it wants to develop economically – no longer an option in our global society – it will have to change some aspects of its traditional culture.

### **17.7 Illustrated by way of a real project**

We have already referred to the failure of many large development projects, viz. the building of huge dams to provide water and electricity to the Third World. Here we use the same example, providing some reasons for its failure from the perspective of traditional African culture.

- The West was only concerned with the best location, the necessary capital and know-how. The local inhabitants, however, resisted because the site chosen was holy ground, the burial place of their ancestors.
- The tribe could not even understand why an irrigation dam was necessary in the first place. Periods of drought have to be accepted. If rain is needed, the ancestors should be approached to provide!
- The local tribe could not reach the necessary consensus amongst themselves.
- The local chief was a progressive man, but his council objected to the building of the dam. He finally succumbed to strong group pressure, because he did not want to disturb the harmony in the group.
- The traditional view of nature also influenced the project. The tribe could not accept the fact that huge building machinery, like bulldozers, would change the whole environment.
- Finally their idea of time and history played a decisive role. For centuries women carried drinking water from the fountains and irrigated their small plots from the river. It would be arrogance to change these sacred old ways!

In summary we may say that fear prevented the building of the dam: fear of the ancestors, fear of the community, fear of nature and the fear to change tradition.

### **17.8 Hope for the future**

When one travels through different African countries today, one discovers how dependent the continent has already become on Western technology. Examples are electricity, drinking and irrigation water, transport and communication. Most of these development projects were, however, interrupted halfway: they are either not working well or not at all.

Under these circumstances one starts wondering whether Africa would not have been better off without all these Western technological "improvements". This, however, is wishful thinking. Africa has no choice but to develop economically, merely to survive. Perhaps the economic development of Africa will take a century. It may never reach the level of Western economic development – something not even sustainable in the West. The way out and ahead for Africa is to look for its own, alternative kind of development.

In the first place it is clear that Africa would not be able to escape the influence of the all-pervasive, powerful Western culture. Of all the options already mentioned, the best to my

mind would be a **selective** and **careful** accommodation and reinterpretation of the **beneficial** aspects of the Western culture. This implies a very critical attitude towards Western culture and its manifestation in Western development ideas.

In the second place, more or less the same attitude would have to be followed vis-à-vis their own African cultures if the people on this continent wish to develop economically. In essence it implies **building** development on the strengths of traditional African culture, while simultaneously **reforming** its weak points. (A good example will be the strong as well as weak points of African communalism.)

To be critical about one's own cultural heritage is very difficult. To do so, one needs the necessary "distance", a perspective from "outside". Western culture can provide this kind of aid. But because Western culture – like any other culture – is also one-sided, the help it provides to Africans to evaluate their own culture is limited. It can be nothing more than a stimulus, not the final solution.

I believe that a Christian, biblically based worldview is capable of providing the very necessary "third perspective", giving guidance to the process of mutual critique and enrichment between Western and African worldviews. Jesus Christ came to the world in order that we may have life in abundance (John 10:10). A Reformational worldview can liberate us from the one-sidedness and distortions of both Western and African worldviews, enabling us to experience life in its fullness – in our task of development too.

### **17.9 Towards a biblical-Reformational perspective on development**

This concluding section unites the lines drawn in previous sections; it provides the final result of the previous pages. It starts with a preliminary new definition of development from a Christian perspective, which is then explained in more detail.

I do hope that this section does not leave the impression that, simply because it is a Christian approach, it can offer instant solutions. Or that only Christians really know the answers; that I am excluding the value of different other perspectives. In spite of the fact that it was not mentioned in the text, I have learned a lot from literature on development from other religious perspectives. This also convinced me that, in spite of the fact that my own definition is of a Christian origin, many people from the East (Muslims, Hindus etc.) as well as Africa will tend to agree with its main thrust instead of the contemporary secular, Western viewpoint. I regard my definition as a first effort, a preliminary suggestion to be discussed and not as a definite blueprint.

My definition reads as follows: **Development is the (1) balanced unfolding of (2) all the abilities of the human being and (3) the potential of material things, plants and animals (4) according to God's purpose and (5) his will, to enable the human being (6) within his/her own culture, (7) to fulfil his/her calling (8) as a responsible steward of creation (9) in a free society (10) to the honour and glory of God.**

Because the quality of development is dependent on all six components of a Reformational worldview (see chapter 4), I have included them in this definition.

### **17.9.1 Balanced unfolding**

Development may be compared (but cannot be identified) with the **physical** development of a crystal or the **biological** development of a plant, animal or human being. The reason why we should, however, also distinguish it from these kinds of development, is the awesome **historical** power God granted man when He gave him the cultural mandate (see previous chapter). Such power implies not only physical-biological development. Man has also the task to develop the emotional (psychical), logical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical and religious aspects of reality. In every one of these areas, man (through his formative cultural-historical task) has to unfold and open God's creation to reveal its richness and diversity.

All these aspects should, however, be developed harmoniously. Not only one aspect, like the economic, should be developed, but all of them simultaneously – even when the emphasis is on economic development. Otherwise the result is a one-sided, distorted development. An overemphasis in one area eventually becomes detrimental to the others. Development does not mean **more** (quantity) of **one facet**, but **better** (quality) for the **whole**. This also implies that development in any one aspect cannot be continued limitlessly. Creation itself is limited.

Harmonious, balanced development has another implication. Development does not only mean, "to take out of", but also "to put back into" creation. Development should not exploit and impoverish creation, but rather enrich it. A simple example is fertilisation of the soil. A more sophisticated example is the cultivation of new plant varieties resistant to pests, droughts, etc.

Against the Western idea of restless progress, we should also emphasise that development does not only entail "evovement" but also "involvement"; not only a "turning

**out**" (of many products), but also a "turning **in**" - in other words to keep, maintain, protect, save and preserve.

This first section of our definition illustrated the importance of the Christian view of **integrated reality**. The next section will focus on the importance of a correct view of **man**.

### 17.9.2 Of all the abilities of the human being

Man is a multi-dimensional being and not only one or two-dimensional. He is not merely an individual or communal being nor only a combination of them. As indicated above, human existence reveals a pistical (faith), ethical/moral, juridical, aesthetic, economic, lingual, logical, emotional, biological and physical aspect, ability or capacity – all of which have to be developed in a balanced way. Man is not to be **defined** by only one aspect.

To be involved in development from, for example, the perspective of man as "nothing but an economic being" will result in dangerous, one-sided development. Such a kind of development not only implies a reductionistic **view** of man, but will finally **treat** him as an economic "commodity" that has to produce and consume.

What should be emphasised is **multidimensional** development. Because development has to do with many-faceted human beings, it will by nature reveal different facets. We should always be aware of this fact. Simple **literacy** programmes for illiterate people will, for example, also have a **social** impact on their lives. And the **social** upliftment of small, subsistence farmers could result in the emergence of **economic** entrepreneurs.

### 17.9.3 The potential of material things, plants and animals

This section of the definition of development includes the next element of our worldview, namely our view of **nature**. We continue to discover the vast potential and immense richness of the material, plant and animal worlds and their value for human life.

A Christian perspective on nature and its development can, however, not be divorced from our view of God. Nowadays the danger exists to separate nature from God, to forget that it belongs to Him (Ps. 24:1). Every creature, however, has an intrinsic value to Him. They are not only valuable because they are useful to humanity. We are therefore not allowed to treat them simply as "objects" or "raw material". They should not in the first place serve us. We, as stewards of God, should serve them, respecting and protecting them. **Using** nature is not prohibited, but **misusing** it is a sin against its Owner and nature itself. We do not only sin against God and other human beings. Apart from **religious sins** (against

God) and **moral sins** (against humanity), our **ecological sins** should also be acknowledged! (See chapter 16 for more detail.)

#### **17.9.4 According to God's purpose**

With this section of my definition I include the **time component** of our biblical worldview. As in the case of the other elements of a worldview, this one too, cannot be separated from our notion of God: our goal for development should be determined by His design for or aim with creation.

As indicated already (see chapter 4), this world was created, fell into sin, was redeemed and is moving towards its final consummation on a new earth. Then God's kingdom will be visible in its full glory: (1) He will be acknowledged as the only King (2) of the entire new creation, (3) where we will be able to enjoy fully the blessings of His kingdom.

This new creation will not be **another** creation, but a **renewed** creation (see different sections of Isaiah and Revelation). Because God is not rejecting the present, but will be renewing it in future, the positive results of our cultural task will be welcomed on the new earth (Rev. 21:24,26).

Christian development projects should keep this eschatological perspective in mind. The future will be so different in all respects (because there will be no evil), that the Bible mostly describes it by way of negations (no more tears, sickness, death, etc). This final goal should, nevertheless, be like a guiding light, steering our development efforts in the correct direction.

#### **17.9.5 According to his will**

With this section of my definition I am referring to the very important **normative component** of a Christian Reformational worldview (see chapter 4). What was said there, will not be repeated here. I only want to re-emphasise that of all six worldviewish elements this one (the normative facet) is the key element, the **conditio sine qua non** for a reformation of present day developmental ideas.

It clearly indicates that we will have to think anew about the dominant ideas about development, not merely adapting or modifying them. We will again have to start asking some basic questions: **Why** is development necessary in the first place? For **whom** is it intended? What **kind** of development is planned? With what **goal** in mind? What will the **results** be? **Who** will benefit? And above all: According to **what** norms?

### **17.9.6 To enable the human being within his/her own culture**

God gave us a cultural mandate. He even looks forward to the purified results of this task on the new earth. He does not expect us to serve Him isolated from our own culture. We should do it **through** and **within** our own culture because we cannot do otherwise. The fact that God's Word associates itself with different cultures (relative continuity), implies that He simultaneously liberates and transforms them (radical discontinuity).

What should be emphasised, is that every community has the right to develop according to its own cultural criteria, provided that people are not uncritical about their own culture. There is no reason why there should only be one ideal of development, e.g. a Western, African or Japanese.

### **17.9.7 To fulfil his/her calling**

With his cultural mandate God calls all human beings to fulfil a task. Development, as part of our cultural task, is also a divine calling. As indicated repeatedly, we cannot divorce any aspect of development from our relationship to God. We may, therefore, not call it a "secular" duty, **next to** or **separated from** our "religious" duties of praying, reading the Bible and attending church on Sundays. Trying to disengage it from our religious life will not make it less religious – we have already indicated the religious nature of secular, Western development ideas.

God not only calls ministers and priests or other church office-bearers. **All of us are called to a variety of offices.** In answering to these callings, we fulfil our task of developing different aspects of life: the social, political, economic, etcetera. Because of the institutional element of this divine calling, we have a calling (both as officers and members) in different societal relationships like marriage, family, school, church, state, business and many more institutions and organisations.

### **17.9.8 As a responsible steward**

This aspect of development cannot be separated from our relationship with God either. His cultural mandate does not imply that man is the owner, proprietor or ruler of creation: He is only God's deputy, manager, trustee or servant. The word "steward" summarises all of them. (See again chapter 16.)

To be a steward does not indicate less responsibility than an owner. God placed a huge responsibility on our shoulders when, at the beginning, He created our ancestors, Eve

and Adam, as stewards. Stewards have a double responsibility: towards the Owner of creation as well as towards creation itself. And as far as creation is concerned, we have the difficult task of both using and protecting it. As stewards we have to use it for our real **needs**, but protect it against our own sinful, selfish **desires**.

In a nutshell, stewardship signifies knowledge of our **place** in creation and fulfilment of our **task** in a responsible way. This also applies to every kind of development.

#### **17.9.9 In a free society**

This section of my definition brings into focus the next element of our worldview: the **communal or societal**. We have already explained that we have a calling to serve God in different offices in a great variety of societal relationships. In each one of them we encounter officers and members. The officers need authority and power to fulfil their task. Authority and power as such are not wrong, but their misuse is. When misused, it robs the members of specific societal relationships of the necessary freedom to fulfil their calling of developing themselves and the rest of creation.

To prohibit this and to enhance freedom, the officers will have to know what real authority (the **right** to govern) and **power** (the **means** to do so) entails.

Real authority from a biblical perspective does not mean **domination for own benefit**, but **service to others for their benefit**, empowering them to be able to fulfil their diverse divine callings. Real authority, therefore, requires (1) **insight** into God's will for the specific societal relationship; (2) a willingness to **obey** this norm; (3) the protection and promotion of the **interests** of those subjected to one's authority and (4) combating **evil** as it is manifested in the specific societal relationship. (See chapter 10 for the details.)

Development cannot simply be planned and executed in an authoritarian way from the top down. Leadership has to empower people at grass roots, from where real development has to germinate.

#### **17.9.10 To the honour and glory of God**

This last section of our definition is not a pious attachment or a concluding Christian "icing on the cake". The six elements of a Christian worldview may be distinguishable, but are inseparable. In the explanation of the previous parts of my definition, it was already clear that not one of them could be detached from our idea of God.



We should live **coram Deo**, before the face or in the presence of God. Life – our entire life – is religion. Our **raison d'être** is to be concerned with the kingdom of God and its requirements or mandates (Matt. 6:33). All these well-known expressions are also applicable to our developmental task.

God did not only give us the task of living in his presence in everything we do, but demanded that He Himself should also be the final Goal of everything we do. **The highest norm according to which we should measure our development projects is to ask the question: Is it done to the honour and glory of God?** If it is merely done for the benefit of the individual (the West) or the community (Africa), it cannot qualify as genuine development according to biblical standards.

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## **Chapter 18:**

### **TOWARDS A NORMATIVE ECONOMY**

The economic sector plays a very important role in our modern world and because of globalisation 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. Lastly, we will have a look at globalisation and its consequences for Africa.

Readers are be reminded of the great difference and even clash between the traditional African economic systems and values and the contemporary neo-liberal free market economy dominating the world. Because traditional economics will not be discussed in this chapter, the reader is referred to a good summary by Gyekye (1996:109-124).

#### **18.1 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 free market, capitalist 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 believes 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 provide norms for economic life nor does he proclaim any judgement 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) acquires a central place in man's life. Jeremy Bentham, for example, reasons that because everyone is propelled by maximum utility, therefore everybody ought to act in such a way. 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 underlain it. According to utilitarian ethics the economist is also not supposed to try to have a corrective effect on the economic processes either. Such 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 supposed 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 or well-being 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.

Let me conclude this section of the chapter with how an African Christian (not a socialist) experiences our contemporary capitalist, so-called free market economy: "I loathe Capitalism because it gives far too great play to our inherent selfishness. We are told to be highly competitive and our children start learning the attitude of the rat-race quite early. They mustn't just do well at school - they must sweep the floor with their rivals. That's how you get on. We give prizes to such persons, not so far as I know to those who know how best to get on with others or those who can coax the best out of others. We must delight in our ulcers, the symbols of our success" (Tutu, 1982: 74).

Elsewhere (op. cit., p. 85) he continues: "Capitalism ... has a morality that belongs properly to the jungle - 'the survival of the fittest, the weakest to the wall, and the devil takes the hindmost' ... I long for a society which is not so grasping, not ruled by the rat-race, but one in which there is more sharing. I deplore the sort of society which is uncaring and selfish, and hope that we will work for a society that is more compassionate and caring, and values people not because they are consumers and producers, but because they are of infinite value, since they are created in the image of God".

## **18.2 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**

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. Besides, such a viewpoint 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 criteria 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 human beings.

- **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 (see chapter 15 on corruption). 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."

- **Only in retrospect**

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 be given priority above the economic when industrial development is disrupting the sensitive balance in nature (our source of life) and pollutes the earth, water and air.

### **18.3 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 (see bibliography).

We therefore return to the biblical idea of stewardship which has already been mentioned. 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 Cramp (1975), Goudzwaard (1979, 1994, 1997, 1998), Monsma (1988, 1998), Tiemstra (1990, 1998) and others 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. Neither should we simply say fatalistically 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 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. Neither may we, as the 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 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 human beings.
- **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 so easily tend 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 woman (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 to 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 ask honestly 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 we are 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: blessings - 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!

#### **18.4 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 his 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 bad state of economics in Africa? 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 human beings. Because freedom is determined and limited by service to God and fellow humans, 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 co-operate 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 not members of the business also, 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 a 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 fellow humans 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 - often 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?

### **18.5 Globalisation and its consequences**

The last section of this chapter deals with the latest trend in business – its globalisation. Globalisation or the stretching of relationships across time and space is a fact. Distant political, economic and other events affect us in Africa more immediately than ever before. What affects us may have its origin no longer in our own neighbourhood, town or country, but in some remote corner of the globe. A few examples will serve as an illustration.

A reckless speculator on the Tokoyo stock exchange can cause the collapse of the economy of a far away African business or even country. The pull-out of a transnational company in Argentina can have detrimental consequences on the local labour market. By e-mail I communicate more often with a person in New York I have never met than with my next-door neighbour!

The powerful impact of globalisation is today felt in all areas of life. **Economically** individual countries are no longer able to plan and direct their own business. **Politically** local governments also lost much of their power – a large multinational corporation can dictate to a small country's government. Also **labour** unions have less influence left, because when problems about wage increases arise, work opportunities are simply moved across borders. Globalisation (the imposition of Western values) also leads to the **social** disintegration of traditional communities, like those in Africa. At the same time it promotes or even forces **cultural** integration or the establishment of a new global culture.

Globalisation is, therefore, affecting all of us, even in Africa – at the periphery of the globalising world economy. We should understand the outstanding features of this late

capitalistic economy, both its threats and opportunities.

- **A definition**

Goudzwaard (1996:99) offers the following definition: "Globalisation refers to the contemporary shift from local and national markets to regional and global markets, the opening (liberation) of all national economies to the global economy".

The idea of the "free market" is not new. What is new is that the market now has the freedom to operate globally and not only (as in the past) within the national economies of the different countries. Countries have to open their markets to the world economy. The belief is that if they do not do so, they are destined to be marginalised.

- **The driving forces behind globalisation**

The following six powers lie behind this new kind of economy:

**The belief in the free market**

The "free" market (which is not really free) is offered as the only sensible form of civilised human relationship. In actual fact the market takes precedence over considerations of justice, (local) employment, the protection of the environment, etc. Human well-being is identified with human welfare or material progress. (For a detailed description of the tyranny of the free market ideology, see Van der Walt, 1997:59-74).

**The powerful influence of big business**

The number of multinational or transnational corporations, which play a crucial role in the process of globalisation, have in the last twenty-five years increased seven-fold. No less than a third of the world's export consists of transactions within these powerful companies. Even the trade of the poorer countries of the South is now concentrated in the hands of about fifteen transnational businesses. The poorer countries, however, do not share in their growth and wealth.

**Influence of technological progress**

Commercial transactions (bank transfers, buying and selling of shares, bonds, etc.) now outnumber the volume of the real transfer of goods and services. The economy today, more than ever before, is dependent on and controlled by the movement of private capital in the hands of individuals, banks, speculators and investment funds. They are only interested in the highest possible returns for themselves and not in the just social use of the money. These technologies are seldom available to the poor countries and they have

little chance to receive new capital funds. This implies slower growth and ongoing indebtedness.

### **Competition**

The present world economy is characterised by extremely dynamic competition. The word "competitiveness" sounds better than "war", but what is actually going on is a war. An economy which is too slow to keep up with this dynamic process is staying behind – a dreadful sin, worthy of excommunication and exclusion. No one is allowed to hamper or hinder the speed of "progress". If you don't make it in the world market, you only have yourself to blame! Competitiveness is portrayed as something good or neutral, which is not the case at all. It is in favour of the stronger, the survival of the fittest, a kind of social Darwinism. In this war greed and self-interest are the only norms.

### **One-sided influence from the West**

Globalisation does not imply reciprocal influence in the sense that the East and the South also become global. In essence the influence is only in one direction: the West is becoming global. In a new form of colonialism the political structures, economic policies and cultural values of the USA and Europe are forced upon the rest of the world.

### **Democracy and human rights**

Two of the Western values propagated and enforced globally are democratic government and (as part of it) the human rights doctrine. These values are closely related to the free market capitalistic ideology and are drenched with individualism and self-interest. They are, however, imposed on nations which still highly value community life, mutual duties and obligations. Therefore, often their results are injustice instead of freedom and justice.

#### **• In the grip of a new and dangerous ideology**

Some writers on globalisation are of the opinion that we should not use the word "globalisation", but rather speak of (late capitalist) "globalism", indicating a dangerous new ideology which is enslaving the world.

The outstanding characteristic of this ideology is economism or the commercialisation of everything. Money and money-making now permeates on an unprecedented scale every sector of life. Typical cultural phenomena like the arts, entertainment, the media, education and even religion are under the threat of being commercialised. Sports, for example, is no more a game for recreation, but a money business, carefully managed and controlled.

Today there is a market for almost everything: health, knowledge, happiness and faith (in yourself). Even (international) organised crime has displayed the capacity to create a whole series of new markets! There is a political market where votes are bought and sold, trade in women and children for prostitution and even in human organs. Body and soul we are becoming the slaves of the international "free" market. Everything on earth is related to and valued only in economic terms!

This is in agreement with the hypnotic influence of an ideology. The greater and more intense the adoration of and devotion to an idol is, the greater the narrowing of the mind: the only meaningful way to conduct life is the commercial-technical way. Our image of reality is shrinking – it consists of nothing else but our idol, its message and its servants. Ideological hypnosis leads to a clear overestimation of the value of what the idol offers as well as of what can go wrong if it is not obeyed. Both the happiness which economic globalism offers and the fear of what will happen if its demands are not met are strongly exaggerated. It is also a very shallow ideology - making bucks by eliminating competition – which oversimplify life and deny its rich diversity.

#### • **Results**

Globalisation leads to the internationalisation of almost everything. Not only science and technology, but also culture (the so-called Coca-colaliation and MacDonaldisation) and labour (large numbers of immigrants moving from East to West and South to North). We can only concentrate on a few consequences.

#### **Only the already rich will benefit**

Most of the writers on globalisation warn that it will only be the already rich individuals and nations who will benefit from the process of internationalisation. The following are examples:

- The global market does not necessarily draw the marginalised into it, but rather pushes them further to the fringes.
- The gap between rich and poor between and within states is widening.
- The poor countries are excluded from big financial transactions. While they are forced to enter the world's money economy they are effectively excluded from the capital supply they need.
- Poor countries experience continuing indebtedness. Some African countries have external debts which are twelve times the value of their export!

- The modern technologies needed to compete effectively are seldom available in the poorer countries and even deliberately withheld by the richer ones.
- The depth level of this exclusion from the global market is visible in the chronic hunger of 600 million people all over the world. In spite of the fact that they (are forced to) export, many countries cannot provide in the most basic needs of their people.

Two African writers have the following to say: "The ultimate outcome of increased internationalism will be the heightened economic nationalism of the stronger states and the erosion of the economic nationalism of the weaker states ... neo-liberal globalism is a special form of economic nationalism – that of the dominant economic powers" (Kiiza, 2001: 37,38). He concludes: "Thus, the doctrine of free market economies is a doctrine of the powerful economies. It is a strategic tool for the furtherance of the economic, political and ideological objections of the mighty ... the ideology of the 'global' market only serves to enrich the economic nationalism of the world's industrial giants" (p. 44).

Chisinga (2001:60) agrees. According to him globalisation "produces gains for a few, marginalisation of many, and polarisation between the poor and the rich ... the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must". Elsewhere: "Globalisation points a picture of gloom and despair in which Africa lies at the periphery of the globalising world economy" (p. 68).

### **A new stateless society**

Because of internationalisation some writers believe that the state will play a smaller and smaller role in economic affairs up to the point of a nearly "stateless" society. Goudzwaard (1996) has a different viewpoint. According to him the increasing liberation and deregulation of the world economy will not lead to its disappearance, but to the increasing instrumentalisation of the state for economic interests. The influence of the state is not reduced, but bent in another direction, viz its greater serviceability to the business sector. The state – like the other societal relationships – is increasingly economised or commercialised.

Whether the state is marginalised or commercialised or both, it will have detrimental consequences. Especially poorer and weaker states (dominated by the economically powerful ones) will experience difficulty in fulfilling their real task, namely to organise a just dispensation for their citizens. How are they going to fight against the global market which have little or no consideration for justice, local employment, protection of the environment, etc?

The free market, for instance, believes that the public services of the state are "inefficient", because they are outside of the arena of private enterprise. They therefore have to be privatised. As a result of this pressure of globalisation to privatise, South Africa has already lost one million jobs. Is this really "efficiency" when one million retrenched workers suddenly have to be taken care of by the state (pensions, health care, overcrowded jails)? The local taxpayer has to pay for these services and the income from privatisation ends up in the pockets of overseas companies of an already rich country!

### **A dual economy**

Another result of globalisation is the development of a dual economy in the poorer countries. On the one hand we experience enforced economic restructuring to please globalisation, and on the other hand people with no access to the international market are returning to traditional modes of survival like informal businesses and subsistence farming. The first is a small but highly developed sector with high income, linked to the sophisticated, dynamic world market. It consumes vast amounts of resources. The second sector, consisting of the majority of people, is excluded from the wealth of the global market, unable even to meet their basic needs, like food, shelter, health and education. Globalisation clearly has no respect for local economies!

### **The irony of democratisation**

On the one hand globalisation is spreading Western values like the protection of human rights, human dignity and multiparty democracy. But on the other hand the Western, global, free market economy contradict these same values – at least when they have to be honoured in their dealings with the poorer parts of the world. Present day managerialism also tends in the direction of technocratic elitism rather than democracy.

### **The rise of nationalism**

At the same time as we are becoming aware of our global interdependence – and vulnerability – we also experience the erection of new barriers between people. All over the world ethnic nationalities are on the rise and fighting for autonomy.

How should one evaluate both these tendencies of globalisation on the one hand and nationalism on the other? Both globalism and nationalism are extremes and should be rejected. The one should not be emphasised at the expense of the other. Unity in diversity and diversity in unity should go together. According to the biblical perspective mankind is one and is moving towards a global city (the New Jerusalem). But according to the Book of Revelation this unity will not exclude the variety of cultures: every nation will

have the opportunity to carry into the city what is good for its own culture (Rev. 7:4 and 21:24-26).

- **The challenge**

The basic challenge ahead seems to be the following: How to benefit from the advantages which globalisation may offer without becoming the victim of a dangerous ideology (globalism).

An example could be how to use modern, global communication technology to our benefit without computers taking the jobs from the people.

But above all as Christians, I think, we should be aware of the spiritual dimension of what is going on in contemporary world economy. We should be ready and equipped to fight against the spirit of our times.

Goudzwaard (1996:106-108) stresses the following three points in this regard:

**It is a dangerous ideology**

The new ideology of free market globalism is viewed – especially after the collapse of Russian socialism – as unchallenged, the ideology of no alternatives. Furthermore, it presents itself as something good, the only self-evident solution for the world's problems. Therefore it can be very seductive, hypnotising many. We should, however, unmask it as a dangerous ideology because of its results already mentioned.

The result of any ideology (the absolutisation of something creational to the level of a god) is a spiral of death, like the following example illustrates: The growth of poverty leads to the deterioration of our environment, and the deterioration of the environment leads to more poverty.

**It is a destructive ideology and therefore will have a limited life-span**

The carrying capacity of the earth and its resources as well as our own as human beings are limited. They will eventually rebel against the massive economic exploitation. Our Lord's creation and our own human condition is not on the side of the exploding global economy. Globalism carries with it the germ of its own destruction – it cannot last forever.

**It is not an ideology with no alternatives**

Not only a downward spiral of death, but also an upward spiral of life is possible. Not only problems but also solutions can reinforce each other.

Such solutions do not necessarily require big things to be done. One small, first step could



be that the poorest countries are liberated from their burdens of foreign debt. This will be a small step of justice, but will immediately open a new spiral of hope and life. Funds will become available for the fight against terrible, dehumanising poverty, the eradication of hunger, provision of health care, education, etc.

Present globalisation is ignoring all the basic biblical norms which guarantee human life in its fullness. Fighting against the spirit of idolatry always begins with listening to the simple commandments of the Lord, like love your neighbour as yourself.

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## Chapter 19:

### THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

#### New hope for the future

I was writing this chapter a few days after the African Union or AU was established in Durban, South Africa on July 9, 2002 to replace the previous Organisation for African Unity (OAU). To Africans this was a sign of new hope for the entire continent. The establishment of the AU was the end-result of a movement initiated by Mr. Thabo Mbeki, state president of South Africa, called the African Renaissance. The word **renaissance** was, however, not the invention of Mbeki.

The aim of this chapter is, firstly, to determine the character of both the earlier European Renaissance (from approximately 1300-1600) and then that of the contemporary African Renaissance. Secondly, to look for similarities and differences between the two movements. Thirdly, in the light of the results of the previous two points, to formulate a Christian response to the present African Renaissance.

#### 19.1 A worldview approach

Both the European and African Renaissance are complex phenomena. They are periods of deep cultural crisis. In both cases the immediate past is rejected and something better and new is anticipated. But there is uncertainty and even anxiety about **how** this newness should be achieved and **what** it should be. When such winds of rapid change blow, people's thinking are often incoherent, unclear and even filled with conflicting opinions.

There are many different interpretations of the European Renaissance (cf. Rienstra, 1981). The same applies to the African Renaissance (see Liebenberg, 1998). My viewpoint is that during periods of transition, people are usually in search of a new worldview. Previous worldviews do not make sense of reality any more, because they cannot clearly indicate one's place and task in a changed environment. One's worldview, therefore, has to be adapted or even replaced by a totally new worldview to provide guidance. A recent example is the rejection of the apartheid (or Christian-national) worldview in South Africa. Something similar happened during the European Renaissance: a general rejection of the medieval worldview.

My approach will therefore be a worldviewish approach. I will omit many small details and rather look for the different kinds of worldviews that emerged during the European Renaissance and may be developing from the present African Renaissance.

## 19.2 The European Renaissance

A first step to understand this movement is to grasp something about the worldview of the Middle Ages – the worldview against which all Renaissance thinkers reacted negatively.

### 19.2.1 The medieval background

As Bouwsma (1988:64) correctly indicates, the Middle Ages inherited two different cultures from antiquity: the pagan Hellenistic and the biblical Hebraic culture. These two they tried to combine in a synthesis. The Renaissance, however, became aware of the uneasiness and growing tension between these two totally different sources of medieval culture.

At the height of the Middle Ages the relationship between pagan Hellenistic and Roman culture on the one hand and the biblical Hebrew and New Testament culture on the other was viewed by the theologians as that of the sacred **above** the secular. Sacred life (faith, religion, the Bible, the church) was **superior** to the lower, secular life (reason, civic life, politics, manual labour, and economics). The lower, natural sphere is a pre-amble which is perfected in the higher sphere of grace. Many Christian today still operate with this dualism between "church" and "world"!

In real life the tension inherent in this worldview was never solved. Should one "marry" Christ or the church and become a monk or nun, withdraw into a cloister and devote oneself to a **vita contemplative**, a life of meditation on God? Or should one marry a real woman/man of flesh and blood and take care of a family? Should one aspire for a clerical position or rather become a farmer, politician or soldier? Should I devote my life to the study of theology or rather serve the poor?

Because of the false dualism inherent in the Thomistic, medieval worldview, none of the above choices could really solve the tension. If one prefers to become a theologian, one would still be confronted with secular 'scholarship'. If one becomes a monk to meditate in peace about God, the "world" would follow you into your cloister. You still have to live together with other monks. And no matter how you castigate your "sinful bodily desires", you still have to eat! And if one chooses a "profane" vocation, one would be confronted by Biblical statements about marriage, labour, money, government, etc.

One of the major breakthroughs of the Renaissance and especially the Reformation (a separate movement within the Renaissance) was that it challenged this medieval worldview which compartmentalised life into sacred and profane realms. One should not feel bad to become a farmer instead of a priest. A theological professor should not feel ashamed about the time he spends in his study, leaving no time to be involved in politics.

This new perspective of the Renaissance was prepared already in the late Middle Ages. McGrath (1988:19-25) mentions at least three important factors in this regard; the rise of doctrinal pluralism, growing religious piety amongst the laity, and the challenge of the authority of the medieval type of Christianity.

### **19.2.2 The Renaissance in Europe**

The Renaissance covering approximately the period from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century can be characterised in many ways because it is such a mixed cultural epoch. Because of its many discoveries and inventions it can be called "The Age of Adventure" (De Santillana, 1956).

#### **The age of discovery**

The innovation covered the following areas (cf. Störig, 1969:16,17):

- **Geographical:** The invention of the compass, which facilitated the well-known voyages of exploration, discovering many new worlds previously unknown to the West.
- **Military:** The invention of gunpowder that challenged the dominant position of the medieval knights.
- **Astronomical:** Better telescopes, which changed the generally accepted belief that the earth was the centre of the universe, to be replaced by a heliocentric view.
- **Communicative:** The invention of the printing press and cheaper paper displaced hand-written texts, made books more affordable and the dissemination of (old and new) ideas faster. (An estimated 20 million books came from the presses!)
- **Literary and philosophical:** The discovery and translation of ancient texts.
- **Scientific:** The development of new ways to read texts as well as new ways to practice natural sciences, e.g. observation and experimentation.
- **Humanistic:** The discovery of wo/man himself as a free individual not bound by societal conventions.
- **Intellectual:** Discovery of freedom of enquiry, to think independently.

- **Political:** The development of nationalism, new nations, new forms of government. The power of the pope decreased and that of secular rulers/governments increased.
- **Economic:** New forms of trade, a rich middle class and a new form of economy (early capitalism) developed.
- **Social:** A serious agrarian crisis, increasing urbanisation, the breakdown of feudalism and the development of a new class of burghers and new city-states.
- **Religious:** The new Protestant religion in a short time spread throughout Europe and like a bombshell shattered the dominant position of the Catholic Church.

In the light of all these novelties it is understandable that Renaissance people regarded their time as the dawn of a new day, not sunset – as their opponents may have thought – but sunrise. It was a time of high expectations!

### **The character of the Renaissance**

Philosophically speaking the Renaissance was a heterogeneous movement. Many age-old philosophies were revived, like Platonism, neo-Platonism, Stoicism, Epicurianism, Aristotelism, etc. (cf. Van der Walt, 1991c:230-238), but no single philosophical idea dominated, it lacked a coherent philosophy (Popkin, 1966). The medieval worldview was no longer acceptable. What kind of new worldview would develop to integrate all the new developments in a coherent whole?

The French word “renaissance” (rebirth) provides some help. Even though this word was applied to this period of history long afterwards, Renaissance thinkers used similar words themselves to indicate what their aim was: “return”, “restoration”, “revival”, “reawakening”, “reflowering”, etc. A dominant tendency of Renaissance thought was – at least during the first period of the movement – to return to what they regarded as a better time than that of the Middle Ages they inherited. They looked back to antiquity for inspiration and instruction. The slogan was **ad fontes**: (back) to the (original) sources (of Western civilisation).

Antiquity was the cultural resource to achieve their educational ideals. To serve the new moral and spiritual needs of their age, they emphasised the **studia humanitas** or **studia humaniora**, like grammar, rhetoric, poetry, literature, history and moral philosophy. Of this rhetoric was of great importance as it teaches one to speak and write eloquently.

The rhetorical tradition has a long history, starting in Ancient Greek thought (e.g. Protagoras), well known in Roman culture (e.g. Cicero) and also with the Church Fathers

(e.g. Augustine). This tradition was revived during the Renaissance because it offered something new in the place of dry medieval culture. Medieval scholasticism depended on **logic**, the art of organising truth in an intelligent system of thought, a conviction about something. During the Renaissance, scholasticism was viewed as too theoretical, abstract, sterile and removed from real practical life. **Rhetoric**, the art of persuasion, took its place. The Renaissance viewed man as passionate, active, social and practical rather than an intellectual being. For this reason they admired the ancient orators, poets and historians. Language, to them, was a power to stimulate the will, inspire the soul and set the heart on fire. It has the capacity – much better than scholasticism – to persuade, lead and reform. Effective communication required more than simple fidelity to the truth – the sole aim of the theological discourse of the past. An important rhetorical virtue to be applied was decorum, adaptation to one's time and audience. The Renaissance intellectuals above all wanted their scholarship to be educationally useful, of service to society and not simply intended for one's own amusement or intellectual satisfaction.

John Calvin, the reformer (1509-1564), was imbued with this spirit. He was not an analyst or a systematic thinker in the first place, but a rhetorician. He always combined the Renaissance idea of **eruditio** (erudition) with **persuasio** (persuasion), by asking for what purpose or what benefit something is said or written. Whatever Calvin wrote or said, his intention was its usefulness: to teach, to move, to inspire or persuade. This is also the reason why he did not see his task as that of a minister (he was never ordained) or to provide a new exposition of theology (he called his **Institutes** an introduction to a Christian philosophy!).

### **Two different trends**

In his desire to return to the past (restitution) Calvin - and many other Protestant reformers – was a true Renaissance figure. This, however, is not the full story. A clear difference emerged on the question which of the sources of antiquity should be regarded as authoritative.

In classical humanism, as the name indicates, it was the classical works of pagan Roman and Greek thought. This tendency was very evident in Italy, the cradle of the Renaissance, usually called the Southern Renaissance. The philosophical substance of these writings was not what the Renaissance men primarily admired, but their literary, artistic and rhetorical value. In spite of the fact that some Italian humanists were concerned with certain aspects of the Christian faith, they were the exceptions. The



Southern (Italian) Renaissance was characterised by a more or less careless, superficial or "secular" attitude towards things religious.

In spite of the fact that the Northern Renaissance learned much from the Renaissance in Italy, these northern thinkers had a different emphasis. Estep (1986:45ff) indicates how, from its earliest days (cf. the **devotio moderna** or modern devotion) the Northern Renaissance humanists were steeped in deep religious quest, preoccupied with Christian religion. In this way it prepared the way for the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation.

The intention of the biblical or evangelical humanists was not in the first place to return to the **pagan**, but to the **Christian** sources of antiquity, viz. the Church Fathers (**patres**) and ultimately to the Bible, the Word of God itself. They respected the Church Fathers (Ambrose, Augustine, etc.) because they were regarded as much more trustworthy guides to understand the Gospel than the medieval theologians. They rejected the stale and corrupt Christianity of their time and wanted to return to (what they regarded as) the Golden Age of the church, original Christianity, in order to regain its purity, freshness and vitality. The great vision of the reformers can be summed up in the Latin slogan: **Christianismus renascens**, Christianity born again.

Through the study of the writings of the Church Fathers and new critical editions of the original texts of the Bible (to counteract the additions and corruption's of the Middle Ages) the reformers intended to hear the voice of authentic Christianity. Such a vision of a resurgent Christianity, which regained the vitality of its youth (the apostolic age), captivated the minds of many at the dawn of the Reformation. The Church Fathers and especially the Word of God (the Bible) was considered to be the "title deeds" of Christianity. Their return to the origins of Christianity was a real lifeline because they despaired at the sad state of the medieval church and theology. They firmly believed that the apostolic and patristic age could once again become a present reality – a real discovery of the living Christ Himself!

It is important to distinguish between the classical and the biblical humanists, because our contemporary word "humanist" or "humanism" has a quite different connotation. Today it implies an anti-religious philosophy – even atheism – together with the affirmation of man's autonomy. During the Renaissance we may encounter some humanists who were sceptical about some aspects of the church life and medieval scholasticism. They also tended towards moralism, but they were not anti-Christian (cf. Rienstra, 1981).

Nevertheless there was a clear difference between classical and evangelical humanism. The first was pre-eminently in favour of a renaissance of ancient pagan literature (the **oratores et poetae**), while the latter's aim was the renewal of Christian piety (**pietas**). We may call the first group Christian humanists (the emphasis on the last word) and the second group humanist Christians (again with the accent on the last word).

Before we describe their two different worldviews first an intermezzo about the possibility of returning to the past – the ideal of both types of humanism.

### **The Renaissance conception of history**

Many of the Renaissance thinkers adhered to a cyclical view of history as a process of birth, growth and decline. The Middle Ages was to them a dark interval between two ages of light. Calvin also accepted this viewpoint. According to him, with the Reformation nothing new had occurred, no radical change had taken place except for the renewal of the ancient form of the church. It was merely a recovery from a period of decline. The improvement is basically a return to a happier state. (Calvin used similar words as earlier Renaissance thinkers, like "rebirth", "restoration", "restitution", "renewal" and "reform".) Such a cyclical view of history promoted Calvin's positive treatment of antiquity. It also promised success for his contemporary reform movement – it could not be a period of decline!

Sometimes Calvin did realise that this (pagan) idea of cyclical time and history clashed with the linear concept of Judaism and Christianity, for instance, when he realised that a perpetuation of the early apostolic age might be inappropriate in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But he did not make explicit the consequences of a view that improvement of the church may take another form than a return to its origins. (For the many dangers of Christian primitivism, see Van der Walt, 1991d:285-286.)

The classical humanists of the Renaissance eventually encountered an identical problem. Because they were separated by nearly 2000 years from classical antiquity, it proved to be impossible to turn the clock back.

This should be a lesson for the contemporary African Renaissance: One should learn from the good in the past, but one can never fully revive the past in the present. Repristinatio is a **cul de sac**!

### **Two different worldviews**

We return now to the basic difference between the classical and evangelical humanists.

Taking as a starting point the medieval worldview (see above), we may say that the classical humanists secularised the sacred. They located man's religious responsibility within the context of the political and moral circumstances of daily life. The medieval perceived and experienced disjunction between the secular and the sacred was transformed in the direction of a unity. Stated differently: church and world became one. The result, however, was that the Gospel, the word of God lost its uniqueness, authority and transforming power. To put it in another way: The sacred was absorbed by the secular. A present-day example of this kind of worldview could perhaps be liberal Protestantism which sees very little if any difference between the secular world and activities inspired by the Christian faith.

Again taking the medieval worldview of a sacred and secular sphere as our point of departure, we may say that the evangelical humanists or reformers agreed with their classical colleagues in their rejection of a compartmentalisation between Christian faith (or grace) and worldly endeavours (nature). To be involved in the world of economics, politics, arts, etc. is not less religious than contemplating God in a cloister.

There is, however, a vital difference. Whereas the classical humanists secularised the sacred, the biblical humanists or reformers sacralised the secular. This does not mean that they tried to put an ecclesiastical stamp on "worldly" affairs. That was what the medieval worldview tried to achieve – a Christian icing on top of a secular cake. No, the reformers propagated a new (third) perspective. In the office of believer we should serve God and promote his glory in **every** area of life. In doing so, we are neither dependent on the church to sanction our activities (as the medieval, Catholic worldview requires), nor should we lose our identity as Christians (as happened when the humanist worldview was followed).

### **19.2.3 Calvin: seeker and master**

The Calvin with whom most of us are acquainted is usually an artificial creation designed by his Calvinist followers. The picture we entertain of this great Renaissance man is more hagiographical than historical. He only read the Bible and was influenced by the Word of God alone! He was not a child of his times, but a kind of 16<sup>th</sup> century Melchizedek appearing from nowhere.

The real, historical Calvin, however, was a Renaissance man, a humanist, not only in his youth, but he remained in major ways a humanist of the late Renaissance.

Of the many things he learned from his spiritual and intellectual environment the following could be mentioned:

- His desire to return to the original sources of Christianity (**ad fontes**).
- The ethical and practical character of his teaching.
- The way in which he returned to Scripture:
  - The Bible itself is more important than the medieval commentaries on the Bible.
  - The Bible has to be read in the original languages (Hebrew and Greek).
  - Textual techniques developed by the humanists are employed to establish the best text of the Bible accurately.
  - New humanist literary methods are employed to replace, for instance, the medieval allegorical exegesis.
  - Calvin emphasised – like the humanists – that the laity should read and know the Bible.
- The ways in which Calvin applied humanistic hermeneutics to understand the Bible were:
  - The interpreter should respect the intention of the author.
  - Everyone of the books of the Bible should be understood as a whole and in the context of the author's purpose.
  - Obscure passages should be clarified by comparing them with those of which the meaning is clear.
  - Recognition that the biblical texts had been assembled and transmitted by fallible human beings over many centuries.
  - It should be kept in mind that different sections of the Bible were written in different times.
- Finally, Calvin's rejection of scholastic theology in favour of a simple Christian philosophy or what we today would call a Christian worldview (cf. Partee, 1977:2-23).

But, as Ganoczy (1987:180;181) correctly argues, Calvin was not only a **seeker** who learned much from his predecessors and contemporaries. In the end he was a **master**, because he rethought, reformulated and reorganised the material drawn from the different sources and submitted it all to the supreme judgement of the Scriptures. For him

humanism was not an **end** in itself, it simply **helped** him to support reform. He chose a direction quite different from the classical humanists.

In an earlier publication on **Calvin and classical philosophy**, Partee (1977:146) arrived at a similar conclusion about the way that Calvin employed Greek and Roman philosophy: He used them as **illustrations** of the truth rather than as **guides** to it.

McGrath (1988:45-48) provides a whole list of the differences between the reformers and the classical humanists:

- In their attitude toward **Scholastic theology** the humanists' rejection was based on its unintelligibility and inelegance, while the reformers rejected it because it was fundamentally wrong.
- To the humanists the authority of **Scripture** was based on its eloquence, simplicity and antiquity, while for the reformers it was the Word of God.
- The humanists appreciated the writings of the **Church Fathers** because of their antiquity and elegance. The reformers accepted them because they were reliable interpreters of the Bible.
- **Education**, according to the humanists, was a cultural process to develop the human being for the service of his fellowmen. The reformers, on the other hand, emphasised religious education in the service of God.
- The humanists were concerned with **rhetoric** in order to promote both written and spoken eloquence, while the intention of the reformers was to promote their religious ideas by means of eloquence.

#### **19.2.4 The social and political context**

The Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was not only influenced by a variety of spiritual movements and ideas. It was also embedded in the political and social turmoil of its times. Its religious ideas were influenced by this environment and, vice versa, the Reformation also impacted on its environment. While the power of the pope diminished, the influence of these secular political powers increased. The reformers allied themselves with these political powers in order to succeed in their programme of reform. This often explains why in some places (as Strasbourg and Geneva) the reformers succeeded but failed in others (as in Erfurt).

It will not be possible to discuss this important aspect in further detail. The fact is mentioned to remind us again that religious reform never takes place in a vacuum –

neither a spiritual nor a social vacuum – but in order to succeed, has to acknowledge the entire context.

### 19.2.5 More efforts at reform

The idea of reform of the Renaissance was not something new in history. Even during the Middle Ages we encounter different efforts at reform (Van der Walt, 1994:322-3). Also during the Renaissance different movements for reform occurred. Apart from the (classical) humanists and Calvin, already mentioned, the Lutheran and Anabaptist (or radical) reformations should be mentioned. We will not deal separately with the so-called Counter-Reformation, initiated by the Catholic Church, especially at the Council of Trent (1545), because it represented basically the same worldview as that of the Middle Ages, already explained above.

A total of five different worldviews crystallised during the Renaissance. Limited space will only allow a brief characterisation of each one of them (for details, see Van der Walt, 1991b:159ff.). Each one of them held a different perspective on the central question of how a Christian should relate to the so-called secular world of trade, politics, education, etc.:

- The humanistic worldview: The Christian **of** the world. (The key word is **equality**, there is no radical difference between the Christian and the world.)
- The Anabaptist worldview: The Christian **against** the world. (The key word is **opposition**, or radical difference between the Christian and the world.)
- The Lutheran worldview: The Christian **beside** the world. (The key word is **parallelism**, no contact, while both have legitimacy.)
- The Catholic worldview: The Christian **above** the world. (The key word is **perfection**, the Christian completes what is already present in the world.)
- The Reformed worldview: The Christian **in** the world. (The key word is **transformation** of the world.)

A concrete example will explain how these five worldviews responded differently to the question “How should a Christian relate to politics?” The answers were as follows:

- The **Humanist** did not see any distinctive contribution a Christian involvement in politics could have.

- The **Anabaptist's** worldview did not allow him any involvement in politics, because politics as such is an evil, worldly affair.
- The **Lutheran** took a position alongside politics. Being a Christian and practising politics were two totally different issues, not in any way related to each other. One could be a Christian and a politician, but one's Christian faith should not influence one's political activities.
- The **Catholic** asked the church and its clergy to guide and dominate political life from "above", it had to be Christianised. A political meeting had to be started with Scripture reading and prayer, but the subsequent political debate did not necessarily testify to a Christian approach.
- The **Calvinist** (or adherent of a Reformational worldview) differed from all the preceding Christians in that he believed a Christian's responsibility included his/her direct involvement in political life to be renewed and transformed. To be able to do so, a prayer or "sermon" at the beginning of parliament would not be enough. The Christian should know the world of politics and witness **politically** about God's will (justice) for both citizen and government.

Personally I am of the opinion that the last worldview is the ideal to be followed also today, because it so closely reflects the teaching of God's Word, the Bible. It furthermore allows the Christian to be a full participant in daily, "worldly" affairs without betraying his/her identity as a follower of Jesus Christ. A careful look will reveal that the four other worldviews are easier options. But if the Reformational worldview is the correct one, do we have a choice?

Let me, however, immediately add three important remarks.

Firstly, for two reasons, **reformational** does not mean **Reformed churches**. One, because a worldview, as the word suggests, is something much broader than an ecclesiastical confession. Therefore people in other than the Reformed churches may also think and act in a reformational way. Two, because Reformed churches – this is my sad experience – often no longer adhere to a reformational worldview.

Secondly, I am in no way canonising John Calvin. In spite of the fact that I agree with the broad outlines of his radical Christian worldview, he has definitely not spoken the last or final word. He is only a beginning, and where necessary, one should not hesitate to disagree with him (cf., for instance, Van der Walt, 1987:244-252). In the line of what

Calvin himself proposed – a reformed church should **continuously** be reformed, otherwise it becomes deformed – I believe that the reformational worldview is not something static, but has to be reformed every day by listening to what God reveals to us in his creation (our context) and in the Bible (our text). This is also the reason why I prefer the active word **reformational** above the static image that the word **reformed** suggests.

Thirdly, in the light of the previous remark, I prefer the word **reformational** instead of **Calvinism** to indicate a worldview based on Gods revelation, instead of on the ideas of a fallible human being.

### **19.2.6 Conclusion**

Should Reformation and Renaissance go together or should we choose between them? On the previous pages I have indicated that Reformation and Renaissance does not necessarily exclude each other. It was indicated that the Reformation was a movement within the broader epoch of the Renaissance. In no ways could Calvin have become the reformer we would still like to follow today without the influence of the Renaissance. At the same time he has made a unique Christian contribution to the Renaissance.

Perhaps we as Christians should adopt the same attitude towards the present African Renaissance: learning from it what we can, but also trying to make our own, unique Christian contribution towards its advancement.

### **19.3 The African Renaissance**

Since 1994 (independence) we have had an endless volley of buzz words unleashed upon us in South Africa: "masakhane", "ubuntu", "reconstruction and development", "reconciliation and transformation:", "a people-centred society", etc, etc. The latest is "African Renaissance". Perhaps this last one is the catchiest of all these new words to enter the lexicon of the "new South Africa". It has a strong bandwagon effect on many people.

Since president Mbeki has popularised this concept and raised his clarion call "The African Renaissance is upon us" (1998), there has been an African Renaissance Conference in September 1998 (see Makgoba, 1999) and many other gatherings. Numerous deliberations have taken place, many articles and books have been written – all devoted to the renaissance of our continent. Also an African Renaissance Institute has been established. The African Renaissance has indeed become a rallying point for people working in the different spheres of the cultural, social, economic and political life.



It has already attracted the attention of not only leaders, politicians and economists, but also of Christian theologians from outside South Africa. (Cf Bediako, 2001; Kombo, 2000; Mana, 2001 and Paris, 2001).

Could this new renaissance perhaps be the answer to the African crisis described in chapter 2?

### 19.3.1 Critical questions

Not everyone is willing to climb on the bandwagon. Critical questions like the following are being asked:

- Is the African Renaissance more than sloganeering and empty rhetoric passing for profundity and originality?
- Is it simply another case of double speaking, an attempt to cover up the real, pressing problems of African by vilifying the outside world and romanticising the African past? Is it perhaps a rosy gloss on all things African?
- Is Mbeki simply a visionary, a dreamer, an optimist, a romanticist and idealist or is he a realist when he says: "Africa's time has come ... The new century must be an African century"? (Mbeki, 1998:204.)
- In other words, is there real substance to the idea that there is something new in Africa? Have the words of the Roman Pliny become a reality: **Ex Africa semper aliquid novi** (something new always comes from Africa)?

Mzamane (2001) correctly asks: What is this Renaissance? And: What is African about it?

Liebenberg (1998) mentions the following three possibilities:

- The African Renaissance may be an **invented myth**, the search for a collective identity. Because Africa is the most exploited continent in the world, many myths (like African socialism) developed in the course of its history. Is the African Renaissance basically a return to the traditional African roots, its values and lifestyles, a reclaiming of Africa's supposed glorious past as a means of arriving at a better future?
- The African Renaissance may simply be a **mobilising tool** for economic and political development. In this case democratisation, peace, stability and the integration into the global economy is at the heart of this Renaissance.

- The African Renaissance may be a **vital lie** for the entrenchment and enhancement of the elite. An elite plots to recruit the poor masses into neo-liberal, multiparty politics and economic globalisation? Is globalisation really good for Africa? Should Africa expose itself to the process before it is better equipped to compete successfully in the global economic system? If Africa is not ready, globalisation will only benefit the already rich elite. Globalisation is Janus-faced, holding good and bad, sometimes more bad than good. The simplistic acceptance of globalisation as both inevitable and beneficial is, to say the least, dangerous. Globalisation can cause the disempowerment of poor communities that survived with self-invented measures of community empowerment schemes (see also chapter 18).

Critical questions like these should not be ignored, but they should instead be welcomed and taken seriously.

From what I could personally read, it became clear to me that the African Renaissance is a multi-faceted, historically evolving process. We therefore have to pay some attention to its history as well as its multi-dimensional character.

### **19.3.2 A brief historical review**

Ironically the revival that the European Renaissance brought about contributed significantly to a Dark Age elsewhere in the world. The "discovery" of the "New World" led to the extermination of many of its indigenous peoples. The vast expansion of the slave trade from Africa (1520-1870) intended to replace these peoples as labourers in the New World. Apart from slavery, the colonisation of the continent (1885-1960) led to the plundering of Africa's natural resources and the decimation of its cultures, replacing it with Western "civilisation". Slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism (after independence) were more devastating than we can begin to imagine. Africa was not a dark continent, but was made a dark continent! This Dark Age lasted for at least four centuries.

And even today Africa is still regarded as a dark continent, primarily known for its bad news. Conflicts, coups, corruption, dictatorships, genocides, aids, famines, natural disasters, etc. dominate what the world hears about our continent. In the global view Africa is written off as having little significance other than being a very secondary market for goods and ideas from elsewhere. No wonder that the word "Afro-pessimism" has become a household word!

History, however, testifies that Africans, long ago already, could not be satisfied with the state of their continent. "In reflecting on the African Renaissance, mere episodes must not

be taken for the totality of the phenomenon. The African Renaissance is not a single event but a process long begun but far from finished. There have been many episodes, spanning several generations, in the rise of the Africans universally from the forces that put them down, many episodes in their unfolding culture of liberation.” (Mzamane, 2001.) I will mention only a few flashes to illustrate that the African Renaissance is not a new idea.

- **The rebellion of African slaves in the Americas and the Caribbean**

The rebellion in Haiti (1751-1757 and again 1791) eventually led to the abolishment of slavery (1793) and the independence of Haiti (1804). In America different slave revolts finally led to a constitution forbidding slavery in California in 1848 and later on in other parts of America.

- **Pan Africanism**

The breeding ground of this movement was not Africa but the Africans in diaspora. The crushing slavery in the New World created a yearning amongst the Africans in the Americas for their ancestral homelands. This resulted in the establishment of both Sierra Leone (in 1787) and Liberia (in 1847) as refuges for freed slaves.

The Pan African Movement also created African scholarship that challenged the racist ideas in the West that the Africans are by nature inferior beings.

Apart from that it also organised a series of important congresses after the Berlin Congresses (1884-85) that carved up Africa between the European powers. The first and second were held in 1892 (Chicago) and 1919 (Paris). At the third Pan African Congress (Paris, 1921) the Pan African Manifesto (a precursor to the OAU Charter) was accepted. The feeling of solidarity engendered by the Pan African Movement led to a greater interaction between the African people in the New World and on the continent. It also propagated the idea of one, unified Africa. And it helped to inspire many nationalists fighting for the independence of their countries. The ANC, founded in 1912, is one of the oldest organisations of Pan African character and persuasion. Important figures in the Pan African Movement were figures both from outside Africa (like W.E.B. du Bois and Marcus Garvey) and inside (Kwame Nkrumah).

- **The Harlem Renaissance**

This movement blossomed in the 1920's. It was largely a cultural movement in the spirit of Pan Africanism. Except for older themes like African solidarity and liberation, it also

aspired to self-expression, because the cultural space of the Africans has been invaded by the West. It provided literary and artistic models people in different parts of Africa, including South Africa, could emulate. By reaching back to their African roots, they could assert their identity. Concrete examples are story telling, Negro spirituals, blues and jazz.

- **Négritude**

The scene shifted from Harlem to Paris in the 1930's, to the Négritude Movement, aiming at psychological and cultural emancipation from European domination, as a prerequisite for political liberation of the Africans universally. Leaders of this movement, like Aime Césaire and Leopold Sédar Senghor championed African customs and traditions that had been ridiculed by Europeans. They glorified the past, implying that Africa, which was great in the past, would be great again. Their discourse was anti-colonial and critical of Western culture's cold, impersonal and individualistic ways. However, they also portray an accommodating vision for the future of a world enriched by cultures from different countries. Stressing the cultural awakening and political emancipation only, *négritude* did not emphasise economic development and technological advancement as Mbeki does in the latest form of an African Renaissance.

- **The post-World War II period**

During this period most of the African countries experienced liberation and independence from the European colonisers. Pan Africanism had finally achieved one of its goals. The other goal of African unity did not fully realise, because the Organisation of African Unity (formed in 1963) proved to be a rather ineffective collection of nation states.

The United States, during the 1950s and 1960, was a place of turbulence and violence as a result of the Black Power and Civil Rights movements. In South Africa we saw the rise of the Black Conscious Movement under the leadership of S. Biko and others.

- **The post-independence period**

The epic story of the rise of a once enslaved people across the globe continued in this period. The time after independence is littered with renaissance efforts by the leaders of the new African states. Senghor promoted African socialism, Kaunda African humanism, Nkrumah consciencism, Kenyatta **harambe** (lets pull together), and Nyerere **ujamaa** (village collectivisation). Some countries preferred Marxism, other Capitalism as their ideology.

At best these efforts succeeded partially and, at worst, failed miserably. The old colonial flags were lowered and new ones raised, but in fact very little changed ... The litany of Africa's social, political and economic woes became endless. Stagnation is to be seen everywhere and the power syndrome is destroying the continent country by country. The terrible suffering in Africa today is certainly not only caused by external enemies, but also from within. One can indeed discern features of the classical tragedy in the modern African state.

- **The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The beginning of the 1990's introduced a new move of democratic transitions in sub-Saharan Africa which led to new optimism. The Cold War ended and after decades of stagnation economic performance improved markedly. (Average growth has increased from about 1% in 1992 to about 5% in 1997.)

At the end of this brief overview of the different phases in the African Renaissance, the question should be raised what must be different about the current efforts to re-ignite the African Renaissance. What should be done differently to make this century truly "the African century"?

### **19.3.3 Mbeki on the African Renaissance**

President Mbeki has gone further than any other African head of state by developing a plan for Africa's political, social and economic recovery. His vision of an African Renaissance is not a romantic or numinous idea. It was concretised in the Millennium Partnership for African Recovery Programme (MAP), the New African Initiative and the recently established New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as well as the African Union, established on 9 July 2002 in Durban with Mbeki as its first president. He has a multi-faceted programme in mind, as will be clear from the following exposition.

#### **A renaissance**

There is remarkable similarity between the words Mbeki uses to describe his African Renaissance and the terms used in the European Renaissance already described. Throughout his book (1998) and his different speeches (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002) we find words like "rebirth", "re-awakening", "revival", "restoration", "re-appearance". He no doubt has the rebirth of Africa in mind. As we will soon see, his vision includes a return to Africa's past. But, as was the case in Europe, especially within the later Renaissance, it is also future-oriented.

One of Mbeki's central themes in his speech at the African Renaissance Conference (1998) was: "Yesterday is a foreign country – tomorrow belongs to us". From these words it is furthermore clear that the Renaissance of today – like the European one about 500 years ago – is a period of transition.

### **An African Renaissance**

Apart from a real renaissance effort, Mbeki clearly visualises an African Renaissance. This is clear from the grand themes occurring in most of his speeches. Let us have a look at ten of these themes. (It will be interesting to compare this list with the different facets of the African crisis discussed in chapter 2.)

- **Politics**

Mbeki over and over again emphasises that without responsible, accountable, transparent, good democratic government, there can be no African Renaissance. Human rights are therefore important.

- **Society**

Mbeki envisages a people-centred society in which the all-round interests of the masses are promoted rather than the acquisition of power for the elite. Ordinary people should no longer be suppressed, but should participate as a conscious force in the African Renaissance. He is much concerned about the poor, the secondary status of women as well as the youth.

- **Economics**

One of the most important differences between previous renaissance efforts and that of Mbeki is that they shared the common failing not to prioritise the economic aspect as a principle arena of struggle. According to Mbeki economic development is a key factor. Democracy, for instance, cannot be achieved when attention is not paid to the plight of the majority of Africans living in abject poverty and dehumanising conditions.

More or less accepting the capitalist model, he is not uncritical. He calls "the market" the modern God, a supernatural phenomenon to whose dictates everything human must bow in a spirit of powerlessness. In reality, however, the market is made up of people who make conscious decisions. Interventions are made by the World Trade Organisation, the IMF and the World Bank. It is our responsibility to question the nature and purpose of their interventions.

- **Peace, tolerance, reconciliation**

Conflicts of ethnical and religious nature undermine democracy and economic development. The African Renaissance is only possible in conditions of lasting peace and stability, a **Pax Africana**. We should stop the deification of arms to solve our disputes.

- **Development and self-reliance**

Instead of exporting Africa's immense mineral and other natural resources as raw materials, which only benefit the outside world, they should be processed inside the continent. Africa also relies too much on often unnecessary imported goods.

Closely connected with his idea of greater self-reliance is the motto that we should look to African solutions for African problems. Our problems can only be solved by ourselves. We should no longer think that we can depend on the merciful charity that the outside world is going to put in our begging bowl. This does not imply that Mbeki sees no role for the international world in the development of Africa. What it does mean is that African ownership of the African Renaissance is vital for its success. It can only succeed if its objectives are defined by Africans themselves and if we take responsibility for its eventual success. The West should also listen more carefully to their African brothers and sisters and restrain their eagerness to impose their own agendas on Africa.

- **Leadership**

Because in many African countries we have leaders who looted their countries on a scale colonial rulers would have envied, there is a vast need for real servant leaders. Leaders that are committed to defend the interests of the people and not their own. We badly need leaders that refrain from corrupt practices and the abuse of power for self-interest.

- **Communication and information technology**

Also the necessity of the radical improvement needed in this area is stressed by Mbeki, because without it many other facets of the Renaissance will remain a pipe-dream and Africa's permanent global marginalisation will be a fact.

- **Closer co-operation between African countries**

When Africa was divided between the different Europeans colonisers, divisive and arbitrary borders were the result. These are still today perpetuated by African leaders themselves. To realise an African Renaissance, however, we will have to pool our resources, enhance regional and continental co-operation and integration and in this way improve our international competitiveness.

- **Greater international co-operation**

Mbeki has really done an excellent job of putting Africa higher on the international agenda. He is pushing relentlessly for the so-called G8 Western countries to agree that Africa constitutes the principle development challenge in the world. At the same time he is not uncritical about the process of globalisation. Its beneficial effects is by no means automatic. We must therefore immerse ourselves in the international debate about globalisation and its impact on the lives of our people – especially the many poor.

- **Culture**

This is a last feature of Mbeki's programme for an African Renaissance which he very often includes in his speeches. The rebirth he envisages includes a reclaiming of the African history, culture and heritage. This is necessary in order to challenge the Western stereotypes of Africa and the Africans. The colonised people of Africa internalised these Western concepts about their inferiority so that they finally behaved with a slave mentality.

The revival of African history and culture will help us to develop a sense of pride and confidence in ourselves that we can succeed. Usually Mbeki will mention inspiring events from the past, like ancient African civilisations (e.g. Egypt) or great medieval kingdoms (Akana, Mali and Monomotapa). Because slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and the present marginalisation of Africa have seriously damaged our souls, our task is that of a rediscovery of our own souls to restore our self-esteem.

Comparing what Mbeki has to say in this regard with previous efforts mentioned above, his viewpoint is well balanced. He is not overwhelmed by nostalgia. Our memory of the past should inform our vision for the future. We should know our history and culture to be better equipped to deal with the problems of today.

But Western cultural imperialism is not only a problem of yesterday. Also today we can easily succumb to a Coca-Cola culture at the expense of our own culture and identity. A difficult question is how African countries can open their doors to Western products and capital, on the one hand, and on the other hand, keep out the cultural baggage that accompanies capitalism and consumerism. Will we be able to remain ourselves in the long run or will we be forced to become Westerners?

If I understand Mbeki correctly, he is not advocating a simple return to the past. Nor is he trying to achieve an opportunistic *mélange* of the traditional and the modern. He is attempting to identify the valuable in traditional African worldviews and to build the future on the foundation of these values.



## **Summary: an inward, continental and global look**

Landsberg and Hlope (1999) summarise Mbeki's African Renaissance ideals in the following three points:

- **A look inward and at the past**

Because the identity, worth and dignity of the African peoples have been trampled upon by both colonialism and apartheid, we have to look at our past heritage to recover our own identity and self-esteem in the present.

Some may regard this talk about culture as conservative or retrogressive, but I don't agree. Cultural identity and pride is a prerequisite to inspire and sustain democracy and economic development. Compare for instance Lawrence Harrison's **Underdevelopment as a state of mind** and **Who prospers; how cultural values shape economic and political success**. This point is also emphasised by the Ghanain philosopher, Kwame Gyekye, in his excellent book **Tradition and modernity** (1997), especially in its last two chapters (p.217-297).

- **A continental look**

In the second place, the African Renaissance is a departure from the hostile policy (that was the mark of the apartheid regime) towards other African countries. It signals a more neighbourly policy towards the rest of the continent. It grew out of the realisation that South Africa cannot itself succeed when it is surrounded by poor, underdeveloped countries. It is also stimulated by the belief that South Africa can be a catalyst or bridge to unleash prosperity in the rest of Africa.

- **A global look**

Lastly, as stated above already, economic development is of vital importance and in the contemporary world this can only be achieved by integration into the global market. To accomplish this we will indeed need a new world order.

### **A brief evaluation**

Let me, in conclusion, mention three reasons why I personally appreciate Mbeki's efforts.

- Because Afro-pessimism is a contagious disease which paralyses, I admire his **optimism**. He firmly believes that, if Africa could overcome slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and apartheid, it can also be victorious in its struggle against present challenges. I fully agree with him when he says that what was previously necessary is

now possible; what was desirable in the past, is realisable in the future. Mbeki is a visionary and the vision he offers is worth our best efforts.

- But Mbeki is also a **realist**. I appreciate his realism when he emphasises that none of what is visualised in the African Renaissance will come about on its own, simply by repeating its objectives. To materialise the vision will ask concerted effort, very hard work indeed.
- In the third place I like his **critical approach**. He speaks convincingly because he does not gloss over all Africa's problems, like underdevelopment, bad leadership, corruption, disease, famine, etc. He openly confesses that Africa's problems were not only caused by colonial powers, but also by Africans themselves. He challenges the African's scape-goating and complacency which blames all the continent's ills on foreigners without accepting blame or responsibility themselves. He openly criticises the abuse of power and the cancer of self-enrichment by corrupt means of many African leaders. He rejects the culture in Africa that "brothers should not criticise each other".

Another side of his critical approach is that directed at the West, who should not always prescribe to Africans what to do, but give them the opportunity to find real African solutions for our unique African problems.

Some serious hurdles will, however, have to be overcome – both inside and outside the continent – to realise the African Renaissance. Will the necessary foreign investments from the outside world be obtained? This will to a large extent depend on whether African leaders would be willing to stop their abuse of power and self-enrichment to rule in a responsible, accountable way. Taking these two facts into account, the likely outcome will be that some countries will get their house in order, but that in other the retardation and underdevelopment will continue.

## **19.4 Similarities and differences**

### **19.4.1 Similarities**

It will not be difficult to enumerate many similarities between the previous European Renaissance and the present African Renaissance. Both of them started because of dissatisfaction with the "dark times" experienced. Both did not occur suddenly, but they were processes of a few centuries. Both tried to look backward in the rear-view mirror to be able to drive with confidence into the future. Both entailed a discovery of what it means to be human, to be liberated from all kinds of oppression.

### 19.4.2 Differences

But because these two renaissances occurred historically at different times and are also geographically separated, one can expect great differences. I will mention only one.

During the approximately 500 years that separate us from Renaissance and Reformation, Western culture has changed drastically. The moderate form of humanism of the Renaissance developed into anti-religious secularism. The characteristics of the secularist worldview are that God's existence is denied. Even if He may exist, his existence does not really matter, it has no relevance to human affairs. When God is declared dead, his will (as expressed in his commandments) does not have any claim on us any longer. Man has become autonomous, creating his own standards, values, norms and guidelines according to which life is organised. Through the use of an idolised reason, man has become the creator of his own destiny. The age old sin of man, viz. the desire to become god himself, already described at the beginning of the Bible, became a fact in Western culture. Western secularism has today infiltrated also the non-western world, Africa included. In the public life of politics, economics, education, etc. religion of whatever kind – except secular religion - is not welcome. Its influence has to be confined to the private life of family and church.

We should therefore not be surprised when president Mbeki does not mention a possible role for any kind of religion in his African Renaissance. He may be a Christian, but he clearly does not see the relevance of Christianity for the burning issues of Africa. It may also be that, because there are so many religions in South Africa, as head of state he cautiously steers away from the topic. Whatever the case, the fact remains that it is difficult to pinpoint the worldviewish presuppositions underlying his ideas about an African Renaissance. Let us consider the possibilities.

From his bibliographical sketch (Mbeki, 1998:i-xxii) we can deduce that during his formative years Mbeki got to know both the Western capitalistic and the socialistic worldviews. He first obtained a B.A. (1965) and M.A.-degree (1966), both majoring in economics, from the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom. Then he studied at the Institute of Social Studies in Moscow. He was also influenced by the socialist ideas of the South African Communist Party. After South Africa's independence (1994), these two trends became visible, first in the Reconstruction and Development Programme or RDP (1994) and then in the Growth Employment and Redistribution Programme or GEAR (1996), which not only replaced the more socialist-oriented RDP, but was built on a

capitalist, free market worldview. Also the new South African Constitution (1996) reflects a Western, liberal-democratic and not an African, communalistic worldview.

While Mbeki's speeches on the African Renaissance still contained many references in appreciation of traditional African culture, the "successor" of the African Renaissance, NEPAD, seems to be a more or less purely global economic-political issue. I am afraid that eventually NEPAD (the economic policy of the newly established African Union) will be so strongly influenced by the economically powerful Western G8-countries, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that very little place will be left for a genuine **African Renaissance**.

My preliminary conclusion is that the worldview behind the African Renaissance (including its successors, like MAP, NEPAD and the AU) is not the African traditional worldview, neither Christianity but secular Western individualism. This worldview is determining the (democratic) political ideals and the (neo-capitalist free market) economic views of the African Renaissance. It fits into the political-economic globalisation propagated by the powerful Western world and its allies, like Japan. (For a description of the neo-capitalist free market ideology, see Van der Walt, 1999a:59-74.)

Because I firmly believe that no kind of development – including economic and political development – can be healthy development without the correct cultural-worldviewish foundation (cf. Van der Walt, 1999b and 2001:43-92 for details), this capitulation to a secular, Western model of development augurs nothing good for the future of our continent. Development can only be genuine development – enhancing the **well-being** of the whole human being and not only his/her material **welfare** – when it seriously takes into account the culture, worldview and religion of the people to be "developed". Only to our detriment can we ignore the fact that Africa is not identical to the West and therefore needs its own indigenous way of development.

As Christians we cannot accept this state of affairs, especially because of the large and still growing number of Christians not only in South Africa, but also in the whole subcontinent. I am convinced that Christians can and should play a vital role in the African Renaissance. We can make a difference.

#### **19.4.3 The Christian's attitude**

What, then, should our attitude as Christians be towards the African Renaissance? To my mind it should be the same as that of the reformers during the European Renaissance. They did not isolate themselves from the Renaissance movement of their times. They fully

participated in its efforts for renewal. They learned quite a lot from the classical humanists in their reformational efforts. In the same way much can be learned from Mbeki's renaissance vision that is already developing into a concrete policy for action. He puts his finger on the things that really matter, the real vital issues confronting our continent. This, alas, cannot be said about most types of Christianity on our continent.

### **Escapism and pietism**

I have heard some Christians saying that Mbeki's effort reminds them of the typical humanist who tries to pull himself from the morass by his own bootstraps. This remark contains some truth. But, on the other hand, Christians in Africa are often guilty of the opposite mistake: They sit back in complacency or at most they pray that God will intervene, without pulling up their sleeves and dirtying their hands.

We cannot ignore the fact that perhaps the dominant type of Christianity on our continent is of an escapist and pietist nature (Van der Walt, 2001:18-20,103-104). Their Christian faith is something of another world, without any relevance to the burning issues of Africa. However, **if we want a new Africa, we need a new type of Christianity** (Van der Walt, 1999a:1-22).

### **Religion and society**

We will, therefore, have done some serious reflection on the central issue of the relationship between religion and society at large (politics, economics, medical care, agriculture, education, etc.) How should we as Christians be involved in the so-called public square? (For more detail, see again chapter 11.)

Many are of the opinion that religion does not make any difference to society. Others believe that it does have an impact, but a negative one. Still others think that the influence of religion has to be limited to private life and the church.

The Reformational viewpoint, however, is that life is religion. Whether we like it or not, as humans we are religious beings. We have to give our hearts to someone or something bigger than ourselves. We are either gripped by the true God or something in creation which is elevated to a divine position. We either obey God's commandments or we obey the instructions of the idol we worship. We personally look more and more like that which we regard as absolute. And we create a society according to our own image.

Because religion is a fallible, human response to what is regarded as divine, it can definitely be used wrongly. Also Christians in the past have done bad things in the name

of Christ (cf. the apartheid ideology). But it is just as true that Christians can be a powerful force for the reformation of every aspect of life.

### **The need of a Christian worldview**

Why then does Christianity, in spite of its numbers, have so little impact on society? One of the main reasons, I think, is because of the lack of a deep, broad and inspiring Christian worldview. To be a reborn Christian and regularly attend church is not enough. Our eyes have to be opened, our vision broadened, we have to know **how** to serve God in every part of our existence.

The outline of such a worldview was formulated long ago by the great African thinker, Aurelius Augustine (354-431). It was reformulated again by John Calvin (1509-1564) and refined by many Reformational thinkers during following centuries. Its essence is that a Christian should not try to live **against, alongside or above** the world. In order to renew and transform it, the Christian should be present **in** the world. The title of a recent book by Marshall and Gilbert (1998) states it negatively: **Heaven is not my home: living in the now of God's creation**. It could also be stated positively as is the case with an earlier book by Wolters (1985): **Creation regained; biblical basics for a reformational worldview**.

According to the medieval worldview (see above) Christians had to choose between God and the world. You either live in this world and forsake God, or you serve God and forsake the world. According to a Reformational worldview, this is a false choice. We have to serve God **in** his creation! (For details on a Reformational worldview, see chapter 20.)

Let me conclude with a last remark.

The maturation of African Christianity, a genuine renaissance, urgently requires the creation of written sources to nourish such an all-encompassing Christian-Reformational worldview. This literature must come from the pens and computers of Africans themselves. We need a whole new corpus of Christian literature that will address the real burning issues of Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from a Reformational perspective. We need a new generation of African reformers – contemporary Augustines and Calvins. They should help us to ensure that this new century is not merely an **African** century. It should be a century **belonging to God**. Remember: If Christ is not King of all, He is not King at all!

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## Chapter 20:

### AN INTEGRAL BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

#### A key to the rebuilding of Africa

Apart from myself, other African writers or writers on Africa have realised that a comprehensive Christian worldview is a **conditio sine qua non**, an absolute prerequisite for Christianity to have any real, deep and lasting impact on the African continent. Already in the second chapter of this book I mentioned that Prof. George Kinoti emphasised the need of a holistic Christian perspective on the world. Dr. Tukurunboh Adeyemo (1993) also stressed the urgent need of a Biblical worldview, of which the two most important components for Africa should be a Christian view of being human and of society. Dr. Stuart Fowler (1995) is of the same opinion about the importance of a Christian frame of mind.

According to Mark Shaw (1986) some African Christians regard very little or nothing in their traditional culture as worthwhile of serving the Lord. To be a real Christian requires the wholesale rejection of one's culture. Other Christians – the majority? – try to sprinkle traditional religion and culture with holy water to swallow it as it is. The problem of many Africans is that the Christian faith can dualistically become a daylight religion that is irrelevant to the dark world of spirits and magic. This is the reason why Shaw is so enthusiastic about a Biblical Reformational worldview, purified of both Western and African distortions. The future of African Christianity will be bleak if it simply sheds one brand of dualism for another. But with an integral Christian worldview Christ can become Lord over the day as well as the dark.

More and more Christian leaders and writers in Africa are therefore starting to realise the need of a biblically sound and inspiring worldview in order to solve Africa's vexing problems. (For a definition of a worldview, see chapter 4).

This chapter consists of three main sections. The first is of a historical nature. It indicates that there are a limited number of five basic positions a Christian could take in his/her relation towards creation or "the world". These different attitudes are recurring throughout history, also in Africa. They determine how we as Christians view our task in creation. They have different practical consequences. Unfortunately four of them are

wrong choices, because they are of a dualistic and not a holistic nature. The brief historical overview, therefore serves as a warning against the destructive influence of dualistic Christian worldviews for our presence in the world.

The second main section of the chapter, apart from providing a systematic typology of the five basic positions, also indicates their different practical implications. Furthermore, this section criticises from a biblical perspective the dualistic Christian worldviews by indicating that they are not founded in the Scriptures.

The third main section of the chapter indicates how an integral Christian worldview enables us to answer one of the most important questions of life, viz. its ultimate meaning. It answers the following three basic questions: (1) Why are we here? (2) Where are we going? (3) How should we live?

This concluding chapter explains the liberating perspective from which we have approached different issues of vital importance for the future of Africa in the preceding chapters. It is a liberating perspective because it takes creation and our task to renew or transform it seriously.

## **20.1 Dualistic worldviews in the history of Christianity**

### **20.1.1 The pagan origins of dualistic thought**

Before the advent of Christ the Word of God was more or less confined to the elect, to Israel. The Greeks and Romans were pagans, living according to a culture, worldview and philosophy in which the Word of God was unknown. But after Christ the Gospel was no longer restricted to the Jewish people, it was preached all over Europe.

The paths of paganism and Christianity converged. Europe was not only Christianised, but Christianity was also Hellenised. Newly converted Christians read the Bible through the spectacles of their pagan worldview, because they could not immediately rid themselves of the culture they were educated in and the convictions they adhered to. And even those who later on grew up in a Christian church, were still surrounded daily by pagan culture. In attacks on the church from outside as well as in the case of internal heresies, they were dependent on terminology borrowed from pagan philosophy to defend themselves. The early Christians were not always sufficiently aware of the radical antithesis between the pagan and Christian (biblically inspired) worldviews. The result was a mentality that favoured synthesis.

One of the ideas that infiltrated early Christianity because of its synthetic attitude was the ontological dualism of a higher over against a lower sphere in reality. This dualism of holy or sacred over and against a profane or secular realm, belongs to the oldest traditions of paganism.

While this distinction between the sacred and the secular was not very clear in "primitive" Greek culture, it was sharpened into a dualism by the first Greek philosophers. In their rational, philosophical enquiry they rejected the polytheistic and pantheistic beliefs of their times. Over against the previous **confusion** between the divine (sacred) and non-divine (secular), they advocated a total **separation** between the two. The divine was declared to be something transcendent, above the cosmos. This idea of transcendence is not a biblical idea: the true God is **different** from His creation, but He can never be **separated** from it.

As a result of their synthesis mentality the early Christians accepted this basic dualism, merely replacing the pagan gods with the God of the Bible, the **theologos** with the church official and the sacred realm in creation with the church.

But this effort to harmonise the truth of the Word of God with another total view of reality did not succeed, because the two views are religiously diametrically opposed to each other. The final victory did not belong to the Gospel, but to pagan dualistic thought. This became evident during the succeeding history of Christianity when, time and again, this dualism torpedoed the most gallant efforts of Christians to be present in the world.

The basic reason is that once one has split the one creation of God into two spheres, these can never be united again into a seamless unity. It is inevitable that, when one **begins** with the presupposition that creation consists of two parts, realms or spheres (a sacred and a secular), the two then have a real or legitimate existence. Therefore one is forced to reduce, distort and deform the rich diversity of reality into only two aspects. At the same time its unity is lost.

In the case of Christianity the implication was that the all-encompassing kingdom of God – wide as creation itself – was restricted to only one area, viz. man's cultic or confessional life viewed as inherently sacred or holy. Or, to turn the statement around: church life was absolutised so that it encompassed the kingdom of God. Such a limitation of the kingdom of God in principle excludes the possibility that His kingdom might embrace the whole

world. Having first tied the Bible, religion and God's kingdom to the church, one cannot give genuine biblical witness in the other areas of life.

The basic mistake of early Christianity – which plagued Christianity throughout its subsequent history – can also be explained by saying that Christians ascribed an **ontological** (or structural) character to the **religious** (or directional) antithesis between obedience and disobedience to God: one part of creation (the sacred) was regarded to be good by nature, while the other was considered to be of less importance or even evil by nature.

### 20.1.2 Patristic and Medieval thought

Employing Tertullian's metaphor of Athens (Greek-Roman culture and philosophy) and Jerusalem (the Bible and Christianity) three distinct positions can be distinguished:

- **An attitude of conformity to the world**, which claimed that Jerusalem is basically not different from Athens and *vice versa*. Therefore pagan culture and philosophy are (through allegorical eisegesis) sanctioned by the Bible and Christianity. In its turn Greek culture should serve as a preparation for the Gospel.

Clement of Alexandria (d. 212AD) uses different images to illustrate this viewpoint. The Old Testament and Greek culture are like two rivers which become one in the New Testament Gospel. God educated the Jews with the Old Testament and the Greeks with their pagan culture towards the final fulfilment in Christ! According to Paul's image of the olive tree (Rom. 11:17) Christian belief has to be grafted on to Greek philosophical thought (the wild olive tree) to be able to bear fruit! Clement even believed that, when necessary, as David beheaded the pagan Goliath with his own sword, heathen thought can be employed by Christians to oppose heathen philosophy!

Origen (182-233 AD) also believed that heathen wisdom should serve as preparation for the Christian faith which provides the fulfilment. Just as the Lord commanded the Israelites at their departure from Egypt to take treasures from the Egyptians for the erection of the tabernacle, so we as Christians have the right to "plunder" heathen philosophy!

- **An attitude of flight from the world** which, in reaction to the first position, taught that Jerusalem should have nothing to do with Athens and *vice versa*. But in spite of the fact that they are opposed to each other, both have a right to existence.

From all the representatives of this stance (Tatianus, Lactantius, Lucifer of Calaris), the North African advocate, Tertullian (150-223 AD), is the most famous. His paradoxical position (biblical revelation and Greek culture and philosophy disagree – but both are true!) may give the impression that he was not influenced by pagan Greek thought at all. The fact is that even he could not disentangle himself from its influence. The dualism in his approach becomes evident when one carefully studies his works.

- **An attitude of compromise with the world** finally tried to avoid the two previous extreme viewpoints of world-conformity and world-flight. Jerusalem (the Scriptures, Christian faith, the church) was neither permitted to be submerged into Athens, nor to escape from it. Jerusalem is neither (more or less) identical to Athens, nor opposed to it, but – as the superior of the two – it surpasses and perfects Athens. Greek culture and philosophy should therefore prepare the way for Christian faith – even defend it. (A similar idea is already present in the first viewpoint. The difference is that the **epistemological** problem of the relationship between faith and reason now developed into an **ontological** distinction.)

The outstanding example in this case is Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who taught that nature – as a threshold to a sanctuary – serves as a necessary and a legitimate preparation for grace. Grace, in turn, does not **abolish** nature, but **completes** or **perfects** it. It is, however, not in a position to really change or transform nature, because nature has a legitimate place of its own and grace has been separated from it beforehand.

### 20.1.3 Sixteenth century Christianity

During this century of the Reformation the Christian models for involvement in the world had increased to five paradigms of “reformation”. We again encounter the three earlier models of world-conformity, world-flight and world-compromise, but in the last one we can now distinguish two subtypes. In total then four distinct answers to the question of how the Christian viewed the world: where the first type **identified** the Christian and the world, the second advocated an attitude of the Christian **against** the world, the third advanced the position of the Christian **above** the world and according to the fourth the Christian should live **next to** or **beside** the world. The fifth option is: Christian **in** the world. Let us have a brief look at each one of them.

- **Christian of the world (or worldly Christian): early Humanism**

This viewpoint was represented in the fifteenth and sixteenth century by the early or so-called Christian humanists (see previous chapter). According to them no real antithesis existed between Christians and the world. The aim of the humanists was a revival of classical (Greek and Roman) philosophy and culture through which Christians should be educated and civilised. They also favoured early Patristic Christian synthetic thought because they intended to indicate how one could be a Greek/Roman and a Christian at the same time! Their intention was not religious renewal, but the Christian faith was more or less watered down to a kind of moral veneer. The tension between “in but not of the world” was suspended.

- **Christian against the world: Anabaptism**

The Anabaptists were the radicals of the sixteenth century. They rejected both the “liberal” attitude of the humanists and the “vacillating” attitude of the Catholics and Protestants. They wanted to make a definite choice between church and world. One should be either of the world or a Christian! According to them there was not merely a **relative** difference between Christian and world, but an **absolute**, unbridgeable gap. The real Christian has no other option but to be **against** the world and to withdraw himself, retreating into an alternative church consisting of really holy people. In their churches the Anabaptists lived under strict discipline, practised communal property, adult baptism and lived in an intense expectation of God’s kingdom.

But, as in the case of their world-flight predecessors in Early Christianity, they could not maintain their viewpoint consistently. A careful study of Anabaptism reveals a curious ambiguity. On the one hand they were pacifists, rejecting politics and military service. But on the other hand they often turned into activists, revolutionary fanatics, who wanted to destroy the world to establish the kingdom of God here and now. They could not be consistent in their attitude of the Christian being “out of the world”, because it robbed them of any relevance to the world!

Behind this strange conduct once again lies an unbiblical anthropology and an ontological dualism of sacred-secular. The ambiguity in their lives is explained by the fact that they see-sawed between the two “poles” of the sacred-secular dilemma, sometimes emphasising the sacred pole and at other times the secular pole.

- **The Christian above the world: Catholicism**

The first middle-of-the-road position (in reaction to the above two extremes) is a continuation of the two-storey viewpoint of Thomas Aquinas, already discussed in the previous section. In the upper storey the Christian lives with his Bible, church and theology in **isolation** from the world, but in the lower storey he lives **in** the world of family life, politics, commerce and philosophy. The relationship between nature (the lower storey) and grace (the upper storey) is one of good-better. To be an ordinary member of the church (a layman) is good, but to belong to the clerical order is better! To marry is good, but celibacy is better!

The world-wide kingdom of God is reduced to the institutional church, the dispenser of grace. From its elevated position, the church has to "baptise" or put its ecclesiastical stamp on everything in the lower realm of "ordinary" life. This ecclesiastical imperialism did have some Christianising influence on the "secular" world, but it mostly amounted to being nothing more than a very thin layer of Christian varnish. The Christian faith was not permitted to **reform** the world from **inside** – it was good already – but could simply **improve** or **perfect** it.

- **The Christian next to the world: Lutheranism**

One could describe Luther's position as a stance between the Anabaptist against the world and the Catholic above the world viewpoints. He regarded the Anabaptist world-flight as too Christian and the Catholic world-conformity as too worldly. Both stressed one of the two "regiments" at the cost of the other, while Luther wanted to maintain a careful balance between what he also called the two "kingdoms". They should be separated and not confused. He taught, for instance, that one can be both a prince (politician) and a Christian, but the two are totally different and have nothing to say to each other. The consequence is that a Christian constantly has to live with one foot in the sacred and the other in the secular world. Luther also committed the basic mistake to fix, localise or institutionalise the deep religious antithesis between obedience and disobedience. Consequently a Christian has to live according to two contradicting sets of norms!

The fact that he speaks of the dominion of God's right hand (the church) and the dominion of His left hand (the state) softened his dualistic approach, because both are regarded as God's dominions. On the other hand one may argue that the Catholic viewpoint of a **vertical** relationship between church and state may have allowed more Christian



influence on politics than Luther's **horizontal** relationship between the two. In summary it is clear that Lutheranism cannot be called a world-transformative type of Christianity – it is prohibited by its worldview of two separate kingdoms.

- **The Christian in the world: Reformational thinkers**

Calvin held a different position from the already mentioned other four models of Christian involvement in the world. His basic intention was not to **identify** the Christian and the world, nor to put himself **against** the world, to elevate him **above** the world or to take a stance **beside** the world, but to be concretely and fully involved **in** the world **in order to** transform and renew it.

In the mind of the French Reformer, re-creation is not a system which **supplements** creation, as in Catholicism, not a religious reformation which leaves creation **intact**, as in Luther, much less a **new** creation, as in Anabaptism, but a joyful tiding of the **renewal** of all creatures. Here the Gospel comes fully into its own. Not only the church, but also the home, school, society and state are placed under the dominion of God and his Word.

Very important is that creation – God's creation – was regained or rediscovered in Calvin's thought. He rediscovered the natural, restored it to its rightful place, and freed it from the Roman Catholic stigma from being profane and unhallowed. The natural is not something of a lesser value and of a lower order, as though it were not susceptible to sanctification and renewal, but rather required to be bridled and repressed. It is just as divine as the church.

The most important contribution of Calvin was that he replaced the **ontological** distinction between nature and grace with a **religious** one. Christianity is not a quantitative entity which hovers transcendentally above the natural, but a religious power which enters immanently within the natural and banishes only that which is impure.

#### **20.1.4 Post-Reformation Orthodoxy or Protestant Scholasticism (16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century)**

Something very strange happened soon after Luther's and Calvin's rediscovery of the Word of God. While Calvin succeeded – in a miraculous way – to escape the full magnetic pull of dualistic scholasticism, his successors completely fell back into it again.

Scholasticism had three basic, distinctive characteristics: (1) It was a synthesis between the Bible and ancient Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle; (2) It accomplished this

synthesis by means of the method of nature and grace and (3) It accepted the Thomistic distinction between theology and philosophy, according to which theology (belonging to the realm of supernatural grace) should employ philosophy (belonging to the realm of nature) as a subordinate servant.

Scholasticism was an abstract, arid and doctrinaire theology – resulting in a cold, lifeless and negative Christianity. This stiffened orthodoxy was the kiss of death to the work of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers. Its dependence on neo-Aristotelian, Thomistic philosophy affected not only its method, but also its message. The living faith of the Reformers was gradually replaced by an ever increasing reliance on reason and ever subtler distinctions and speculations. The net result was a static, rigid dogmatism and dead orthodoxy. In effect, the dynamic Word of God and living faith in it was replaced by reason and logic. A rationalistic **rigor mortis** (stiffness of death) gained the upperhand!

How was it possible for the Reformation to be of such short duration and for scholasticism to gain such a powerful influence at universities all over Europe? The main reason was the following. Post-Reformation scholars wanted to base their heritage on a rational (theological) foundation. But, because during the Reformation, no radical Christian philosophy was developed, they lacked the necessary philosophical “tools” to do so. The only “Christian” philosophy available was synthetic scholasticism. And the way of using it had already been smoothed by the relapse of Beza and others into this kind of synthesis.

An important motive behind this whole effort was of an apologetic nature. The Reformed heritage had to be defended – first against Catholicism and later on against Rationalism. It is a real tragedy that in this way they tried to fight Catholicism with its own philosophy and Rationalism with scholastic synthetic philosophy – instead of defending their heritage with an integral Christian philosophy!

### **20.1.5 Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)**

These two Dutchmen again revived the reformational idea. They were followed by a long list of Reformational philosophers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The central idea in Bavinck’s thought (cf. Veenhof, 1994) was that grace does not **abolish** nature but **restores** it. His viewpoint is clear from the following quotations:

- "So Christianity did not come into the world to condemn or put under ban everything which existed beforehand, but quite the opposite, to purify from sin everything that was; thus to cause it to answer again to its own nature and purpose".
- "Revelation does not mean an annihilation, but a restoration of God's sin-disrupted work in creation. Revelation is an act of reformation; in re-creation the creation ... is restored ..." Salvation in Christ is "not a new creation, but a re-creation". Bavinck continues: "It would have been much simpler if God had destroyed the whole fallen world and replaced it with an entirely new one. But it was his good pleasure to re-establish the fallen world, and to liberate from sin the same mankind which had sinned".
- Bavinck emphasised that nature as God's creation "is in itself of no less value than grace" and "the kingdom of God is hostile to nothing but sin alone". This insight made it possible for Bavinck to replace the predominantly **ontological** dualism with a more **religious** antithesis. Therefore he could say these remarkable words: Not grace and nature but "grace and sin are opposites; the latter is overcome by the power of the former; but as soon as the power of sin is broken ... the opposition between God and man disappears. Grace militates against *sin* in the natural, but it does not militate against the natural **itself**; on the contrary, it restores the natural and brings it to its normal development, i.e. the development intended by God". Elsewhere he said: "Grace does not suppress nature, including the reason and understanding of man, but rather raises it up and renews it, and stimulates it to concentrated effort".

#### **20.1.6 Similarities between Early Hellenistic Christianity and contemporary African Christianity**

In his dissertation Kwame Bediako (1992), one of the most prominent present-day African theologians, discovered remarkable similarities between the theologies of Early Christianity (2nd century A.D.) and modern Africa. He was so impressed with the similarity that he could write: "If I looked closely enough into the concerns of modern African theologies, it was possible to wake one day and find myself in the second century of the Christian era!" (1992:xii). According to him – apart from their different cultural environments – Early Christianity and contemporary African Christianity belong to one and the same story (1992:xviii, 441), because there is hardly a problem, a situation, a task belonging to the history of the early church which is not a chief preoccupation to the

African churches today. He bemoans the fact that African theologians are not aware of this fact and therefore pursue their agenda in isolation from this rich heritage.

Bediako discusses parallels between the following early Christian and contemporary African theologians:

- **Tertullian compared to Byang Kato:** discontinuity between the Gospel and culture or a negative attitude towards culture.
- **Justin and Clement compared to E. Bolaji Idowu and John S. Mbiti:** continuity between the Gospel and culture or a positive attitude towards culture.
- **Thomas Aquinas compared with Mulago gwa Cikala Musharhamina (a Catholic):** both continuity and discontinuity between Gospel and culture.

In other words, today we encounter the same three basic positions in Africa as those described above, viz world-flight, world-conformity and world-compromise.

### **20.1.7 The development of escapist Christianity in Africa**

Bediako did not indicate which of the three models can be considered the most popular in Africa. According to my own research the model of world-conformity or compromise (propagated by Idowu and Mbiti) was at first very popular amongst African theologians in favour of an own African theology. Gradually, however – especially during the last decade or two of the previous century – a shift occurred to a kind of world-flight attitude.

#### **The Evangelical heritage**

When we keep in mind the strong influence of missionaries from the Evangelical camp on the continent in mind, this world-flight trend is not something new. Amongst the many characteristics of the Evangelicals is their pietism (a limitation of the Gospel to one's soul or inner life), individualism, emphasis on personal holiness only, their spiritualising of the kingdom of God to become something transcendent and heavenly, and their reluctance to be involved in public life, for example in politics.

Early Evangelicals maintained an **either-or position**: either proclamation of the Gospel or social involvement. In this false dilemma, they chose for evangelisation over against presence in social-cultural life. It is true that in approximately 1974 (Lausanne I) a shift was noticeable in the evangelical mind from an either-or position to a **both-and stance**: both evangelisation and social involvement. How this should be understood was not

always clear. At least three possibilities crystallised: (1) social involvement as a **result** of evangelism; (2) as a **bridge** towards proclaiming the Gospel and (3) social involvement as a **companion** to proclamation. It seems to me, however, that this both-and position – apart from its inherent dualism – did not last long. Already at Lausanne II (1989) social involvement was rarely mentioned.

### **The most recent trends**

One should keep in mind that African Christianity is both a localised religion and part of a world religion. On the one hand it is influenced by local circumstances like poverty as well as traditional African cultures, worldviews and religion and on the other hand by trends in European and especially American Christianity.

One of the outstanding characteristics of this type of Christianity imported from the US is its strong disapproval of Christians with a social conscience. It is a privatised, spiritualised and individualistic religion which offers no criticism of the existing socio-economic-political order, but rather supports even oppressive governments. It easily deteriorates into a civil religion which exploits the Christian religion for economic and political ends.

The sort of liberation which this kind of Christianity offers is liberation from alcohol, tobacco, paralysing doctrinal beliefs, law, church tradition, intellectualism, the spirit of criticism and bad marriages. For millions of other captives – captives of poverty, imprisonment, malnutrition, educational deprivation – not a word ... All is private, personalised, narrowly spiritual, intra-ecclesial. There is no threat to any social order here.

Gifford in his book **The religious right in Southern Africa (1988)** describes in detail the lack of social awareness amongst these Christians because of their one-sided emphasis on personal motivation, personal sin, private morality, exclusive reliance on prayer and the miraculous intervention of God. The following quotation more or less summarises the whole package of the vote of this type of Christianity for the **status quo**: ... "by focusing so narrowly on supernatural causes, it diverts attention from the economic and political causes of so much reality – it hardly encourages critical analysis of the economic interests shaping society. By advocating the gospel of prosperity, it dissuades adherents from evaluating the present economic order, merely persuading them to try to be amongst those who benefit from it. With its emphasis on personal healing, it diverts attention from

social ills that are crying out for remedy. Its stress on human wickedness and the 'fallen' nature of 'the world' is no incentive to social, economic or constitutional reform. By emphasising personal morality so exclusively, it all but eliminates any interest in systematic or institutional justice. By making everything so simple, it distracts attention from the very real contradictions in the lives of so many ... By spiritualising everything, it leaves no room for social involvement, except that of exerting influence by the example of personal holiness" (Gifford, 1988:69. See also Gifford, 1998.)

### **Christianity an opium?**

In summary, we may say that this is clearly an **escapist** type of Christianity, trying to achieve the impossible: to serve God **outside** His creation. We know that in times of trouble and crises people tend to take refuge in a simple, basic type of Christianity in which they can feel at home and escape the harsh realities of the world around them. (Some of these groups will, for instance, continue their worship services non stop through a whole day or even a night!) But at the same time the Christian religion then becomes an anaesthetic or drug instead of a tonic or stimulant for social action. As someone with Reformed convictions I cannot expect much hope for the future of our continent if we have to rely on this type of Christianity imported from abroad and, at the moment, spreading like wildfire throughout Africa.

#### **20.1.8 Growing secularism in Africa**

While many African Christians still look for the enemy outside themselves in, for instance, witchcraft, demons and other religions, a secular worldview has infiltrated deep into their hearts and lives. Added to this is a second irony, namely that this secular worldview did not originate from **outside** Christianity. It slowly developed from **inside** Christianity itself, being the direct result of a dualistic Christian worldview in which the "natural" realm was separated from the influence of the "sacred" realm. Secularism's influence has become so pervasive on our continent that we don't even recognise it.

A brief description of its major characteristics will help us to recognise the dangers of secularism. They are the following: (1) Secularism is a religion, an alternative religion which is to an increasing extent shaping the fundamental character of our societies in Africa. It is not necessary to engage in acts of worship, rites and rituals to be religious! (2) Secularism is a shift from the worship of spiritual powers (external to the human person) to secular powers (identified with the human person). (3) Because man himself is

worshipped, he is also regarded as autonomous, a law unto himself. (4) The main feature of secularism is not the **denial** of the existence of God or the sacred, but the **separation** between the "sacred" and the "secular", of religious faith from everyday life. We should not be deceived either by a growing number of Christians in Africa or by the place and scope given to formal acts of worship in public life. Secularism may allow room in the "public square" that pays homage to God. In many instances governmental, educational and business activities may start with prayers and devotions, but what happens following these ceremonies does not reflect any obedience to God and his Word. These activities, therefore, do not challenge secularism, but rather encourage its development, because secularism has no problem with someone confessing his/her faith, but such faith should have no place in the functioning and direction of "secular" affairs. It remains in fact an empty confession, because it has no relevance to practical, everyday life.

Secularism will eventually – as is already clearly evident in the West – bring about the decline of Christianity in Africa, because people will realise that an empty, otherworldly religion cannot solve our real problems. What we need instead is an integral, radical, encompassing, biblical Christianity which, because of its transforming power, is of direct relevance to every facet of our lives!

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We have arrived – after a lengthy review of the history of dualism during more than 2 000 years – at the final, more systematic section of this chapter. The last three sections will first provide a summary of the five main types of two-realm theories; in the second place illustrate their practical consequences; concluding in the third place with a biblical critique.

## **20.2 A typology of five basic Christian worldviews**

The variety among Christian worldviews becomes evident when one takes a look at the different answers Christians provide regarding the relationship between grace and nature. However, like many other fundamental problems in the history of thought, the number of possible answers to the problem of the relationship between grace (redemption) and nature (creation) or the Christian and culture/world are limited. As described above, only five basic models or paradigms have been employed during the past 2,000 years.

### **20.2.1 Different attempts at a typology**

Herman Bavinck (cf. Veenhof, 1994) was one of the first to distinguish carefully between the five positions. Following his pioneering work, we have Richard Niebuhr's classic, **Christ and Culture** (first published in 1951, with many reprints). In 1970 James Olthuis gave his own version of the five types. And more recently Albert Wolters (1990) applied the same basic models to explain the different attitudes of Christians to Greco-Roman culture.

Of course it is not only Reformed people who have struggled to develop a typology of the different options. As early as the early nineteen forties Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1966:196) summarised three of the five models with the following words: "In the scholastic scheme of things the realm of the natural is made subordinate to the realm of grace; in the pseudo-Lutheran scheme the autonomy of the orders of this world is proclaimed in opposition to the law of Christ; and in the scheme of the Enthusiasts the congregation of the Elect takes up the struggle with a hostile world for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth."

### **20.2.2 The principium divisionis**

Of the five viewpoints four are dualistic. Only one really rejects dualism. The two moderate types avoid the extremism of the other two viewpoints, but all four accept dualism.

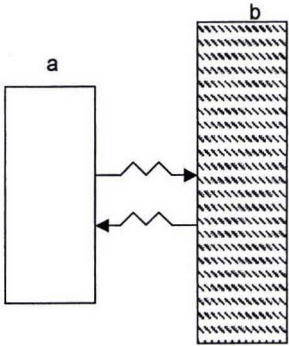
One can apply different principles to arrange the five paradigms. On the one side, thinkers emphasise the corrupting power of sin and consider the natural realm to be predominantly evil while, on the other side, others are impressed by the goodness of creation and conceive the realm of nature to be more or less good in itself. Therefore, the most common method is to order them according to the degree of appreciation for nature in contrast to grace, from the most negative to the most positive.

Because dualism (or its rejection in the fifth model) plays such a fundamental role in one's outlook on life as a whole, these frameworks are more than merely models for describing the relationship between nature and grace. We can also use them in describing different worldviews. The following comparison provides a summary of the worldview models distinguished by three of the aforementioned authors, indicating their basic agreement:

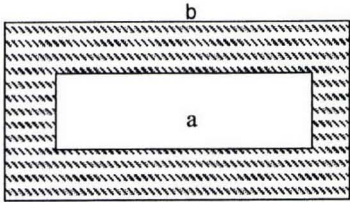


<b>Niebuhr</b>	<b>Olthuis</b>	<b>Wolters</b>
Christ <b>against</b> culture	Right bank extreme (Tertullian, Anabaptism, older Evangelicalism, dialectical theology, e.g. Karl Barth)	Grace <b>opposes</b> nature
Christ <b>of</b> culture	Left bank extreme (from Origen and Justin, to modern theologians like Ritschl, Paul Tillich, Paul van Buuren, and the social gospel movement)	Grace <b>equals</b> nature
Christ <b>above</b> culture	Moderate, middle of the stream type - to the left (Thomism, Neo-Thomism, Catholicism)	Grace <b>perfects</b> nature
Christ <b>and</b> culture in paradox	Moderate, middle of the stream type - more to the right (old and new Lutheranism)	Grace <b>flanks</b> (stands alongside) nature
Christ <b>transforms</b> culture	The Reformational-biblical model (Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, Olthuis, Wolters - Niebuhr's position is not clear)	Grace <b>restores</b> nature

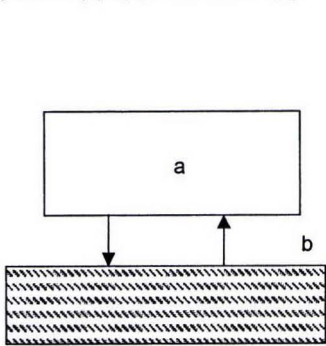
This typology can be visualised in the following diagram (Van der Walt, 1994:102 and 1999:133):



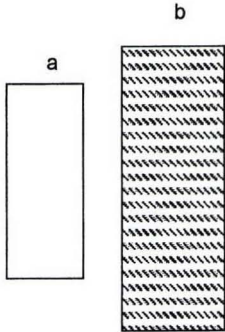
(1) Grace (a) **opposes** nature (b)



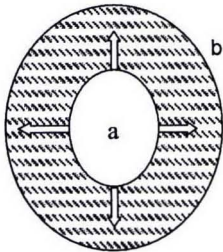
(2) Grace (a) **equals** nature (b)



(3) Grace (a) **perfects** nature (b)



(4) Grace (a) **flanks** nature (b)



(5) Grace (a) **restores** nature (b) from within

Worldviews number 1, 3 and 4 can be characterised as dualistic, number 2 as the liberal perspective, while number 5 is what I would regard as the radical, Reformational or biblical perspective.

### 20.3 Practical consequences

The difference between the five paradigms or worldviews becomes even clearer when their practical results in everyday life are considered.

Manifestations of dualism include the following: (1) Sunday is regarded as the Lord's day, but the rest of the week is for us to get our business done. (2) Tithe money is dedicated to God; with the rest we may do as we please. (3) Certain activities in life (like Holy Communion) are considered holy, while others (ordinary eating and drinking) are not. (4) Evangelism is more saintly than social work. (5) Theology is more honourable than philosophy. (6) Some callings are holier than others. I will briefly elaborate only on this last example.

Many Christians today still evaluate professions using a hierarchical scale, according to which some are closer and more acceptable to God while others are less so. Missionaries, clergy, and Christian school teachers are at the top of the scale, while "ordinary" professions, like business people and farmers, politicians, lawyers, and artists, etcetera, occupy lower rungs on the ladder. Only the former are in full-time service of the Lord. Many in the lower ranks often feel uncomfortable as a result and either leave their professions or try to give at least one year of their life or two weeks in the year to God by, for instance, joining a missionary campaign or charity project.

There is, however, no such thing as a part-time Christian. As a Christian one is either God's servant full-time or one is not a Christian. A so-called part-time Christian, serving two masters, is a contradiction in itself. We are only permitted to serve one Master (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13). In spite of the fact that not everyone of us is called to be a missionary, all of us - without exception - are called to God's full-time service, to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1).

This is the reason why converts in the Bible are not asked to change professions. When tax collectors - a hated profession even today - became converted and asked John the Baptist what they should do, he did not demand that they **leave** their work, but that they **change** the way in which they behaved **in** their profession: "Don't collect any more than you are required to" (Luke 3:13). The same advice was given to the not very highly

esteemed work of being a soldier: "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely - be content with your pay" (Luke 3:14). From Paul we hear the same message: "Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him" (1 Corinthians 7:17, 21, 24). This he even applied to slaves - if they could not gain their freedom (1 Corinthians 7:21-23). Therefore he sent Onesimus back to his master Philemon. Paul respected the social customs of his day, but at the same time he challenged Philemon to abandon slavery by calling Onesimus "his brother in Christ"!

One of the most fundamental biblical perspectives - which was re-emphasised throughout the Reformational tradition - is that ordinary "jobs" are divine callings. Instead of divided allegiance we can serve God with single-mindedness in any work!

A good number of polar concepts are not derived from the Scriptures, but are read into them. Be careful with contrasts like the following - they may be the result of some or other form of dualistic thinking: nature – grace; nature – supernature; natural – spiritual; creation – redemption; kingdom(s) of the world – kingdom of God; secular – religious; autonomous man – sovereign God; autonomy – theonomy; the god of the philosophers – the God of the Bible; God the Creator – God the Redeemer; earth – heaven; visible world – invisible world; flesh – spirit; body – soul; outer life – inner life; lay person – clergy; world – church; state – church; emperor – pope; politician – priest; marriage – celibacy; natural (general) revelation – supernatural (special) revelation; reason – faith; understanding – believing; natural theology – supernatural theology; academy – church; university – seminary; classroom – chapel; natural law – divine law; horizontal – 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; etcetera, etcetera.

#### **20.4 A concrete example**

In the previous chapter (19.2.5) I have already illustrated the reaction of different Christian worldviews to the question how a Christian should relate to politics. The response of the five Christian worldviews mentioned above to the question of whether a

young Christian should attend a rock concert, will be more or less the following, respectively:

- Stay away - it is from the devil!
- If it is a good performance, no problem - go for it, enjoy yourself!
- You may attend - but remember to pray before you go or after attending the concert, to confess your sin!
- Please go - but I want to see you in church tomorrow (Sunday)!
- Be careful! First ask yourself whether you will be able to serve God - not **before** or **after** the event, but - **in** your attendance.

It is evident from this example that the Reformational viewpoint does not provide easy, clear-cut, simple answers. As a result, my students often regard it as being too vague on specifics, too imprecise, and even fuzzy. The reason is that as in this case of the rock concert it is difficult in our sinful world to define exactly what is creationally valid and what is sinfully distorted. How should we understand Christ's parable of the weeds among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30)?

But the difficult, more complicated Reformational way is the only correct way. The reason is that, when we follow any one of the three other orthodox roads (1, 3, or 4 above), we have only two options: we either legalise what is sinful or we fight against wrong enemies.

On the one hand we can simply accept the **status quo** because it has a right of existence of its own. On the other hand we could engage in the futile business of fighting against imaginary "enemies"; for example, against our bodily needs, while in our hearts the devil reigns. We fight against so-called dirty politics, but we fail to recognise sinful practices of the church. We distance ourselves from married life, not realising that the temptations of immorality follow us into the solitude of the monastery. We fight against philosophy, while our theology is infiltrated by all kinds of unbiblical ideas.

In both cases (accepting or opposing what exists), dualistic Christians are condemned to powerlessness. To **fight** against the world and even to **destroy** it (position 1), to **churchify** it (position 3), or to **accept** it (position 4) does not really **change** it in any **fundamental** way!

To think and act according to a Reformational worldview based on the Bible therefore can be a liberating experience. This was evident from the writings and work of archbishop Desmond Tutu during the difficult apartheid years in South Africa. We have already quoted from Tutu extensively in chapter 11 (on religion and politics) but want to add more from his other publications.

His starting point is that life is religion: "All of life belongs to him [God]. Because of him all of life is religious. There are no false dichotomies so greatly loved by those especially who are comfortable in this life" (Tutu, 1994:117). Elsewhere: "I believe that religion does not just deal with a certain compartment of life. Religion has a relevance for the whole of life ..." (ibid:204).

Christ is our supreme example, because there was nothing that might be called otherworldly about his ministry. We could also not accuse our Lord of using religion as a form of escapism from the harsh realities of life – as many people live and experience it. Nowhere are we told that Christ ever turned anybody away who was in need. No matter how busy He was, He never neglected anybody (cf. Tutu, 1982:2).

He was not even afraid of the religious establishment of his day. "He scandalised the religious leaders of his day, the prim and proper ones ... The religious establishment saw him as a young upstart who had no religious training, who had not sat at the feet of any renowned rabbi. What was more, he came to turn upside down everything they knew ... He had dared to have dinner with Zaccheus, a tax collector, a collaborator with the Roman oppressor, and had the temerity to call him the son of Abraham. He had invited another tax collector, Levi, to become his follower ... he had sat at his table with all the riff-raff of the town, those whom every respectable person would not be seen dead with, let alone supping with them, the so-called scum of society ... Jesus revolutionised religion by showing that God was really a disreputable God, a God on the side of the social pariahs" (Tutu, 1982:3-4).

The same should also be our attitude: "... He [Jesus] described in the parable of the last judgement [Matthew 24] what makes us fit or unfit for heaven, and those criteria have nothing that you could call religious or otherworldly, in the narrow sense about them. We qualify ourselves for heaven by whether we have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick or the imprisoned. And Jesus said to do these things to the least of the brethren, is to have done them to him" (ibid:4).

His view is that "Our God does not permit us to dwell in a kind of spiritual ghetto, insulated from real life out there. Jesus used to go out and be alone with God in deep prayerful meditation, but he did not remain there. He refused to remain on the mount of transfiguration but descended to the valley beneath to be involved in the healing of a possessed boy ... He did not use religion as a form of escapism" (Tutu, 1994:70).

We should also reject both escapism and activism: "We cannot use religion as a form of escapism, skulking behind our prayers, because that cannot be an authentic Christian spirituality. Equally we cannot engage in a merely worldly 'busyness' or activism. For then what do we bring that is distinctive to the hectic busyness of sorting out our problems?" (1982:6. Cf. also 1994:239 where Tutu speaks of a "spirituality of transformation", instead of choosing for either contemplative spirituality or activism.)

In conclusion: "Christianity can never be a merely personal matter. It has public consequences and we must make public choices. Many people think that Christians should be neutral, or that the church must be neutral. But in a situation of injustice ... not to oppose, is in fact to have chosen to side with the powerful, with the exploiter, with the oppressor. Christians had wanted to shut themselves in a holy ghetto, almost entirely unmindful of the cries of the hungry, and the anguish of the poor and exploited ones of this world. There was an almost Manichean dread of the material, existent world, and Christians had to deny in an absolute way the world, the flesh ... in order to concentrate on a world to come" (Tutu, 1982:9, 10). A genuine biblical worldview can liberate us from such an unhealthy otherworldliness or escapism!

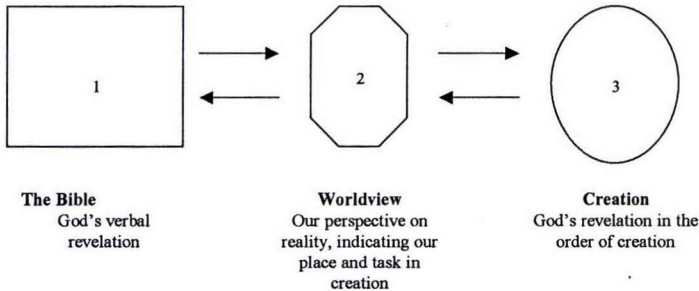
### **20.5 Dualistic worldviews in a biblical perspective**

When dualism is an inherent part of our Christian worldview it is very, very difficult to get rid of it. Bonhoeffer (1966: 203) realised this when he wrote: "It is hard to abandon a picture which one has grown accustomed to using for the ordering of one's ideas and concepts. And yet we must leave behind us the picture of the two spheres, and the question now is whether we can replace it with another picture which is equally simple and obvious."

Bonhoeffer, because of his Lutheran background, could not find the correct alternative picture. There is - as we have already discovered - no simple "picture" to replace simplistic dualism. Even God's Word is sometimes powerless to liberate us, because we simply read it - again and again - through the spectacles of our dualistic worldviews.

Nevertheless, God's Word can correct our worldview dualism. Instead of reading polar concepts and dualistic attitudes **into** the Bible (**eisegesis**), we should permit the Scripture **to speak to us** again (**exegesis**). For there is an obvious "picture" to be had - a integral Christian worldview inspired by the Word of God.

The following diagram explains how we should arrive at a correct worldview:



The two arrows pointing to the right (direction 1-2-3) indicate that our worldview is shaped by God's verbal revelation, accepted in faith (1-2) and then applied to our life in creation (2-3). The arrows pointing to the left (3-2-1) explain that our experience of God's revelation in the order of creation also determines our worldview (3-2) and can promote a better understanding of the Bible (2-1). Our worldview, to be genuinely Christian, should therefore continuously be corrected from two directions by God's revelation. (God's revelation in the order of creation and in the Bible culminated in Jesus Christ, his incarnated revelation.)

Most Christians pay only lip-service to God's revelation in the order of creation. They expect everything – too much - from God's verbal revelation in the Bible. By absolutising the Bible they become biblicists.

I am not a biblicist, but because Christians who adhere to a dualistic worldview usually try to prove their viewpoint by appealing to the Bible, I will have to disprove their claims from the same Bible.



### 20.5.1 Replacing a dualistic exegesis

Christians in the past have tried to support their dualistic approaches by appealing to the Old and New Testament. I will try to indicate how one can understand Scripture in a totally different way when one removes the glasses of a dualistic worldview.

Before I discuss specific texts from the New Testament, first one remark in general about the Old Testament. Proponents of a dualistic worldview like to garner support from the Old Testament's distinction between the profane, the holy, and the most holy in the construction of the tabernacle and the temple of Israel. However, the fact is that the holy and most holy parts of the tabernacle did not remind Israel of a separate holy sphere above creation, but of the garden of Eden - the beginning of creation! The Old Testament concept of holiness (cf. Leviticus 19) is not about a supernatural existence, but about obedience to God on this earth, like respect for one's parents, compassion with the poor, honesty in juridical and business affairs, etcetera. In the Old Testament, religious intermediaries (priests and prophets) still played an important role. In the New Testament every believer is priest, prophet and king, living in the immediate presence of God! (This does not imply that God's holiness did not involve great distance between Israel and himself. In his presence Moses had to take off his shoes! At Sinai Moses had to mediate between the holy God and Israel.)

Some New Testament texts as well are misinterpreted by dualistic thinkers. They quote Christ, for instance, when he said that his followers should not - like the pagans - worry 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 set 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 against deducing from these 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 entrusted his followers with the task to be the salt and light of **the world**. He also prays that the Father not take us out of the world but keep us safe from evil (John 17:15).

Christ's kingdom is certainly not **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 - doing his will **here and now**. Paul's instruction to set our eyes on "things above" should not be contrasted with "the things of the earth," but with **sinful things** (cf. Colossians 3:5, 8, 9). "Things above" 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 God's kingdom is other-worldly. It simply indicates that its **origin** is with God in heaven.

It is very important to remember that the word **world** is used in the New Testament with at least two different meanings, the first positive or neutral and the second negative. Examples of the first are: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16a; cf. 1John 4:9). Christ is the Saviour of the world (John 4:43; 12:47; 1John 4:14). The world has to be reconciled to God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19). Thus "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord" (Revelation 11:15). "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected" (1Timothy 4:4). God not only created the world, but he loves it and cares for it despite its sin and rebellion. In this sense we too are to be concerned about it, care for it, and become involved in its betterment.

In the majority of New Testament references to the **world** its meaning, however, is negative, particularly in the writings of John and Paul. In this case "world" indicates a sphere at enmity with God and man. "The whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1John 5:19). The devil is the ruler of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The world hated Jesus and will hate his followers (John 7:7, 15:18-10; 17:14; 1John 3:13). According to James (4:4) one has to keep oneself unstained from the (sinful) world.

The first (positive) meaning concerns the **structure** of this world. The second (negative) meaning indicates the wrong religious **direction** of the fallen world. We do not have to retreat from or avoid the world in the first sense, but from the world in its second meaning, namely, the worldly (sinful) things of this world (1John 2:15). Christ's high priestly prayer is very clear on this point. He prays that his heavenly Father should not take his disciples "out of the world." True, they are not "of the (sinful) world," but Jesus sends them "into the

world" (John 17:15-17). Christians are to remain unstained by the sinful world, but at the same time they have to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13, 14).

It is true that the Bible speaks of two kingdoms - the kingdom of God and that of Satan. But the point is that only one of them has a legitimate existence. The kingdom of the devil is to be defeated and destroyed. The dualistic worldviews change these two **kingdoms** into two **realms** and, in spite of the fact that they are usually not regarded as of equal value, both of them are at least accorded a relative right of existence. Consequently man is placed under two opposing norms - the unity of God's law is broken!

God's Word assists us in replacing the false antithesis in dualism, between nature and grace, with the real antithesis. Because grace is an attitude of God which intends to **renew** (rather than stand opposite, above, or alongside) nature, the nature-grace antithesis is wrong. The grace of God is not even the opposite of **sin** - the work of man - but it is the opposite of **God's wrath** against sin. The real biblical antithesis is between man's obedience to God's will (a result of God's grace) and man's disobedience (earning God's wrath).

Most Christians will 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 is renewing it through his Spirit to become the kingdom of God." They do not, however, agree on the all-encompassing meaning of the core concepts (creation, fall, redemption, and kingdom) in this confession, but limit them in one way or another.

According to Scripture **creation** includes everything that God made; the **fall** corrupted the entire creation; **redemption** is intended for the whole of creation; and the concept **kingdom** points to the fact that God is King of everything he has created.

In the history of Christianity the fall into sin has often not been viewed as a radical or totally disruptive, life-destroying power, penetrating and corrupting everything. Its effects were minimised because it was regarded as the mere loss of something good (grace). Or it was localised as an area of creation that was less good or even bad as such. In the same way redemption was viewed as something extra, added to creation or - even worse - as a special power in man that just needed to be actualised, instead of as a total and integral renewal. In a similar way the kingdom of God was seen as a separate part of creation - or even as something separate from creation. When we do not understand

these core biblical concepts in their holistic meaning, they inevitably result in some or other kind of dualism.

Another example is the dualistic perspective on God's original cultural mandate (Genesis 1:26-28) and Christ's missionary command (Matthew 28:19). While the cultural mandate is our primary, all-encompassing religious calling, it is often viewed as a secondary, more or less "secular" task over against the primary importance of missions and evangelism. Christ's "missionary" command is, however, only a reminder of God's very first command!

#### **20.5.2 God's kingdom and the church**

In Christian dualism the church is regarded as belonging to the supernatural realm of grace. In principle it can therefore have no real connection to or influence on the world. The further limitation of the encompassing kingdom of God - as wide as creation itself - to the area of grace (understood as cultic life in the church), which also characterises all forms of two-realm theories, excludes in principle the very possibility that God's kingdom can embrace the whole world. Having first tied the Bible and religion to the church, one cannot possibly present a genuine biblical witness in the many other non-ecclesiastical areas of life. At every turn, one will be faced with false dilemmas and pseudo-choices.

The institutional church is but one "room" in the kingdom and should not be identified with the whole "building" of God's reign. The Bible clearly teaches that the kingdom has cosmic dimensions (cf. Psalms 24:1, Psalms 103:19).

The church reveals the kingdom, but it is not its only expression. It can never exhaust the richness and variety of God's reign. Membership of the church only, does not fulfil our responsibilities as citizens of the kingdom. Belonging to a church is important, but still it is only one way in which the Christian should be present in the world.

A clear distinction between the institutional church and God's kingdom does not imply a devaluation of the church. It rather relieves the church of an impossible burden, namely, to make its own witness the **total** biblical witness in society. At the same time it enables the church to concentrate on its specific calling: the nurturing of faith through the preaching of the Word during communal worship.

Every section of life has to reveal the kingdom of God in a **different** way. Because Christians must be present in the world in **various** ways, the form of their witness will differ as the structural make-up of the different sectors of life differs. Nor will the witness

have the character of something ecclesiastical coming from **outside** - it will be a witness **within** and **relevant** to the specific sphere of life. In this way Christians will be able to speak **concretely** about the day-to-day affairs of the world!

Nowadays we can understand this basic distinction between church and kingdom, already present in the Bible, even better, because we live in a much more diversified society with different societal relationships and organisations responsible for a variety of tasks. At its inception the church took upon itself many of the wider, non-ecclesiastical kingdom responsibilities. It was not simply a gathering for prayer and preaching of the faithful. In Acts 2:42, for instance, we are told that the first Christians shared the same roof, pooled their finances, were a separate social community, etcetera.

### 20.5.3 Religion and faith

Another way of explaining the difference between kingdom and church is the distinction in Reformational philosophy between religion and faith.

Religion is not an **addition** to life, but its **essence**; it is not a **complement** to existence, but its **character**; it is not **higher** than "ordinary" life, but its **central thrust**. Religion or spirituality is as broad as life itself. It is a way of life that people engage in with their full existence at all times. It is not, as many believe, a carefully limited enterprise for the nurturing of the soul at special times and in special settings. No, service - or disservice - of God is what life is about. Life is religion!

Faith, by contrast, is only one of the modes or ways of being religious in which the intrinsic spirituality of all of life is expressed. Faith, although the most important, is one kind of function belonging to the created order next to many other human functions, like sensitivity (the psychical), justice (the juridical), clarity (the logical), beauty (the aesthetic), morality (the ethical), etcetera. In each one of these different ways of human behaviour, one's deepest religious commitment is expressed in a unique or **sui generis** way. In the particular way of faith the central **dynamis** of religion is expressed in a focused and very explicit way, for instance, in personal devotions, prayers, and worship in the church. Faith, therefore, is both distinct from religion and expressive of religion.

When one regards religion as the nature of all of life, that all of life is a spiritual response to God, while one facet of this all-encompassing response is the response of faith, the benefits are substantial. Two of the most important are the following.

In the first place, other human modes of functioning need not be downgraded as second-rate or "natural" or even the locus of evil and sin. Our eating, sleeping, sexuality, emotions, and politics are as spiritual as our thoughts, morals, and beliefs. The Bible likewise teaches that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 10:31).

In the second place, such a view avoids reducing religion to one sphere of life alongside that of art, science, politics, business, etceteras, with the always present danger of acting as if God is locked up in the church and is only a concern on Sundays. Faith is only one of the many modes of religious response to God.

#### **20.5.4 Confusing structure and direction**

Since the fall there are two directions present in the one creation: both obedience to the will of God and disobedience; either service of the true God or an idol in his place. Obedience to God brings forth the good while the result of disobedience is what is bad or sinful. Good and bad occurs throughout creation and should not be limited to a specific thing or delimited area. Because we are living in-between the time of Christ's first and his final coming, everywhere - even deep in our own hearts - we experience a mixed situation and should be careful to make a clean-cut distinction between light and darkness. The tension between the two is the cause of a **religious** antithesis and not the result of **ontological** opposition. The basic mistake of all the dualistic worldviews we have discussed is that they misunderstood the religious antithesis as something spatial or ontological. In Spykman's words: "Dualism gives the spiritual antithesis ontological status by defining some parts, aspects, sectors, activities or realms of life (the ministries of the church) as good and others (politics) as less good or even evil. Dualism grants sin a built-in ontological status ... At bottom, therefore, dualism may be defined as a confusion between structure and direction ... the antithesis is read back ontologically into the very structure of creation" (1992:67).

The consequence of this, according to Spykman, is that dualism fails to see that life as a whole is sacred - in the sense of being dedicated to God - and that it should be lived to the honour of God in our daily down-to-earth activities. Dualism considers some parts of our lives as inherently, innately evil or at least as having less status than other parts. It draws a line through God's creation and tries to walk with an uneven pace on both sides. Consequently some life activities and structures are regarded as redeemable and others

at best only remotely redeemable. Spykman therefore regards dualism as a deceptive attempt to partly accept life and partly reject it. It leads to a dual normativity, the legitimisation of sin, disruption of the unity of creation and the limitation of the cosmic impact of the Biblical message of redemption.

The variety of two-realm theories is the result of different viewpoints about the following: (1) the place in creation where sin is localised, (2) how serious or not the effects of sin are regarded, and consequently (3) how great or little the need for redemption will be.

## **20.6 The hallmark of a Reformational worldview**

Dualist Christian worldviews could be compared with a chronic disease which has weakened, crippled, and paralysed Christianity for two thousand years. Such worldviews have robbed Christianity of its power to transform the world. They are dangerous not only because of their detrimental consequences, but also because most Christians are not even aware that they are infected with the virus. It has become most natural for them to wear bifocal glasses and to see the whole of reality divided into a secular and a sacred domain.

The only cure for this serious disease is to get rid of the wrong spectacles, the lifedistorting worldview. We should not even try - as so many Christians have done in the past - to simply modify or reformulate the dualism. Something which is essentially wrong can in no way be improved by changing it from a "hard" to a "soft" dualism. The only way to finally liberate Christianity from its dualistic imprisonment of the past two millennia is to deliberately reject dualism and replace it with an integral worldview.

The Reformed outlook is one of great scope and grandeur compared to other forms of Christianity: "In contrast to Lutheranism's quest for a gracious God, pietism's concern for the welfare of the individual soul and Wesleyanism's goal of personal holiness, the ultimate concern in the reformed tradition transcends the individual and his salvation. It also goes beyond the church. The concern is for the realisation of the will of God also in the wider realms of the state and culture, in nature and in the cosmos" (Hesselink, 1983:108-109).

The hallmark of the Reformed tradition is its development of a biblically Reformed worldview, "A life and worldview, a vision of the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ manifest in every sphere of life which transcends time and space - this is the grand design ... one Leitmotif underlies them all: the glory of God: 'From Him and

through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever!' (Rom. 11:36)" (Hesselink, 1983:111, 112).

In his contribution on the essence of being reformed, Zuidema (1951:157, 158, 159, 160, 165) emphasises as well that religion for a Reformed person is not something extra added to life, an "after dinner" cordial, or simply a consolation prize for the disappointed. No, life in its totality is religion - or it is not worth living. Therefore, Reformed believers will never be able to sit idle, without work to be done. They will rather have more than they can do and always be in need of more workers and more money for the great variety of works in God's kingdom.

In humility and honesty we will, however, have to admit that, in many instances, this description of the Reformational worldview remains an ideal to be accomplished. Contemporary Reformed Christianity has lost a great deal of its saltiness. One of the major reasons is the unnoticed infiltration of dualism into a worldview that ought to be integral and holistic. What we badly need in South Africa, in Africa, and in the entire world, is a genuine, integral, Reformational worldview to inspire Christians again to be fully present in a suffering and groaning world. We urgently need a salty Christianity which is again capable of healing a wounded world and preventing its increasing decay.

We should, of course, always be keenly aware of the fact that our efforts and even our small achievements in the socio-economic-political world can never be **identified** with the kingdom of God. At the same time they are not entirely **unrelated** to his kingdom. As signs they point beyond themselves to a kingdom that is still coming. We are not allowed ever to fall into triumphalism. Our task is not to **seize** power, but to **transform** the powers of this world. Therefore, however provisional, partial, and sinful our social involvement as Christians may be, it has a place in the powerful kingdom of God to which the future belongs.

### **20.7 Answering the ultimate question about meaning**

A worldview has many functions (cf. Van der Walt, 1994:53-55). In this concluding section I want to indicate one of its most important functions, viz. answering one of the ultimate questions of life. One of the most basic questions every human being has to answer is: What is the meaning of my life? (cf. Frankl, 1969, 1987 and Rossouw, 1981).

History testifies to this search for meaning and purpose. Let us have a look at a few flashes from the long history of mankind.



### 20.7.1 Flashes from history

#### The Book of Ecclesiastes

Already about 2500 years ago the writer of the book Ecclesiastes wrestled with exactly this question. He investigated - with nearly brutal honesty - in an empirical way everything people do. His final conclusion was: "I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14). The very first chapter of his book starts like this: "'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the teacher. 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless'" (verse 2). He investigates the following efforts to find meaning:

- **wisdom** which will satisfy reason - the philosophical way;
- **pleasure** which should appease the body - the hedonistic way;
- **wealth** which fills one's purse - the materialistic way;
- **duty** towards one's neighbour which should salve one's conscience - the ethical way;
- **piety** which should gratify the spirit - the religious way.

However, when the writer of Ecclesiastes, without any mercy, removes the masks he cannot find any sense, any aim in anything, because death has the final say. No reason makes it worthwhile to live. What remains is the night of despair.

Like cancer the following five things devour all meaning:

- Everything remains the same and all things equally unimportant.
- Time and history are repeating themselves eternally in a monotonous, cyclical way.
- Evil infects everything and remains a problem that cannot be solved.
- Death is the final end.
- God too is incomprehensible - He is quiet in the book of Ecclesiastes!

Can such a book about the meaninglessness of life have any meaning? Yes, because it assists us in discovering meaninglessness, to look it straight in the eyes. In absolute honesty it puts the penetrating and disturbing question on the table: Does life - including my own - have any sense? Ecclesiastes is an important book in the Bible, because it does not ignore or try to escape one of the most important of all questions. It forces us to look for an answer. We could say that Ecclesiastes poses the **question**, while the rest of

the Bible provides the **answer**. (Only at the very end of this book it provides a very brief answer "Fear God and keep his commandments" (Ec. 12:13)).

### **From the history of philosophy**

Ecclesiastes could have been written in the 21st century. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, our greatest fear is not the fear of death, but fear of a pointless life, fear to be the captive of an empty existence, fear of walking through life like a robot.

The difference between our own age and previous centuries, however, is that Western civilization is the first (of a total of about twenty preceding civilizations) which no longer has an answer to humanity's urgent question. "Why do I exist?" (A. Toynbee). The only answer it provides is that there is no answer!

Shakespeare already said: "History is a tale told by an idiot - full of sound and passion, but without meaning anything". Schopenhauer added: "Life is something that should not be". The existentialist philosophers of the previous century wrestled with the same problem. Heidegger asked the penetrating question why there is something instead of nothing. In other words: Why does this reality exist - including myself? According to Sartre life is futile passion. Camu's conclusion is that only one real philosophical solution remains: suicide!

Contemporary Western man is infected by a disease more serious than physical death: death of the heart, inner emptiness, anxiety about the meaninglessness of life. Amidst all our wealth we are destitute; with all our power we are powerless; a deep unhappiness hides behind our pleasures ...

There is no escape in nihilism. Every generation has to answer this question anew. There is no exception: we will also have to tackle it. It is not a question on which philosophers have a monopoly. Apart from scholars, every human being - especially in times of crisis - is confronted with this question. It may be repressed, but because every human being is in search of meaning - without meaning we cannot live - it cannot be ignored permanently.

Our greatest problem today is not that we don't **know** enough, or that we are ignorant. It is about the **meaning** of all our expert knowledge. Our dilemma is not that we don't have enough **to do** - we have too much to keep us busy - but about the **sense** of everything that keeps us so busy. The issue is definitely not that Westerners do not **have enough**. The question is rather about the **point** of continuing to add more and more possessions

and wealth to what we already have. Like the young American who asked his father why he should study economics. His father's answer was to be able to make money. His son was not satisfied with this (materialistic) answer to his question about the sense of his life in future. Therefore he asked: "But why should I make money?" The only answer his father could offer was "To make more money my son". Clearly this father did not answer his son's question about the purpose of life - at least not to the satisfaction of his son.

Viewed from one perspective, the question about meaning is the **last** question that surface at the end of all our thinking and doing. Viewed from another perspective, it is the very **first** question to be asked. The reason for its priority is that it is so basic that it first has to be answered before any real answers can be given to many other questions.

### **20.7.2 Three questions about meaning answered by a Christian worldview**

As a Christian I have to confess that it is impossible to **make** life sensible. God alone can do it. He alone can answer this very deep and most important question. He **provides** meaningfulness to our existence. Not as something superficial **added** to life, but as an **inherent** part thereof.

Because God Himself guarantees meaningfulness, it is immensely rich. It will be possible to distinguish between meaning in a logical, lingual, pschycological, economical, historical, political, esthetical, religious sense and many more. I am not going to deal with these different senses of meaning. My aim is also not to discuss the meaning of an individual life or a period of history.

In humble faith we accept the very first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". **God** exists and He created this **earth**. In the rest of the Scriptures it is repeatedly revealed that the earth was not left on its own, but that God rules it according to his **will** and that his will is expressed in a great variety of **laws** for His different creatures.

The three most important realities therefore are: (1) God, (2) Creation and (3) His laws for creation.

According to these three realities we are going to divide the central question of meaning into three different questions: (1) Why?, (2) Where? and (3) How? Why do I exist? Where am I going? How should I live?

- **Why are we here?**

Looking around, in amazement we often ask Heidegger's question. Why all these wonderful things exist - they could have been non-existent! With a shock we realise that instead of something there could have been nothing. The fact of my own existence is also a miracle. Is there some reason for my existence or do I merely exist by **chance**?

The philosophers quoted earlier believed in the latter: existence has no meaning. Contemporary scientists, pragmatists and technocrats do not even bother to answer this question.

However, according to God it is a question of such vital importance that He provides an answer in the very first verse of His revelation: He is the Creator of this world. He is the Cause or Reason for its existence!

The next question will of course be: But **why** did He create this world? It was, after all, not necessary for Him to do so. Even about the answer to this question we need not speculate. Again God Himself provides the answer. The reason was not that, like an artist, God was in a mood to do so. It was a deliberate act of God, which is clear from the fact that every time something new came into existence it was the result of God saying: "Let there be ..." (cf. Genesis 1). We should not regard the "Let there be" as harsh commands either. The living God had pleasure in creating this world. This can be derived from the refrain in Genesis 1: "And God saw that it was good".

Our existence - and that of the rest of creation - has a reason, a ground. It is grounded in God's goodwill, his pleasure. When we believe this, our existence is relieved of the heavy burden of meaninglessness. Such a belief also provides us with a reason to joyfully, thankfully celebrate life as God Himself has done.

In this way only can we answer the first question about meaning, the why-question. It has to be done in faith, childlike faith, accepting life as a wonderful gift from God - and enjoying.

In summary the answer to the question **why** does this world exist? Is only one word: God. He is there and He enjoys His creation. In **faith** we **discover** this immense wonder.

- **Where are we going?**

This is the second important question. It does not deal with the reason for our coming into being, our **origin**, but with our **destination**, the final goal of our lives.

Our time is characterised by setting goals, efficiency, competition and achievement. We want to be successful, only the best, winners of the competition. We are motivated by more wealth, more recognition, more prestige. The question about the meaning of these goals is, however, seldom asked.

By the wayside of this rat race there are many drop-outs or wrecks. Even the most successful are often not happy. Too many things can spoil our success. Can one be "successfully" seriously ill? Can the weakness of old age be called an achievement? Who can win the race against death? Can neglect of one's wife, children and fellow human beings - for the sake of the hustle after success - ever be regarded as success? Sooner or later the inevitable question turns up: Exactly where am I going?

To this also the Word of God provides a surprising answer, exciting news. God, in Jesus Christ, has conquered the threatening meaninglessness. In stead of being travellers on a cul-de-sac or wanderers to nowhere, God is leading us somewhere: we are pilgrims on our way to a new earth! Our final destination is not death but life eternal. That is God's own promise.

This promise we should grab in hope. Hope is not a vague expectation. It is solid certainty. Exactly how it will be like on the new earth we do not know yet. When John tries to describe it in Revelation he stammers and uses negative language (**no** longer illness, tears and death) in trying to describe the glory of a totally renewed creation.

Such a hope creates a new vision. With the deed of transfer of the promised land in our pockets we may set out on our pilgrimage.

In summary the answer to the question "Where are we going?" is one word: **creation**. Not a destroyed, but a renewed creation. Not an otherworldly abode for angels, but this same world.

As **pilgrims**, with a song of **hope** in our hearts, this is where we are going, our final destination.

- **How should we live?**

This is the third question about meaning. It does not deal, like the first, with our **origin**, or the second, with our **destination**, but with the **present reality** on our way from origin to destination.

How do we know that we are travelling on the correct road? There are so many ways? We

need clear guidelines or norms to choose between the different possibilities, to provide direction to life's voyage.

As we have seen, the answer of many philosophers to the why-question was nihilism. The answer of many to this third question is cynicism. People are today cynical about a clear distinction between right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly. Normative relativism has become fashionable. Everything goes! What I personally believe to be the correct conduct does not necessarily apply to others. Relativistic cynicism, however, is not a viewpoint that can be lived in a consistent way. It is impossible to live without any normative direction.

The fundamental reason why many today have no answers to the questions of **where?** and **how?** is because they have not answered the question about **why?** If God does not exist, the **origin** of the world becomes an inexplicable mystery, it cannot have any **future** and the question how we should live **today** will remain unanswered. Dostoyevsky once correctly remarked that, if God's existence is denied, there are no divine laws left to direct our behaviour - everything goes!

Again God's Word provides a solution to this third burning question. He equips us with the necessary guidelines for life's journey. His answer to our first two questions was **faith** and **hope**. Now His answer is **love**.

As we have noticed already, the final conclusion of Ecclesiastes was that the **whole** duty of man is to keep God's commandments.

Already in the Old Testament all His commandments are concentrated in one word: love (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is repeated by Christ in the New Testament (Matthew 22:37-40).

Love is not simply a good feeling. To love is to give - not something, but yourself - and to serve. In Matthew 16:25 Christ warns us: "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it". What an extraordinary way of bookkeeping in which a loss is regarded as a profit!

Usually we don't want to give but to receive, to have. We also want to be served. Again Christ taught exactly the opposite: "Whoever wants to become great ... must be your servant, and whoever wants to be the first must be your slave". (Matthew 20:26,27). In what follows He reminds us of His example: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Compare also Philippians

2:5-7.)

Real love towards God and our fellow humans is not something cheap. It is self-denying, unconditional service. It implies self-surrender, literally giving yourself away - in gratitude. Not because we are expecting something in return. Like Christ's love for us our love to others should be **ex gratia**, absolutely free of charge.

What is the greatest need today? Success, wealth, status, achievement? No, our contemporary world is crying for compassion, sympathy, mercifulness - love. The reason is that only by giving and receiving love does life really become meaningful.

Viewed from one perspective, all God's commandments are concentrated or summarised in love. Viewed from the opposite perspective, love diversifies in many commandments or norms. It reveals many forms or aspects. (Like a prism breaking up a ray of white light into many colours.) Examples are fidelity in friendship and marriage, loving care for your family, justice in politics and stewardship in business.

As in the case of faith and hope, love does not make us lie back, becoming passive. No, it turns us into reformers, because there are so many areas of life where God's commandment of love is not obeyed, like unjust political behaviour, wasteful economic practices, pollution of nature, broken marriages and families, etc.

To summarise our answer to the third question of meaning "**What** are we doing, and **how** is it done?" the answer in brief is: **God's will**. In it He daily calls us to unselfish, self-forgetful service of love. In obeying His will our lives overflow with meaningfulness!

One question remains to be asked: What could be the secret behind the three previous answers to our Why? Where? And How?

The answer is a Person, Jesus Christ. During his whole life on earth, but especially on the cross, He had to drink from the bitter cup of meaninglessness. More than any human being He had to wrestle with our Why's?, Where's? and How's?

Firstly, God - the answer to our first question - deserted Him at the most difficult point in His life. On the cross He cried out in a loud voice: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Secondly, there was no place for Him in creation - our answer to the second question. He was born in a stable, He had no place to lay down His head and finally died on a cross between heaven and earth.

Thirdly, during His whole life He suffered from the worst transgressions of God's laws. He was hated by many. The injustice against Him again reached its climax on the cross on which He - without any sins against God's laws - had to die.

The devil tempted Him to get off the cross, because Satan does not like us to live meaningful lives. But because Christ was both man and God, he overpowered every form of senselessness. Thus He became the Source of meaning. Through His Spirit He gives us the power to live a life of faith, hope and love - a life full of purpose, significance and meaning.

- **Summary**

Everything said so far can be summarised in the following four points:

1. **The three most important realities are**

- God
- Creation
- Law

2. **The three questions about meaning are connected to these three realities**

- **Why** does this world (including ourselves) exist? This is the question about the **origin** = the **past**
- **Where** is it (including ourselves) going? This is the question about **destination** = the **future**.
- **How** should we live? This is the **normative** question = the **present**.

3. **The biblical answer to the three questions are:**

- God the **Creator**: He **formed** it, it has its **origin** in his act of goodwill to create.
- God the **Redeemer**: in spite of **degeneration** after the fall, there is a new **future** in Christ.
- God the **Holy Spirit**: **reformation** is possible because His revelation provides clear norms for our lives **here and now**.

4. **Our answer should be**

- **Faith** changes us into **discoverers** of an immense wonder, viz. that life originated



because God had pleasure in creating it - and He wants us to celebrate it in His presence.

- **Hope** turns us into **pilgrims** on our way to a new earth - the final result of Christ's liberation from evil.
- **Love** renews us into unselfish **servants** who, inspired by the Spirit, live in obedience to all God's commandments.

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(For more books explaining a Christian worldview, see the bibliography of chapter 4)

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## **Other (still available) books by the author**

1. *Anatomy of reformation; flashes and fragments of a reformational worldview.* 582 pp.
2. *The liberating message; a Christian worldview for Africa.* 625 pp.
3. *Man and God; the transforming power of Biblical religion.* 520 p
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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Regrettably there is still - in spite of modern communications - a serious lack of insight into the socio-economic-political situation of our continent. This applies to both outsiders and Africans themselves. The **aim** of this book is twofold: to understand Africa better and to offer some insights as to how it can be rebuilt.

Because of their fundamental nature the **focus** of the author is on African and Western culture, worldview and religion. As Africa, because of increasing globalisation, can no longer be isolated from the rest of the world, there is a need for Africans to grasp what Western culture is about and for the West to understand Africa at a much deeper level. The book, therefore, offers compulsory reading for everyone who wants to communicate effectively cross-culturally.

In his **preface** Desmond M. Tutu, archbishop emeritus, has the following to say about the book: "It is of such a foundational nature that it deserves to be read by a very wide audience, including more or less every profession: politicians, economists, sociologists, religious leaders, development workers, educationists, etc. ... It will benefit Westerners involved in Africa and it will assist Africans in dealing with the West and evaluating the impact of Western culture on the continent".

As the sub-title of the book indicates (**from desperation to expectation**) it challenges Afro-pessimism and offers new hope for the future. It is a follow-up and up-date of the author's previous bestseller, **The liberating message; a Christian worldview for Africa** (published in 1994, fourth print in 2002).

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