

TRANSFORMING POWER

Challenging Contemporary Secular Society



BJ van der Walt

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secular society**

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B.J. van der Walt

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Potchefstroom

**Institute for Contemporary Christianity
in Africa**

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This book may be ordered directly from:

Prof. B. J. van der Walt
7 Bezuidenhout Street
Potchefstroom 2531
South Africa
e-mail: hannah@intekom.co.za
fax & telephone: (018)2947691

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DEDICATION

In appreciation for their friendship dedicated to

Four Christian philosophers:

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- Prof. dr. J.J. (Ponti) Venter (Potchefstroom, South Africa)
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A PREVIEW AND REVIEW

One has to know and understand his/her opponent to be able to refute and combat his challenges. Faced with the problem of secularism - which cannot be evaded - this book is a must for every Christian who wants to be relevant for today and who accepts his/her calling to be a Christian, who wants to be of service to God and his/her fellow beings.

To whet the appetite of readers, I will highlight the – to my mind – most valuable insights in the fifteen different chapters of this important book.

In his *Introduction* the author explains clearly what he has in mind with his book: How to transform the increasingly secular culture and social life of today.

Chapter 1

Families rarely come together for family devotions or fellowship. This chapter makes a detailed enquiry into growing together in faith. It first looks into the serious practical problems that growing in faith poses. The author does not merely repeat or add on to what has already been written regarding faith development. A critical investigation is made of the studies of James W. Fowler's theoretical model of faith development as well as of some more explicit Christian models. The author then takes the reader by the hand to come up with a more appropriate theoretical, Christian model as well as practical advice for faith development.

Chapter 2

This chapter is about friendship. It explains the importance of friendship amidst the many wrong existing notions about it. It calls for introspection and it deeply challenges the reader to look into his/her relationships. Friendship is a Biblical concept and thus has to be cherished to fight against the influence of secularism on this important facet of our lives.

Chapter 3

The aim with this chapter is to replace the limited vision on mission with an unlimited vision of mission. It pleads for a correct worldview which determines

one's vision on mission. Mission that focuses merely on the saving of souls is not promoting Christianity but "churchianity". The act of witnessing is thus not limited to professionals. It is everyone's task to witness and do so in every profession and domain of life. The purpose of mission should not be to rescue people from the world and lock them behind church walls. Mission should be to regain and restore God's entire creation.

Chapter 4

Does the church still understand herself in this modern secular society? The biggest crisis the church is faced with concerns her role in society as well as her identity. When the church ventured outside of the churchgates and mingled in the affairs of the marketplace, she adjusted and compromised and even denied her message. When, on the other hand, she was content to, or forced to remain within her walls, she failed to give concrete form to her Christian witness and discovered to her own consternation that she was "outside" the world. Struggling with the problem of identity and reacting against growing secularism, Christians, like snails, retract into their church shells and no longer participate in worldly issues. Now the age-old question arises: How can the church be present in the world without becoming part of the (sinful) world? The aim with this chapter is to indicate how the church should, on the one hand, be involved in societal life and, on the other hand, how it should – simultaneously – retain its own (Christian) identity.

Chapter 5

Man is inherently a religious being and thus religion cannot be isolated. Religion is integral and encompassing, yet it is also diverse. Three kinds of diversity are distinguished: religious (directional), structural (associational) and cultural (contextual) diversity. These three types may be distinguished but cannot be separated, since they are intimately interwoven. Secularism intends to isolate the religious aspect as something personal or private from the rest of life. The author clearly points out that secularism in this way is doomed to failure right from the start, for religious convictions have wide structural and cultural implications. Religion cannot be separated from societal

structures and culture in general. Hence, whether people are in politics or economy or in whatever sphere of life, they somehow have to make a choice between what they consider as right or wrong. They work from norms derived from a worldview based on religious presuppositions. Regarding the issue of diversity of religions, secularism does not really recognise it but in fact intends to replace it.

Chapter 6

Despite the fact that there is a diversity of religions, religions are not equal. The diversity of religion should also not be seen as an excuse to live without norms. Moreover, this chapter indicates that, even though the law of a country might deem all religions equal, they can not be equal in principle. There is no way any constitution may guarantee full religious freedom. It is essential that a constitution be based on Christian principles and not on human autonomy - which is an essential trait of secularism. A Christian should also not dissociate his rights and duties from his relationship with God.

Chapter 7

- This chapter exquisitely indicates how Christianity is a unique religion. The thesis “outside the church, no salvation” is challenged to read “outside Christ, no salvation”. It becomes evident how faith in Jesus Christ makes the Christian religion unique. There is no other religion that knows of a God who sent His Son to die for the sins of his people so that all those who believe should be saved. There are many prophets, but only one Prophet who is also High Priest, died and rose from the dead, and now rules as King over heaven and earth at the right hand of the Father, from where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. Only He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Different ways of salvation are also critically evaluated. Regarding the issue of tolerating other religions, an intensive study on tolerance is done. Tolerance means God’s tolerance: Christianity should treat other people as God would treat them. He does not simply write them off, but He gives them rain, food, etc. He treats them with love. It should be the mission of Christianity to win the hearts of people outside Christianity. The basic approach should be to treat them with love, but not to compromise on any of their sins.

Chapter 8

As Christians we are faced with a great challenge, viz. that of secularism. To be able to deal with the enemy in a proper way, one has to know who the enemy is, what tactics the enemy uses, and which devices one has to use to overcome the power of the enemy. Secularism, the enemy we are faced with, is discussed in more detail in this chapter. It explains why it is such a great threat to South Africa, the rest of the continent and the world.

Chapter 9

This chapter, as a continuation of the previous chapter, now presents us with a precise description of the characteristics of secularism. This is done through the eyes of a Christian philosopher from a historical and a systematic perspective. For the first time the two perspectives are combined in an approach to the phenomenon of secularism. The surprising reality discovered is that the causes for secularism are to be found not far away from Christianity itself. This chapter also clearly indicates the nature and influence of secularism by discussing different aspects of life. The attractive but seductive power of secularism is also indicated. It is explained that the first step in attacking secularism is Christian awareness. Yet Christians will have to change (second step) to be armed before they can refute the secularistic worldview (third step).

Chapter 10

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that Christians will have to change in order to be armed to refute secularism. This chapter explains what should be changed among Christians themselves to be able to face the challenge of secularism. It explains that, if one views secularism as an authentic religion, then nothing less than an authentic Christian faith can refute it. Secularism in a sense freed Christendom because no person is forced any longer by authorities to be a Christian to be taken into consideration for a public office. In fact, we are back for the first time in something like the earliest centuries of Christianity. The author also correctly indicates that Christians should be Kingdom Christians. The Kingdom of God should not be identified with and narrowed down to the organised church as an institution. Not only the people

who work for the church are involved in the work of the Kingdom. God reigns over the whole world. It is also stated that Christians should fulfil their office. Office has nothing to do with status, power or self-enrichment, but service to one's fellow human beings. A person who holds an office without having insight in the divine norms valid for the specific office is not worthy of his/her office. Christians must furthermore have a vision - they need a worldview which determines how one looks at reality and at one's own place and calling in the world. Christians should also be organised. Equally important is that Christians should reject both despair and exultation. This chapter finally strongly encourages Christian education.

Chapter 11

It was mentioned in chapter 4 that Christianity has lost its identity and no longer knows how to play its role in a proper manner in society. This chapter aims to determine how Christians can, especially by way of Christian organisations, be relevant to our contemporary, secular society without the danger of losing their Christian identity. To deal with this issue the author again deals with the phenomenon and the challenge of secularism; different ways to respond to the challenge; wrong motives for the establishment and/or maintaining of Christian organisations; the correct motives for doing so, and lastly the different categories of Christian organisations and institutions.

Chapter 12

Here prof. Van der Walt moves to another very important issue, viz. how to practice Christian scholarship in the different disciplines. He rejects the integration model, because it merely aims at the integration or accommodation between secular scientific endeavour and Christian beliefs. It does not realise that faith – in either God or a substitute in his place - determines academic work right from the beginning. The clash is therefore not between secular science and Christian faith, but basically between different religious, worldwiewish and philosophical presuppositions underlying scholarly work. This wrong paradigm is therefore replaced by Van der Walt's transformational paradigm, in which he emphasises the need for knowledge of

God's threefold revelation, a truly Christian worldview and an integral Christian philosophy.

Chapter 13

Here our attention is focused on sport. The author is of the opinion that many people today do not really know *what kind* of activity it is and therefore also not *how* they should be involved in different sporting activities. This valuable chapter deals inter alia with the history of sport; its great influence on contemporary society; wrong attitudes – also amongst Christians – toward sport; the many evils accompanying sport today and the little reflection on these problems; basic Biblical perspectives about sport and, finally, a philosophical analysis of the structure (nature) and religious direction of sport. A thought-provoking chapter which will help Christians a lot to serve God – also in their leisure time!

Chapter 14

This section of the book tackles yet another topical issue: sexual ethics. The writer here investigates the implications of secular naturalistic-evolutionistic ethics, propagated today in both popular books as well as in academic publications. He also uncovers its worldviewish and philosophical presuppositions. However, as in all the other chapters, he not only criticises, he also offers something positive in the form of a Christian alternative. In his conclusion he clearly spells out the calling of men and women and how they should relate to each other.

Chapter 15

This concluding chapter provides a brief summary of the whole book. Christians are not to remain seated in the passenger seat. They have to begin driving, they have to be the people who give direction to secular society. Passivity is not the ideal for any Christian. It is not sufficient to emphasise the freedom we received in 1994 as South Africans. The freedom attained is but one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is that we have to serve God and our fellow human beings. This is the ultimate, positive side of the coin without which our freedom remains incomplete. This situation (after decolonisation and apartheid) is likened to the situation of the Israelites after

their liberation from Egypt. They still had to travel a long way through the desert to reach Canaan. Christians have to learn on this way to live positively according to the same laws God gave the Israelites at Mount Sinai long ago. This chapter makes it clear that the road is not easy – as it was not easy for the Israelites either. It may have times full of confusion, uncertainty, even anxiety, as well as the danger of reprobation. The author warns strongly against ten -isms which he describes as the weak points of present-day Christianity. Yet, he does not leave us with a negative view, but brings us back on how to deal properly with the challenges and problems by indicating the road to a transformed, new Christianity. For this he presents ten agenda points. He concludes that Christians are people living here on earth, having a mission in this world. They are not *of* this world but they are *in* this world and therefore have to be a missionary people, changed from passivity and increasing irrelevance into active, fully relevant Christians for South Africa, Africa and the world at large.

Highly recommended

This book is non-stop reading material. I was thrilled by the information it provides. It does not only explain how huge the crises of secularism is but also gives answers on how to deal with this problem. It is scientific enough for scholars to be interested. It is also simple enough for ordinary readers to follow. It is a must to read for academics, politicians, teachers, ministers, etc. – to every Christian who wants to understand the time in which he/she is living and his/her calling in South Africa, in the rest of the African continent and even globally. The contents of this book confirms its title: it explains the secret of real transforming power.

Prof. dr. Rantso S. Letsosa,
Practical Theology, School of Ecclesiastical Studies,
Theological School of the Reformed Churches
of South Africa,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Introduction:

THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN INCREASING SECULAR SOCIETY

This introduction explains, firstly, the focus and contents of this book (secularising societal life) and, secondly, the perspective from which it was written (the need for transformation).

The title of this book draws attention to the fact that the gods and their norms for social life are vanishing. It not only applies to the God of the Christians. As a result of increasing secularisation, also the influence of other religions (like Islam, Traditional African Religion, Buddhism, Hinduism etc.) on social life – the so-called public domain – is reduced. Because the new religion of secularism rules everywhere, the other religions are only allowed a marginal influence in the personal or “private spheres” of existence. Like the already greatly secularised Western world, Africa and other countries of the south are today heading in the same direction: towards the twilight of the gods.

0.1. The focus: secularised societal life

This book is a following-up on the two of my previous publications (2003, 2006), but with a different focus. In these two previous books I compared African and Western cultures by indicating their differences. This book is not about their *differences*, but rather about what is *common* between Africa and the West: like the already greatly secularised West, Africa is developing in the same direction. (This does not exclude the possibility that this book may be found relevant to readers outside the African continent.)

0.1.1 Social life has become secularised

As Jenkins has clearly indicated in his previous book *The next Christendom; the coming of global Christianity* as well as in his latest work *The new faces of Christianity* (2006) Christianity is declining in the north, while it is growing rapidly

in the south. But because of increasing globalisation, both southern and northern Christians are today living in similar contexts in which they have to shape public life. Societal life includes many societal relationships, like friendship, marriage, family life, government, educational institutions, businesses, sport, sexual life, religious communities and various other organisations and institutions. All of them are increasingly influenced by a secular ideology and way of life.

The burning question is: How should Christians – in a growing secular context – influence social life? They can not *isolate* themselves from their context. Neither should they simply *accommodate* to a social life in which God's norms are ignored. This book advocates a "third way": Christians should try to *transform* their social environment.

0.1.2 The different facets to be transformed

While growing secularism is the *context*, transformation is the *challenge*. Transformation is the golden thread uniting the different chapters.

In *Section A* chapter 1 starts at a personal level: How one's faith is transformed and grows through different stages towards maturity. Chapter 2 deals with an often neglected but important building block for societal life, viz. friendship. The next chapter (3) indicates how the current, narrow idea about missions should be transformed and broadened to be relevant for the entire "public" life. Chapter 4 challenges standard views about the identity of the church and its relevance for secular society. A transformation of traditional viewpoints about the church may also enhance its influence on secular society at large.

Chapters 5,6 and 7 (*Section B*) views the Christian religion against the background of increasingly multi-religious and secular societies. How should religious diversity, intolerance and freedom be viewed? In what sense can the Christian religion be called unique? What exactly does religious tolerance imply?

While the previous chapters only referred to secularism, the following chapters (8,9 and 10) of *Section C* provides an indepth analysis of the present-day

dominant religion which has a powerful impact on people and societies all over the world. Like a steam-roller this ideology is eradicating traditional cultures and religions in the West and also in Africa. Its dangers are indicated, its nature described and a Christian response is outlined. The next chapter (11) suggests the establishment of Christian organisations and institutions as an effective challenge to a secularised society.

In the last *Section D* chapter 12 indicates how integral, transformational scholarship can challenge and combat secularism on the academic level, while Chapter 13 focuses on sport as a contemporary secular religion. Chapter 14 investigates the implications of a secular (naturalistic-evolutionistic) worldview and ethics for the relationship between men and women.

In contrast to "traditional" Christianity, the concluding chapter (15) summarises the characteristics of a new, transformational Christianity.

0.2. The perspective: the meaning of "transformation"

If Christians should not isolate themselves from or conform to their surrounding culture and its institutions, but transform them (cf. 0.1.1), how should it be done?

0.2.1 The special place of philosophy

Since it is impossible to deal with all facets of society, this book approaches the above-mentioned problems from a philosophical, worldviewish angle in order to indicate a way how many other issues may be tackled. This is done because philosophy takes a special place in any culture and society. It puts into words what takes place in a specific culture; it is the "understanding" of a culture. It lays open the insights, opinions, norms and values, the deepest motives and the highest ideals lying "under" or "behind" a culture or a whole society. As it were, it turns a culture inside out so that one can look at it from the inside.

In the case of a Christian worldview (something prescientific) or a Christian philosophy (the scientific reflection on a person's worldview) an attempt is made to understand and evaluate society in the light of the revelation of God's word.

However, this does not mean that a Christian philosophical approach is perfect. It remains a fallible human endeavour.

What should one's attitude be towards one's own or other cultures and their social life when seen from a Christian worldview or philosophy?

0.2.2 Different attitudes

During the two thousand year history of Christianity mainly three attitudes may be discerned: (1) isolation; (2) accommodation and (3) transformation.

In these three ways Christians through the ages have positioned themselves with regard to ancient Greek and Roman cultures as well as traditional African cultures (*pre*-Christian cultures and philosophies which did not know the Bible) and with regard to modern secular Western cultures and philosophies (*post*-Christian in nature, since they knew the Christian faith but have knowingly rejected it).

Isolation

This group of Christians took up an antithetic or repudiating attitude towards the surrounding culture and way of thinking since it was believed that a true Christian could only live in isolation from the (sinful) world. They took recourse to Bible texts like Col. 2:8: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of the world rather than on Christ." To God the wisdom of the world is foolishness (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25). Therefore a believer may not serve under the same yoke as an unbeliever or have the same interests at heart (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-16).

Accommodation

The opposite of the antithetic was the synthetic way of thinking. Often it was practised to such an extent that the communication with non-biblical thought ended in accommodation, an erosion of Christian convictions.

However, neither, of these two standpoints can be practised consistently. Those who tried to isolate their thinking could not really shut themselves out from the surrounding culture, societal relationships and spiritual climate in which they were living. And if those who tried to accommodate their ideas were consistent, they would not really call themselves Christians any more.

Transformation

Still, there is an element of truth in both viewpoints, for the correct Christian worldview is *simultaneously* antithetic and synthetic. It is antithetic, because on account of God's revelation a Christian cannot accept the wisdom of the (sinful) world. And it is at the same time synthetic, since Christians are children of their times. They can never completely sever themselves from the spirit of their own times which determine the current questions and answers to societal problems.

2 Cor. 10:5 sums up the antithetic and synthetic attitude as follows: On the one hand we demolish the dissenting arguments and proud onslaughts against God with the powerful weapons God puts at our disposal. On the other hand every (unbelieving) thought is taken captive to bring it to obedience to Christ.

0.2.3 Two types of transformation

Since 1994 the word "transformation" has become fashionable in South Africa: literally everything has to be transformed. Transformation as such, is elevated to a norm in stead of judging it – like everything else one does – in a normative manner. Therefore not every form of transformation is acceptable to a Christian. In the light of Scripture one should distinguish between normative and anti-normative transformation.

Normative transformation

The salient issue is how the Christian faith, worldview and philosophy can change the culture/cultures and their institutions according to the criteria of God's Word so that they will further God's purpose for creation.

One could explain it as follows: Before the exodus from Egypt Moses ordered the Israelites (Ex. 12:35,36) to demand gold and silver objects from the Egyptians. This is the way a Christian should go about with the (old and modern) heathen culture – by laying hands on it. But it should not be done the way the Israelites did it. They used the gold objects to make a golden calf that they worshipped. (Ex. 32.1-4). This was simply a continuation of the pagan animal worship of the Egyptians. It was merely an adaptation, an accommodation to or a synthesis with pagan customs. Only later the plundered Egyptian gold was utilised in the right way when it was melted for building the tabernacle, a dwelling place for the true God (cf. Ex. 35:4-9).

Therefore normative, correct transformation demands a *critical reshaping* in the light of the Christian faith of the non-Christian cultural products and institutions. It amounts to something like a “melting down” or a “purification” in the fire of God’s Word. Critical reshaping means that the valuable insights in the non-Christian culture are freed from the context of their worldview or from their religious or ideological seed-bed to be integrated into a Christian worldview and become truly serviceable in the kingdom of God.

Anti-normative transformation

The danger attached to all attempts at transformation is that reversed transformation may take place. In stead of the Christian faith changing the culture and its societal relationships, the opposite takes place. Christian convictions are twisted to such an extent that they become unrecognisable to believers. Salvation, for instance, becomes self-salvation. Truth is diluted to subjective feelings. In social philosophy authority is interpreted as power. Love becomes self-gratification, and so forth. In such cases in stead of the Christianisation of secular culture, the reverse takes place, namely the de-Christianisation or secularisation of the Christian faith.

Neither is it a case that inverse, anti-normative transformation occur only among non-Christians. The two forms of transformation can even be found in the work of

one and the same Christian thinker. This occurs when someone succeeds in making the message and the norms of God's word clear for his culture in some respects, while in others he/she still falls prey to unbiblical ideas.

Being open to the world always carries the danger of being open to worldliness (sin). On the one hand Christians should deal with the current cultural and societal problems of their time from the perspective of their Christian worldview and philosophy and point out the implications of their Christian faith for these problems so that *reformation* of society can take place. On the other hand involvement in current issues can also lead to *deformation* when Christians get sucked in by the power of the surrounding secular culture and its many institutions.

I found it difficult to make a choice between the (older) concept of "reformation" and the (more recent) concept of "transformation". Transformation – at least in present-day South Africa – sometimes looks more like revolution, a tendency to get rid of all Biblical norms. (Indicated above as an anti-normative, wrong kind of transformation.) The danger with regard to the concept of reformation is that it is often misinterpreted as a conservative attitude, a mere acceptance and repetition of the *status quo* of the past. (In the Reformed tradition this often implies a canonisation of the theological ideas of the 16th century Reformation, especially of John Calvin.)

"Transformation", has the advantage that it does not create the misunderstandings which could be attached to the word "reformation", namely (1) that it is a mere repetition of what existed previously, in other words, mere repositioning, or (2) that it is something which can be completed. Judging by sound, "reformation" points to the past, to things that went wrong in the past and now have to be corrected. Transformation, on the other hand, also refers to the past in this sense, but it has a bearing not only on the past. For in *transformation* the *trans* refers to what lies on the other side – the new form to emerge from the old in the future.

Both words – reformation and transformation – will be used in this book to describe our calling as Christians.

0.2.4 Three characteristics

Transformation has three characteristics: it is dynamic, contextual and differentiated.

Transformation is dynamic

If transformation is taken as the critical, selective reshaping of the philosophical core of different cultures in the course of history, done from a normative, Christian perspective, it cannot be unvarying. It is not possible to create a Christian philosophy (a *philosophia perennis christiana*) which would always be valid for all people, times and places.

In every group of people in every region, each with their own unique problems, the exchange of ideas, a “cross-fertilisation” between the Christian faith and the cultural context, should take place. Even modern, secular post-Christian thought cannot be understood outside its earlier contact with the Christian faith. Unconsciously it still feeds on what is now a secularised Biblical inheritance, like the idea of progress, which originated in Christian hope on a perfect life hereafter. Reversely among Christian scholars we often find opinions of non-Christian origin – even going back as far as ancient Greek philosophy. An example is the two-realm theory of nature and super-nature, according to which social life is divided into secular and holy areas. Another example is a dualistic anthropology according to which the human being consists of two components, namely a higher, immortal, more important soul and a lower, mortal, less important body.

Transformation is contextual

Since transformation does not support isolation, it can also be contextual. It is involved with the people in the social contexts in which they are living, with all

their questions, doubts, frustrations and aspirations. Therefore such a transformation can be really relevant.

This does not mean that the secular culture determines the agenda, puts the questions and name the problems to which Christian thinkers merely have to supply the answers. Neither does it mean that Christians have to prescribe to the world what its questions – and answers – should be. No, there should be true dialogue, mutual questioning and criticism. In this way Christians will have to look critically at their own problem statements and if needed, reformulate them. At the same time Christians should ask their partners in dialogue whether their questions and answers are well put, in other words, whether they are the right questions and answers.

Transformation is differentiated

Since a Christian philosophy reacts to the culture and social set-up of a certain time, place and people, it cannot have exactly the same content in Europe, North America, Africa, Asia or South America. A Christian response to European culture cannot simply be “exported” to Africa, but will have to be contextually differentiated. Only then can it be truly relevant and liberating.

0.3. Conclusion

Beneficial transformation cannot be achieved by way of the coercive power exerted by the spirit of secularism. The transforming power advocated in this book is of a totally different nature, inspired by the Holy Spirit (cf. Zechariah 4:6 and Romans 8:11).

Such transformation is the compulsory and permanent calling of every Christian (Romans 12:2). Without continuous transformation, deformation will characterise social life. Transformation, however, is not an easy task. When tested against the above criteria for genuine Christian transformation, this book is only a very modest beginning. It only offers some suggestions according to which increasingly secularised social life should be transformed. It needs to be fully

contextualised for Africa and also other parts of the world. May it, nevertheless, inspire more capable Christians to take up this challenge.

0.4. Two postscripts

Readers who are not used to theoretical, scholarly material or who do not have the time to read all the chapters, are advised (after reading this *Introduction*), to first read the Concluding chapter (15). It will assist them in understanding the basic message or gist of the whole book.

As this book contains a reworking and compilation of articles (originally in Afrikaans), previously published in different journals at different times, a repetition of some ideas is unavoidable. However, such duplication may have the benefit of emphasising important perspectives.

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* * *

Chapter 1:

GROWING TOGETHER IN FAITH

How can it be understood theoretically and be achieved practically?

People not only have to be *converted*. We often forget that this is only the first step – we also have to *grow* in faith. This chapter (1) starts with a number of practical problems experienced by adult Christians in relation to the faith development of children as well as themselves as grown-ups. (2) Then it proceeds to a critical investigation of James W. Fowler's theoretical model of faith development. Evaluated from a Christian perspective, his theory cannot be accepted. (3) Three other, more explicit Christian models (developed by Olthuis, Westerhoff and Van Belle) are subsequently investigated. (4) The concluding section is an effort to solve, in the light of a more appropriate theoretical, Christian model for faith development, the practical problems mentioned at the beginning.

1.1. Growing in faith poses serious practical problems

The people who heard about the birth of John the Baptist asked the question: "What then is this child going to be?" (Luke 1:66). A similar question is asked by Christian parents today: "Will our child one day be a believer?" This crucial question is not only asked at birth and other special occasions, like baptism, but very often when their children grow up and become critical about the faith they have inherited from their parents. Then parents ask themselves what role they should play in ensuring that their children will be believers (cf. Westerhoff, 1983) - especially in the contemporary secular, God-denying world..

1.1.1 A great responsibility, but how should it be fulfilled?

Usually parents realise that what they say and do will influence their children's faith development. In the light of their promise to God at the baptism of their child(ren) they have to guide them. They are responsible not to give their children "stones" instead of bread or feed them "snakes" instead of healthy

spiritual food (cf. Matt. 7:9-10). Christ reminds all adults of their huge responsibility when He says: "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him/her to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his/her neck" (Mark 9:42).

At the same time parents realise that they cannot *determine* how their children's faith will be. If, on the one hand they are *responsible* for their children's development in faith, but on the other hand cannot *make* them to believe, cannot *give* them faith, *how* then should it be achieved?

1.1.2 Not only a problem for parents

Religious education is not only done in the family, but also in the churches, schools and at tertiary educational institutions (cf. Astley, 1991; Buetow, 1991; Groome, 1991; Morgan, 1983 and Westerhoff & Hauerwas, 1992). More adults (teachers, lecturers, ministers etc.) than only parents are therefore confronted with the problem of exactly *how* to assist and guide children and young people to grow in faith. Their problems are complicated by the fact that they have to provide spiritual guidance to children who are not their own and of different age groups. Furthermore, this has to be done in an religious-unfriendly, secular environment.

1.1.3 Adults may be part of the problem

Many parents, ministers, teachers and lecturers still regard children and even young people as incomplete persons who have to be moulded into adults. Before they have grown up, they have little to contribute. They are not appreciated for what they *are* (also as believers), but for what they will eventually *become*.

Christ's disciples were of a similar opinion (cf. Mark 10:13-16). But Christ was indignant: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these". Simultaneously he warned the grown-ups: "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it". With these words Christ draws attention not to the childishness but the childlikeness of the children, their

childlike trust. Children's faith seems to have a dignity and value of its own. They can put grown-ups to shame by teaching them how to believe!

To be able to help the young, adults may therefore sometimes need a critical look at their own faith: What is the character of my own faith? Is it a living faith? Am I growing in faith? Have I really reached a mature faith?

1.1.4 A joint venture, but in different stages

God has ordained it that the pilgrimage of faith should be made together. At the same time we know by experience that the content and way of experiencing faith are different in adults and in children. The Bible confirms the fact that there is something like growing in faith or different stages in faith. Christ himself indicates that children already have faith (cf. again Mark 10: 15). And elsewhere the Bible criticises "grown-up" believers who still want to live on milk instead of solid foods (Heb. 5:12-14 and 1 Cor. 3:1,2) and emphasises the need of maturity in faith (Eph. 4:13).

But what exactly is meant by a mature faith? And if we should grow through different stages, which stages? These are important questions, because adults have to be aware of their own faith development and the specific stage of their own faith to be able to assist younger people at a different stage. If not, they may delay and even harm instead of facilitate the growth of faith in others.

1.1.5 More than simply a human endeavour

Two important facts are already clear from our knowledge of the Bible. Firstly, that God created man/woman with a capacity to believe, to live with Him in a relationship of trust and surrender. Secondly, that this capacity has to be unfolded. Our task is to answer to God's revelation in particular phases of faith. But, in the third place, the Bible also draws attention to the fact that growth in faith cannot simply be achieved in one's own power. It is the work (a gift) of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit blows wherever it pleases and can play a role in the faith of a person which is above human comprehension. How

should this decisive fact be acknowledged in our own life of faith as well as in our efforts to influence and guide the faith development of others?

1.1.6 Even more complicated

Being human includes the following dimensions: the numerical, spatial, physical, biotic, psychic, logical, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, moral and pistical (faith).

It should be remembered that faith – the highest, most important facet of human life – doesn't exist or grows in isolation from all these other facets or capacities of the multidimensional human being.

Because of their close interconnectedness, will it be possible to isolate and describe one's faith life? If not, is it really possible to consider the influence on faith of *all* these factors and *vice versa*? (It is a difficult task already to understand, for instance, the emotional and rational dimensions of faith.) However, these facets cannot be ignored. (The faith transferred in a family or a church, for example, clearly has a social dimension.)

1.1.7 Conclusion

From these few remarks it should be clear that growing in faith is a very complex problem, especially in a secularising world. To know how to help others to grow in faith is even more difficult. Christians cannot achieve this important task successfully by merely reading the Bible. They have to face the difficult task of studying the development of faith *itself* and do so *in the light* of God's revelation in Scripture.

Can the many *practical* problems (of which only a few were mentioned as examples) perhaps be solved from a *theoretical* perspective? How should such a scientific approach be inspired by the Biblical perspectives about faith mentioned on the preceding pages?

1.2 An evaluation of Fowler's theory of the development of faith

The works of James W. Fowler (1981, 1984, 1987, 1991 and Fowler *et al.* 1991) are not the most recent, but still the best known and most influential written by development psychologists on faith development. Many scholars and other writers continue to apply his theory in their study of the faith of children (cf. Pierce & Cox, 1995), students (cf. Gathmann & Nessian, 1997; Das & Harries, 1996 and Dudley, 1999), men (cf. Dittes, 1999), women (cf. Slee, 2000, 2003), alcoholics (cf. Hortsman & Tonigan, 2000), HIV-positive people (cf. Courtenay *et al.*, 1999) and in pastoral care (cf. Tam, 1996) to mention only a few examples.

Fowler (cf. 1981, 1984, 1987) distinguishes the following six phases in the development of faith: (1) the intuitive-projective, (2) mythic-literal, (3) synthetic-conventional, (4) individuative-reflective, (5) conjunctive and (6) universalising faith.

Because of its already indicated popularity the real danger exists that Christians may accept and apply Fowler's theory as if it is the final word on this important but complex subject. To counteract this tendency, this article will not emphasise the positive elements of his theory, but rather draw attention to its weaknesses. Today critical questions are already asked in many reviews (cf. for instance Hoehn, 1983/1984) about Fowler's first book of 1981. The discussions continued during the nineties (cf. Astley & Francis, 1992; Fowler, Nipkow & Schweitzer, 1991; Hobson, 1993 and Dykstra & Parks, 1986). Today the critical questions are asked especially from a post-modern perspective. (Cf. the following articles published in *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 11(3), 2001 : Streib, Fowler, McDargh, Day and Rizzuto).

The following (ten) critical questions will be asked:

1.2.1 Could Fowler's theory achieve a satisfactory synthesis?

Fowler tried to integrate in his theoretical insights both theology and (development) psychology. Theologically he was influenced by H.R. Niebuhr

and P. Tillich and he combined the work of the following psychologists: J. Piaget (cognitive development), L. Kohlberg (moral development), E.H. Erickson (psychological development) and R.L. Selman (development of interpersonal perspective-thinking).

Four important questions can be asked in this regard. Firstly, did Fowler really succeed in integrating (Christian) theological insights in his effort to outline the psychological prerequisites for faith development? Stated differently: Could he separate the *how* (of faith development) from the *what* (the content of faith)? The author will return to this issue again under 1.2.10 below.

Secondly, did Fowler not try to yoke together disparate, incompatible psychological theories, for instance Piaget's theory emphasising the cognitive and Erickson's which stresses the affective aspects of the human being?

Thirdly, may theories designed to study other facets of human development be applied to faith/religious development (cf. Schweitzer, 1991:80)? Because all the theories combined in Fowler's own theory are basically psychological in nature, the question may be raised whether faith is not being psychologised, in other words against its own nature reduced or even misformed to something merely psychological. (For examples, see different contributions in Malony, 1977. A more balanced and Christian approach is visible in Bussema, 1993 and Meyers & Feeves, 1987.)

Fourthly, an opposite outcome is also possible. Fernhout (1986) complains that, because of the many theories Fowler tried to combine, his theory became so broad that it gives the impression of describing the total development of the human person instead of his/her development in faith.

1.2.2 Is Fowler's theory of faith development not strongly influenced by the modern, secular Western idea of progress?

Moran (1991:150-153) indicates that the idea of development is a religiously laden secular, Western belief in emancipation and progress according to which everything – including faith – will in future develop to ever higher levels

and therefore become better. This boils down to a dangerous secularisation of Christian eschatology.

The result is that development psychologists (just like development economists) are inclined to judge earlier stages negatively and later stages positively. Consequently a child's faith is regarded as of less value than that of a grown-up. However, as indicated already, a child's "underdeveloped" faith is just as real as the "developed" faith of an adult. Children may even show "greater" faith than grown-ups. On the other hand adults may find themselves in childlike stages of faith or slide back into them.

Schweitzer (1991:80) rightly says: "The danger of the hierarchical stage theories ... is that the lower stages – and especially the stages of early childhood – appear primitive and deficient. Such a view implies that the perspectives of adulthood is dominant while childhood is considered only a pre-stage or preliminary form of real life ... But childhood is not just a pre-stage of life ... Childhood is a stage of life with its own dignity and value ... Its meaning and value cannot be measured by its contribution or relationship to adulthood".

May development of faith be depicted as a linear progression to an ever greater perfection? Is it true that a person's growth in faith is a straight, continuous, upward line or can there also be regression and discontinuity? Can the different phases which are distinguished perhaps develop parallel instead of consecutively?

Moran touches a weak point in Fowler's theory when he asks whether people who are most developed (physically, psychologically, cognitively and economically) are guaranteed to be the most religious. The most developed cognitively may or may not be the most developed religiously. "The poor, the lame as well as the unschooled may be religiously more advanced than those who are trained in logic, science and criticism" (Moran, 1991:155).

The other side of the coin is that, because the different dimensions of being human are closely interrelated, underdevelopment or the wrong kind of "development" in other human aspects (like the psychic or social) do influence

one's faith development. To what extent and exactly how this happens, poses difficult challenges to the researcher (see 1.1.6 above).

1.2.3 Can Fowlers six stages be accepted?

Apart from the idea of development as such, also Fowler's view of how faith development occurs (his six stages) can be queried. A few questions in this regard are: How many should be distinguished? In what respects do they differ from each other? What sequence do they follow?

A serious question is raised by Hoehn (1983/84:78) when he draws attention to the fact that most people's faith stop developing at Fowler's middle stages. According to Fowler only 7% of the subjects in his sample reached stage 5 and only 0.3% the final stage (6). Examples of his stage 6 are extraordinary persons like Gandhi and Mother Teresa who were committed to and lived a grand vision according to Fowler.

Hoehn's problem is the following: "There are millions, perhaps billions, of people who will by virtue of their socio-cultural situation never rise above Stage Three ... does that give me the right to suggest by implication that their faith is childlike or immature? I can imagine a peasant shaking her fist at Fowler and saying: 'That's all well and good for middle-class people who live in America and teach at universities. My faith is as good as yours'. And it is just possible that she is right. It may be just as good for her as 'higher' stages are for others. It may even be the only level that would work in her situation; higher stages might fail there. The book (of Fowler) is not explicitly condescending. But the theory implicitly is ..." (Hoehn, 1983/84:79).

1.2.4 Is Fowler's theory not a reflection of his own preferences and circumstances?

In spite of the fact that Fowler states that it is necessary to combine in his theory thinking (the cognitive) and feeling (the affective), because they influence each other reciprocally, he still regards the rational aspect as of greater importance as is clear from his stage 4. This may simply be the result of his personal preference for a rational approach to faith. It is significant that

development theories which favour an abstract, theoretical and critical stance at the higher stages, have being designed by white male university professors in the West. Jardine & Viljoen (1992:82) suspect the following: "It is possible that these theorists have inadvertently made their own personality preferences normative for the general public".

Hoehn (1983/84:78) does not hesitate to state that Fowler's "stage six sounds like a sophisticated version of the orientation of middle-class academics" and elsewhere (p. 79) that Fowler's theory "seems ... to have been too highly shaped by the lifeworld of the theorist".

Also Van Belle (2004) indicates how every model of faith development is clearly influenced by a scholar's own religion, personality, culture, age and experience.

1.2.5 Is Fowler's theory not a very narrow, one-sided approach towards faith?

Fowler's already mentioned emphasis on the cognitive, rational-theoretic aspect of faith development has serious implications. Jardine & Viljoen (1992: 80-81) mention that other researchers have indicated that approximately 75% of the adult population of the United States prefer a concrete and practical approach to a situation, while only about 25% prefer an abstract one. Most adults therefore run the risk of being relegated by Fowler's theory to the adolescent category (stage 3) on the grounds of their being concrete-operational thinkers.

The fact that cognitive criteria virtually define Fowler's levels of faith development leads to another uncomfortable conclusion: Because a person's cognitive ability is (according to Fowler) genetically determined, does it follow that a person's potential to develop in faith is also genetically determined (cf. Jardine & Viljoen, 1992:83)? Such a conclusion will not be acceptable to Christians and Christian theologians who like to emphasise that faith does not only entails a sure knowledge of God but an equally important element of unconditional trust in God (cf. Bavinck, 1980).

1.2.6 Can Fowler's theory be applied to women's faith experience?

This question is answered negatively by researchers like Gilligan (1982) and Slee (2000, 2003). Slee (2000:6) objects to the fact that male development enshrined in the psychological accounts of Erickson, Kohlberg and Fowler are used as models for women. While men develop according to them through a process of individuation and separation from others, women's faith is essentially relational, rooted in a strong sense of connection with and care for others.

According to Slee (2000:15) women can therefore not be neatly fitted into Fowler's theory but rather challenge it in the following three ways: In the first place the dominance of concrete, visual, narrative and embodied forms of thinking over prepositional, abstract or analytic thought, clearly evident in women's faith experience, challenge Fowler's strong emphasis on the cognitive component of faith. (Also in the case of men their faith is not primarily something abstract or analytic.) Greater attention should therefore be given to the role of affect, imagination, symbol and narrative – not only in the so-called pre-logical stages and in the later, so-called post-logical ones, but throughout all the stages.

In the second place, Fowler will have to redraw his middle stages in the light of the centrality of the relational consciousness in women's faith life.

Thirdly, women's experience of powerlessness, alienation and impasse represent a key challenge to Fowler's notion of faith as progressive meaning-making, development, forward movement and ever higher stages.

1.2.7 Was Fowler's theory empirically tested for its reliability and validity?

Different writers have drawn attention to the fact that we have Fowler's conclusion (theory) without being able to review his evidence. Was his (limited) research sufficient to support his theory of six stages?

Because Fowler himself notes that his sample was not selected randomly, Jardine & Viljoen (1992:83) suggest that Fowler's specific research sample may be biased in favour of abstract thinking in the adult years. If the majority of his subjects were chosen from his colleagues and/or students and their associates, it explains the preponderance of abstract thinkers. Therefore his research findings cannot be generalised to cover the total population.

However, as indicated already (see the beginning of point 1.2 above) many researchers have already applied Fowler's theory to different categories of people. These applications of his theory (in for instance, religious education and pastoral counselling), before it has been thoroughly tested and amended/corrected where necessary, cannot guarantee correct results.

1.2.8 Can Fowler's metaphor of faith development be replaced with a more appropriate image?

Since metaphors play such a decisive role in abstract scientific work, this facet of Fowler's theory should be corrected by replacing his progressive, linear, additive or *ladder*-image with something more appropriate to faith. Different options are available.

Moran (1991:153-156) suggests the image of a *spiral*. It indicates that in our "development" of faith we do not only move upwards and forward, but can also circle downwards (cf. also Schweitzer, 1991); development proceeds from a center rather than a base; it also suggests the idea of human freedom instead of the limits and endpoint in the linear image of Fowler.

Howard (1999) prefers the image of the *sea* to describe the development of faith.

An even better metaphor is perhaps that used by Westerhoff (1976: 80 and 1980: 24), viz. the image of (the growth of) a *tree*. He explains the value of his metaphor as follows:

- A tree that is one year old (with one annual ring) is just as complete a tree as one that is eighty years old (with eighty annual rings). The younger tree is

no less a tree or less good. And the older tree is not more of a tree or a better one. They are *different* trees. Likewise the faith of a child is no less faith or worse faith and that of the grown-up is not superior or better. The faith of the grown-up is (like the tree) more extensive, maybe more complex.

- Every tree has its own unique way of growing. However, no tree can grow without a favourable environment. It needs sunlight, water and fertile soil. If these things are not available, its growth is retarded. The same applies to growth in faith.
- A tree grows slowly and gradually acquires more annual rings. This process cannot be "hastened" so that it could for example skip annual rings and develop from annual ring 2 to annual ring 5. In the same way a person gradually progresses from one phase to the next in the development of his/her faith without skipping one phase.
- A growing tree does not lose the previous annual rings. New ones are added while the previous rings are retained. In the case of the growth of faith likewise the previous phases are not finally left behind. We don't outgrow them altogether. Problems in earlier phases, for example, have consequences for later stages. And even in later stages one can return to earlier phases of faith.

An even more appropriate image is one suggested by Van Belle (2004), viz. that of different *seasons* of life through which one travel in one's life of faith. (He also uses the metaphors of the *chapters* of one's book of life or the *acts* of one's life's drama.)

In the light of the foregoing the concept of "*growth* in faith" rather than "*development* of faith" is preferred. At the same time it should be kept in mind that to replace a mechanical metaphor (that of progress) with an organic metaphor (that of biological growth) does not fully solve our problems. Faith (and its development) is something unique, totally different from other aspects of the multidimensional human being and therefore not comparable with something physical-mechanical or biological.

1.2.9 Can the growth of faith not be viewed from more angles than only the cognitive?

As indicated, Fowler's theory is primarily of a cognitive (logical)-psychological nature. Van Belle (2004) correctly indicates that the development of one's life course of faith can – and has been – studied from a variety of viewpoints. He mentions the following: (1) the chronological (e.g. different "clocks"); (2) the biological (of growing and ageing); (3) the psychological (e.g. one's self-image); (4) the sociological (e.g. social behaviour appropriate to one's age) and (5) the cultural-historical. As examples of the last he mentions that prior to 1600 there were no real children who could (as we today) enjoy their childhood, but only "small adults". Because, during the 1930's one already had to start working after only primary or secondary school, young people had no experience of their adolescence.

All these approaches merely study *aspects* of the course of life. If they are over-emphasised they result in dangerous reductionistic viewpoints. According to Van Belle the only *encompassing* perspective is the religious. (He distinguishes between one's faith life as one of the aspects of religion which is the radical, total and integral surrender to God or a god.)

1.2.10 Is Fowler's theory compatible with Christian beliefs?

In order to decide whether they may apply Fowler's theory, it is in conclusion for Christians important to know whether Fowler's psychological scheme is reconcilable with the Bible and Christian doctrine.

Firstly, is Fowler's idea of faith (as the way people orient their lives towards the absolute in order to experience meaning) the same as that of the Bible ("being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see", Hebrews 11:1)?

Secondly, does Fowler take account of sin? Does he distinguish between sin and "underdevelopment"? (The "underdeveloped" faith of a child is not of necessity sinful. Christ urges us to become like children – not childish but childlike – in our faith.)

Thirdly, similar questions may be asked about God's grace and human conversion. According to Christian doctrine, grace enhances a person, it is a power which can transform the self, the other and the world. If one is permanently caught in one of Fowler's lower (deficient) faith stages, then the power of the Holy Spirit to redeem and uplift a person will be largely ineffectual. The author agrees with Jardine & Viljoen (cf. 1992:84) when they conclude that Christian theologians cannot be expected to agree with such a viewpoint, since it would seem to put limits to the power of God.

Fourthly, it may even be the case that God deliberately does not select the wise, scholarly or strong man/woman to work in His kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:20 – 2:15). To put it bluntly: In which stage will Fowler place the heroes/heroines of faith described in Hebrews chapter 11?

1.2.11 Conclusion

After the review of Fowler's theory two concluding remarks have to be made:

Firstly, it is clear that Fowler's theoretical model is a secular model and cannot be accepted uncritically – especially not by Christians who want to understand their faith development in a scientific way in the light of the Bible. In the light of the ten points of criticism, Christians will have to look elsewhere for a theory (or theories) more compatible with their own beliefs.

Secondly, it became clear that all theoretical models (this will also apply to the Christian models to be discussed) are schematic and systematic abstractions. They can never fully capture the dynamics and complexity of real life. Because scientists are inclined to divide everything into neat categories or phases, their theories have to be handled cautiously – especially when they deal with the multidimensional human nature and something as fundamental as the life of faith.

1.3 Three alternative theories developed by Christians

Since they are developed from explicit Christian perspectives, in this section the theories of Van Belle, Westerhoff and Olthuis will be discussed. They will

be treated in more detail, because they are not well-known as is the case with the theory of Fowler and his followers.

1.3.1 The five seasons of life and their different tasks

Van Belle (2004) takes God's cultural mandate (Genesis 1:26 and 2:15) as starting point. As humans we have the *task* to respond to God's *calling* – also in our life of faith. Since we move through different *seasons* of life, we also have different tasks. Accordingly Van Belle distinguishes between the following five types of religion:

- **The religion of childhood: trust.** The primary task of children is to learn to trust in God.
- **The religion of adolescence: commitment.** The task during this season is to choose for and finally commit oneself to God. (This includes commitment to an own worldview, lifestyle and identity.) Because serious decisions have to be taken, the time of adolescence can be a period of uncertainty and turmoil.
- **The religion of early adulthood: effective nurture.** The young adult has the task of turning the vision (s/he committed herself/himself to in his/her youth) into reality. The three main areas where this vision of serving God is to be realised are in relating (marriage), caring (family life) and working (vocational life).
- **The religion of the middle years: surrender.** During middle adulthood one's task changes to leading, counselling and encouraging others. (Self-absorption during this season or chapter of life is something wrong.) We should begin handing over to the next generation ("generativity").
- **The religion of the later years: review.** Van Belle describes this last "act" in the drama of faith as slowing down (retirement), letting go (the world may change without your consent), taking stock or reviewing your own pilgrimage of faith, and also looking forward, preparing yourself for your final home-coming.

1.3.2 Growth in faith explained in more detail

While Van Belle provides Christians with a broad perspective, Olthuis (1985) and especially Westerhoff (1976 and 1980), discuss the development of faith in more detail. Olthuis only explains the growth in faith of children. Westerhoff covers the entire lifespan. The two theories are combined to provide an overview of all the seasons of the life of faith. This is necessary because parents and grandparents, teachers and ministers, should know in which phase of faith they find themselves to give good guidance to the younger generation. Unless they realise that the things that matter in their own experience of faith is not the same in the case of younger people, they will be unable to give the right guidance.

Growth of faith up to about 3-5 years

While Westerhoff describes the faith of children up to five years as *experienced* faith, Olthuis (1985: 500) divides this "season" in more detail. (Compare also the following on faith in childhood: Blazer, 1989; Coles, 1990; Cully, 1979; Pierce & Cox, 1995 and Shelley, 1982.) He distinguishes the following four sub-phases:

- The need for *certainty* is of great importance as early as the first two months of a baby's life. Complete physical acceptance by especially the mother is of the utmost importance. The baby should feel that he/she is welcome, belongs somewhere, has a home in the world. The warmth exuded by the parents can ensure this. If it does not happen, the baby feels uncertain, unwelcome and that he/she has no right to an existence. This has consequences later for mature faith life: the certainty of acceptance by God, our Father and Mother, is doubted.
- *Trust* develops in the baby during the fourth to the sixth month. The baby feels (especially in his/her alliance with the mother) the unconditional love and thus also learns trust and surrender. Or – because it does not receive unconditional love – the baby begins to distrust the mother with the resulting feelings of emptiness, helplessness, loneliness and fear. These feelings also

have consequences for the later faith life in the person's relationship with God: Trust in God – an essential feature of faith – cannot really develop.

- *Power* is typical of the third sub-stage. At the age of 6 to 16 months the small child begins developing greater independence without the need for warm nearness disappearing. Again the parents have to handle this phase in the right way. If for instance the father is too strict, aloof and inaccessible the child or the grown-up later will also see God as someone who totally rules our lives in stead of seeing Him as Someone who acknowledges our independence, freedom and initiative.
- *Love*, according to Olthuis, characterises the fourth stage. From 16 months up to 3 years the need to be loved and to love is important. If this does not happen, the child feels worthless and not worthy of being loved. The result in adult life is that the person cannot love God spontaneously but keeps Him as it were at a distance and has a kind of impersonal relationship of faith with Him.

These stages are mentioned – without going into any details – to show how extremely important the task of the parents (and other adults) is right from the birth of their children. The religious upbringing of one's children does not start when one can tell them Bible stories or teach them their first prayers. Long before they can even understand one's language or before they can speak, non-verbal communication takes place (they interpret the tone of voice, the facial expression and the way the parents touch them) which has a decisive impact on the further development of their faith.

An overview of the growth of faith from birth to death

Westerhoff (1976:91-97 and 1980:25-29) distinguishes the following six stages of faith:

- *An experienced faith* during the pre-school period or early childhood (approximately 0-5 years).

- *An affiliative faith* during childhood years and early adolescence (approximately 6-12 years).
- *A searching faith* during the adolescent years (approximately 13-20 years)
- *An owned faith* during early adulthood (20-35 years).
- *A creative faith* during the mature years (35 to 65 years).
- *An integrated faith* during late maturity (from about 65 years)

Although with every phase the age is given to denote the starting point and duration of the particular phase, it has to be borne in mind that it is not really possible to go by a person's age to determine the phase of faith in which a person finds himself/herself. Some people can grow and become mature in faith while with others it may not happen. Even those people who live through normal growth may find it necessary to return to the needs of earlier stages, live through them again and reaffirm them in order to have a complete and healthy faith life.

Although one can try and place oneself or someone else in one of the phases of this development pattern, it should be done with great circumspection and the necessary reserve. Because each person is unique, his growth in faith is also something peculiar to him. It cannot be neatly categorised.

The following is a brief description of how Westerhoff views the six different seasons of faith.

Experienced faith (approximately 1-5 years)

For children of this age *words* about faith are not nearly as important as the *experience* of the Christian faith. They have to sense in actual experiences with older people what it means to be a child of God. In particular they should experience love, trust and acceptance (cf. Olthuis above). They like to observe, explore, test, experiment and imitate.

So it is important for parents and other adults to share their faith in a spontaneous way with their children. They must also deliberately create

opportunities for their children to experience what it means to believe. Children should not only memorise prayers, texts and songs (learn the words), but be admitted to religious activities (like going to church) so that they can experience it and develop trust (cf. Van Belle above).

Affiliative faith (6-12 years)

In this phase, too, it is imperative that the child (now of school-going age) feels welcome, enjoys acceptance and security, feels important and needed. If the community of believers do this, it helps the child to build an identity of his/her own.

Further, the child must get to know the traditions of the community of believers, or its "story". In this way s/he should learn what is important for Christians, what the final authority in their lives is according to which they organise their lives; what they regard as right and wrong, good and evil. Adults should aid them and deliberately create the opportunities for them to experience the story of the Gospel in different ways and repeatedly so that it becomes part of them, their very own. Here, too, it should be kept in mind that for children of this age "religion of the heart" (the emotional aspect of faith) is more important than "religion of the mind". Thus the ceremonies and the symbolic part of the faith life are important. Faith must not be abstractly intellectual but should be experienced in song, plays, drawing, painting, telling of stories and similar activities.

As indicated already, the community of believers in which children grow up plays a very important role during this phase. But during the next phase they will have to develop their own independent standpoint in faith. Affiliation in this phase may therefore not be forced, since it could create problems for the following more critical phase of faith. Authoritarian religious guidance (of ministers, teachers of (Sunday) schools, catechism classes and parents) can cause the child to remain fixed in this phase. Likewise, an attitude of "we alone know what the truth is" may later have detrimental results.

Searching faith (13-20 years)

As this phase is the “Sturm und Drang” period of the adolescent years, it will be dealt with in more detail (cf. also Loukes, 1961). The child is now becoming physically, sexually and intellectually grown-up. He is in a transitional phase between being a child and an adult. Seeking his own identity is thus very much in the foreground.

In the field of religion, too, this phase is characterised by doubt and critique. The reason for this is that having her/his own identity – including an own identity in religion – demands that the adolescent no longer be dependent on the community of believers (to which s/he has been affiliated up to this point). He/she has to become more independent. This may explain why young people sometimes break away from the religious, social and moral norms of the community, leave the catechism class or Sunday school and youth group and no longer want to attend church – are “difficult” in all respects.

Therefore the earlier “religion of the heart” now changes to a “religion of the mind”. Apart from the emotional issues, the intellect now plays a very important role. Adolescents want to argue, analyse, evaluate and reason. Besides, they want to experiment. They want to compare and test the faith with which they grew up with reference to other religions and viewpoints.

Young people also have a great need of commitment and surrender (cf. Van Belle above). But in this uncertain period their loyalty can shift quite fast. However, it is the only way of eventually learning full surrender to God.

Parents and other grown-ups often make the mistake of thinking that their children in this phase are losing their faith. Indeed, it does happen that young people in this stage take leave of the church and faith and that some of them do not come back. Adults should, however, understand that it is an essential stage – not to lose their faith, but for the exact purpose of really owning it up for themselves. So parents may never think that they have been rejected by their children or – worse still – have their children feel rejected by them.

Instead of trying to give their children faith – forcing it down their throats – they should encourage their children to own up the faith for themselves. Adolescents are searching for acceptance – not approval; empathy – not sympathy; sincerity – not pretence; the necessary freedom – not to be cooped up. In spite of the freedom, they are also looking for clear norms and guidelines for life. What they need most is the presence of older people who are prepared to share their doubt and the intellectual struggle for finding the truth from which they can live for the rest of their lives.

To be able to do this, adults will have to admit that deep down they often struggle with the same questions. (The various stages of faith cannot be subjected to watertight separation and it is not abnormal for a person in a later stage to return to an earlier phase.) Not only the three year old asks: Who am I? The adolescent also does it, and the forty year old also asks himself: Am I really satisfied with myself and my life? Perhaps many parents find it difficult to help their adolescent children because they themselves are still struggling with all the problems, uncertainties, doubt, dissatisfaction and lack of faith. The best way of helping your children is to start working in earnest on these issues and not to try and hide it from your children.

The last thing an adolescent should learn at this stage is that the Christian faith is a kind of escape or something anti-intellectual. So their parents should welcome their questions and thus help them to love God with their minds, too. The Bible should be studied together in great open-mindedness so that the young people feel free to ask their questions – even though not all questions can be answered by the parents. For parents and other adults to admit that they themselves do not know all the answers either, is much more important than an attitude of “we must simply believe it”.

In this phase, too, the example set by the parents and other older people is of the utmost importance. Their behaviour should testify to their integrity. The youth should be able to detect what their parents, teachers and ministers believe, according to which norms they live and for what they live. Simply acting in faith in whatever situation they are confronted with, is still the best

and most important gift they can offer adolescents on their way to adulthood in faith.

Owned up faith (20-35 years)

After the critical, searching phase of the adolescence follows this calmer period in the growth of faith. The young adult has learned to accept God's authority. A personal faith in God has taken shape. Where s/he was formerly extremely critical towards the establishment, her/his own community of believers, parents and tradition, the emphasis now falls on adapting to or conforming with the community. The person is much more sensitive to the expectations and demands of the community than being set on his/her own viewpoint. You allow the group to determine your identity, for not being accepted by the group means isolation. Doctrine (credo, dogma) also plays a significant role in the determination of one's own identity. The attention in this phase is primarily directed outwards and there is a need to live the faith in everyday matters (cf. Van Belle's characterisation of early adulthood).

The risk attached to this phase is a certainty which is too comfortable, does not encourage questions or change, and ignores those who hold different standpoints of faith.

Creative faith (35-65 years)

In contrast to being focused outwards as in the previous stage, the believer who is in this phase is mostly focused inwards. He/she is conscious of changes within him-/herself, of unsolved problems, failures, sadness and many more things. (According to Van Belle one's task in this phase is to surrender.) The introspection is focused on the own inner needs of faith, like for instance how one subjectively experiences the working of the Holy Spirit in one's heart. It leads to a deepened faith in which renewed commitment, love and the struggle for justice take prominence. The person now doesn't do things because society expects it, but from inner conviction and from a feeling of personal responsibility. The "inward" way therefore opens up possibilities to act "outwards" with new creative energy.

The risk attached to this phase, however, is that the believer could become fixed in living inwards and so become passive. Or as a result of a greater understanding of the relativity of all things could fall into relativism.

Integrated faith (from 65 years onwards)

During this phase our lives more or less come together, become integrated. One usually experience satisfaction and a strong feeling of fellowship with creation around us and especially with God Himself. This is coupled with distancing oneself from one's occupation, reviewing the past, letting go – coming home.

The obverse of this may, however, be a deepened cynicism, despair, anguish and bitterness towards God and towards other people.

The preceding pages provided enriching theoretical insights developed from a Christian perspective. Theory and practice can, however, never be totally separated. Already the previous theoretical material contains some suggestions about its practical applications. The following section will have an explicit practical nature.

1.4 From theory to practice

This section will have to answer to the practical questions posed at the beginning of this article. How can they be answered in the light of the theoretical clarification provided in the two previous sections?

1.4.1 If parents, teachers, lecturers and ministers have to influence, but cannot determine the faith of the young, how then should it be done? (This question combines 1.1.1 and 1.1.2).

To believe is to love God, have fellowship with Him, to address Him (in prayer), to do His will (obey Him), offer oneself in service to Him and our fellow humans, to surrender one's entire life to Him. But faith is also to know Him.

Though no one will either be able to explain faith and its development analytically or succeed in convincing someone by means of logical arguments to believe, faith (a concrete act) has an analytical side. Through its analytical side (especially its content) we can approach faith thoughtfully. In reflecting on the content of their faith, young people's faith can be aroused, opened up, extended and deepened. And instruction in faith by older people can stimulate this process of growth.

To grasp *how* adults should influence the faith of younger people, it is therefore necessary to understand this instruction or teaching process. Van Dyk (1990:156) provides a simple but clear definition: teaching is a multi-dimensional formative activity consisting of the functions of guiding, unfolding and enabling. He explains as follows (cf. Van Dyk, 1990:156 ff):

Adults are not in a position to form, shape or mould younger people, because only God's Word and Spirit can do so. They can, however, play a *formative role*, viz. a modest way of exercising an influence which points the young, as they develop in faith, in a certain direction.

To *guide* does not mean to grab someone by the scruff of the neck and forcibly compel him/her to go somewhere. It rather means in a gentle way to nudge him/her in a certain direction. The young should be guided according to Gods' norms into discipleship. To be a disciple is to hear God's Word and to live according to His will, to become His servant.

Unfolding in Van Dyk's definition indicates to open up to children and young people what they as yet do not know and cannot do. This contains a cognitive element, but the unfolding should never be reduced to merely facts to be mastered. Because faith contains an analytical element, the knowledge of faith can be approached thoughtfully, but can never be completely framed and mastered. To achieve this unfolding effectively at the appropriate level of the learner, teachers must have a keen understanding of the stages of human (including faith) development.

Enabling means to provide the child or student with the knowledgeable competence and willingness to function in this world as a disciple of his/her

Lord. This is the ultimate goal of Christian education in general and also instruction in faith. Summarised: Older people should *guide* younger ones by way of *unfolding* into an *enabling* of discipleship.

1.4.2 How can adults be part of this process of instruction in faith?

To be able to motivate younger people towards discipleship, their parents and other teachers should model such discipleship themselves. But (as indicated in 1.1.3) because of the lack of a living, growing and mature faith, often grown-ups cannot effectively nurture the faith of younger people. In the words of Van Belle: they are not aware of their specific task during the season of their life of faith. Neither do they know the characteristic needs and specific tasks of the younger people they have to guide, unfold and enable.

The fact is that we can only grow in faith *together*. God has ordained that the pilgrimage of faith should be a joint venture between the different generations. We therefore briefly look at five practical ways in which it can be achieved.

- **Reading the Bible together**

The Bible is a story, a love story between God and his people. The story of a covenant which was agreed upon, broken and re-established in Christ.

This story should be told over and over to the children, so that they get to know it better, can own it up for themselves and live it from their hearts. It must become their own story. It must give meaning to their lives – one of the most basic human needs.

Adults will have to become much better storytellers – especially for the sake of the little ones. Bible stories should not only be read out (cf. Griggs, 1981; Murray, 1993; Pardy, 1988; Van Ness, 1991 and Wiggins, 1975.) Apart from stories being told, they can also be experienced by the children themselves in different ways, as in games, songs, dancing, drama, drawing, painting and such like.

A second important way is:

- **Commemorating together**

Faith and ceremonies (the symbolic side of it) cannot be separated. Ritual is an inherent part of any religion. Usually it is expressed in prose, poetry, music and song. Other art forms like drama and the visual arts can be used as well. All of these are ways of getting a deeper understanding of our faith. (Words are not the only way of understanding.) As Olthuis have indicated, the child begins understanding at a more intuitive, emotional level. A child does not learn about God for the first time as a theological dogma but on an emotional level as someone whom he meets, who fires his imagination. Children learn by means of action and experience. Experience comes before reflection. Quite possibly the Reformed Churches' type of worship services are too intellectual and too much laden with words.

It may also be a mistake to keep children away from the worship service of the whole congregation – they understand much more than adults think, although it may not be on the intellectual level.

Is it correct that children should be absent when adults commemorate the Lord's Supper on the supposition that they will not understand its meaning? If the Lord's Supper really is a symbol, children will maybe "understand" it better than adults.

In any case it is important that parents and other teachers in faith deliberately create such occasions for *experiencing together* the mystery and meaning of their common faith in a symbolic way and for really *celebrating* it. Do Christians radiate enough sincere joy and gratitude during our religious activities at home (for instance during devotions) and in the church?

A third important means of growing together in faith is:

- **Prayer**

One could call prayer the heartbeat of faith. This, too, is something children and parents should do together regularly.

Perhaps parents should be reminded again what prayer really is. It is a personal conversation with God in which they speak to one another and listen to one another. So prayer starts with a sense of God's presence. Then follows gratitude for his presence and love – one answer by saying that one also loves Him. God is then asked what it is He wants one to know and to do. After this one should listen to what He wants to say.

Important elements of prayer thus are *joy* of his presence; *thanksgiving* for everything He graciously gives us daily; *praising* his Name; *confession* of guilt and asking for forgiveness; *intercession* for ourselves and others and finally a promise of *commitment* to the Lord. Prayer can also mean just being quiet in the presence of God.

Parents and teachers are often worried when children cannot "say" their prayers, while they are not worried because they themselves do not have a personal relationship with God. Not only their children, but they as parents, too, will have to learn again to pray.

- **Talking and listening**

This may take place at the occasions mentioned above, but should not be limited to these. The important point is that it happens too seldom that parents and also other adults and children talk about their faith, and share their faith.

Children ask difficult questions and pray difficult prayers (cf. Hample & Marshall, 1991). When we were children, we had similar questions but we set them aside or suppressed them. Our children remind us of these questions once more – sometimes to our embarrassment. Our small and adolescent children's questions should be taken seriously. We should react to them - even when we cannot give final answers. (The deepest questions of faith have no final answers.) What especially small children really are looking for, are not dogmatic answers, but that adults should open up and share their faith with them. Then they put at their children's disposal their experience of faith as a source of learning and growing. Neither should this happen in an authoritative way, from the top down. On the contrary, we struggle *with* them and *together* we look for explanations.

A last important means of growing together in the faith is:

- **Doing acts of faith together**

Faith is not just knowledge and trust. It also includes the deed – deeds of love, justice and peace. Faith which does not emerge in good deeds, is not true faith. Parents, teachers and ministers should remember that it is their actual deeds of faith which have the strongest appeal for the younger generation. And young people should learn that religion is not only something of the heart and mind but also of the hand or will. Their own will must be in harmony with God's will and it should actually be seen in their lives.

Christian faith is not something abstract, but a certain lifestyle. If adults want to share their faith with their children it simply means they must share their lifestyle with them. By their example they give their children a peep into what matters for a Christian. They should in particular share with them their life of service – and invite them to do it with them. There are so many opportunities for this that examples are not necessary.

The gravest danger today is that grown-ups occupy themselves with so many other things that they neglect their faith lives and their children's – while it should have been their first priority. The solution is a simple one: Adults have to *make* more time. The time to share a great treasure – the immeasurable treasure of faith – that will not devaluate, but become more precious as we grow together in faith.

In summary, adults have a grave responsibility towards themselves and younger people. They must live so near to God that the younger ones will be able to see Him in the lives of the grown-ups. And what they see of God in the lives of older people, should attract them so much that they will long to see and know more and in this way grow in faith every day.

1.4.3 How does one grow in faith towards maturity?

As indicated in the theories above one's life of faith develops through different (5 or 6) stages. Maturity is not only reached at the final stage. During every

"season" one has a task to complete. When this is done, one has reached one's appropriate "maturity". In the case of adults the theoretical models can therefore be of great practical value to assess their own status and growth in faith.

When adults guide, unfold and enable younger people in their faith, the adults will also be aware of the important fact that the younger ones live in and experience a quite different phase, they have a different task to fulfil. With the insight provided by the stage model, adults will also be careful not to guide children and adolescents in the same way. It will, for instance, be unfair to expect from children "a decision for Christ". They still have to learn *trust* (phase 1). *Commitment* is the task of the adolescent (phase 2). If trust does not precede one's commitment, "commitment" in children may at best be anxious obedience and (later in life) an effort to base one's righteousness on one's own goodness.

1.4.4 How should God's grace through the work of the Holy Spirit be acknowledged?

Apart from the fact that this question was asked at the beginning (in 1.1.5), it was also a major point of critique against Fowler's theory that it excludes God's role in the development of faith (cf. 1.2.10 above).

Certainly we cannot teach someone to believe. At the most we can teach or instruct a person what s/he ought to believe and what this could mean in her/his daily life. De Graaff (1966:161) explains: "... instruction in faith may be one of the avenues by which a person reaches a greater insight into the total meaning and relevance of the Word of God, but the instruction as such cannot provide him with the full and integral knowledge. The instructor (parent, teacher, minister, etc.) cannot teach a person to believe in God, nor can he furnish him with the knowledge of Jesus Christ. In this particular nurture the instructor is limited to the activation, disclosure and deepening of the person's thinking about faith".

Van Dyk (1990:161) concurs: "... ultimately no teacher is able to transform a student into a disciple of Christ. This ... is the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word".

Recognising the indispensability of the Spirit does not, however, imply that parents and other adults do not have a responsibility and should not be concerned about guiding the young towards discipleship. On the contrary, their task is (cf. again Van Belle above) that of effective nurturing. They have to be co-workers of the Holy Spirit. Therefore they must make sure that they are creating the necessary human conditions whereby the younger ones can grow in faith.

1.4.5 How can we avoid distorted ideas about faith?

In all age groups (phases) the concrete act of believing has many aspects or dimensions, inter alia an emotional, mental and social. These different facets of the diamond of faith are not only inextricably connected, but they also mutually influence each other. To believe, therefore, is something extremely complex, never to be fully comprehended. However, because to believe has an analytic side, we can understand something about it, learn its content and teach it to others.

As a result of its complex nature, a permanent temptation is to try to reduce faith to one of its aspects. In Fowler's theory the cognitive element dominates. History provides many other examples of such reductionisms. Faith has been explained as something emotional, social, analytical, etc. However, to reduce living faith to one of its facets inevitably distorts its real nature. Two examples will explain.

The danger in the Reformed tradition is intellectualism. The element of knowledge (an inherent part of faith) is isolated (and overestimated) from the other aspects of the full, many-sided, integral faith experience. In reaction the Charismatic movement falls into another extreme, viz. emotionalism. This group of Christians tend to isolate (and absolutise) the psychic element (feeling, experience) of faith.

We will never grasp – neither on a theoretical nor on a practical level – faith in its complexity and totality. But theoretical reflection can have great practical relevance: it may help us to avoid one-dimensional and therefore distorted views of the immensely rich gift of faith.

* * *

The aim of this (first) chapter on growing together in faith will now be clear: Personal growth in faith throughout all the seasons of life is a first prerequisite for counteracting the secularisation of contemporary life.

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Chapter 2:

FRIENDSHIP

Why is it so rare and how should it be restored to a place of honour?

Different authors mention the fact that today friendship is ignored and rarely celebrated. In trying to improve this sad state of affairs, this chapter proceeds through the following steps: (1) A brief historical review which reveals that already in the past friendship was confused with other relationships and its real value was not acknowledged by Christians. (2) From the perspective of a Christian philosophy of society, it is next indicated that friendship is a unique relationship of love which should be clearly distinguished from other forms of love, for instance the love of marriage partners, brotherly love and neighbourly love in general. (3) This is followed by a structural analysis of the friendship relation, indicating what real friendship entails. (4) In the light of the preceding it becomes possible to discriminate between acceptable forms of friendship and unacceptable "friendships". (5) The next section provides, apart from the already mentioned historical causes, different reasons for the rareness of friendships in our contemporary, especially secular Western, societies. (6) In conclusion the special value of friendship is emphasised: a unique gift of God and simultaneously an important human obligation.

2.1 Introduction: Friendship has become rare

Numerous writers call attention to the fact that friendship has become something rare – both in the Western world and in Africa. Lewis sums up the situation in the West as follows: "To the Ancients, friendship seemed the happiest and most fully of all human loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue. The modern world, in comparison, ignores it. We admit of course that besides a wife and family a man needs a few 'friends'. But the very tone of the admission, and the sort of acquaintanceships which those who make it would describe as 'friendships', show clearly that what they are talking about has very little to do with the *Philia* which Aristotle classified among the virtues or that *Amicitia* on which Cicero

wrote a book. It is something quite marginal; not a main course in life's banquet; a diversion; something that fills up the chinks of one's time" (Lewis, 1990:55).

Olthuis has the same conviction: "... the modern world generally ignores friendship. We admit that everyone needs a few friends, but we don't become very excited by their presence or absence. Today we rarely celebrate friendship ... Very few sing the praises of friendship because very few have experienced its heights" (Olthuis, 1975:108, 109).

Similar utterances can be read in the works of Woldring (1994:11), Van der Walt (2000:417) and Linden (2003:162). The latter writes: "close friendship ... is rarely experienced."

This void is also found in Christian ethical literature. Brillenburg Wurth wrote (as long ago as in 1953:137) that it was striking how little was written on friendship in Christian circles. Important other works on Christian ethics (cf. e.g. Fairweather & McDonald, 1984; Henry, 1965; Reid, 1981 and Stob, 1978) confirm this.

This also applies to Reformed theologians. In the four-volume *Van 's Heeren ordinantien* (About the Lord's ordinances) by Geesink (1907-1908) there is not a word about it. In the same writer's later two-volume *Gereformeerde Ethiek* (Reformed Ethics) (1931) comprising more than a thousand pages, a mere two pages (part 2, p. 295-296) are devoted to friendship. When Aalders (1947) writes about ethics, not a word is said about friendship. The same holds true for Brillenburg Wurth's three-volume *Het Christelijk Leven* (Christian Life). It deals with diverse subjects but not friendship. So too, later works on ethics from the circle of Reformed theologians in the Netherlands (cf. e.g. Schippers, 1955 and Von Meyenfeldt, s.a.) offer nothing on friendship. In South Africa the situation is no better. Van Wyk (1986, 1991, 1998, 1999 and 2001) for instance, who is a prominent Reformed ethicist, does not deal with friendship in any of his works – while it is one of the most important ethically qualified human relationships. While friendships between different age groups played an important role in traditional Africa, I could not find a single article on the topic!

The problem that is treated in this study is therefore how it is possible that something as essential as friendship receives so little attention from most Christians. Maybe history can shed some light on the riddle.

2.2 Friendship through the ages

The quotation above from Lewis (1990:55) shows how differently friendship was valued during the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans and afterwards by Christianity: in the first-mentioned it was *over-rated* and in the last-mentioned *under-rated*.

2.2.1 Among the Greeks and Romans

Since the intention here is to investigate the traditional Christian view of friendship, we give only a few glimpses of friendship in antiquity (for a short summary compare Ritter, 1972:1106-1107).

Among the ancient philosophers Aristotle made perhaps the most important contribution (cf. Woldring, 1994:37-49). Even contemporary writers on friendship return to his work as a source of inspiration (cf. e.g. Ladikos, 2000 and Stortz, 2002).

Despite a great variety of interpretations of friendship in antiquity (cf. Woldring, 1994:15-66) it was always seen as a form of love. The word *philos* (friend) is derived from the Greek verb *philein* (to love). The Latin word for "friend" is *amicus* which goes back to *amor* (love) and the verb *amare* (to love). But the specific kind of love is not specified. (Linden, 2003:157 states for instance that the word *philia* by Aristotle was wrongly translated with "friendship" in the past instead of simply with "love" in the general, broader sense.) The foundation of friendship was correctly seen as the psychic attraction between two people.

So there is much to be learnt about friendship from the Greek and Roman philosophers. The most important criticism from Christian side was that they attached too much value to this intimate human relationship. (According to

Woldring, 1994:15 we can compare the place they gave to friendship to the place given nowadays in the West to a family, namely "the corner-stone of society".) An important reason for this opinion is found in the nature of friendship, namely that it is selective, while God's commandment of love applies universally to the neighbour. However, it is a fact that Christian thought on friendship, in reaction to the "overrating" by the Graeco-Roman world, has gone to the other extreme by underrating it.

2.2.2 Friendship in the Christian tradition

Before investigating what the Bible itself teaches on friendship we take a brief look of what Christians think about the matter. We will deal briefly with the viewpoints of only four prominent Christian philosophers.

Augustine and his influence

Although the Christian tradition goes far back, we could start with the Christian reflection on friendship at the great church father, Aurelius Augustinus (354-430 AD). For a full exposition see Hartmann (1955); McNamara (1958), Woldring (1994:69-78) and Andresen (1973:128-130) who provide more literature under *liebesbegriff* in the writings of Augustine.

Friendship is important according to Augustine – without it the world would have been a wilderness. Because he regards it as a gift from God, friendship may not be a sideline, mere casual relationship in the life of a Christian. He regards friendship as a relationship of mutual love, founded on a certain equality in interests and ideals. So Augustine is strongly under the influence of the Greek and Roman philosophers' high regard for friendship.

Unfortunately we find in his work already a kind of dualism which would have a decisive influence on Christendom after him. To be acceptable to the Christian, *amicitia* (friendship) must be elevated and brought on a higher level, namely that of *caritas* (love). This idea is clearly a forerunner of the nature-grace theme which divided life into two domains: a natural and a supernatural or spiritual. The

natural is the first step and the supernatural the perfection. According to this unbiblical dualism friendship is something natural and only then becomes really acceptable when it is reformed and perfected by the so-called supernatural love of God and the neighbour.

This tension between friendship (*amicitia*) which is selective and exclusive and Christian love (*caritas*) which applies to all, is a problem that is prevalent in all Christian philosophy right through the Middle Ages. We have to add, however, that Medieval and Roman Catholic philosophy also did make an important contribution when it reflected on how friendship (and love in general) is enacted in the context of faith, and emphasised that the love in friendship cannot be seen separately from one's relationship with God. Stressing this connection (even though it was worked out in a dualistic manner) is a much better vision than the current secularist viewpoint in which friendship is completely separated from the religious relationship with God and is reduced and downgraded to a horizontal relationship between people.

The fact that the Renaissance returned to the high regard for friendship in Greek and Roman culture, only increased the reaction against it among the Christians of the 16th century Reformation.

Three modern Christian philosophers in whose work this under-appreciation of friendship is still evident, are the following:

E. Brunner

The tension between friendship (something "natural") and (true) Christian love (something "supernatural") which we found in Augustine's work is also present in Brunner's work. Brunner (a dialectic theologian) was most probably strongly under the influence of S. Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the Danish irrationalist Christian philosopher, who is regarded as the father of both the existentialist philosophy and dialectic theology (for detail on his viewpoint, cf. Kierkegaard, 1962 and Woldring, 1994:129).

Brunner writes: "Friendship ... does not spring from ethical impulses but from our *natural* spiritual impulse. We are not driven to it by a sense of compulsion or duty, but we are drawn to certain people by a certain attraction ... Friendship begins with pleasure in the individuality of the other person ... From the point of view of faith, friendship is a *natural* fact which can only become ethical through the love of our neighbour. Real community, *Agape*, is foreshadowed, *naturally* in friendship ..." (Brunner, 1949:517-518, italics added). A tension, therefore, exists between friendship and the commandment of love. (The same dilemma we also find in the well-known book by Nygren [1957]).

C.S. Lewis

In his well-known work *The four loves* (1990) this universally known Christian writer grapples with the problem of how the human love in friendship can be connected with divine love (cf. his chapter on "Friendship", pp. 55-84 and the one on "Charity", pp. 107-128).

With right he says (1990:83) that friendship is a gift of God. His motivation for this, however, is to be questioned: "Friendship, like all other natural loves, is unable to save itself ... it must ...involve the divine protection if it hopes to remain sweet" (Lewis, 1990:82). Friendship ("appreciative love") is something natural and insufficient over against the supernatural, divine love ("charity") which has to perfect it.

In both "gift-loves" and "need-loves" Lewis distinguishes between natural and supernatural love – confirming that he had not escaped the age-old dualism of the nature-grace theme either. It is stressed all the more when he writes "the Divine love does not substitute itself for the natural – as if we had to throw away our silver to make room for gold. The natural loves are summoned to become modes of charity while also remaining the natural loves they are" (Lewis, 1990:122).

The dialectic tension caused by the unbiblical scheme of nature-grace is quite clear: On the one hand the so-called natural loves (in friendship and marriage) are something good – they may not be abolished. But on the other hand they are not good enough unless they are elevated to the sphere of grace. A more biblical view would be that we should obey God's commandment to love one another *in* our loving relationships in friendship and marriage (and in many other fields).

G. Brillenburgh Wurth

The above-mentioned dualism is evident at the very beginning of Brillenburgh Wurth's short chapter (1953:137 et seq.) on "Liefde als vriendschap" (Love as friendship) and it pervades the whole of his argument. According to him friendship is "natural" over against brotherly love which is "spiritual". Friendship is a mere "humane greatness" (p. 147, 139). "We could put it like this: in friendship the specific and characteristic of Christian love is not seen as much as in brotherly love or in charity or the love of an enemy" (Brillenburgh Wurth, 1953:137).

In opposition to this it must be stated that all kinds of love is something "human" and that friendship therefore is not an *inferior* kind of love – there are no grounds for such an opinion in the Scriptures (cf. 2.2.3 below) – but a *different kind* of love from brotherly/sisterly love or love of one's enemy.

It seems as if it is the very nature of friendship love (as we have indicated above) that causes Brillenburgh Wurth, too, to degrade it. Since friends choose one another, since preference comes into the picture – something which may not apply to love for the neighbour – it is supposedly of less value. He more or less ensnares himself with this presumption though, since love in marriage also rests on preference for a particular person and he cannot for that reason regard it as less important or even wrong. In spite of this he perseveres – evidence of how the nature-supernature scheme determines his train of thought: "With this ... the relative value of friendship is given. Friendship is surely not one of the highest forms of love. And something like friendship may therefore never take such a

great place in our lives that it encroaches on the other task of loving.” (Brillenburgh Wurth, 1953:138). .

When freed from the unbiblical nature-grace doctrine of two domains, one no longer needs to choose between lower/higher, lesser/major kinds of love. It then becomes possible to acknowledge that there are different God-given appearances of love, which each has its own nature and thus is equally important for a full Christian life. It is of such importance to clear up the confusion over the different kinds of love that a section (2.3 below) will deal with it in detail. It is one of the main reasons why something as valuable as friendship is so underestimated.

2.2.3 The Bible on friendship

Before discussing the confusion, we must first hear what the Bible itself teaches on friendship. From this it will become apparent that it is wrong – as in the Christian tradition – to regard friendship as something inferior. We give only a few glimpses from Scripture to counter this wrong perception (for more detail, cf. for instance Anonymous, 1982:271-272 and Adams, Irwin & Walters, 1968:237-238).

- The writers of the Bible were fully conscious that friendship also participates sin. So Jeremiah (9:4.5) complains that one could no longer trust one's friends. Micah (7:5) says that one should trust no friend. (According to these texts friendship presupposes trustworthiness, integrity.) Proverbs 18 verse 24 warns that one should distinguish between mere pals or fair weather friends, who can disappoint you, and a friend who is nearer than a brother. (The fidelity of a friend can thus be stronger than the love of a blood brother.) According to Deut. 13 verse 6 one's "friends" can also lead you astray – even into idolatry.
- Contrary to this true friendship, as a gift of God Himself (cf. Job 6:14), is of special value. Although Job's friends did not understand what was happening to him and why, they still tried to support him in love (cf. Job 2:12, 13). Christ Himself said that there is no greater love than giving one's life for a friend (John

15:13). Friendship love – faithfulness until death – was definitely not regarded by Him as third rate love.

- From the words of Christ it became apparent that the form of love in the case of friendship is fidelity. This fidelity must be mutual. That is why David complains in Psalm 55 verse 13-15 that he was betrayed, not by an enemy – from whom it could be expected – but by his good friend with whom he had such close ties.
- According to the Scriptures it does not mean that friends may not reprimand one another. Proverbs 27:5,6 says that one can rely on a person who sometimes opposes one. And Proverbs 27 verse 17 uses a beautiful image: as iron sharpens iron, friends sharpen one another.
- When in Deuteronomy 13 verse 6 there is talk of “your friend who is as your own soul” (RSV) the foundation of true friendship comes to the fore, namely like-mindedness. A friend is a “soulmate”.
- If friendship was not a serious human relationship, why then is the Bible positive about the love of Jonathan for David (cf. 1 Sam. 19, 20) and David’s great love for his friend Jonathan? In his lament after Jonathan’s death he says: “I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women” (2 Sam.1:26). Nowhere in the Bible is there a correction of what David says here. In the New Testament we read of the love between Peter and Andrew, Philip and Nathaniel – without any negative comment as if it was not good.
- Defending the viewpoint that friendship is something insignificant becomes even harder when we read that God Himself called Abraham his friend (2 Chron. 20:7; Is. 41:8; James 2:23). Christ not only calls his disciples his friends (John 15:14,15), but the Bible also says that He loved some of them particularly (John 13:23). Apart from his disciples He also had other friends like Martha, Mary and Lazarus (cf. John 11:11).

From these few glimpses it is quite clear that the Bible never downgrades friendship. On the contrary it values it highly. Equipped with these biblical

perspectives we can more clearly see the misunderstanding and confusion around friendship and the subsequent neglect of it in the Christian tradition.

2.3 Four misconceptions in the Christian tradition corrected

Four misconceptions now have to be cleared up : (1) the idea that friendship, as something "natural", should belong to a lower order than other types of love; (2) the confusion between friendship and love for the neighbour in general; (3) the idea that friendship should be in competition with marriage and family and (4) the lack of a clear distinction between friendship and brotherly/sisterly love.

2.3.1 Friendship downgraded in comparison to other types of love

Since friendship is a human relationship given by God we may not devalue it. One of many ways to love God is to be good, faithful friends. *In* the love friends have for one another – not separately from it – they also love God, they fulfil his commandment of love.

The distinction between "natural" love (friendship) and "spiritual" love (other forms of love) is unbiblical. Olthuis briefly describes it as follows: "Dividing life into things natural and spiritual is contrary to the basic thrust of the Scriptures. When Paul told the Colossian believers to seek the things above where Christ is, he did not urge them to leave the world. On the contrary, he called them to live in a spiritual way in all of life's relationships. *Spiritual* does not refer to an additional, higher realm; instead it describes a life in its totality driven, motivated and guided by the love of God. If all our relations are spiritual – driven by the love of God – there must be a place for genuine, renewed friendships. The only important question is whether it is moved by the love of God or gripped by the lie of the Devil" (Olthuis, 1975:119, 120).

2.3.2 The difference between friendship and love of the neighbour in general

In an attempt to retain friendship, many Christians have identified it with Christ's central commandment of love – that we should love our neighbour as ourselves

(Matt. 22:37-40). This way the unique nature of friendship is lost, however. Besides it would mean that all human activities should be normed according to the model of friendship.

This misconception is not limited to Christians. It can be seen in the (humanist) idea that all are "brothers", and among communists who address one another as "comrades".

This confusion also reigns in contemporary scientific literature. Of course friendship can be reflected on from the angles of various subject fields. But then friendship should be acknowledged in its uniqueness, as something with a nature all its own and not as the (only) solution for all kinds of *heterologous* human relationships. In our individualistic times, with its lack of communion, friendship is seen for instance as a solution to problems in the field of sports (cf. Pienaar, 1995 and Steyn, 1996), social problems (cf. Dunstan & Nieuwoudt, 1993), illness (cf. Linden, 2003), psychological disorders (cf. Liddell, 1987), the care of aids patients (cf. Decker, 1997), sociological issues (cf. Wuthnow, 2003), issues of leadership (cf. Dreyer, 2002), in the political field as "civil friendship" (cf. Woldring, 1994:183-191) and even applied by criminologists to correctional services (cf. Ladikos, 2000).

However, friendship cannot be the central model for our whole life. Nobody can have a special (friendship) relationship with everyone he/she meets. If we confuse friendship with love for the neighbour, we eliminate variety from human society and cause it to become a drab, insipid uniformity. What is more, "friendship" then becomes something meaningless – if everyone is my friend, then (in reality) no-one is my friend.

The Biblical commandment of love for the neighbour presupposes a *variety* of loves. In a court of law not the fidelity of friendship but fair *justice* (also a form of love) should be the norm. Children are not their parents' friends, but owe them the love of *children*. A business concern cannot be built on friendship either, for *economic* principles are at stake (cf. Olthuis, 1975:121). Brotherly or sisterly love (in, for instance, the church) is love qualified by *faith*. It differs from the *ethical*

love for brothers and sisters in the family. Although one cannot have one's enemies as friends, the Bible still demands that we *love our enemies!*

In short: If we fail to distinguish between the broad encompassing command of love for our neighbour and friendship (which is but one of the many ways of loving God and our neighbour) then (1) friendship is being robbed of its specific meaning and (2) it leads to an erosion of the central commandment of love. (The commandment should then have said that we should love our *friends* like ourselves!)

Apart from the *difference* between the various forms of love we may not forget the *connection* between them either. This happens because an interpersonal relation like friendship (something which is ethically qualified, with fidelity as its norm) takes on an own "colour" (modal differentiation) in different qualified relationships and societal contexts.

So for instance, the relationship between acquaintances is *logical* and *social* by nature. The relationship towards a companion is *socially* qualified. For comrades the *political* and *military* aspect is foremost. In the case of colleagues the characteristic aspect may be *academic* or *economic*. And in the case of good neighbourliness it is probably *spatial*.

In the light of this my examples above should be altered as follows: Children and parents are indeed friends, but also *more* than that. Marriage partners should also be each other's (best) friends, but are at the same time much *more* than that. Even in an economic context friendship plays an important role (as mutual trust). So the researchers who offer friendship as a solution in various fields of life (compare above) do stress an important element of truth.

2.3.3 Love in friendship and marriage

When no distinction is made between friendship and love for the neighbour, it is also not possible to *distinguish* between the relationship in friendship and marriage so that the real *connection* between the two cannot be seen.

The result of the age-old confusion between two distinct human relationships (friendship and marriage) was that Christian churches devaluated friendship to a mere preparation – sometimes even a threat – for marriage. The result was social poverty, because it limited intimate contact between people to only one societal context and to one relationship, namely with the spouse. Unmarried people were affected by this even more seriously – they were doomed to solitude. Any intimate friendship outside marriage was in this way regarded as questionable.

As a result of this unfounded fear marriage was thus isolated, cut off from the stimulation, support and advice that spouses could receive from people (friends) from outside their marriage. It also expects too much from marriage: Marriage can become too tense if it is the only way for close contact and sharing of one's problems and thoughts. Precisely this fact – and not true friendship – can lead to the lure of extra-marital affairs.

Woldring (1994:162) puts his finger on the pulse when he says that the widely held and deeply rooted marriage and family ideology (the belief that the meaning of life is to be found par excellence in married and family life) has blinded many people in the West for the meaning of friendship.

With right Lewis (1990:68) says that friendship and marriage are not to be confused. Friendship may eventually develop into a marriage. The mere fact that we can say it *developed* into a marriage, however, means that it became something of a different nature.

Van der Walt (2000:421) remarks that nearness and love are also possible without physical, sexual communion which is peculiar to marriage. Intimacy is not the same as sex – not even in marriage. Even when one is married it is still possible – and necessary – to also love other people (friends, relatives, oneself). It is extra-marital sex that is wrong, not extra-marital *love*!

Once more Olthuis gives a good summary: : "We need to recognize the God-willed possibility of friendship being friendship; marriage, marriage, and family, family. Certainly in actual living they are linked to one another, but this very

intertwinement reveals that the contours of the husband-wife relationship are not identical with those of father-mother and friend-friend relations. Troth plays a key role in all three relationships, but the troth in marriage is different from the troth in friendship and the troth in family. Since each of these relationships are unique, none can be defined in terms of the others". (Olthuis, 1975:123. Also compare Olthuis, 1986 in which he further works out these insights especially regarding marriage.)

A Reformational philosophy of society (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1986) can help us to make a clearer distinction. Friendship, marriage and family are all three ethically qualified. The norm is mutual fidelity (compare Olthuis above). The ethical is the *leading function* or modality. However, their *foundational functions* differ.

Friendship is founded on mutual *psychic* attraction. This spiritual bond, the foundational alone, however, is not enough for friendship. The primary, leading one is mutual fidelity.

In marriage the foundational aspect is biological. On the biological foundation the sexual is possible, which is deepened psychically and unfolded ethically. Here the foundational is not the most significant either: Mutual loyalty should lead to sexual unity and not the other way round. Sex does not create fidelity. The opposite is true: sexual intercourse confirms, strengthens and deepens the promise of fidelity to each other.

In the case of the family the foundational aspect is the *biological* (blood relationship). But it has to be opened up for the social and eventually the ethical function.

All three of these therefore are ethical relations of love, but the love between friends is of a different nature from that between spouses. It also differs from the love parents have for their children, children's love for their parents and the love between brothers and sisters in one family.

2.3.4 Friendship and brotherly/sisterly love

Friendship is one way of being a neighbour. Another way is that of being a brother/sister in faith for your neighbour.

Geesink (part 2, 1931: 296) is of the opinion that one of the reasons why so little attention was given to friendship within Christendom, is the fact that it was supposed that friendship has to yield to brotherly love.

The other "solution" (which Geesink does not mention) is of course to regard all your brothers and sisters in faith as your friends. Many Christians still think – and this is wrong – that they should reckon everybody who is in the same church as friends. However, (sometimes bitter) experience shows that friendship and brotherhood shouldn't be confused. There are many true Christians with whom one would not like to be friends – simply because one does not feel drawn to them. And this is not necessarily wrong. It depends how the actual situation is dealt with. If one tries to give a special place in the church to one's friends while ignoring those who are not your friends, then it is wrong. For, although all members of the church cannot be one's friends, they are all still one's fellow-believers who have to be treated with brotherly/sisterly love. (Cf. for instance Rom. 12:10; 1 Thes. 4:9; 2 Peter 1:7 and Heb. 13:1.) Brothers and sisters should support, encourage and sincerely love one another.

If you think that every fellow-believer should be your friend, you will have a guilty conscience since only a few can be your friends in the true sense of the word. (Friendship is by nature selective, it gives preference to certain people.) In such a case one does not really know what friendship is. A still greater threat is that the church may lose its character, since it could develop into a "club for friends".

Also in this case the structural analysis of a Reformational philosophy can be enlightening. The church is a societal relationship in which faith is the leading function, while it is founded on the social aspect. As we have shown already, the qualifying function in the case of friendship is the ethical (fidelity) while it is founded on mutual psychic attraction (a spiritual bond). Every societal relationship participates in all the aspects or modalities of reality (e.g. the judicial,

economic, lingual, social, psychic, biological, etc.), but every societal relationship is unique – and is thus distinguished from the others – because it has its own leading or qualifying function and its own foundational function which characterises it.

So the conclusion is: *Everyone* you come across, is your neighbour; *many* are also your sisters/brothers; only a *few* can be your friends.

Having made clear the difference and connection between friendship and other human loving relationships, we now need to go into the detail of what friendship actually is, so that it may be restored to its rightful position.

2.4 What friendship is

Because there is so much confusion a clearer delineation is needed. Numerous writers become lyric about friendship – without saying clearly what they mean by it!

2.4.1 An inter-human relationship

In the first place it is vital to state that it is an inter-human relationship ordained by God. It is not based on a personal whim.

2.4.2 Qualified by mutual loyalty

In the second instance God's norm of fidelity applies to this relationship. We could put it in a different way: In friendship the central commandment of love is positivised in the form of fidelity.

Most of the writers mentioned above (e.g. Lewis, 1990; Olthuis, 1975; Van der Walt, 2000 and Woldring, 1994) regard fidelity as the core of friendship. Olthuis (1975:110) for instance says "truth characterizes, constitutes and qualifies" friendship. Geesink (part 2, 1931:296) also writes: "True...friendship, founded on congeniality for each one's individuality, creates a relationship of faith and loyalty, so that one can depend on the other ...". The definition given by Woldring, (1994:175, 176, 177) who merely describes friendship as "mutual love" is therefore still too vague, since this also applies to other relationships (like marriage and family).

2.4.3 Founded on a spiritual bond

In the third place friendship also has a specific foundation. This escapes Woldring (in the places quoted directly above). Lewis (cf. 1990:62-68) deals with it in detail. According to him friends are bound by something deep-down or spiritual which can hardly be expressed in words. It entails more than just common interests. Friends share a common worldview. (Van der Walt, 2000:420 calls it a "mutual spiritual bond".) Elsewhere (1960:68) Lewis speaks of "affection" which he maintains is the matrix or seed-bed in which friendship develops. In this he hits the nail on the head.

Olthuis (1975:110, 111) aptly puts it: "... psychic attraction or congeniality is the foundation for friendship. It can not be forced: either people are attracted to each other or they are not. Still, this sudden attraction is not yet friendship; it is merely the first spark which will eventually produce the flame of friendship".

2.4.4 A summary description

I would like to voice my endorsement for the following definition by Olthuis: "Friendship is a pledged vow of truth between two persons based upon psychic congeniality" (Olthuis, 1975:112).

From this concise description many other characteristics of friendship follow: (1) the pledge of truth is usually tacit and yet one *knows* who one's friends are; (2) friendship loyalty needs time to develop; (3) without asking for it, friends support one another; (4) it is something spontaneous which doubles joy and shares grief; (5) friends respect one another and therefore manipulation does not fit into such a relationship; (6) this does not mean, however, that a friend simply accepts everything one does or says; (7) further it is a relationship which is characterised by intimacy, openness, involvement, solidarity and durability.

2.4.5 Friendship has a part in all facets of reality

A fourth important point which has to be stressed is that, since friendship is something real, it mirrors or has a part in all sides of reality. In the Reformational philosophy the following facets or modalities (from the lowest to the highest) are

distinguished: (1) the numerical (2) the spatial; (3) the physical; (4) the biotic; (5) the psychic (=the *foundational* function in friendship); (6) the logic; (7) the historical (8) the lingual; (9) the social; (10) the economic; (11) the aesthetic; (12) the juridical; (13) the ethical (= *leading* function in friendship) and (14) the pistical(faith).

We lack the space here to show that although only two facets characterise friendship, all of them has a place in a friendship. Different sciences (cf. 2.3.2 above) can therefore study friendship from a religious, juridical, aesthetic, economic, social and all other angles. Friendship, for instance, can have great biological value. Linden (2003:162-164) shows that research has proved convincingly that friendship not only prevents serious illness, but also play a significant role in the process of convalescence after serious medical intervention.

Does this apply to any kind of friendship? In other words, is any type of friendship good and right?

2.5 Acceptable and unacceptable forms of friendship

Like all else in life, friendships, too, can be either good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Even a band of robbers cannot but maintain (to an extent) God's norm for friendship, namely mutual fidelity – otherwise they would betray one another and begin stealing from one another. It is true that such a relationship is *structurally* a kind of friendship, but its normative *direction* is wrong and therefore it is unacceptable. With right Lewis (1990:75) remarks that friendship can be "a school of virtue and a school of vice".

2.5.1 Significant influence of society on friendship

By way of introduction it must be stated that the juncture in time and the society in which one lives play important roles in the form(s) which friendships will take. Woldring especially (1994:120, 158) showed clearly that friendships take on different forms among different nations and at different times. The forms of friendship also differ in different layers of society, as in aristocratic circles, among

labourers and other occupations. Friendship clearly is not only the expression of individual needs but also the result of social circumstances and processes.

During the time of the knights in the Middle Ages the prevalent opinions on power, fidelity and honour was conducive to heroic friendships. Times of conflict and disruption usually foster friendships characterised by courage and an attitude of sacrifice.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century friendships were mostly founded on *social* status (compare for instance how aristocracy was overrated). In the twentieth century *political* (ideological) friendships were important, while today it has more and more of an *economic* (materialistic) basis.

Currently in the secular Western world mainly two things stand out: (1) friends appreciate one another's company (the social side) and (2) friendship is increasingly approached in a pragmatic way – it should be useful to both parties, for instance serve common interests and material advantage (cf. Woldring, 1994:12, 13). What kinds of friendships will our present, increasingly secularised (South) African society bring forth?

However, Woldring remarks with right that a society not only produces certain friendships, but that the kinds of friendships which we foster can also have a significant influence on the society in which we live – all the more reason to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable friendships.

2.5.2 Various kinds of acceptable friendships

Although friendship can take on many good forms, we mention only the following two as examples:

Youth friendship

In spite of the fact that most school and adolescent friendships do not have the depth and durability of ripe, adult friendship – they are easily forged and easily broken – they still are valuable. It helps children to get past the stage where they are bound to their parents alone; to broaden their experience. They get to know themselves better; learn to associate with others and in this way progress to

adulthood. However, the process of forming identity – in which friendship plays such an important role – takes place not only during childhood and adolescence; it is continued in adult life.

Friendship with the opposite sex

Diverse answers are given to the question whether unmarried people and especially married people may have friendships with someone of the opposite sex. Brillenburg Wurth (cf. 1953:142, 143) does not regard it as wrong in principle, but since being human and sexuality can in practice not be separated, he disapproves of such relationships.

Olthuis, too, acknowledges that whether one is married or unmarried, it is difficult to maintain a friendship with someone from the opposite sex. The reason is that people do not make a clear distinction between friendship and the sexual (which belongs in marriage). Such relationships (between persons of different sexes) are therefore suspect. Friendship across the borders of sex is, however, acceptable to him. Nevertheless, he also warns (cf. Olthuis, 1975: 115,116) that intimate physical contact (which, unfortunately, he does not spell out clearly – does he mean *sexual* contact?) between a man and a woman or two men or two women is a sign of danger, that the friends no longer maintain the norm for friendship and therefore should rather break off the relationship.

2.5.3 Various kinds of unacceptable friendship

Like anything else, friendship can be inspired by the spirit of God or by the spirit of the devil. The last-mentioned forms of friendship may meet all the *structural* requirements for friendship (the member of a band of robbers may for example be prepared to give his life for his friend) but its religious *direction* is wrong and therefore it is unacceptable. However, the focus will not be on such clearly wrong forms of friendship, but on more subtle kinds – which are therefore all the more dangerous.

Acquaintances and comrades are not friends

Many people whom we like to call friends, are not really friends in the sense described above. One can have an easy, hearty relationship with acquaintances, comrades, business colleagues, etcetera, but the promise of fidelity (the qualifying characteristic) is lacking. Such relationships are mostly logically, politically, socially or economically but not ethically qualified.

Linden (2003:158) gives an example of this "buddyhood" in places from hair salons to bars. However, it never reaches the depth, durability and intimacy of true friendship, since only pleasure (the social) and usefulness (the pragmatic) are of importance to the buddies.

Cliques are dangerous

It seems as if the formation of cliques is normal for the youth nowadays, belonging to the nature of their phase of development, but it is – fortunately – also something fleeting. Brillenburg Wurth (1953:139) is correct in warning that a clique is no longer a relationship of friendship since it is dominated not by love, but by pride, selfishness and group egotism. Lewis, too (1990:74, 75) warns that cliques look inwards to themselves, slap each other on the back and look down in pride on those outside, and that they become deaf for any correction from outside.

Since this is a very serious matter and Olthuis (1975:125, 126) characterises it very aptly, he is quoted at length: "Sometimes friends form cliques that turn in on themselves to the exclusion of everyone else. The clique overflows the bounds of friendship and attempts to swallow up all other relations by becoming a privileged circle serving itself – an elite that doesn't care what anyone else does, says or thinks. The clique emasculates true friendship for the sake of selfish pride. Cliques offer the prestige of belonging to the ruling coterie, of obtaining positions of esteem and honor, of having the privileges of power. Personal growth, truth, and enrichment – the plant of friendship – are choked by the weeds of corporate haughtiness and self-aggrandizement. The group exists for the group, a self-elected aristocracy. Everyone outside the circle must be reminded

frequently that he is not in it ... Such false friendships so misuse the relationship that they become tyrannical". Among Afrikaners, too, there is an organisation which (especially in the past) fitted perfectly into this description.

Contemporary kinds of "friendship"

A separate chapter would be needed to go into the nature of all kinds of modern friendships. Modern society offers possibilities to enter into relationships of which our forbears would never have dreamt. By means of e-mail and "chat rooms" one comes into contact with an unlimited number of people and you can express your deepest emotions without any inhibitions. Most probably such relationships originate from a lack of true friendship in our modern day individualistic society. Can we call it "friendship"?

Linden (2003:157, 158) has no doubts and makes it clear why electronic "friendship" does not qualify as friendship: "Though one may experience emotional release in a chat room, such exchanges cannot have true reciprocity ... Cyber friendships lack commitment; the society of cyberspace is a faceless society and can easily be a faithless one ... such friendships can become a form of electronic egotism, often degenerating into isolated narcissism ... Despite expressing depth and feeling, distance and anonymity allow these relationships to be intrinsically superficial."

This once more raises the question why true friendship has today become so rare – so rare that people even find refuge in cybernetic friendships.

2.6 Why friendship has become so rare in our day

A number of factors which can harm friendship has already been mentioned on the preceding pages. Among them are (1) the fact that Christianity has generally underestimated and under-appreciated it; (2) that it was confused with other human relationships and therefore could not flourish with the richness and value it could have; (3) the concept of friendship suffers from inflation by being associated with other relationships which cannot truly lay a claim to being proper friendship.

Without doubt present Western culture also has its drawbacks. (I have already pointed out above that a particular society can have a decisive effect on friendship.) These causes for the lack of true friendship have been gleaned from several already mentioned sources and are summarised here. (For lack of room the causes are given point by point since the implications for friendship should be clear.)

Modern Western secular society is characterised by the following:

- *Individualism*, in which everything centres around the self (egotism).
- It is *economic-materialistic* and *pragmatic* in nature since everything is weighed in terms of its usefulness.
- It is founded on relentless *competition*.
- Furthermore it is an extremely *rushed* society.
- It is a very *mobile* culture – people no longer stay in the same job or the same place for a long time.
- It is a *technocratic* society, which sacrifices human fellowship on the altar of professionalism, efficiency and results with a resulting void and loneliness.
- The *electronic media* (TV and computer) replace or supplant personal human contact.
- *Work (occupations)* are so over-emphasised that other human relations are neglected.
- It is a *therapeutic culture* in which not the counsel of friends but various specialists and therapists have to solve people's personal problems.
- Deep down it is a *fearful* culture in which people are afraid of opening up themselves to others, because they may be disappointed or even deeply hurt.
- Furthermore it has a *fixation on sex* which is detrimental to true friendship.
- Compared to most of the preceding civilisations, present Western culture is extremely *superficial*.

- Differences of *political and racist* nature also obstruct friendship (especially in South Africa).
- Finally it is a cold, *loveless* society with a lamentable lack of involvement with fellow human beings.

Olthuis concludes that the kind of friendship which existed in former ages are no longer possible today. We live in a secular society which, where it is not hostile towards friendship, certainly does not stimulate it. "Society just does not allow the freedom for the growth and development of genuine friendships" (Olthuis, 1975:127).

The question is whether this sad state should be accepted.

2.7 A wonderful gift and a great obligation

The dilemma is: Since many people today seldom or never experience sincere friendships because of the factors mentioned above (and there are some more), they do not appreciate or develop it either. And if they do not try it, they will never experience the great value of friendship themselves. We have to emphasise two significant points in this regard.

2.7.1 A wonderful gift from God Himself

God knows what man needs – otherwise something like friendship would not have existed. He knows that without close friendships few people can survive. But there is more at stake than survival. With the divine gift of friendship life is infinitely enriched and deepened and one experiences a special kind of joy. To go into the great value of friendship would require a chapter by itself. (The literature cited dwells on this in great detail.) The important point here is that, if friendship is a gift from God Himself, not only is it a sin when it is not accepted, developed and fostered with gratitude – it also is neglected to one's own disadvantage. Therefore this great gift from God is at the same time also a task or an obligation. It is not merely an option.

2.7.2 A great responsibility

In this case one should not only think about the great void in one's own life when one tries to live without friends. You should also think of what you do to others when depriving them of your friendship. Olthuis says that to withhold friendship from someone "is to condemn them to a life of aching loneliness and pain which others cannot even imagine. For them friendship could mean a bounteous share in the spice and joy of life. For many it could even mean the difference between experiencing life as a cruel trick or a rare treat" (Olthuis, 1975:128).

Therefore Christian society should actively create circumstances which can allow friendship to flourish. This can be done in many ways. Perhaps it is most urgent to remind society that the essence of friendship is mutual fidelity. When you live in a society where you can hardly ever take a person's word for something, how can friendship – in which trust is everything – survive? That is why Olthuis says: "Troth (a more modern English word would be "fidelity") must be recovered ... our culture requires a new life-style – a biblical life-style – in which keeping troth is an essential mark:" (Olthuis, 1975:129).

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* * *

Chapter 3:

MISSION UNLIMITED

Towards a holistic vision with an impact on society

The problem to be addressed and solved in this chapter is why, generally speaking, the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA) – and also many other denominations in Africa and elsewhere in the world – have a limited vision on mission, confined to preaching, the conversion of individuals and the planting of churches. This is a surprising fact, because witnessing in the Bible includes the whole person as well as all the needs of the people to be addressed with the Gospel. Furthermore Reformed theologians, including missiologists, used to emphasize the Biblical, all-encompassing concept of the kingdom of God. This concept contains three basic elements, viz. (1) that God is sovereign King of his entire creation; (2) that He rules creation through his will; (3) that He confers his blessings on those who obey his laws. A possible explanation for the often limited vision on mission may be the fact that this second element of the central Biblical concept “kingdom of God” was not explicated fully enough in worldviewish terms. This chapter provides in this neglected aspect by reflecting on God’s threefold sovereignty as expressed in his threefold law (structural laws, law of love and positive laws). Such a perspective may also serve as an important building block in constructing a Christian philosophy of society – an indispensable element of a more holistic vision on mission, in which real societal involvement could be realised and the growing secularisation of societal life be challenged.

3.1 Introduction: the background

Christianity has grown in Africa at a phenomenal speed during the previous century (cf. Bosch, 1990). It may have been small, but the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA) also played a role in the expansion of the Christian faith on the continent (cf. Spoelstra & Louw, 1999).

However, already at the end of the previous century attention was drawn to the fact that the missionary zeal of the RCSA was declining: "One can not deny the impression that during the last years our missionary work was

characterized by fatigue. However, our missionary calling is not completed ... a still bigger task awaits us ..." (Preface in Denkema, Kruger & Van Rooy, 1990, translated from Afrikaans). Later on in the same volume Kruger confirms this statement (I translate): "Judged in general terms, great missionary enthusiasm no longer exists in the Reformed Church. Participation in missions is often nominal and regarded as a (burdensome) duty".

A Reformed Mission Conference (held at Pretoria from 18-19 March 2005) came to the conclusion that, fifteen years later, the situation has not improved. Different reasons for this sad state of affairs could be identified.

One of the most important reasons mentioned at the conference is that the focus of the RCSA was (and in many places still is) on rural mission, while the demographic movement of the population is in the opposite direction: away from the rural areas to the cities. Urbanisation also brought large numbers of people from many other African countries (as far away as Nigeria and The Democratic Republic of the Congo) to the big cities of South Africa. The erstwhile far away mission fields are now in our midst. In addition to this the traditional Reformed Churches are declining in numbers. In a recent book on challenges in mission in a changing South Africa, Kritzinger (2002:5) therefore concludes that the main challenge of mission may not be *outside* but *inside* our own churches!

This chapter will focus on another main cause (identified at the above conference) for the lack of "missionary flames" amongst the RCSA: their *limited* vision on mission. Its aim is to replace it with a vision on a mission *unlimited*.

3.2 Mission and vision

I want to make the following two statements: Firstly, that a discrepancy exists between the broad Biblical idea of mission and many of the Reformed Churches' own limited vision. Secondly, that the perspective of the kingdom of God should have encouraged the churches to accept a broader vision. Why did it not happen?

3.2.1 The current limited vision of mission

One's vision or worldview determines how narrow or broad one's perspective on the missionary task of Christians should be. (Cf. Hart, 1968:1-20 for the importance of a perspective or vision). Matthew 28:20 tells that *all* Christians have to make disciples of Christ amongst *all* the nations, baptise them and teach them *everything* Christ has commanded. These same all-inclusive words are, however, interpreted differently from different Christian worldviews.

The so-called Evangelicals – including most Reformed Churches – usually understand Christ's' command as limited to the following: (1) preaching the Gospel; (2) getting individuals converted and baptised (to become disciples) and (3) establishing churches as communities of believers. If these churches could furthermore become self-governing, self-sustaining and self-propagating (making more disciples), their missionary task is usually regarded as completed. The social involvement of churches is regarded with suspicion and even viewed as deplorable "social gospel".

The reason for this tension between evangelisation (or mission) on the one hand and social action on the other, is a dualistic instead of integral, holistic worldview. Meijers (1997:111) is correct when he says: "... right through Reformed theology there is an Anabaptist trait, a denial of mundane, historic reality ...". (Cf. Van der Walt, 1995 for a detailed analysis of this type of dualistic Christian worldview. Bosch, 1991 discusses the different paradigm shifts in the history of missions in great detail.)

The result of this type of missionary work in Africa is described by a prominent African Christian leader in the following words: "For decades in Africa, evangelism and missionary activity have been directed at getting people saved (i.e. spiritually) but losing their mind. Consequently, we have a continent South of the Sahara that boasts of an over 50% Christian population on the average, but with little or no impact on society" (Adeyemo, 1993:227).

Even a superficial look at the South African society will be sufficient to confirm Adeyemo's observation also in the case of the missionary work of the Reformed Churches. This comes as a surprise for the following two reasons. Firstly, because the Bible seems to contain a different message about

mission. Secondly, because Reformed Christians and theologians (including missiologists) usually emphasised the all-encompassing Biblical concept of the kingdom of God.

3.2.2 Mission unlimited according to the Bible

What should be the scope of missions in the light of the Bible?

A special kind of mission

The word "mission" can be used in more meanings than only the evangelising mission of the churches. One can speak of a diplomatic (political), cultural, economic, sports and other missions. In all these cases people are usually sent as representatives of their country to a place outside their own. In the same way Christian missionaries have to leave their own church, move outside its walls to represent the church and its Head (Christ) elsewhere.

Christian mission is, however, also different from these other kinds of missions. One striking difference is that the church is *by nature* a missionary community, directed outward. Stated differently: a church not engaged in missionary work cannot be called a real church – it is a galvanised corpse (Kraemer as quoted by Bosch, 1978:44). Or in the words of Floor (1990:100): "Die gemeente is werwend of hy is sterwend" (A congregation is either recruiting or dying). Bosch (1986:193-202) indicates how mission not only benefits the missionary "objects" but also the missionary churches – instead of dying they are renewed in different ways.

Different words are used in the Bible to indicate Christians' missionary task. In the past Reformed people used to distinguish clearly between mission (directed at people who have not heard the Gospel) and evangelisation (directed at people who left the church). Kruger (1990:189-199, cf. also Van der Walt, 1986:ii-iii) however indicated that in the light of scripture, such a watertight distinction cannot be maintained. One should not be ashamed to speak of "missionary" work amongst one's own (secularised) ethnic group (cf. Van Zyl, 1990). Today the terms "evangelism" or "evangelisation" usually includes both activities. Others prefer the word "outreach". The Bible often uses a to my mind stronger term, viz. "witnessing".

Called as witnesses

According to Acts 1 verse 8 (cf. also Acts 13:4-7) Christians are called to be Christ's witnesses. Other relevant passages are Matthew 10:1-25; Luke 10:1-20 and of course the already mentioned, well-known Matthew 28:19, 20. (Cf. Van der Walt, 1987 and 1991. For a detailed discussion of the different missionary mandates in the four gospels, cf. Verkuyl, 1975:143-154.)

To be a witness implies great responsibility. It means *inter alia* to testify (1) to others (2) about something/someone (3) that you have seen and/or heard (the first apostles) or only believe in (contemporary apostles) which is (4) of ultimate importance. The message the witnesses are commissioned to deliver is so important that they should travel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 and 13:47). They should even be willing to become martyrs for the sake of the Good News and the Person behind this News. (Cf. Matthew 10:17,18,21,22.)

Holistic witnessing

The *whole* life of the witnesses are involved. They have to testify in word *and* deed. They do not simply deliver a message, as a postman will deliver a letter. (Cf. Rabali, 2005 for a detailed description of the relationship between word and deed in the Bible.) The relationship between these two facets of mission is so seamless that one should rather speak of words *with* deeds or deeds *with* words than of words *and* deeds or deeds *and* words.

To remind our Reformed people, often mainly occupied with doctrine (words), Luke states (cf. Acts 1:1) that the aim of his Gospel was to write down "all that Jesus did and taught". (*Nota bene*: Not what he first taught and then did.)

Why not the limited perspective

Firstly, if one confine missionary work to saving "souls" and establishing churches, one is not promoting Christianity but "churchianity".

Secondly, Christ nowhere says that He calls only professionally trained missionaries but *everyone* to be his witnesses – not only in the ecclesiastical sphere but in *every* profession and domain of life. The missionary scope includes the mission station but also the petrol station. God does not call

every fisherman to become a preacher like Peter, nor every tentmaker to become a missionary like Paul, nor every doctor to become an evangelist like Luke. But fishermen, tentmakers and doctors – as well as all the other vocations – are all called to be witnesses. That, by the way, was the secret of the rapid spread of the Christian faith during the first centuries: merchants, farmers and slaves proclaimed the gospel to their fellow-merchants, -farmers and -slaves.

A third, even more basic reason is that Christ did not come to rescue people out of the world to lock them up between church walls, in this way *rejecting* the greatest part of God's creation. He came to *regain* and *restore* God's entire creation.

Christ as Example

One should have a careful look at places where Christ describes his own "mission". In Luke 4:18 (cf. also 7:22) one reads that the Spirit has anointed him "to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom to the prisoners, and recovery of the sight of the blind, to release the oppressed"

To many a Reformed ear this may not sound like true "spirituality", but rather like "social gospel". But this *is* true religion. Did not the apostle James (1:27) said: "(The) religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress"?

Christian sects usually draw the attention of the church to a weakness in its own preaching and conduct. Reformed people should ask themselves whether their lack of a holistic approach may not be a contributing reason why the unbiblical "Prosperity Gospel" of health, wealth and happiness is spreading like wild fire all over Africa (cf. the insightful work of Gifford, 1998).

In the light of the foregoing Reformed people need a double conversion: *from* the (sinful) world, but simultaneously back *to* the world (as God's creation). Christ himself did not pray that his followers will be taken *out* of the world, but He sends them *into* the world (cf. John 17:15-18). They have to regain his entire creation in his Name.

It seems as if the Reformed Churches are still trapped in an outdated view on mission which was – already in 1978 – described by Bosch in the following

words: "Mission was ... defined almost exclusively as the verbal proclamation of an other-worldly message and a preparation for the hereafter. Consequences of mission, such as social and political changes, were, in essence, regarded as by-products. Other activities ... such as education and medical care, were only ancillaries to the verbal proclamation of the Gospel" (Bosch, 1978:35).

Already in 1978 mission was no longer regarded as verbal proclamation only, or the geographical movement from those who practise Christianity to those who do not practice it. "The frontiers the church will be crossing ... may sometimes, indeed, be geographical; they may however be – and usually are – also ideological, cultural, religious, social, economic and ethnic" (Bosch, 1978:36).

3.2.3 Mission in the encompassing perspective of the kingdom of God

A "simple" reading of the Bible therefore already indicates that a limited vision on mission cannot be correct. An additional reason to be surprised by the Reformed Churches' limited perspective on mission is the fact that most Reformed theologians used to emphasise the Biblical concept of God's encompassing kingdom. This was done, for instance, in Old Testament Studies (cf. Helberg, 1980), New Testament Studies (cf. Van der Walt, 1962; Floor, 1978, 1981), Ethics (cf. Van Wyk, 2001) and Missiology (cf. Du Plessis, 1960, 1963; Van der Merwe & Van der Walt, 1976 and Mashau, 2004:166-169).

Was this important Biblical perspective never realized in missionary preaching and in missionary practice? Or is it perhaps not regarded as of importance any more? Could it be explained as a result of the contemporary (wrong) reaction of Christians to secularism, viz. to withdraw from public life (cf. 3.4.2 below)?

Whatever may be the case, the present writer is of the opinion that the perspective of the kingdom of God is a powerful Biblical antidote to a church-centred view on mission. It should therefore be revived in Reformed Theology. The contemporary reader will (in spite of the fact that they were all written in the previous century) greatly benefit by consulting the following

works on the Biblical concept of the kingdom of God: Bright (1955), Ladd (1959), Ridderbos (1957, 1962 and 1975) and Sauer (1959a, 1959b). How this kingdom perspective was practically applied in organisational form in Africa, see Breman (1995).

Kingdom, Church and church

A clear distinction should be made between church (with a small "c"), Church (with a capital "C") and kingdom (cf. Spykman, 1992:429-479). "Kingdom, Church and church are not three separate realities. They are interdependent, but they stand in a certain unique relationship to each other. For in Scripture Church/church derives its meaning from kingdom, and not vice versa" (Spykman, 1992:478). The church should therefore not be an "introverted" church only trying to maintain, serve and promote its own interests. It should be "extrovert" – a servant of the much more important kingdom of God.

With the image of four concentric circles Spykman explains the difference and relationship as follows: "God's Word is the central dynamic for all life in the world. The ministries of the church as institute proclaim the Word within the fellowship of the worshipping community. The Church as the body of Christ is then called to translate that Word into concrete forms of Christian witness in every sphere of life. The goal of this ever widening outreach is the coming of the kingdom ..." (Spykman, 1992:479).

One should therefore distinguish – without separating them – two steps in mission or a twofold mission: the mission of the church as institute (which leads to conversion and church planting) and the mission of the Church as organism (which equips the body of Christ to apply the word of God in different areas of life and in this way serves his kingdom).

To understand one's missionary calling correctly, one not only need the four Gospels (containing the Good News) or the Acts (indicating how the Gospel was disseminated and churches planted), but also the Epistles (which explained to Christians and churches the implications of the Gospel of the kingdom for their entire life).

Three facets of the kingdom

But what exactly is meant with the concept of the kingdom of God? The Bible mentions different facets, but they may be summarised in the following three: (1) God is sovereign King of the entire universe; (2) He rules and directs his subjects through his will as expressed in his laws; (3) with the result that all his creatures can experience life in its fullness. Summarised "kingdom of God" includes the *King* (God Triune), his *rules* and his *blessings*.

Life is religion

In terms of a Christian worldview these Biblical perspectives about the kingdom of God can be summarised by saying that life *is* religion. Life does *not have* a religious aspect *besides* all the other aspects, like the social, political, economic, etc. To be an a-religious human being is therefore impossible. Every person is a believer. People only differ in the *direction* of their ultimate commitment. Their hearts can be directed in trust and obedience to either the true God or an idol in his place.

Stated in the following way it is evident that religion cannot be confined to one's inner life: (1) People either trust and serve the God of the Bible or absolutise something of his creation (for example, in the past human reason was regarded as the last ground of certainty and today often human emotions takes its place); (2) they reflect in their own lives the image of the God or god they obey; (3) they create a society (a marriage, family, political order, etc.) according to their own image, according to what they regard as being human. Therefore social life (3) is not something neutral, but it reveals one's perspective on what it means to be a human being (2), and ultimately whether one is in the service of the real God or a prisoner of one of the many surrogate gods (1).

The importance of God's laws

As indicated above, one aspect of Gods' kingdom is his laws. Rephrased from a worldview perspective one should distinguish clearly between the following three realities: (1) *God*, who posited (2) his *laws*, which are valid for his (3) entire *creation*, which is subjected to these laws.

This perspective is of paramount importance. Especially in the contemporary world, a time in which God's sovereignty is blatantly rejected. Man/woman has become either a law unto him/herself or has elevated something from creation – which should be subjected to God's laws – to the status of a law.

Because it is not done, or not explicitly enough any more in the missionary reflection and action of the Reformed Churches and, as indicated already, also in other denominations, God's sovereignty will be the focal point of this chapter. This main section will therefore focus on only one sentence of the great commission: "teach them everything I (Christ) have commanded you". Without a clear grasp of the implications of these few words (cf. also the prayer in Matthew 6:10: "...your will be done on earth as in heaven") "a mission unlimited", real Christian involvement in society will not be possible.

Before explaining what God's sovereignty entails, it is necessary to state clearly that the writer is not turning the Gospel and its proclamation in mission upside down by propagating legalism. Christ starts his sermon on the mount with his beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). His beatitudes are nevertheless followed (in the rest of Matthew 5 up to the end of chapter 7) by the laws of the kingdom – introduced with the important words of Matthew 5:17-20. In the same way mission should *begin* with the good news of God's undeserved grace, but should not *stop* its message without proclaiming the necessity (out of gratitude) to obey God's laws.

3.3. God's threefold sovereignty as vital part of missionary proclamation

The three central events in history according to the Bible are creation, fall and redemption. Or, in different words: formation, deformation and reformation. These crucial events have determined and today still determines man's/woman's relationship to God's sovereignty.

3.3.1 Formation

After God created the earth, Genesis proclaims that everything was good, very good. Adam and Eve enjoyed life in its fullness. The reason for this was that the whole of creation responded obediently to God's sovereignty as expressed in his laws for every creature.

According to the Trinity a threefold divine sovereignty should be distinguished: The law of the Father (the *structural laws* revealed in his creational revelation), the law of the Son (the *directional law of love* revealed in his Scriptural revelation, the Bible), and the law of the Spirit (the *positive laws* formulated by human officers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for different societal relationships). This distinction between three kinds of laws is borrowed from the Christian philosopher Vollenhoven (cf. the first part of Tol and Bril, 1992).

Structural laws

These laws are given "in" creation, but they are not the same as the created things (matter, plants, animals and human beings). They can only be known from the regular, law-abiding behaviour of the different creatures.

Because human beings were created as responsible beings, these structural laws have a normative or indicative character in the case of humans. The laws for thinking, speaking, governing, doing business, social and religious life can be either obeyed or disobeyed. Non-human creatures do not have this choice, for them the laws have an imperative character.

The difference between God's laws and human norms

It is important to distinguish between God's laws which are divine and constant and the human, fallible understanding of his creation ordinances. To emphasise this difference, the human interpretation of God's laws is called "norms". When one lives according to these norms one's life becomes worthwhile, it has value, different "values" are realised.

Over against God's eternal laws, human norms are temporal, intended for a certain time, situation and culture. They have to be continuously revised in the light of Gods revelation in creation.

Also in the case of Scripture one has to distinguish the erstwhile *form* of a certain commandment from the universal *law* and formulate the last in a *norm* relevant for one's own time. For example, we don't have to wash each others' feet today (cf. John 13:14), but we have to formulate God's demand of humble service to each other in a norm relevant to our contemporary situation in

which we do not wear sandals but nice shoes and don't walk dirt roads but travel by car.

Briefly, defined, norms (and values) are one's fallible response to the real God or an idol in his place whose will one regards as the highest authority.

Correct and wrong norms

Because norms are fallible, one has to watch creation's reaction to one's application of these norms carefully for both "green" and "red lights". The green lights are signs that the norms formulated are the correct ones. This happens when people experience joy, physical and spiritual health and peace – the fullness of life (cf. John 10:10). The red lights are warnings. They flash in the case of a lack of direction, pain (physical, psychological and spiritual), suffering (of different kinds), the death of humans and animals and damage done to the rest of creation.

A great variety of norms

Examples of how one may formulate God's structural laws for the different aspects of life are the following. (It should be noted that in case of the biotic, physical and numerical it would be more appropriate to speak of (natural) *laws* and not *norms*. But in our human *relationship* to these aspects norms do apply.)

- **Religious norms:** faith, trust, surrender, commitment, veneration, piety, praise.
- **Moral/ethical norms:** fidelity, loyalty, integrity, credibility, honesty and trustworthiness.
- **Juridical norms:** justice, fairness, respect (for authority), obedience to laws.
- **Aesthetical norms:** power of expression, allusiveness, beauty, harmony.
- **Economical norms:** stewardship, thrift, frugality, compassion (with the poor).
- **Social norms:** respect, unselfishness, friendliness, kindness, benevolence, graciousness, obligingness, cooperation, etc.

- **Lingual norms:** truth, clarity, reliability.
- **Logical norms:** clearness, distinctness, convincingness, cogency.
- **Psychical norms:** sensitivity, emotional balance, self-control, courage, perseverance.
- **Biotic norms:** health, respect for (plant, animal and human) life.
- **Physical norms:** appreciation, respect and care of material things.
- **Numerical norms:** accuracy, responsibility in the use of numbers/ statistics.

The following are three key norms:

- In relation to **nature:** stewardship.
- In relation to **humans:** service.
- In relation to **society:** justice.

The law of love

The second kind of law, the law of the Son (Jesus Christ), one does not discover by observing God's creational revelation. It is given and repeated many times in his Scriptural revelation (cf. Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 13:8-10). In this directional law Christ speaks to the heart, He wants people to be directed in love towards God and other human beings.

Both the *structure* and the *direction* of creation and what humans make out of creation in the form of culture are therefore determined by God. As indicated above, the first is determined by his creation ordinances and the second by his directional command of love.

Evaluation according to structure and direction

Thus it becomes possible to evaluate every cultural product which human beings produce. Two examples will clarify what may still sound very abstract.

A book has to comply with the following *structural* criteria: understandable language, no spelling mistakes, clear typography, attractive cover, strong binding, etc. If this is the case, it can qualify structurally as a *book*. But whether it is a *good* book is determined by the contents or *direction* of the

book. If it is, for example, God denying and full of hatred, it cannot be called "good" – it is a bad book which will not benefit anyone.

The same applies to a development project. It should be *both* structurally and directionally good to be really beneficial. One may encounter development projects which look acceptable, because most structural criteria for effective development have been considered. But when the motive behind such a secular project is considered, its wrong direction is revealed: It is not motivated and guided by love towards those who have to be developed, but by the self-interest and financial advantage of the developers. A reverse situation, however, is also possible (as is the case with many sincere Christian development projects): It could be inspired by real love towards God and neighbour (correct direction). But the people involved do not have the slightest idea of the structural requirements for good development.

Not only does a close relationship exist between structural and directional laws, but also between these two laws and the third, viz. positive laws.

Positive laws

Positive laws, as will be seen, form a "bridge" between the structural laws and the law of love. Love in general is an abstraction. It is always a specific, certain kind of love. Love for one's wife is different from the love of your brother/sister in church, your parents, fellow-countrymen, dog or garden.

Diversified love in societal relationships

Because human beings live in different societal relationships, love is diversified, obtains different "colours". Structurally these relationships are differently qualified with different tasks. Marriage for, instance, is an ethically qualified relationship. And the state is a juridical relationship. In agreement with its structural qualification, love should be expressed as mutual fidelity in married life. Justice should be done in the juridically qualified sphere of the state. (Justice is not something opposite to love, but a specific form of love.)

It is especially the task of officers (people in authority) to apply the law of love in agreement with the typical character of a specific societal relationship (cf. Van der Walt, 2003b and 2006 for details about office, authority, power and responsibility.)

This is not an easy task, because times change and circumstances may make it very difficult to concretise Christ's law of love for a specific domain of life. This, however, is the only way people in office can be co-workers of God, ensuring that his purpose with human life in its rich diversity is achieved. It is also the only way towards real freedom and human dignity.

To provide this (combined structural and directional) guidance in a complex, secular society, requires deep insight and absolute obedience. It is impossible without love for God and the discernment provided by the Holy Spirit. (The reason why the positive laws were indicated above as the "law of the Spirit".)

The importance of God's threefold law

It should be clear now why it was decided to emphasise only one aspect of Christ's great commission, viz. "teach them everything I have commanded you". If Christ's witnesses/missionaries/apostles, do not preach – and explain – these words, their best endeavours will be in vain. It will not be *good* but *bad* news. Because, if people can't know and obey the threefold sovereignty of the Father, Son and Spirit as expressed in God's threefold law (structural, directional and positive), experiencing a good life will be impossible. Life can only bloom and flourish – and be blessed – when people obey *everything* Christ has commanded.

Reborn, baptised and catechised church members can still live directionless lives in the dark maze of our contemporary secular world. The present phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa may end in disillusionment and go in the opposite direction of a rapid decline for the simple reason that people have never learned how to live – in all areas of life – in obedience to God's threefold law.

3.3.2 Deformation

What happened when Adam and Eve (and all their successors) fell into sin can be dealt with briefly.

A god and a law unto oneself

Instead of being God's image, his representatives, Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, gods unto themselves. From this it logically followed that they also rejected God's laws. They wanted to be a law unto themselves (autonomous). God's structural laws were ignored; Christ's law of love was turned into a law of hatred; and the formulation of norms for human life was not done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but under the control of the evil spirit of the devil. As a result the good life disappeared, paradise was lost.

Idols in the place of God

Because it is impossible to be one's own god (no one can be boss and servant simultaneously), human beings became the fabricators of an endless number of idols, surrogates for the real God. Created as religious beings, every human being needs ultimate security, something one can trust with your whole heart.

From the perspective of a Christian worldview such absolutions of an aspect of creation are called "-isms", like humanism, secularism, selfism, hedonism, materialism, militarism, racism and many more. None of these idols can fulfil their promises.

But if one may single out the most misleading and therefore most dangerous ones in the contemporary world, they will be secularism which means living as if God does not exist and his laws are irrelevant (cf. the valuable study by Verkuyl, 1965), capitalistic materialism, selfism and hedonism (cf. Van der Walt, 1999b:59-74). The "good life" today is defined as satisfying one's greed's (not needs), having an abundance of everything to enjoy oneself. Paul describes these "last days" in the following words: "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive ... ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God ..." (2 Timothy 3: 2-4).

The Biblical ideal

The Bible provides a totally different ideal for human wellbeing. Jesus said his children should not worry about what they will eat, drink or wear. He draws their attention back to the deepest secret of real, full life: to seek first the kingdom of God and his laws. Then all these secondary things will be given to them – as gifts (Matthew 6:33). They need bread, but they can not live by bread alone. They have to live from every Word (law) of God (cf. Matthew 4:4).

An important part of the task of witnesses is to challenge all these “isms” which besets us and our fellowmen and -women so that they can be reduced to “wasms”. A vital task of missions is to liberate people from the captivity to these dehumanising ideologies and restore the image of God to its proper functioning in all of life (cf. Verkuyl, 1975:505-550).

Things in the place of God's laws

Not only God was replaced by absolutised things (idols). The same was done to his rejected laws. Initially this was not so clear, but today it has become abundantly clear that subjectivism rules. Because secular man cannot live without direction, the only option left is for him to elevate (absolutise) something in creation itself to the status of norms (usually called “values”). Things (that should be judged normatively) today are the norms. The examples are countless: competition, development, progress, growth, self-satisfaction, etc. Because these things became norms, they cannot anymore be evaluated as good or bad – they are (like true norms) elevated above critique. If someone wants to “transform” society (cf. below), to do “development” or to promote “progress” one simply have to accept it in gratitude! It is against the spirit of the age to object, because the spirit of an age is determined by what it accepts as its guiding norms/values. And the deepest motivation or direction of the present age is absolutised aspects of creation.

If God is declared dead, his laws disappear – *everything* is acceptable – with the final consequence that the entire creation suffers. Without God and his

ordinances there is no direction, no goal, no real life possible, everything falls apart.

3.3.3 Reformation

Following God's *formation* of the world and the human *deformation*, the third main epoch in history is *reformation*. "Reformation" simply means that God (in Christ) did not dump his fallen, deformed creation, but redeemed or restored it.

Reformed, transformational or reformational?

Some people don't like the word "reformation" because the prefix *re-* would mean to repeat, to return to something that existed previously. "Reformed" may give the impression of something static, that a church or doctrine or whatever has somewhere in the past (in the sixteenth century Reformation?) arrived at a perfect state. They prefer the words "transform"/"transformation"/"transformational" because they sound more radical. They, however, leave open a vital question, viz. according to which criteria the transformation should be done. In an effort to start right from the beginning everything could be rejected in the name of "transformation". (Transformation – a thing – has itself become a norm.) For this reason I have emphasised the need for *normative* transformation. (See Introduction to this book.)

The word "reformation", however, need not be rejected. Firstly, it clearly indicates that we cannot "form" anything totally new like God did at creation. We can only *reform*. Secondly, to *reform* implies a criterium: it has to be done according to God's laws given at the beginning of creation. But because one's understanding of his laws is always fallible, I personally prefer to use the word "*reformational*" to indicate our task in the world. The word "reformational" emphasises continuous reformation – otherwise deformation will set in.

Because each concept (reformation and transformation) has its advantage and drawback, both will be regarded as interchangeable in this book.

This intermezzo on clarifying terms was important because it clearly spells out one's task in God's world.

Not one but two “great commissions”

Usually Matt. 28:18-20 is regarded as a separate command of God, the so-called “missionary mandate”. It is also regarded as “spiritual” and contrasted to what is usually called the “cultural mandate” of Genesis 1:26, 27 and Genesis 2:15. In actual fact the mandate in Matthew is simply a reminder of the original mandate already given in Genesis. Spykman (1992:473) correctly remarks: “In his parting message Christ takes the ‘great commission’, enunciated by his Father at the dawn of creation, and restates it in the language of redemption for the New Testament era”.

If one reads the “great commission” of the New Testament in the light of the “great commission” of the Old Testament, one can no longer regard missionary work as something spiritual, ecclesiastical, separate from the rest of one’s life. God’s original commission was down-to-earth: to rule over the entire creation (Gen. 1:26), to work in the world (garden) and take care of it (Gen. 2:15). This includes all kinds of human activities – from manual labour and farming to philosophising. Free *from* the slavery of Satan and his many misleading idols, Christians can be free *towards* obedience to God again, reforming everything which has become deformed.

Not only deeds, but good deeds

It has today become customary to emphasize that mission has to be done in word and deed, deed and word (cf. above). However, if this implies a mere combination of orthodoxy and orthopraxis, it will not be sufficient. It should be the *correct* words and *good* deeds. When one asks the Heidelberg Catechism (one of the confessions of the RCSA) what good deeds are, it confirms this chapter’s emphasis on God’s laws as an indispensable direction for life. The Lord’s Day 33 (answer 91) defines good works as “only that which (1) arises out of faith, (2) *conforms to God’s law* and (3) is done for his glory, and not that which is based on what we think is right or established human tradition” (italics added). The last words of this answer also emphasises our continuous reformatinal task.

It is correct to say that the heart of reformation is the reformation of one’s heart (cf. Romans 12:2). On condition, however, that one reads this important

verse to its end: "then you will be able to test and approve what Gods' will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will". God does not merely want *warm* hearts (full of excitement about salvation). He wants *obedient* hearts! Only when mission have achieved this, its task of witnessing is completed.

Not mere icing on the cake

This chapter is not pleading – as is often done today – for the mere addition of a few "ethical values" to secular life. (More or less similar to a layer of icing sugar on an untasteful cake.) Moralisation is not yet reformation. What I have in mind is the *inner* reformation of all the different areas of life (moral, social, economic, etc.). This cannot be done by applying *moral* norms to everything, but by obeying *norms which are applicable* to the specific domain of life.

Reformation is a return to God's laws

It should be clear now why no reformation (or real transformation) is possible without a return to God's threefold law.

- His *structural laws* determine the existence and identity of his creatures. These laws indicate that God wants a variety of things (matter, plants, animals and humans) as well as a variety of modes of being (aspects or facets) in every one of these things. Christians ought to acknowledge and respect this variety and formulate norms for the different areas of life and social relationships to ensure a good life.
- God's *law of love* determines the direction of the human heart and of the culture s/he creates. Service in love gives meaning to life. Different from hatred, which destroys, love builds what is good. God blesses the good and people enjoy the fruits of their labour.
- The *positive laws* (the "bridge" between structural laws and the law of love) are the laws for living together in society. The structural side of a positive law helps to distinguish the nature, task and limits of different societal relationships. Its directional side (diversified love) determines in which direction a specific societal relationship (marriage, family, church, state, etc.) will develop – to the glory of God and the benefit of all its members or

glorifying and idol, with disastrous results for everyone. Positive laws also implies that God's laws should be formulated differently in different times and different geographical and cultural situations. (For examples, see 10.3.4 below).

3.4 The urgent need for a Christian philosophy of society

The preceding section (on God's threefold law) already contains important building blocks for a Christian perspective on society. First, however, a brief sketch of contemporary society is needed.

3.4.1 The context

In brief society is increasingly becoming secularized (cf. Van der Walt, 2004 and 2005). Secularism divides life between a "public" sphere, which should be neutral (in actual fact it is not neutral, but governed by the religion of secularism) and a "private" sphere where people are still allowed to be religious. Like other beliefs, the Christian faith is consequently marginalised, limited to personal devotions and life in the church. Except for perhaps a prayer to start public meetings or a few moral lessons, any influence on social life is forbidden, against the right of religious "freedom". Religion is regarded as a divisive factor in so-called public life, while no mention is made of the fact that secularism is ruling – also in a divisive way – in public life.

In this context Kritzinger, in the book *No quick fixes; challenges to mission in a changing South Africa*, concludes: "The church has to reposition herself, and redefine its role in society. Clearly this search is basic for the future functioning of the church in the country. It is not an easy transition ..." (Kritzinger, 2002:5).

3.4.2 The reaction of Christians

But what is the reaction of Christians to the growing secularisation of society? Many either accepts it passively, and other simply withdraw from public life (cf. Van der Walt, 1999a:21-23 and 1999b:4-6 on pietism and escapism). The last phenomenon, evident also in the Reformed churches, is called by Du Rand (2002:54) "emigration into inner life" in contrast to emigration to a country outside. Unknowingly in this way Christians are complying to the

demands of secularism, helping to increase its influence, instead of fighting against it (cf. Du Rand, 2002: 55, 56).

Bonhoeffer (1989) unmasked this pietistic flight into inner, personal life when he wrote: (I translate): "There is no place on earth to where Christians can retreat, either in a physical sense or spiritually. Every attempt to escape from the world, will eventually result in sinful accommodation to the world". (If one tries to escape from the world, one implicitly condones the *status quo* existing in the sinful world.)

3.4.3 How to reform or transform society

How should one then tackle the question of societal change?

Three options exist: (1) One can challenge societal deformation unarmed, without an own worldview and social philosophy. This could be compared with the stupidity of a soldier going to war without his weapons. (2) One could borrow one's "armament" from all kinds of unbiblical philosophies of society, like individualism (e.g. capitalism), collectivism (e.g. Marxism) or communalism (e.g. ubuntuism). This could be compared to a man cutting the branch on which he is sitting. How can one deliver a Christian witness in society with a non-Christian view of society!? (3) The third option is to develop one's own weapons, a real Christian philosophy of society.

3.4.4 The urgent need for an own perspective

Adeyemo has realised this urgent need when he writes: "We are convinced that an integral Christian worldview based upon the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, is an indispensable foundation to live out an authentic Christian life in our contemporary society, hence the imperative of calling all Christians to develop a Christian worldview within the African context. The battle, therefore, is to grasp the full implications of the Lordship of Christ over all areas of life. This implies the necessity to develop a Christian ... social philosophy" (Adeyemo, 1993:227).

If the missionary task includes social action – and it does – it cannot be accomplished without a real Christian perspective of society.

3.4.5 A few sources

Where will one find such a Christian social philosophy? It already exists. The reader can be referred to the following sources. For an elementary introduction, consult Van der Walt (1999b:23-24; 2000: 387-416; 2002: 259-335); easy to follow are Dooyeweerd (1986) and McCharthy *et al.* (1982), while more scholarly works are those of Dooyeweerd (1957) and Skillen & McCarthy (1991).

This Christian philosophy of society is called "pluralism" because it acknowledges, in agreement with God's structural laws (see above), a variety of differently qualified societal relationships each with its own task and authority. No one of them, for instance the state, is more important than the other or entitled to dominate the rest. Because of diversified love (see above) it is anti-totalitarian philosophy of society and aims at the freedom of individuals and communities. Therefore it also allows – different from secularism – confessional pluralism in society. Religion is not marginalised, but allowed to be expressed in society outside the church by believers of different faiths.

3.5. Conclusion: towards a solution for the decline in missionary zeal and a limited vision on mission

This chapter started by drawing attention to the contemporary decline (and its possible reasons) in missionary zeal amongst the RCSA as well as in other denominations. It has become clear that what a church can *offer* (in the form of evangelism) to the outside world, depends on what itself *has* or *is*. The outward directedness of mission simultaneously necessitates inward, self-reflective soul-searching.

Van der Walt (1999b:3-10) tried to do so by summarizing the weaknesses of the RCSA (and this may again be applicable to other churches) in the following ten –isms: nominalism, pietism, escapism, denominationalism, institutionalism, secularism, subjectivism, eurocentrism, myopism and syncretism. In their place he proposes the following ten agenda points for a new type of Christianity with which also this essay may be concluded: a committed, integral, involved, ecumenical, kingdom, radical, normative,

African, visionary and socially involved Christianity (cf. Van der Walt, 1999b: 10-22 and chapter 15 of this book). The limited vision of the RCSA and similar churches should be replaced with a broad Christian worldview which includes obedience to all God's commandments. Such an approach could ensure that the future missionary endeavours of the churches can have a more visible and beneficial impact on society at large.

But because such a wide scope for mission puts a huge responsibility on the shoulders of every Christian, this chapter can not be closed without a reminder about the deepest secret of mission. It is a twofold secret, containing a human as well as a divine element.

3.5.1 The human side of the secret

An old church building displayed three colourful stained glass windows. In the inside (from the left to the right) the first panel contained a cross – the symbol of Christian faith. The second window showed an anchor – the symbol of hope. On the third window appeared a heart – the symbol of love. For Christians inside the sequence of these symbols is: faith, hope and love.

But if one is an outsider, walking past these beautiful windows, the order will be reversed. From left to right one will first see love, next hope and then faith. People outside the church (the missionary "objects") are not in the first place attracted by what one says one believes in or hope for, but by "the greatest of all" (1 Cor. 13:13) – one's love. Only when people discover – amongst all the superficial surrogates of today – real, unselfish love, will they also start asking where this amazing love comes from (faith in God) and where it leads to (hope for this as well as a new creation).

The deepest secret of *mission unlimited* is *love unlimited!* May the Reformed Churches never forget this secret.

3.5.2 The divine side of the secret

Apart from the human side, the secret of mission also contains an equally important divine aspect. Let this divine moment in the double secret of mission be to the encouragement of God's apostles – men and women – in the 21st century.

Christ not only *begins*, but also *ends* his great commission (Matthew 28) in a remarkable way. He begins it with his *unlimited authority* (verse 18b) and He ends it (verse 20b) with the promise of the *unlimited presence* of His Spirit: "I will be with you always, to the very end of the ages". From the beginning to the end mission is His work!

How is a *mission unlimited* possible? Viewed from the human side, because of *unlimited love*. Viewed from God's side, because of his *unlimited authority* and *unlimited presence*.

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Chapter 4:

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

On the identity and relevance of the church

The problem to be discussed is the role of the church in society. In spite of the fact that this has been a topical issue for centuries, it has today become a burning issue – particularly because of the increasing secularization of the social environment. (1) It seems as if churches are becoming more and more marginalised, as if they have lost their relevance for broader societal life. This chapter, however, indicates that a major reason for the situation may be with the churches themselves, viz. a wrong conception about their own identity. (2) From a Biblical-Reformational perspective this wrong view is first explained historically. (3) It is followed by a systematic exposition of the church as a societal relationship. Such a Christian-philosophical analysis in no way harms but rather enhances the uniqueness of the church. According to this philosophy of society (which views the church as societal relationship as an integral part of society) the church no longer needs to be irrelevant and consequently be “made” relevant. (4) The chapter is concluded by indicating, on the one hand, how the church should not be involved in secular societal life and, on the other hand, how it should correctly be related to the rest of life.

4.1. The crisis of the church and inadequate solutions to it

Normally the word “crisis” is used when one is faced not with a single problem but with a whole constellation of problems. Furthermore there is no unanimity as to how these problems are to be solved. The word “crisis” is also applicable to the church(es) today: There are numerous problems and numerous possible answers to them.

4.1.1 Recognising the crisis

A few examples will suffice to confirm that church(es) of the Reformed tradition have been experiencing problems for some time. As long as 25 years ago it was said about the Reformed churches in South Africa by Van der Walt (1979) and

Vorster (1981). By the end of the previous century the same two writers (cf. Van der Walt, 1999 and Vorster, 1996) again warned of the urgent necessity of renewal and reformation in the church. According to Du Rand (2002) and Kritzing (2002) the family of Dutch Reformed Churches (DRC) experienced similar problems. Jonker (1998), too, is of the opinion that the DRC can – and must – change.

From the works of Dekker (1995, 2000, 2001, 2005 and 2006) who writes about church crises in the Netherlands it becomes apparent that this is not an isolated (South) African phenomenon. Churches in the rest of Europe and the USA have not avoided a serious crisis either, as seen in the work of Hendriks and others (2001)

4.1.2 Facets of the crisis

Naturally in the various publications on this crisis different and even widely varying facets of the crisis are identified – depending on the background, life-view and fields of expertise of the particular writers. As a Christian philosopher the present writer is interested particularly in the *fundamental* causes of the crisis. In this chapter it is therefore shown that many of the current problems of the church may be reduced to two basic issues which are closely connected.

The first is that the church no longer knows what exactly its role in broader society should be. (This not only applied to the pre-apartheid society but also of the present post-apartheid times in South Africa.) The following words written by Olthuis (1967:15) also apply here: "... when she (the church) ventured outside of the church-gates and mingled in the affairs of the marketplace, she adjusted, compromised and even denied her message; when, on the other hand, she was content to, or forced to remain within her walls, she failed to give concrete form to her Christian witness and discovered to her own consternation that she was 'outside' of the world".

So once more the church today stands before the age-old problem of how it can be present *in* the world without becoming part *of* the world itself (worldly).

However, today this issue has become far more serious since the society in which the church finds itself becomes increasingly secularised.

The second problem (which is closely connected to the first) is that the church no longer is certain of what it should be, it is in doubt about its own identity. Each of these problems (the secularisation of society and the identity crisis of the church itself) needs further explanation in order to understand the crisis better.

4.1.3 The secularisation of society

The first problem of the church is connected to the fact that the society in which it finds itself is becoming more and more secular. (Because secularisation was already mentioned in the previous chapter and will also be discussed again in following chapters, the reader will please excuse the repetition in this chapter.) "Secularisation" is not used here in the acceptable meaning of the emancipation of society from dominance by the church (from about the end of the Middle Ages). By secularisation is meant that modern day societies look as if God does not exist and his commandments are no longer important. (Cf. Van der Walt, 2004a and 2004b and 2005a for a philosophical exposition of what secularism entails and Van der Walt, 2005b and 2005c for a more popular version.)

Present secularism regards religion, faith and church as "private" matters over against the broad (social-political-economic) society as the "public" domain, which should be neutral in religious matters. (In truth the public domain is dominated by the secularist belief.) Consequently churches which formerly had an important voice in public life in South Africa – and also elsewhere in Africa (cf. Shorter & Onyancha, 1997) – are increasingly seen and treated as marginal phenomena of society.

With right Kritzinger (2002:5) says that the position of Christendom and the church changed radically with the acceptance (after 1994) of a secular (so-called religiously neutral) constitution: "The church has to reposition herself, and redefine its role in society. Clearly this search is basic for the future functioning of the church... It is not an easy transition".

Jonker (cf. 1998:220) confirms this, because Christians can no longer depend on it that they have the ear of government or that a certain Christian tradition will influence the ordering of public life. I translate: "The official position of the new state is one of religious neutrality. Religious belief belongs to the personal and private sphere. In stead of the norms of Scripture, humanistic considerations become the criterion by which morality in politics and society is judged... society is at present exposed to the full force of Western secularism. Christian norms are considered as something which only has significance in the personal sphere and at most in a specific group context." (Jonker, 1998:220)

One of the most common reactions to the growing secularism is that Christians, like snails, retract into their (church) shells. Du Rand (2002:54) calls this phenomenon "inwards" emigration (contrasting it with the outward emigration of many South Africans to another country). Apart from being ironic, it is also very tragic, since "(I translate)... the full privatisation of religion... (is) exactly what is expected of religion in a secularised society" (Du Rand, 2002:55,56).

Other theologians have already accepted this incorrect reaction as an inescapable fact. So, for instance, Dekker, a Dutch Reformed sociologist of religion, first says that it is typical of the Reformed faith that it wants to be relevant for all aspects of life – therefore also for the so-called secular, public life. But directly afterwards he says (cf. Dekker, 2001:156) that it is very hard, maybe even impossible to practise this outstanding characteristic of Reformational Christianity today. It is only for a "more pietistic form of Reformed belief" (p. 156) that he sees the possibility of surviving in the Netherlands. According to his initial statement on what Reformed means, pietism cannot be called a form of it! Apparently he has already capitulated before the division made by secularism between private (or sacred) and public (or secular).

Jonker (1998:219, 220) summarises the first main problem (secularisation) as follows: "The political transformation in the country means that the church must get clarity on her role in the new dispensation. The church may not, for shame at her mistakes in the past, withdraw from public life... It would be tragic if the

church becomes unfaithful to her Reformed character and retreat into an unworldly and individualistic piety. There is no other institution which can fill the void that will be left when the church neglects her prophetic calling and no longer make the light of God's Word to fall on the problems of society ... The church will have to learn anew to do this..." (translated from Afrikaans).

4.1.4 An identity crisis in the church itself

Growing secularisation of the surrounding society thus clearly influences the vision of what the church is, can be or should be (the second main problem mentioned above). But the opposite also applies: "Churches have become so busy with their own internal programmes and problems that they can no longer be effectively concerned with the proper structure and direction of society and the world. Such 'out-of-breath' churches run the grave risk of becoming aloof and irrelevant institutions" (Zylstra & Vander Stelt, 1996:25).

Thus it would be unfair to lay the blame for the crisis in the church solely on secularising society. It is the present writer's opinion that the church crisis is also determined by the (already age-old) wrong vision of the church itself.

Meijers (1997:111) puts his finger on the pulse, saying "... right through Reformed theology there is a Anabaptist trait, a denial of mundane, historic reality..." Jonker (1998:6-8) points out the same phenomenon in the South African churches (like the DRC) when he says that they were strongly influenced by a pietistic devotion which was geared more to the sanctification of the individual than of life as a whole. Until recently this tendency was reinforced by the idea of a national church: "On the one hand the church in its pietistic attitude neglects to make its voice heard in national life. On the other hand the church serves the role of lending religious sanction to the national establishment." (Jonker, 1998:64, translated into English).

However, this pietistic vision on the church cannot be retraced (as Jonker argues) only to the influence of the Scottish ministers. As Meijers rightly puts it (and as will become clear under 4.2.2 below) an "Anabaptist" trait of denying the world can be discerned right through the church's history of two thousand years.

According to this view the church was regarded as "above" the rest of society, something spiritual or supernatural, while its human or terrestrial character was more or less ignored.

It is understandable that such a vision of the church would make church leaders and theologians sceptical towards looking at the church from the angle of (the various facets of) society. The contributions different disciplines could make about the church, like that of sociology, psychology, economy and philosophy are regarded with suspicion right from the start. Because they spiritualise the church, many people do not realise that the church is an inherent part of human society and that, apart from theology, the various facets of the church's existence (cf. the structural analysis under 4.3) can be studied by various sciences, which could help to understand the church better and improve its functioning. So for example, economy can help the church to do better financial planning; managers can help to improve its organisation; communication experts to improve its communication; psychologists to do more effective pastoral work.

According to church leaders (especially theologians) this would injure the unique character of the church. Unfortunately their scepticism is sometimes well-founded, for in each of these approaches there lurks the risk of reducing the church to something merely social, economic or psychic – a temptation for most scientists. Then not enough room is left for the fact that the church is instituted by God, belongs to Christ and should be guided by his Spirit. It is therefore not a mere social club, a business, an organisation or a psychological clinic.

It is therefore understandable that theologians in the past felt reticent about even Christian philosophical reflection on the church as a societal relationship. Fortunately a turning point has already been reached, at least in the Netherlands. In the volume by Van den Brink et al. (1997) Christian theologians and Christian philosophers realise that they desperately need one another's help in the struggle against growing secularisation.

This chapter wants to underline the value of such a Christian philosophical reflection for the (South) African audience – which does not exclude its possible

relevance to other parts of the world. Our main aim is to use a structural analysis of the church to lay open its true identity in the world and in this way curb the pietistic spiritualisation of the church. (By the way, it should be stated that a (neo-)marxist view of church and society – very popular about twenty years ago – is also unacceptable to me. In many respects it is worse than a pietistic view.) It is essential since most common solutions for the crisis of the church is unsatisfactory.

4.1.5 Unsatisfactory solutions

After drawing attention to the crisis in the church, and showing what its two main causes are (a lack of clarity on its role in a secular society and on its own identity), one needs to look briefly at the solutions which are being offered. As a result of the numerous problems and the variety of viewpoints on the possible causes, the answers are also discursive. A few examples will suffice: worship, witness and service (cf. Vorster, 1981:25 et seq.); transformation of confession and mission (cf. Du Rand, 2002:65 et seq.); a return to the old confession of Nicea which teaches that the church should be one, holy, catholic and Christian (cf. Naude, 2004:163 et seq.)

However praiseworthy, not one of these works see the necessity of reflecting from a philosophical, worldviewish angle on exactly what the church as a societal relationship *is or should be*. All the emphasis falls on what the church should *do* or the *characteristics* it should have.

In my opinion Adeyemo (1993:227), already quoted in the previous chapter, puts his finger on the pulse when saying: "We are convinced that an integrated Christian worldview based upon the Holy Scriptures ... is an indispensable foundation to live out an authentic Christian life within our contemporary society, hence the importance of calling on all Christians to develop a Christian worldview ... This implies the necessity to develop ... a Christian social philosophy."

To comply with this call by Adeyemo for a Christian social philosophy (which should include a structural analysis of the church) the rest of this chapter runs as follows: (1) First an investigation is done into the origin of the incorrect vision of

the church, namely that it was something that stood over against, next to or above society. (2) Subsequently a systematic analysis is made of the church as a societal relationship. (3) Finally it is shown how (according to a more correct, Biblical vision) the church can indeed be involved in our increasingly secularised society – and do so without losing its identity.

4.2 The historical background for the dual problem of the church

Both the identity crisis and the problem of the church's role in society have deep historical roots. It is not my intention to go into the detail of the historical development here (cf. Van der Walt, 2005d: 5-38 for a brief overview). It has been done comprehensively by inter alia Olthuis (1967), Olthuis et al. (1970), Olthuis et al. (1972), Zylstra and Vander Stelt (1996) and Spykman and Hart (1996). In order to create a better understanding of the aberration in the course of history I start by giving the Biblical vision of the church.

4.2.1 A Biblical view of the church

The above-mentioned Reformational philosophers all agree that there should be a clear distinction – without separating them – between “church” (with lower-case c), Church (with a capital letter) and the kingdom of God.

Olthuis (cf. Olthuis et al. 1972:239, 240) explains the distinction with the image of a wheel which consists of a hub, spokes and a rim: “The institutional church might be called the hub of an imaginary kingdom wheel. However, without the outer rim (the total vision of the kingdom of God) and a network of kingdom spokes (other activities of the people of God), the hub does not make a wheel. But with a hub, spokes and outer rim, the wheel of God's kingdom can be of lasting significance in our society”. The church as an institution may not be identified with the kingdom of God (the whole wheel). (The different modalities which are distinguished in Reformational philosophy – cf. 4.3.4 below – gives an impression of how many domains the kingdom includes apart from the domain of faith of the church as institution).

Spykman (1992:478 et seq.) uses a different image of four concentric circles to explain the same (see also previous chapter). From the outer to the inner circle he differentiates the following: (1) the Word of God, (2) the church (with lower-case c), (3) the Church (with a capital C), (4) the kingdom of God. Church with a lower-case c indicates the church as an institution, Church denotes the body of Christ, the presence of Christians in all walks of life. (If being a church were limited to going to church on a Sunday, the Christian faith would degenerate into "churchianity".) Although church and Church are important, they derive their meaning in the final instance from the all-encompassing kingdom of God and not the other way round.

As already quoted in chapter 3, Spykman sums it up as follows: : "God's Word is the central dynamics for all life in the world. The ministries of the church as institution proclaim the Word within the fellowship of the worshipping community. The Church as body of Christ is then called to translate the Word into concrete forms of Christian witness in every sphere of life. The goal of the ever widening outreach is the coming of the kingdom" (Spykman, 1992:479). Christ not only is Head of the church, but also the King of the Church and the Ruler over the whole of creation. This rule includes all other societal relationships.

In the above-mentioned publications the other Christian philosophers also use these distinctions in stead of the well-known theological distinctions between, for instance, the church as an institution and organism, visible and invisible church, et cetera (for the motivation, see Olthuis, et al., 1972:25, note 2), since they are of the opinion that it indicates the biblical message about the church and the kingdom of God better.

On the one hand being the church (with a lower-case c, in other words the church as an institution) does not cover the whole life of a believer. It has a task in a specific domain, namely to strengthen the faith of its members, particularly by preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. On the other hand it is not limited to the cultic aspect of the church. As the body of Christ (Church with a capital C), Christians should also practice faith, love and hope (strengthened

liturgically in the church) outside the walls of the church in different walks of life. What they have “breathed in” in the church, they should “breathe out” in society. Neither the church nor the Church exists for itself. They are means by which signs of God’s rule (kingdom) can be set up in all domains of life.

This viewpoint clearly has a different view of the identity of the church and its role in society from the view that came about in the course of history and is still held by most Christians.

4.2.2 The incorrect viewpoint

To save room the findings of the different writers (mentioned above under 4.2) on the aberration of the church in the course of history, are summarised point by point. Afterwards comment is made on every point from a Reformational perspective.

1. According to an incorrect interpretation, good and evil in creation was understood in such a way that it could be localised in certain clear domains.
2. Thus the whole of creation was divided into two domains. The higher, more important domain of grace stood opposite to the lower, less important domain of nature. The domain of grace contains the holy, sacred things, while nature is the domain of the profane, secular things.
3. Bible, faith, church and theology belonged to the higher domain, while science, reason, the state (plus other societal relationships) and philosophy belonged to the lower domain.
4. In this way the church was reduced to something cultic or liturgical (only the service on Sunday). To be a Christian was identified with being a church member and the other way round.
5. Although an attempt was made to maintain a connection between the two domains (nature was regarded as a stepping-stone to grace, while grace perfected nature), this dualistic life view led irrevocably to the irrelevance of the church for most non-cultic domains of life.

6. Since Christians could not really be satisfied with such a schizophrenic life, the church was not only limited, but simultaneously over-estimated by identifying it with the Church and the kingdom of God.

7. Consequently the church was absolutised, it became an idol, a totalitarian ruler – in stead of a servant, merely an instrument in the service of the body of Christ (Church) and the kingdom of God. Everything was placed under the supervision of the church and had to get approval from the church (curchified) to qualify as Christian.

8. This dualism is like a dark trail running right through the 2 000 year history of Christendom. Although most Christians were not even conscious of the split in their worldview, it clearly determined their thoughts and acts.

9. Those who did struggle with the consequences of the doctrine of two domains could not solve it. For once one had separated reality between the church and the rest of life, what had in principle been separated, could never really be united again. For this reason all the various modifications of the dualistic scheme could not solve the dilemma of "church and world".

10 By about the time of the Renaissance (15th, 16th century) the Middle Age dominance of the church over the rest of society began to come to an end. The emancipation of the domain of "nature" (politics, labour, economy, education, etc.) had begun and was continued in the following centuries (= positive secularism). However, since everything Christian was associated with the church, faith in God and God's Word were now also rejected as irrelevant (= negative secularism). After the dualistic vision of life had broken down, the church was removed even further from society – it was considered as something irrelevant which dealt with holy, spiritual things, foreign to this world. As we have shown, it is considered today as a "private" institution which has little or no voice in the "public" domain of broader society.

4.2.3 The correct viewpoint

According to the above-mentioned writers (cf. 4.2 above) all ten facets of this worldview and view of the church have to be rejected and replaced by a Biblical view:

1. In stead of dividing reality into two domains, there is only one creation structured by God's laws. We as human beings can answer God's creational ordinances in two ways, or take one of two directions: obedience or disobedience. This antithesis is of a *religious* nature and cannot be described in an *ontic* way as two domains (e.g. church and world). Good and evil pervades creation as a whole, every walk of life – including the church.
2. Nothing is inherently good or bad. The Bible does not know the antithesis of nature and grace. The opposite of grace is God's wrath.
3. The Bible, faith, church and theology do not belong to a separate, higher, supernatural domain, separated from the rest of one's existence. Since God created man and woman with the ability to believe, it is as natural as eating, drinking, talking and trading. (After the fall of mankind only the direction of his faith is different.) In the same sense as marriage and the state, the church is also an ordinary societal relationship, part of earthly reality.
4. It is true that the domain of the church is the cultic and liturgical where faith has to be celebrated and strengthened. One could call it the *explicit* or *concentrated* focus on Whom one believes. But this is not all that being church entails. Apart from this focused (*cultic*) aspect there is also the all-encompassing living of the faithful in all domains (being Church with a capital). To make it clearer Reformational philosophers usually differentiate between the more limited (concentrated) life of *faith* and one's all-encompassing *religious* service in the kingdom of God. Once more: to be a Christian may not be identified with being a church member.
5. If the church is reduced to the cultic and liturgical it would indeed be irrelevant for the numerous other, non-cultic aspects of life, like the economic,

political and social. If being church also includes the Church (body of Christ), however, the presence of Christians in all walks of life it is not irrelevant at all.

6. Although the church may not be under-estimated – it fills an important place in the kingdom (according to Olthuis and Spykman it is in the centre) – it may never be over-rated by identifying it with the kingdom of God. Not only is the kingdom much more inclusive, but also much more important. Therefore the church may not grab the kingdom for itself, it must serve the kingdom.

7. Just as they do with political or economic dominance, Reformational philosophers also reject dominance of society by the church. In stead of totalitarianism, they teach that there is a variety of societal relationships, which each has an obligation to be obedient to an own divine norm. No one of them is higher or more important than the other. Reformational philosophers also emphasise that the *churchification* of life would not mean that it would be *Christian*. Being Christian cannot be forced from above or from the outside. A *church* school therefore is not necessarily a *Christian* school. Likewise, something like a church state or a state church is unacceptable.

8. One usually acts and thinks unconsciously according to one's worldview. This also applies to the dualistic worldview which has been reigning church history for two millennia. The only way to get rid of it is to become conscious of it and to acknowledge that it is not in line with God's Word, because it renders the church and the Christian faith irrelevant for the greater part of one's life.

9. The solution therefore is not to try and *modify* the doctrine of two domains, but to *reject* the underlying dualistic scheme *itself*. Only then could the church be freed from its imprisonment in a supernatural domain and its reduction to cultic life only.

10. Secularisation in the sense of society being freed from the dominance of the church is seen as a positive development by Reformational philosophers. Secularism as life being severed from God and his Word, however, is rejected.

Finally it is clear that the wrong vision of the church as outlined above has had catastrophic consequences: it has contributed to our living today in an atheist, secular society.

The next section therefore contains an exposition of what the church (as an institution, with a lower-case c) looks like according to a Christian philosophical view. Such a perspective could help to regard the church as an inherent part of society in stead of seeing it as an unworldly institution.

4.3 A Christian societal philosophy applied to the church

Reformational philosophy has developed its own view of society. As indicated already in two previous chapters, in contrast to the individualistic (liberalist), collectivist (e.g. communist) and communalistic societal views, the Reformational view could be called pluralistic. (For detail cf. Skillen & McCarthy, 1991 and McCarthy et al., 1982:13-30.) There are various forms of pluralism, but we will not go into the details (cf. McCarthy et al., 1982:30-36 and for still more detail Skillen & McCarthy, 1991).

Reformational pluralism has a long tradition. However, the person who worked it out in the greatest detail, was Dooyeweerd (in 1957:157-626 in a scholarly way and in 1986 in more popular form). McCarthy et al. (1982) and Fowler (1993 and 2002) also give clear explanations for those who are uninitiated in this field, while the elementary version by Van der Walt (2000:387-407) could also be useful. What follows here is a brief exposition of this Christian social philosophy and the meaning it has for understanding the church as a societal relationship. Point by point this specific view of human society can be explained as follows:

4.3.1 It recognises both the individual and the social side of being human

In contrast to both individualism, which views being human as an individual, and socialism and communism, which see the human being in the first place as a social being, pluralism teaches that man *as such* is neither an individual nor a social being, but only displays an individual and a social *facet*. Justice has to be

done to both. In the different societal relationships – in the church too – the social side of man comes to the fore (cf. structural analysis under 4.3.4).

4.3.2 Basically there are two societal relationships: institutional relationships and free associations

Marriage, family, church and state are examples of the first-mentioned, namely institutional relationships. They have been instituted by God. A school, association, rugby club or political party are examples of the second kind (free associations) which came into being during the course of history. The nature of a church is different from an association or club. In spite of this difference a pluralistic social philosophy believes that no societal relationship is a mere contract between individuals.

4.3.3 Each one of these numerous societal relationships are necessary for the full development of a human being

Since every one of them has its own domain, task or working sphere, it may not be assumed that one (like the church) is more important than the other. One relationship (e.g. previously the church, later the state and today business) may not be regarded as the most inclusive while the others are seen as mere parts of it. This would amount to totalitarianism. Then life would be dominated and warped in a unilateral manner by this one societal relationship.

4.3.4 A structural analysis helps to understand the different natures and tasks of the various societal relationships

Reformational philosophy's teaching about the modalities or aspects of (earthly) reality offers a very useful means for making a structural analysis of the various societal relationships. Human beings, and therefore also every societal relationship, participate in the different aspects of reality.

As an example we first take the family. The concrete things (in the right hand column) serve as examples of how all the aspects of reality (in the left hand column) are reflected in family life.

Aspects

religious

ETHICAL

juridical

aesthetic

economic

social

lingual

historic & cultural

logical

psychic

BIOTIC

spatial

numerical

Things

family devotions

fidelity in the family

parental authority

typical style of a family

family budget, finances

social intercourse, family amusement,
games, parties

nicknames in the family, family idioms

family planning, family education

family opinions, talks

family feelings, homesickness

blood ties, family traits (children look like their
parents)house or space within which family members
live together

family as a unit, number of people in a family

Although the family participates in all facets of reality, it has two points of orientation: the ethical (the tie of fidelity) – the qualifying function/aspect – and the biotic (tie of blood) – the foundational facet.

If we apply the same structural analysis to the church, it would be as follows:

FAITH

confessions of faith, songs of praise, prayers

ethical

brotherly/sisterly love

juridical

church order or church law

aesthetic	the style of the church building or the style of a service
economic	congregational budget/ finances
social	fellowship of believers
lingual	typical church language
HISTORICAL	church organisation, power and education
logical	the doctrine of the church (dogma) and the way people of the church reason
psychic	emotional experience of various activities
biotic	the church as a living community
physical	all kinds of material things the church needs
spatial	a congregation's geographic area or the building in which they meet
numerical	local church and its unity with other churches of the same confession, number of church members

Such a structural analysis clearly brings out the following:

- Most of the societal relationships (except marriage and the family) are *historically founded* (That is the reason why it is set in capital letters above.) This means that human historical power, organisation and institutionalisation all play an important role in all the different societal relationships.
- However, the different societal relationships have different *qualifying aspects*. In the case of the church it is the aspect of faith. (That is the reason why it is set in capital letters above.) In the case of the state it is the juridical aspect, in the case of business it is the economic, for the family it is the ethical, for some clubs it is the social and for the artists' club the aesthetic.

This qualifying aspect determines the destination, task or calling of the specific societal relationship and also differentiates it from every other relationship. A church cannot, for instance, be equated to a political party, a cultural organisation or a social club.

- Apart from the foundational and qualifying aspects, all the other aspects also play a role in the various relationships as becomes clear from the examples of the family and the church above. Depending on the specific societal relationship, each of these aspects take on their own “colour”. We could also say: They are determined by the particular qualifying function. In the case of the church it is as follows:

⇒ Its *ethical side* does not only denote love for the neighbour in general, but it is guided and directed by the tie of the common Christian faith. It is *brotherly/sisterly love* which has its origin in the love for God. It is not the same as other kinds of love as, for instance, between friends, comrades, people of the same nation or the same cultural group, in the family (love of parents, children), et cetera.

Because the church is a specific kind of loving fellowship (determined by the Christian faith) the office of the deacon is not merely something incidental, but an indispensable church office which gives an organised form to this specific kind of love. Therefore the charity work done by the deacon will differ from that done by individual persons, charity organisations or the well-fare department of the state.

⇒ The *juridical facet* also takes on a peculiar, unique form in the case of the church. It is not true – as some Christians believe – that the church has no business with justice and law. In every societal relationship there should be order. Therefore the church also has its own (church)order, regulations and procedures whereby discipline is maintained. It is usually done by church office bearers. For their election, confirmation and service there are also rules and requirements.

But all these have to take place in a typical ecclesiastical manner. State law and church law are not the same. The state can enforce its law – even by force (the

power of the sword). In the church justice may never be like that. It should not be formalistic either so that it smothers faith. It must be sensitive to the functioning of the Word and the Spirit in the fellowship of the believers.

⇒ The same applies to the *aesthetic facet* in the case of the church. Objects of art for instance may never be so prominent in the service and in the church building that it overshadows faith in God as the essential factor. It should be in the service of the qualifying aspect of faith. It does have a place in the church – an unaesthetic, ugly building does not promote worship – but it has a limited, qualified role to fill.

⇒ Without money, the *economic facet*, a church cannot function well either. But the church should handle its finances in a different way from a business (which is economically qualified) – both in the way it procures money and in the way it spends it. It should not in the first instance pursue profit or the gathering of huge capital.

⇒ The church also has a *psychic side*. According to the different aspects of reality given above, religion is not the same as a feeling, it is higher (more) than emotion. At the same time – since one practices religion as a *whole* person (all aspects are involved) – religion should also be experienced emotionally.

One could proceed in this way right down to the *spatial aspect*: Even when a congregation meets in a shed or a garage, the building gets a different character. These few examples are sufficient, however, to make clear that the activities of the church at different levels take on a unique colour or form – it is qualified by faith.

From this it also transpires (cf. 4.1.4 above) that different sciences (ethics, law, aesthetics, economics, psychology, etc.) can make a contribution towards a better understanding of the church – it is not a mere “theological phenomenon”. For instance the communication sciences would regard the church in this first place as a “communication unit” in which different kinds of communication has to take place in the best possible way, for example, between people and God and among people themselves.

And what we have said about the church applies to all other societal relationships. The ethical, juridical, aesthetic, economic, etc. life of the family, state or a business will be different from that of the church, because they are differently qualified societal contexts.

Finally, such a structural analysis of the church also promotes a balanced vision of the church. It excludes a biased emphasis like the Church Growth Movement (all emphasis on the numeric aspect) or the Gospel of Wealth (over-emphasising the economic aspect).

4.3.5 Every societal context should give shape to God's central commandment of love in its own peculiar manner, for its own times

God's central commandment (love for Him and the neighbour, cf. Matt. 22:37-40) is no abstraction. It should take on concrete shape. And it gets different shapes in the different societal relationships in which people live together, it becomes *differentiated* love. As one has a different kind of fondness for one's car, garden, dog or cat, so too the love between people in different societal relationships differ. People express God's fundamental command of love in various norms for various societal relationships.

4.3.6 The different societal relationships have to be distinguished clearly, but they do not exist in isolation from one another.

The relation between the societal relationships has to be positive. This means that on, the one hand, every relationship should fulfil its own task and calling and may not neglect it or shift the responsibility for it onto another relationship (e.g. parents who neglect their task to educate, and leave it to the school). On the other hand, every relationship should acknowledge the task of the other, and in turn, expect them to respect and acknowledge its peculiar calling.

If we put it negatively, it means that in the relation between societal relationships one may not interfere in the domain of another or try to dominate it or even eliminate it. Every societal relationship therefore has the right to resist such interference.

A Reformational, pluralistic social philosophy is anti-totalitarian. It resists every attempt in which one relationship (whether it is the church as in former times, or later the state or the world of economics as at present) over-estimates itself, crowds out the other or "swallows them up" so that they lose their own character and are downgraded to mere "subdivisions" of the totalitarian relationship. (Cf. for instance, the commercialisation today of schools, universities and many other *non*-economically qualified societal relationships according to the business model.)

4.3.7 Every societal relationship has its own form of authority

In every relationship a distinction has to be made between the authorities and those who are subject to authority, between the correlation authority-respect. In the case of the state it is the authorities/government and citizens/subjects. In the case of the church it is the church council and the members.

The salient question here is *how* or *from where* the authorities get the right to exercise authority over others. The following three theories can be distinguished: (cf. Van der Walt, 2003a: 155-162 and 2006a:138-144): (1) a hierarchic vision (certain people have more/all the authority and it is exercised "from the top down"); (2) an egalitarian view (everybody has equal authority and authority originates "from below", at grass-roots level) and (3) a Biblical view of authority, rejecting both the other two.

The hierarchic or elitist view of authority which is still accepted by many Christians – even Reformed believers – teaches that authority comes "from above". For Christians it usually means that God *delegates* his authority to the (highest) authorities. They then delegate it to "lower" offices. Authority is not primarily seen as *service*.

The problems with and risks entailed in this view are the following: (1) Nowhere in the Scriptures are we taught that God delegates His authority to people, only to Christ. (2) The "higher" offices have unlimited authority "downwards", but little accountability "upwards" (they rule *in the name of* God), while the lower offices, in spite of the little power or say they have, have to be accountable to the whole

hierarchical bureaucracy above them. (3) Such a view may easily lead to elitism and even tyranny, in other words to the absolutisation of authority and power. (4) Criticism on the exercising of authority by office bearers is almost excluded, since they allegedly rule “in the name of” God. As a consequence no clear distinction is made between the (infallible) authority of God and (fallible) human authority. In spite of the fact that in this view God is called the Origin of the authority, it can – and it has happened in the past – lead to abuse of authority and power and even dictatorship. Even churches were not immune to this.

The egalitarian view of authority (which is very popular today) holds that authority does not come from “above” but from “below”. Man is his own legislator (autonomous). And every individual has equal power. Those subject to authority decide together who they want as the bearers of authority. With their election the subordinates delegate their authority to the elected office bearers to rule over them – in the name of the subjects. In practice it usually means that the majority rules (democracy).

The problems with and risks attached to this view is the following: (1) The human being is elevated to become his own legislator (autonomy) – an unbiblical idea. (2) The absolute authority of a single bearer of authority is rejected, but not the absolute authority of the members of the societal relationship. Just as little as the will of a single ruler (e.g. a king, dictator or pope) the will of the people (members of the relationship) guarantees that authority will be handled in a just way. It makes little difference whether an elite rules (the hierarchical vision) or the masses (the egalitarian view). (3) This view is also inclined to lead to anarchy. (Where the hierarchical view over-estimates authority, the egalitarian tends to look down on it.)

A Reformational vision. According to this view God, in the first place, determines *where* authority will be seated and, secondly, *what it will look like*.

Authority rests with human bearers of authority in every societal relationship. Authority is connected with an office according to God’s creational order. He *lends* authority to the offices in the different relationships. He does not *delegate*

his authority to them (the hierarchical view), just as the members of a particular societal relationship do not *delegate* their authority to the office bearers (the egalitarian view of authority). We merely have to *acknowledge* the authority which God has linked with an office. Authority, simply put, is the right to exercise an office.

The office and authority which office bearers exercise, is creational, human authority. Bearers of authority exercise it as *servants* of God and of their fellow human beings and not as *replacements* of God to be *rulers* over people. This clear distinction between the authority of God (which He delegates to Christ only, and not to any human being) and fallible human authority is of great significance, for it prevents sinful human beings from thinking that they have been invested with divine authority, that human authority is deified and that a check on authority by their subordinates is out of the question. If this clear distinction is not made, criticism against faulty exercise of authority and resistance against the abuse of power could easily be regarded as revolt against God himself. It is true that He has *ordained* authority in every societal relationship, but the *de facto exercising* of it remains fallible human work, which is therefore subject to criticism. Even authority in the church is not divine by nature, but the faulty, imperfect work of humans and therefore not above criticism.

In the second instance God determines what authority will look like in every societal relationship. Apart from the fact that (all) authority is *service* (for more on this aspect, cf. Van der Walt, 2003a and 2006a:129-130, 131-132), it should also correspond to the nature or character of the particular societal relationship. In other words: it is *qualified* authority. Its nature, and the way it should be exercised is determined by the qualifying function of the particular societal relationship. Thus we have to distinguish between the *judicial* authority in the case of the state, the *religious* authority in the case of the church, *economic* authority in the business world, *academic* authority in the case of a university and many more.

In stead of the incorrect, quantitative question "*How much* authority should an office bearer have?", the right question is the qualitative one: "*What kind* of authority applies in this relationship?" When the question is put *what kind* of authority (instead of *how much* authority) the answer is: a *specific kind* of authority. In other words not unqualified, but always authority that is *qualified* or determined by the qualifying aspect or norm of the particular societal relationship in which it is exercised (e.g. faith in the case of the church).

Qualified authority at the same time means *limited* authority. In a pluralistic social philosophy there is no room for unlimited, absolute or totalitarian authority – that is due to God alone and not to any human being or human relationship. In the past (the Middle Ages) the church inclined in that direction as we have explained above. Later on (with national states coming into being) politics dominated society. Today the economic sphere dominates and everything is commercialised. Just as one should fight for "dechurchifying" and depoliticising, today we have to fight for the decommercialisation of society. Society is not only something economic. It consists of different societal relationships, every one with its own peculiar authority.

Authority in the case of the church is *religious authority*. It has been written into various creeds through history. But the following should be kept in mind: (1) Although such creeds were attempts to sum up and understand what the Word of God teaches, it still remains the fallible work of humans which may never be equated to God's Word, but has to be tested from time to time in the light of the Word. (2) A creed should not be regarded as something static. It has to be reformulated for new times and circumstances so that it remains relevant. (An example of this is the creed of the Christian Reformed Church [1987], *Our world belongs to God; a contemporary testimony*.) (3) It may not degenerate to a piece of compelling dogma so that a science (Dogmatics) rules in the church in stead of the living Word of God itself. There is a real risk that, while the original writers of the creeds confessed their faith in God in the creeds, people may today believe in the creeds themselves.

In no societal relationship is it an easy matter to exercise authority correctly. Of all forms of authority the authority of faith which is dealt with in the church, is probably the most difficult – since faith is directed at man's last certainty (God).

4.3.8 Different offices for the different societal relationships

As far back as the Old Testament different offices developed during the history of Israel. Abraham was not only the head of a family and clan, but also of the cultic and political life. Already in the time of Moses the political office was separated from the cultic (the church) and the prophetic office came to the fore. Thus the Lord calls people to *different* offices. He also punished the transgressions of the kings (e.g. Saul and Ussa) when they abused their political office to infringe on the cultic domain and take over the work of the priests. God calls everybody to *an* office, but not all to *the same* office.

From the Scriptures it becomes clear (cf. Luke 22:24-27) that offices are not there to *rule* over the members of a societal relationship, but to *serve* in the following ways: (1) By taking care that all members of the societal relationship live in accordance with the God-given norm for the societal relationship (e.g. faith in the case of the church or justice in the case of the state) and in this way fulfil their calling in the specific relationship; (2) by protecting and promoting their calling in the particular relationship; (3) by fighting sin which affect every relationship and (4) by maintaining the necessary justice and order. (Important further Biblical perspectives on authority can be found in Bennett, 1993.)

Since it happens so seldom in practice, it can never be stressed enough that an office is synonymous with service to others and not with dominance or suppression. Too many office bearers – even in the churches – identify office with position, status, dominance and self-enrichment. (Cf. in this connection the valuable study by Schrottenboer, 1972.)

Naturally offices are not the privilege of men only. Even in the strongly male-oriented Old Testament there are examples of women who held important offices. (Cf. Van der Walt, 2006b:228-280.)

As we have said already, authority is the right to hold an office. Office and authority are thus inseparably linked, but should still be distinguished. An office may be held merely by reason of popularity, seniority, supposed capability or even the illegal appropriation of an office. Except for the last-mentioned, one could say that such a person does hold the office legally and even may have great power.

According to the Scriptures, however, it would be an office *without true authority*, since the basic requirements for authority are lacking. For, according to the Bible, authority presupposes the following: (1) *insight* in the specific task (determined by the specific norm) of the particular societal relationship; (2) a willingness to *obey the norm*, as well as (3) *growing* daily in insight and obedience. (These insights have been taken over from the valuable work by Schouls, 1972.)

An example of an office without authority would be that people are elected and serve in church offices without really knowing what the church is about (the insight is lacking), or they do not obey the basic norm for the church (faith) or they stagnate in their office in stead of growing to better insight in their task, nor do they grow in true obedience to it. This phenomenon of office without true authority is, however, not limited to churches, but occur in all societal relationships.

The next question is therefore how a person may come into legal authority (the right to hold an office) in a societal relationship. As we have stated, this may not happen merely on the grounds of years of service, seniority or popularity. The members of the relationship should first perceive a person's capabilities or gifts (insight in the task of the particular relationship) and then elect, appoint or induct him/her in the particular office. A grave responsibility rests not merely on the office bearers themselves, but also on the members of the societal relationship who put them in the offices. They must ascertain beforehand that the person to be elected knows God's will for the particular relationship and will be willing to obey it. Friendship, "politics" – church politics, too – and other considerations are the wrong criteria, which in the end lead to great trouble.

In the case of the church offices there are clear requirements stated in several instances in the Bible. One basic requirement for all office bearers is that they should be filled by the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit gives insight and obedience. (Cf. further Spykman & Hart, 1996:34-41 for valuable insights on the church offices in general as well as the different church offices.)

It transpires that it is important to distinguish between the bearers of authority (the offices) and those who are subject to authority in every societal relationship. A state consists of rulers and citizens. (1) When the government says "we are the state," it leads to tyranny. (2) When the citizens say "we are the state" anarchy may ensue. (3) When the government identifies itself with the citizens by arguing for instance "We just carry out the citizens' will" it could lead to the government seldom or never consulting the citizens. (4) When, the other way round, the citizens equate themselves to the government with an argument like: "By means of the election we have endowed them with authority, so that they carry out our will until the next election", there may not be a another election.

The church also consists of the bearers of authority (the church offices, who together form the church council) and those subject to authority (the church members). The four distinctions we made with reference to the state, are *mutatis mutandis* also applicable to the church. It would be a huge mistake not to distinguish clearly between the church council and the church members. All emphasis on the church office bearers (the church council) leads to neglect of the office of the members (church) or of the believers (Church). On the other hand there should not be an emphasis in the other direction either, by thinking that church members alone form the church. A true church consists of office bearers and members.

4.3.9 To exercise authority, power is needed

Because power so often leads to the abuse of power, many people – including Christians – are inclined to think that power *as such* is wrong. This, however, is not the case. In order to exercise authority (the right to an office) office bearers must have power (the capability).

Here, too, there should be interaction between the bearers of authority and those subject to it. On the one hand, those subjected to authority *acknowledge* the power of the authority, makes *room* for it and supply the necessary *means*, empower him/her therefore in his/her office. On the other hand, the office bearer *serves* the members by *empowering* them to fulfil their calling in the particular societal relationship.

If office bearers abuse their power the empowerment of the members cannot take place, and a lack of freedom occurs. The abuse of power can even lead to violence. A lack of freedom work destructively in any societal relationship and can only be allowed in case of emergency in one societal relationship (the state). Even then the violence should have a constructive, not a destructive purpose.

So the power given to a specific office should not be too *little*, for then the office cannot be carried out effectively. It should not be too *much* either, for then it may easily lead to abuse of power.

The salient question, however, is not *how much* power, but *what kind* of power. Just like authority, power in every societal relationship has its own peculiar character. For instance, power in the family, church and state will be different. Someone who wants to use political power in the church, will greatly harm the church, while church power is completely out of place in the political domain. (History, however, provides examples of both errors.)

When the question is put *what kind* of power, it will also be clear that power is always *limited*, since every societal relationship has only a limited task or domain of work. No human power may therefore be unlimited or totalitarian. God alone has unlimited, absolute power. When persons or human relationships – including the church – claim such power for themselves, it goes against God's will, and amounts to idolatry – with all the disastrous results attached to it.

4.3.10 In decision-making in a societal relationship all members of the relationship are involved and their opinions respected

Authoritarian decisions by authorities are wrong. Where possible, for instance in a family, the church or an association, all members have to be involved and their contributions taken seriously. (In the state it will have to be done in other ways because of its great size.) In the case of a church it may be done by way of a congregational meeting.

Even small decisions taken by the majority are not ideal. An attempt should rather be made to reach consensus. Thus the task of the office bearers is not to try and see that a certain group wins the vote, but to help everybody together to take a decision which would serve the best interests and calling of the particular societal relationship.

Since there can be different offices within the same societal relationship, decisions can also be taken by the different sections of a societal relationship. So for instance, the council of a school or university has a supervisory office, while the teachers or lecturers have a teaching office. Neither are the learners or students without an office. They can all take decisions according to their own competence. In some cases these three groups (learners, teachers and the school board in the case of the school, or students, lecturers and the university council in the case of a university) may meet to take joint decisions on matters which affect the institution as a whole.

Although the office of the believer (Church with a capital C) is acknowledged in theory, in practice in church life it often hardly functions or not at all. This "general" office – this name contributes to its not being regarded as serious – will have to begin functioning much more effectively. The "special" offices (of ministers, elders and deacons) – this terminology, too, is inappropriate – are inclined to have a poor opinion of the office of the believers with detrimental consequences. Often these so-called special offices are napping. In that case the (church) members who take their office as believers (the Church) seriously can also help to rouse the "special" offices from their slumber.

4.3.11 Office bearers are accountable to members of the specific relationship and to God for the way they exercise their office, authority and power

Finally we have to add to the three core concepts (*office, authority and power*) a fourth one, namely *accountability* – something which is often neglected.

In the first instance, the office bearers are accountable to those (the members of the societal relationship) who elected and appointed or confirmed them in the office. They may not, once they are elected, proceed without consulting or giving an account to their subordinates. Such communication is not only extremely important in the case of a small relationship like the family, but all the more so in the case of more comprehensive (larger) contexts like the church or state. It guarantees transparency and enables citizens (in the case of the state) or church members (in the case of the church) to keep a check on the work of the office bearers. For citizens and church members also have their own peculiar responsibility (except where a hierarchical view of authority is held).

In the second instance, the responsibility of office bearers is even greater when one keeps in mind that they have to give account not only to people, but also to God Himself of how they carry out his will regarding a specific societal relationship. To God they should be able to say in all honesty that they strove for *justice* in the state, that they truly *cared for* their family, were honest *stewards* in business or promoted *brotherly/sisterly love* in the church.

Responsibility means to answer to God's will and his Word. Do the office bearers answer with insight, wisdom and in obedience? Do they also encourage the members of the societal relationship to answer in the right way and thereby fulfil their God-given calling in a specific domain?

Of course it is not only the office bearers who have to answer to God. The members, too have to answer to God for the way they fulfil their calling. Their responsibility includes that, apart from electing competent office bearers (cf. above) they should rebuke or admonish the office bearers if they (the office

bearers) neglect their office or exercise their authority and power in the wrong manner or abuse it.

Although we should make a distinction between office bearers and subordinates in the same relationship, they may never be separated. Any societal relationship can function well and fulfil its calling only when office bearers and subordinates fully know and meet their own responsibility towards one another (regarding the calling of the societal relationship) and towards God.

Van der Walt (2006a:151) summarises the previous exposition about office, authority, power and responsibility in one diagram.

4.4. The unique character of the church

Theologians sometimes remark that the unique character of the church is denied when it is regarded and analysed as a societal relationship the way we have done in the preceding pages. They allege that the church is a mystery which transcends human understanding. There is nothing wrong with such a remark as long as we keep in mind that *nothing* in reality is fully understandable and analysable. Marriage, too, can be called a mystery. Today scientists openly admit that even physical things cannot be fathomed.

The problem is that behind such an opinion often lurks an unbiblical doctrine of two domains (as we have pointed out under 4.2 above). This doctrine turns the church into something "supernatural" and implies that God can only be really served in the domain of the church. However, the uniqueness of the church is not vested in her so-called supernatural character. Neither is it the case that a structural analysis of the church according to a Reformational societal philosophy (as we have done above) in any way holds a threat to the special character of the church.

4.4.1 Common features

In the light of what we have said before one would have to admit that there are many things which are common to the different societal relationships, things in which they are *alike*. For instance, it cannot be said that the church is unique

because it was established by God. He also instituted other societal relationships, like marriage, the family and the state. Neither can it be said that the church is unique since Christ is its Head. For He is also the King of the world. As we have shown his will for marriage, family, business, state et cetera has to be obeyed. In each one of these his central commandment of love has to be practised in a unique manner. Christ did give his life for the church, but He also did it to deliver the whole creation – including all the other societal relationships.

4.4.2 Unique characteristics

According to a Reformational social philosophy, however, every societal relationship is unique, of its own peculiar kind as shown above. Thus a Reformational social philosophy does not deny the church's special nature or character. The opposite is true: it acknowledges it fully and clearly points it out.

Popma (1961) for one was one of the Reformational philosophers who could never emphasise enough that the church is something unique. One can never think of the church without Christ, or Christ without his church. The miracle of the church is the miracle of Christ Himself of whom we confess – but can never understand – that He is truly God and truly man (Popma, 1961:66). Even the simplest description of the church (Christ the Head and we the body) is something that cannot be fathomed. For if one were to say Christ is her Head, one can never fully understand what it means. Human confession – and still less a science (theology) – can never comprehend the greatness of Christ.

In summary the church's unique character transpires according to the above analysis from the following:

- It is an institution of God. It is not a free association or a religious club.
- It has a unique obligation and role in the full development of true humanity and human well-being.
- It has its own peculiar qualifying aspect (faith) which does not apply to any other societal relationship.

- The other aspects to which the church has a part (e.g. the ethical, judicial, aesthetic, economic, etc.) each take on its own peculiar "colour" in the case of the church. We could put it differently and say the way the church practises love, maintains justice and manages its finances, should differ from the way other societal relationships do it.
- Only in the church should God's central commandment of love be expressed in brotherly/sisterly love.
- The church has its own, unique kind of authority (the authority of faith) and exercises it in a manner that differs from all other societal relationships. Although it is not divine authority, but fallible and limited human authority, it should meet God's will for the church.
- The church consists of its own peculiar bearers of authority (the church offices) and those subject to this authority (members).
- Unique gifts, insight and obedience are expected from the office bearers to qualify and be elected as office bearers in the church.
- The power that ecclesiastical office bearers wield is a unique power of faith.
- Since the church differs from the other societal relationships on all the previous points – and many more – the accountability of the office bearers to the members and finally to God, is something special or unique.

Thus, contrary to what Christians and theologians may say (namely that a Reformational social philosophy denies the unique character of the church or does not fully acknowledge it because it is regarded as a societal relationship), a structural analysis according to this pluralistic social philosophy is actually able to bring out sharply the uniqueness of the church.

This unique, peculiar character of the church furthermore transpires from the following:

4.4.3 Confessional pluralism

Apart from *structural* pluralism (described in the preceding pages) the Reformational social philosophy also recognises *confessional* pluralism (cf. McCarthy et al., 1982). By this is meant that no societal context can be religiously neutral. It can be explained as follows: (1) Every human being serves either the true God or an idol; (2) a person resembles the God/idol that he/she serves, bears the likeness of his/her God/idol; (3) he creates different societal relationships like marriage, family, church state, etc. according to his own likeness (which reflects his image of God/a god). His life in these various societal relationships (3) therefore is a concrete expression of who he himself is (2) and is in the final instance a confession – albeit unconsciously – of his faith in God (1).

Confessional pluralism is concerned with recognising this fact and thereby recognising the right of different religions to express their convictions in the different societal relationships. An example of this is that Christians, Jews, Muslims and Hindus should have the right to establish their own faith-oriented schools. Likewise these religions should have the right to their own cultic or religious communities, e.g. a church in the case of Christians, a synagogue for the Jews, a mosque for the Muslims and a temple for the Hindus.

4.4.4 The church can only be a Christian church

There is another aspect in which the church is unique when compared to other societal relationships. A non-Christian (e.g. Jewish, Muslim or secular) marriage, family or state retains its character as marriage, family and state in spite of the fact that it is not inspired by the Christian faith. But a non-Christian church is a contradiction in itself. Without the tie with Christ and without Christians as members the church cannot exist. The church can only be a Christian church. Other religions or religious communities therefore do have a right of existence, but may not be called “churches”.

4.5. The role of the church and religion in society

After having spoken about the first aspect of the crisis in the church (its own identity) in the preceding structural analysis, we now have to deal with the second aspect of its crisis (its role in society). Consecutively we look at the following: (1) wrong views on the relation between church/religion and society; (2) why it is difficult to determine the exact influence the church/religion has in society; (3) the potential positive and negative influence of the church/religion; (4) the critical task of the church, and (5) the importance of Christian organisations.

4.5.1 Erroneous views of the relation church-society

For convenience sake we do not make a difference here between the influence of the church and of religion. Erroneous views on the influence of religion on society are found among both Christians and non-Christians.

As far as Christians are concerned, Zylstra & Vander Stelt (1996:42 et seq.) warn against the following erroneous views: (1) that the church tries to *isolate* itself from society; (2) that it simply *accommodates* to society; (3) that it, as it were, *goes under* in society by taking on itself all kinds of (economic, political and social) responsibilities which do not belong to its domain (cf. in this respect also Dekker, 2006); (4) that the church attempts to *dominate* society.

Among people of non-Christian convictions we often get the following unacceptable viewpoints (cf. Van der Walt, 2005d:2-3): (1) religion cannot influence broader society. It can only have a *limited* influence on individuals; (2) religion can have only a *negative* influence; (3) as a result of increasing secularism soon it will *no longer have any* influence.

4.5.2 The influence of religion is hard to determine

The fact that it is not easy to determine exactly the influence of the church/religion on society can be seen from the following: (1) different factors normally play a role in changes in society. Religion is often influenced by other factors, but the other way round religious convictions can structure these other factors (political, economic, social, etc.). So it is an intricate matter isolating the

religious from the interaction of factors and determining its influence – especially since religion is fundamental and colours the other factors. (2) The influence of the different factors are not consistent either. In a more religiously oriented society the influence of the religious factors may be stronger than in a modern, secular, so-called religious-free society. Therefore circumstances and context also play a role. (3) The import of religious factors and the extent to which they influence the process of change in society can hardly be measured, especially not according to strictly scientific standards.

4.5.3 Positive and negative influence of religion

Usually the perception is held by the followers of a certain religion that religion can only have a positive influence on society. The opponents of religion (the followers of a secular religion) say exactly the opposite: religion has an interfering, detrimental, inhibiting influence on society.

According to Van Ufford and Schoffeleers (1988:10) the situation is in reality much more complex: "Put in the simplest possible terms, religion can function as an ideology in support of the status quo; it can function as a critic of the status quo and it can be both at the same time, depending on the aspects in focus."

Verbeek (1991 and 2005:121-130), too, emphasises that religion can inhibit or promote change; religion can be opium or a source of rebellion. So it is wrong to say that religion plays only a positive role when it promotes change.

Positive influence

Verbeek (1991:18) mentions the following positive roles of religion in society: (1) It contributes – especially during times of fast change – to the stability of a society, because order in society is anchored in the divine will. (2) During rapid change religion offers security and provides identity in, for example, a worldview. (3) It motivates, inspires and disciplines people to reach a common goal. (4) Because of faith in the "supernatural", religions can also fulfil its prophetic function to rouse a society. I would like to add something important. (4) This is

that religion – all religions – also should play an important role by offering their followers norms or guidelines for life.

Negative influence

Verbeek (1991:18,19) also mentions the following negative influences of religion on society: (1) a simultaneous legitimising of the power of the privileged (since it allegedly is God's will) and the subordination of the poor (with a promise of a better life for them in the hereafter). (2) Justifying or sacralising of the existing norms and values – even when they are wrong – or legitimising an erroneous priority in the value system. (3) Smothering individual initiative by too much emphasis on discipline. (4) Creating a group mentality characterised by passivity and fatalism. (5) Neutralising criticism on and protest against wrong structures as a result of established interests. (6) Religious fanaticism could promote discord and disintegration in a religiously pluralistic society. (7) The Christian (and other religions) can be used towards the promotion of wrong ideologies, like (neo-) marxism or a kind of extreme political idealism.

These negative consequences could also be valid in the case of the Christian faith: "Christianity as an empirical religion is a historically determined cultural phenomenon, an expression of the Biblical message that is conditioned by various circumstances. As such the Christian faith is almost inevitably being narrowed and limited by historical, natural and practical constraints. As a result of this process, the church tends to attribute value to certain religious and social structures, that in fact are relative. This totalitarian tendency may severely compromise the authentic contents of the Biblical revelation" (Verbeek, 1991:91).

4.5.4 The obligation of churches: self-criticism and outward criticism

Naturally the problem of the influence of religion on society (in the light of the distinction between church, Church and kingdom made above) is not limited to the relation church-society. But if one should limit the problem to the church (in Africa the churches often are the only well-organised institutions) Verbeek stresses the following contributions which churches could make: (1) Spiritual guidance geared to actual situations, therefore not an unworldly spirituality. (2)

Educating or alerting people to problems in society. (3) Practical work on economic, political, social and cultural structures and not merely attention to individuals. (4) Undertaking actions which other (societal relationships) would have to do, but which they neglect. (5) Exemplary conduct to serve as an illustration of an alternative style in society. The church should set up signs of the coming kingdom of God. (6) Taking the lead by formulating and living clear norms or values.

Self-criticism

Verbeek further emphasises that criticism by the church on society (its prophetic task) should always go hand in hand with probing self-criticism – otherwise its criticism would have no credibility. Some of the matters churches should pay attention to are, inter alia: (1) They should not attempt to maintain a sterile distance from society (eschatological escapism). (2) The Christian faith as preached should have a bearing on the reality of everyday life. (3) The church should be conversant with the intricate problems of modern society and avoid simplistic solutions at all costs. (4) It should be a dynamic church with an attitude of rendering service to broader society. (5) It should not uncritically simply follow the latest spiritual trends.

Outward criticism

Regarding the outreach of the church (to broader society) we learn the following from Verbeek: (1) Critical support of, but not an alliance with, for instance, the political establishment. (2) The church should point out the relativity of the order in society in stead of canonising it. (3) The socio-economic-political processes and changes should be analysed together with the stake holders and scientists to get a clear view of the underlying values. (4) Expose structural evil and suppression, especially when it is also being justified by means of religious arguments. (5) Teach society to understand the value of non-conformism and protest. (6) Activate civil society and people on grass roots level to organise themselves, so that the gap between the macro-level (the state) and the micro-level (citizens) can be bridged. (7) Teach society to share in responsibilities.

Thus churches can fulfil a significant religious role in society. Particularly in Africa their importance should not be under-estimated, since churches on the continent are often the only functioning societal relationships which could reprimand the state and to whom governments may listen.

4.5.5 The important role of Christian organisations and institutions

Since the present writer does not limit the church to the institutional church (the “hub” of the wheel), but also stresses the Church as the body of Christ (the “spokes” of the wheel) and the kingdom (the “rim”) we finally have to mention a last very important way of influencing society. It is the urgent need for Christian organisations and institutions. Elsewhere (cf. Van der Walt, 2003b, republished in English as chapter 11 in this book) I have motivated their existence and distinguished between different types of Christian organisations. Since these organisations are *Christian* and not *church* organisations, they are an inherent part of civil society and therefore better able to have a good influence on the increasingly secular society.

4.6. In conclusion: to both maintain identity and be relevant

The value of a Reformational social philosophy’s view of the church is that – without denying in any way the uniqueness of the church – it does not elevate the church to a supra-worldly institution. It need not ask why the church, which does not *belong to* the world, can still be present *in* the world. Neither is the church something divine (except if we mean by “divine” that Christ is its Head). It is something which is given form, institutionalised by fallible people. Therefore it not only *may* be criticised, it *must* be. Since it is part of this sinful dispensation, it needs constant reformation – otherwise it will become deformed. From this chapter it has become clear that a Reformational social philosophy can make a unique contribution to such essential reformation of the church. In this way it can help the church at one and the same time to maintain its identity and to be relevant in secular society.

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Chapter 5

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

This chapter and the following two want to address the following six interrelated problems – of vital importance for Christians – in our contemporary societies: (1) We live in a world today of growing religious diversity and contact in the same country and city. Apart from the well-known world religions, this diversity includes different kinds of revived pre-Christian religions as well as brand new cults. Does the secular model offer a solution for handling the great diversity and mutual contact and even conflict between religions? (2) People often do bad things in the name of their religious convictions. How could this kind of intolerance – even violence – be explained? (3) The secular constitutions of most countries today guarantee religious freedom. Is this basic human right fully – also legally and structurally – realised? (4) If religions are legally equal, does it also imply that they are equal in nature, that every one of them can be regarded as true? (5) If Christians reject the principal equality of all religions, in what sense can Christianity be regarded as unique? (6) In the light of the danger of religious conflict, what should be the ground(s) for and the nature of religious tolerance?

5.1 Introduction: a wide-angled lens

In contrast to the trend of thought in our secular times that religion is something of lesser importance, these three chapters take as a first point of departure that religion is important. Berger (1999:14) is right when he says: "Those who neglect religion in their analysis of contemporary affairs, do so at great peril". Or in the words of Wentz (1987:57): "Religion is the one thing intelligent people should earnestly study, yet it is the most neglected of studies".

In the second place, the six problems just mentioned are often discussed separately. In stead of such a detail focus, this chapter and the two following it look at them through a wide-angled lens since the six issues are closely linked and cannot be understood well if treated separately. The aim is to give broad principal guidance from a Christian perspective on six very topical, mutually

cohesive issues with which every Christian is confronted at one time or another in our modern day multi-religious societies. An example is the clash between Muslims and Christians (see 5.4.3 below).

5.2 Religious diversity

First attention is given to the great diversity of religions and the fact that increasingly close contact between them does not always go peacefully. In the light of the failure of the secular solution for the problem, we subsequently reflect on how it may be handled better. Finally the question is discussed how the concept of "religion" can be defined, so that religions can be judged normatively.

5.2.1 Religion cannot be eradicated

During the previous century scientists who worked according to the secularisation hypothesis predicted that religiousness would gradually decrease and finally disappear completely. Have their words come true? The opposite is happening today: Today it is more fashionable to be "spiritual" than "secular".

Several writers point out that the 21st century is a particularly religious era. One of the authorities in this field says for example: "The world today is as furiously religious as it ever was, in some places more so than ever" (Berger, 1999:2). Elsewhere he says: "The world today is massively religious, is anything but the secularised world that had been predicted ... by so many analysts of modernity" (Berger, 1999:9).

Van der Walt (2003:379) says the same: : "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 gods, or everything is god: god in nature, in oneself, in one's fellowman, in other religions – everywhere!"

Berger's explanation of this phenomenon is simple and correct: Man is inherently a religious being who looks for sense and meaning which transcends his empirical existence. So every person needs greater assurance than the superficial secularist faith can offer. "The process of secularisation of the West ...

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!" (Van der Walt, 2003:380). With right Wentz (1987:14) says: "To be human is to be religious."

Furthermore it is important to grasp that secularism itself is also a religion with its own worldview. The secularisation of the West – together with ever more parts of the rest of the world – does not mean (as was thought initially) a *decrease* in religiousness. It rather means the *replacement* of other older religions by this new dominant world-wide religion of our times (cf. Van der Walt, 2004a, 2004b and 2004c).

5.2.2 Religion cannot be isolated

Since religion is something integral and encompassing, it can hardly be isolated from the rest of life. However, if we speak about religious diversity, it should be distinguished from other types of diversity as far as possible.

Mouw & Griffioen (1993:17) distinguish between the following three kinds: (1) religious (or "directional"), (2) structural (or "associational") and (3) cultural (or "contextual") diversity. Within these three more distinctions can be made (cf. e.g. Van der Merwe, 2003:64-68, who distinguishes seven types of multiculturalism). For the present, the distinction of Mouw and Griffioen will meet our need.

The important point to be stressed here is that these three types of diversity may be distinguished but cannot be separated, since they are intimately interwoven.

Structural diversity (the diversity of various societal relationships) is an expression of a diversity of religious convictions. Put the other way round: Religious convictions take form in various societal relationships or structural forms, like the family, marriage, churches, temples or mosques.

Diverse religions are also the core or driving force of diverse cultures. Or, to see it once more from the opposite angle: Religious convictions take on diverse

cultural forms. In short: Particular cultural groups combine the religious and structural dimensions into unique configurations.

Thus the religious element can never be severed from the structural and cultural; the structural cannot be isolated from the religious and the cultural; and the cultural cannot be properly seen in isolation from the religious and the structural. Wentz (1987: preface) rightly says: "... religious pursuit of ultimate order and meaning expresses itself socially, economically, and politically". Or the other way round: "Our political and economic needs will determine the manner in which we use our religion".

In the light of this the efforts of secularism to isolate the religious aspect as something personal or private from the rest of life (the so-called public sphere) is doomed to failure right from the start. Religious convictions are not merely personal – they have wide structural and cultural implications! (In section 5.3 below the importance of this insight will become clearer still.)

After these introductory remarks the focus now falls on:

5.2.3 The great diversity of religions

The following list is not meant to be exhaustive, but merely to give an impression of the great diversity of religions with which we deal in the 21st century (cf. Bavinck, 1985, Van der Walt, 2003:380 and Vos, 1986): (1) The so-called *primal* (formerly "*primitive*") *religions* which are still found right across the world (of which the Traditional African religion is an example); (2) the so-called *world religions* (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Confucianism, etc. cf. Alterino, 1957); (3) the *Christian faith* (in a great variety of forms and churches); (4) *adapted Eastern religions and cults* (like Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, etc.); (5) a variety of *New Age movements*; (6) all kinds of *new paganistic religions* which were formerly expelled or suppressed by the Christianising of Europe, but which are now reviving (under these fall e.g. the Celtic and Germanic heathen beliefs). (7) The next category is *implicit religions*. By this is meant that particular facets of reality (e.g. success or riches) or values (e.g. individuality) are absolutised. (They are called "implicit", because those who

practise them are either unaware of the fact that they are religious in nature or deny it.) Wentz (1987:15-19) mention several examples from everyday life (e.g. a fire fighter, artist and scientist) who do not belong to a particular religious group or institution, but who still think and act in a religious way, for "He transcends the biological character of his existence. He has ideas that give ultimate order and meaning to life" (Wentz, 1987:15).

(8) Van der Walt (2003:380) distinguishes an eighth type of religion, namely "*vague superstitions*" which point to religions which cannot be put into words clearly (e.g. people who believe in life after death, but have no clarity on how it will be).

(9) Another related type of religion is discussed by Biezeveld et al. (2006) which is called (in Dutch and Afrikaans) "ietsisme". Some people at least believe that "something" exists. (Cf. Acts 17:23 where Paul tells the Athenians: "What you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you".)

(10) Finally a last (tenth) kind of religion may not be forgotten: *secularism* (already mentioned above), which thinks and lives as if God and his law do not exist, or is irrelevant to life.

Wentz (1987:33) sums up the present situation concerning religion as follows: "... human religiousness is in a state of confusion and radical change. We therefore find it expressing itself in ways that are not traditionally religious. Our technological and consumer society functions as a religious establishment. Certain scientific and political movements function as religion. Marxism and other forms of communism are surrogate religions (We should add here: present-day neo-capitalism – BJvdW) ... they are religiousness at work in non-traditional ways, building new walls that house the substitutes for the great religious traditions of our history".

In general it can be stated that, when about twenty years ago religion were strongly socially-politically focussed (cf. for example the strong influence of neo-marxism in the case of liberation theologies), individual experience is stressed

today and consequently various kinds of mysticisms and "spirituality" are becoming popular.

Although it may sound strange to Christians, we have to speak of "religion" today in cases where there is no "god" concerned.

5.2.4 Closer contact between religions

Not only do religions of all kinds multiply, they also come into increasingly closer contact with one another.

Formerly the followers of various religions were more or less geographically separated from one another. For instance, a person born in India would most probably become a Hindu; in Egypt he would probably follow Islam; in Sri Lanka he would be a Buddhist and in Africa a follower of Traditional African Religion or (later) a Christian or a Muslim.

The present globalisation process (cf. Van der Walt, 2006:89-122) however, results in millions of Muslims living in the former Christian Europe. One survey (cf. Weisse, 1995:263) shows that in one European city, like Hamburg, there are followers of more than eighty different religions today. In South Africa the variety is probably not quite as big yet. The census of 2001 gives the following percentages for the most important traditional religions: Christians (78,30%), Traditional African Religion (1,75%), Muslims (1,46%), Hindus (1,23%), Jews (0,17%) and "no religion" (17,10%). For more particulars, compare Kauuova (1997a, 1997b) and Meiring (1999).

Weisse (1995:263) with right says that today people get to know religions about which they formerly only read in books. The former "foreign" religions have today become our "neighbour" religions.

In different fields of life (at work, at school, in relaxation and in politics) people of diverse religious convictions thus come into daily contact. As the intermingling and contact increases, the potential for conflict also increases. (Wentz, 1987, points out many instances of this all over the world and almost every issue of the

Reformed Ecumenical Council's *News Exchange* contains reports on religious intolerance and related violence.)

The important question is how this religious controversy, conflict and even violence can be lessened or maybe even eliminated completely. How should one – Christians included – view religious diversity and deal with it?

5.2.5 The secularist model is no good

One of the most important reasons for the origin of the present secular political dispensation in most countries was the bloody religious wars in Europe especially during the 16th and 17th century. Since after the Reformation there no longer was unity in religious convictions (Protestants opposed Catholics and vice versa and various trends within Protestantism fought with one another), there could no longer be structural unity or unity on the level of society (cf. 5.2.2 above). Consequently the secular, "religiously neutral" state was born, which relegated religion to the so-called private sphere, because it was regarded as intolerant and divisive and therefore dangerous to a sound civil life.

However, because it is impossible to sever one's religious convictions from the societal structures and culture in general (cf. again 5.2.2 above), the secularist division between private-public could not really solve the problem of religious diversity. No state or public sector can be fully secular in the sense that those who exercise authority in it have no belief of what is true or have no convictions on what is good and right. Every politician has to choose and judge at some time or other. Not only religious but also political leaders make universal pronouncements and vie for power accordingly. This is done according to norms derived from an – acknowledged or unacknowledged – worldview, based on religious presuppositions.

Looking at the issue from a principal viewpoint, the "public" domain may not be identified with the state. The so-called public sector is much broader. The state shares it with numerous other societal relationships (the church, mosque and temple included), which all play a role in defining the political domain and without which the state would as it were hang in the air. The secularist division of private-

public is very artificial and not founded on social reality. In stead of such a rigid, unnatural *separation*, the various societal relationships should rather be seen as a *continuum* in an unbroken cohesion of less or more "private" to less or more "public".

In essence the problem is that secularism not only does not *recognise* the variety of other religions, but that it also *replaces* them (in the public field). Marshall (1991:7) aptly formulates it: "The question of diversity is supposedly solved by eliminating ... the contending parties from the public realm. The eradication of public religious expression is offered as a solution to the genuine problem of diversity of religions. However, this approach does not deal openly with diversity. It merely *excludes* religious diversity and establishes secularism in its place ... The problems of religious pluralism is a very real problem and very difficult, but they are not to be solved by pretending that a secular society is genuinely pluralistic when secularism is in fact only one part of our plurality".

5.2.6 The correct solution to religious diversity

If the public sphere cannot be devoid of religion what, then, is the solution? How can we see to it that justice is done in our modern societies, which include so many religions, if no religion may have an influence in the public domain?

Some philosophers (e.g. Vroom, 1996) put their hope in interactive dialogue and the search for common values which can be valid for the public domain. Others see this as too idealistic. Would it not be more realistic to recognise openly the plurality of religious convictions?

The last-mentioned is the opinion of Mouw and Griffioen (1993:17,18). For them religious diversity can never have a normative character, since it would imply accepting religious diversity as something that is good in principle, while there can only be one true religion, namely obedience to the true God who revealed Himself to us in his Word. Thus *normative* religious diversity would boil down to religious relativism.

According to these two Christian philosophers religious unity (also in the “public” field) is an unrealistic expectation in this dispensation (between the coming of Christ and his second coming). We simply have to accept that we live in a world with a variety of clashing religions. Religious unity will only become a reality – the way it was before the fall of man – when the end of the world comes.

What, then, is their solution? For them (cf. Mouw & Griffioen, 1993:175,176) the only way out is to allow justice to be done to religious diversity, to respect and be tolerant towards other religions. However, tolerance for them does not mean – the way it is seen by the current secularists – to be indifferent and to accept anything as right or just. (In the last section of chapter 7 it will be more clearly spelt out what tolerance would entail for a Christian.)

5.2.7 A definition of religion

Since it is unsatisfactory to write about religion(s) without saying what is understood by this concept, finally something on this difficult question. In the first place “religion” is defined and secondly the important difference between religion and revelation is explained.

Faith and religion

On the one hand it is extremely difficult – perhaps impossible – to find a definition which would do justice to all faiths. On the other hand it does not satisfy to simply consider anything as “faith”. Does satanism for instance qualify as a faith? And what about the cults which some years ago committed mass suicides in the USA, Switzerland and Japan? No faith should be above criticism. Therefore we need benchmarks or criteria to determine what may qualify as a “faith” and what may not.

The problem with most of the definitions of faith is that they only stress the *structure* and not the (religious) *direction*. Wentz (1978:81-83) for example, writes the following: : "We are restless beings, because we transcend the world in which we exist. 'Our hearts are restless' said St. Augustine, 'until they find their rest in Thee' ... our restlessness is the result of our nature – we are more than we

seem to be". According to him the human being should be directed at something bigger than himself. "To be religious is to be involved in ideas and actions that transcend biological existence and tell an ultimate story of order and meaning" (Wentz, 1987:13). No-one should have any problem with Wentz's definition if only the *structure* of religion is important. Unless we also include the (religious) *direction*, however, we simply slip into religious relativism.

Thus far (and also in what follows) the words "faith" and "religion" were simply used as synonyms. But now it becomes clear that we should distinguish between the two. According to Reformational philosophy "religion" indicates the more encompassing service to God or an idol (the *direction*), while "faith" is the cultic expression (the *structure*) of a person's religious convictions, for instance in the church, temple, mosque or other "holy" place.

True religion according to the Scriptures is simply to serve and worship in love (the true) God in all areas of life. As a result of the fall of man however, there are many people whose hearts have been averted from God and who serve surrogate gods. What they do complies *structurally* with Wentz's definition, but the religious *direction* is wrong. Only when this, too, is involved in a description of religion, it is possible to evaluate faiths normatively. This will become clearer under the following point.

Religion and revelation

Religion is man's answer to God's Word (his three-fold revelation in creation, Scripture and in Christ). Although his Word and our answer cannot be completely separated from each other, they should be clearly distinguished. For the revelation of God is divine, infallible and consistent, while the religious life of humans is human, fallible and inconstant – it never really reflects what God expects in his service. (The same apply to non-Christian faiths which are based on holy books.) In what follows, we will repeatedly work with this vital distinction – it runs like a golden thread through our treatment of all six main problems mentioned at the beginning.

In this way the common mistaken view is rejected that the Christian faith – because it is founded on the Bible – can always be good only. The many heresies among Christians, injustice and even violence in the name of Christendom all through the past 2000 years clearly illustrate the fact that difficult, it will have to be admitted that no faith is perfect and thus above criticism. Note that the revelation of God (which is above human criticism) is not queried, only man's reaction to and interpretation of the divine revelation.

Religion – even the Christian religion – has not only good but also bad consequences. (Cf. e.g. Verbeek, 1991 mentioned in the previous chapter, who points out the positive as well as negative roles which religion can play in broader society.) The next section focuses on the last-mentioned: the bad things which happen in the name of religion.

5.3 Lack of religious freedom, religious intolerance and religious violence

First attention is briefly drawn to the factual situation and afterwards an endeavour is made to answer the question why people even use violence in the name of their faith.

5.3.1 Lack of religious freedom

A lack of freedom occurs in all religions. Where Islam has political power the tendency is to relegate people of other faiths (like Jews and Christians) to second-class citizens. Although Hinduism displays striking religious tolerance, intolerance may ensue when a Hindu goes over to another faith, since he/she violates religious unity. Buddhism, too, on the one hand displays willingness to listen to other religious convictions, but when Buddhism is coupled with nationalism, a breach with this faith is considered as treason.

As far as Christianity is concerned, it was believed up to the 16th century – and even later, compare the old formulation of Section 36 of the Belgic Confession – that the state has the responsibility to further Christianity and should even have the power of punishing those who are not Christians. As recently as 10 years ago

South African Christians were still convinced that it was permissible for the Christian faith to be furthered by political means.

It seems as if lack of religious freedom usually occurs when a clear *distinction* is not made between religion and politics (or church and state). Consequently the *link* between these two fields of life cannot be seen correctly either. The result is that a specific religion is elevated to state religion (or state church in the case of Christianity).

Fortunately it was gradually realised that one could not by means of compulsion, suppression or even violence change another person's convictions, conscience and faith. Besides it was understood that elevating a religion (e.g. Christianity) to the official religion of all citizens resulted in extensive superficiality and deformation. The temptation is simply too great in such a case either to use Christianity to sanction (even unjust) political actions or for Christians themselves to use the power of the state for their own benefit. The final consequence of a too close alliance between religion and politics and the resulting lack of religious freedom is intolerance and even violence – both from the side of the official religion and from those who cannot freely choose and practice their own religion.

5.3.2 Religious intolerance

Because religion is so important to every person – it encloses and determines one's whole life, is near to one's heart – it is understandable that followers of other religions who contradict your own deepest convictions are not easily tolerated, but are seen as a threat (cf. Ramachandra, 1999).

Wessels (2001:10) points out, for instance, that there is discrimination on different levels in numerous countries world-wide against Christians. In some countries (particularly Muslim countries) it is illegal to be a Christian. There it is dangerous to speak to someone about his/ one's own faith or even to have a Bible in one's possession. In other countries religious freedom is recognised nominally, but it is not practised. Although there is no law prohibiting anyone from being a Christian, Christians experience opposition when they want to build a church or witness publicly to their faith. In Indonesia – the country with the

greatest number of Muslims – the faith of citizens is even noted in their ID documents!

Lack of religious freedom and intolerance can have even greater consequences – religious violence.

5.3.3 Religious violence

When religious violence is the topic of discussion, reference is usually made to atrocities committed in the past by Christians, as in the crusades, the inquisition, religious wars, slavery and during colonialism when Christians often supported the exploiting European colonial regimes without criticism.

But even today lack of religious freedom and intolerance give rise to violence. First some facts – mostly well-known – to confirm this, and then the important question has to be answered as to why it happens.

The memory is still fresh of 11 September 2001 when Muslim terrorists made a particularly violent attack on Western secularism in the USA (cf. Barber, 2001). Muslims and Christians are in constant conflict elsewhere in the world (cf. Wessels, 2001 in general and Boer, 2003b specifically on the situation in Nigeria.)

Less well-known is the fact that Christians are persecuted in some way or other in about 70 countries world-wide (cf. Wessels, 2001 and for more detail the work by Marshall & Gilbert, 1997.)

What is more difficult to understand is the fact that people who call themselves Christians also act violently towards one another, as is still the case in Ireland. (Perhaps this struggle is not essentially religious in nature, but greatly a fight for socio-economic equality.)

With right New (2002) points out that “holy” wars do not only occur among Muslims, but – even if to a lesser extent - also among Jewish radicals and Christian fundamentalists.

5.3.4 Why people commit violence in the name of their religion

The problem that faces one in this regard is the following: On the one hand almost all religions preach love for one's neighbour. (Cf. Du Preez, 2002b:44 who quotes from the holy books of Judaism, Christendom, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, the Bahai faith and Sikhism.) On the other hand violence is committed in the name of the same religions.

Juergensmeyer (2002:243) draws the attention to this tendency in the following words: "Perhaps understandably ... in the wake of secularism, and after years of waiting in history's wings, religion has made its appearance as an ideology of social order in a dramatic fashion: violently".

We first look for the possible reasons for violence by and between two specific religions and then we look at violence in general in the name of a religion.

Violence between Muslims and Christians

Different writers point out different reasons for the world-wide conflict between these two religions. For Maggay (2002:5) one of the main reasons is – quite remarkably – the similarities between the two. She writes: "Both are exclusivist religions, having sprung from Judaic monotheism, or the belief that there is only one God, and he brooks no rivals. Both lay claim to total allegiance of the entire society, refusing to be contained in just one compartment of life as the secularists would have it. Both are fired by an evangelistic zeal, wishing to convert infidels and bring them within the fold of either the church or the umah".

Boer (2002, 2003a and 2003b) offers a further explanation of the second trait of the Muslim faith which Maggay mentions, namely its holistic attitude towards secularism's compartmentalisation of life into a public and private domain. Boer does not deny that political power motives are also involved, but the main reason for Muslims' aversion to the West is the secularism of the Western world. (Cf. also Juergensmeyer above.)

"In the Muslim world, secularism is regarded as a foreign imposition that was imported by colonialism and as a tool of colonialism to destroy the very

foundations of Muslim faith and culture. Unless faced squarely, it undermines Islam as it undermines Christianity. It reduces the entire worldview and way of life that Muslims are so proud of to a narrow religious affair restricted to the mosque and to the personal. For a time it succeeded in reducing the grand edifice of their comprehensive religion to a dualistically reduced social force for which there was no longer room in the public square". (Boer, 2002:24, 25).

But do not Christians think holistically too? According to Boer unfortunately they no longer do: "Christians' easy resort to secular thought is due to the influence of Western missions that have brought the gospel wrapped in the cloth of the traditional Western worldview. That worldview, it has been widely recognized by scholars of every stripe and colour, includes a dualism that separates religion and spirituality from so-called 'mundane' or 'secular' affairs. Though Evangelical mission bodies are beginning to reject this dualism, the damage has been done: it forms an unfortunate part of the ... Christian heritage with which they counter the Muslim challenge" (Boer, 2003a:26).

So on the one hand we have the Muslims, "angry at having been drugged by a secularism they consider the ultimate weapon of Satan," who at all costs want to re-instate their *sharia* (traditional laws); on the other hand we have the Christians who want to check the Muslim *jihad* (war) for power by means of a secular state and legislation. Secularism has become the flashpoint for both, one opposing it, the other promoting it" (Boer, 2003a:26. For detail cf. Boer, 2003b).

One can agree with Boers' analysis except for the fact that Muslims not only fight Christians with a dualistic worldview, but also holistically consistent, sincere Christians.

After this example about the reasons for violence between two specific religions, we should put the more general question whether religion *as such* is violent.

Why violence in the name of religion?

In answering this question the different religions have to be distinguished into the more traditional ones and the implicit religions (the seventh type mentioned under 5.2.3 above).

Traditional religions and violence

Wentz (1987) deals in detail with the question why religions are violent. He admits (p.42) that (any) religion – intentionally or unintentionally – can have both good and bad consequences. However, he turns the issue the other way round: People do not do bad things as a *result* of their religion, but religion exists *because* people do bad things (cf. p.42-50).

The reason why people are serious about their religion, is precisely because they realise the world is not what it should be: "... religions exist as a means of contending with the fact *that people do bad things*. All great world religions have come into being *because* people do bad things. The human condition is, one way or another, the doing of bad things" (Wentz, 1987:48). How complex, even ironical the situation is, becomes apparent from the following: "People do bad things in the name of their religion because they are prone to self-worship and desire. Yet it is religion that helps us to understand our plight" (Wentz, 1987:50).

Thus most religions search for what is good, and are not inherently bad – as secularism would have us believe.

Whether religion contributes to violence, usually depends on the political, social and economic circumstances – especially where these contribute to (a group of) people feeling frustrated or threatened. In such a case religion can either function as a sedative which helps them to accept their fate, or it can – as a result of the same frustrations – result in violence. In the last instance religion then serves as a means of justifying a struggle that has been declared holy. Usually the holy books of a religion are then interpreted in such a way as to sanction the "holy war".

Implicit religions and violence

Under 5.2.3 above we explained that religion could be directed at the true God or at a surrogate idol – something in creation. Something from the earthly reality is taken out of context and absolutised (cf. the seventh category under 5.2.3 above). Wentz (1987:65-70) devotes a whole chapter to this “demon of the absolute”. He also offers valid criticism on it since absolutising things may result in violence.

He says the following, for instance: “... people like absolutes. They fight for absolutes. It is inconvenient for them to believe that the only real absolute is that we are not to be trusted with absolutes ... The only absolute is that there are no absolutes ... To say that there is no god but God is to understand that there are no absolutes” (Wentz, 1987:68, 69, 71).

From a Reformational philosophical perspective Heyns (2003) recently worked out the same idea in more detail. An important cause of evil, cruelty and violence according to him, is a totalitarian worldview which is the result of the following: (1) people do not recognise the *diversity* in creation, but reduce it to one facet thereof; (2) subsequently they cannot admit that the different other facets of reality are of *equal value*, so they try to suppress or eliminate them (reductionism); (3) they do not notice the close *interdependence* of all aspects and things in creation.

In the Reformational philosophy this phenomenon is usually called an “-ism”. *Rationalism* is an absolutisation of the mind (reason), *communism* of the community, *individualism* of the individual, *economism* of the economical aspect and *technicism* of the technical facet of life. Since an -ism entails the absolutisation of something creational, it has the character of an ideology – something that, if necessary, must be realised by violence.

Can the formal recognition (as in most secular constitutions) of religious freedom solve this problem of lack of religious freedom, religious intolerance and religious violence? To answer this question, it is important to investigate in the next

chapter what exactly the concept of "religious freedom" entails and whether as a human right it can also be realised structurally in practice.

(The bibliography for this chapter will follow at the end of the series of three chapters.)

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Chapter 6:

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND RELIGIOUS EQUIVALENCE

This chapter builds on the previous one (on religious diversity and religious intolerance). It deals first of all with the question whether a (secular) constitution can guarantee true religious freedom. Secondly we look at the question whether treating all religions equally *before the law* also implies that they are *in principle* equal or equally true.

6.1 Religious freedom

Nowadays the constitutions of most countries guarantee religious freedom as a basic human right. The pivotal question to be answered here is whether a secular constitution (like the South African Constitution) can truly guarantee religious freedom.

6.1.1 Three solutions

In the previous chapter it was pointed out that a lack of religious freedom is usually a result of the fact that no clear distinction is made between religion (e.g. church) and politics (the state) and that consequently their interrelatedness cannot be seen correctly either. A religious state or political religion thus does not solve the problem of the lack of religious freedom. Even at the time of the 16th century Reformation Christians in Europe were still confused about the tasks of the church and the state.

Skillen explains: "The biblical view of justice for every earthly creature will mean ... that Christians will work politically for the achievement of governmental policies that protect, encourage, and open up life for every person and community of people, whatever their religious confession or view of life. Justice in political life cannot be based on the biblical teaching about church discipline since ... states are not churches. The state is not a community of Christian faith; it is a community of public legal care for all people which must not favour or persecute any particular group or society" (Skillen, 1995:350, 351).

In opposition to the extreme of *mixing* the two domains of politics and religion, there is the other extreme of radical *separation*. It is the solution of a secular instead of a religious state. We have already referred to this earlier. It was then also shown that the encompassing, all-inclusive character of religion makes it impossible to separate it from the political sphere. This "solution" does not work, since the secularist view is in itself of a religious nature.

The true solution then is most probably not to *mix* religion and politics, neither to try and *separate* them, but to *distinguish* between them.

The state and the church (add synagogue, mosque, temple, etc.) are two different societal relationships with different divine assignments (cf. Skillen above). The church/synagogue are communities of *faith* which have to promote a specific *faith*. The state is a (political) *legal* community which has to take care that *justice* is done in an impartial way for *all* citizens. One of the many ways in which the state fulfils its god-given task is treating all religions in a religiously plural community equally and protecting them. The government may not violate any religion or give preferential treatment to one religion. Thus religious freedom is a political and juridical matter. (A standard work on religious freedom as a human right is the one by Witte and Van der Vyver, 1996.)

The main question is, however, how this ideal can be realised. In what follows, it is shown from a Christian perspective that the South African Constitution, even though it guarantees religious freedom, is in essence a secular constitution and its interpretation and application fails to realise fully religious freedom.

6.1.2 The purpose of a constitution

A constitution, especially in the case of a state (the only societal relationship that can enforce its authority), is important. The purpose of the constitution of a country is to circumscribe the relationship between the government and the citizens: on the one hand the right, duty, authority and power of the government and on the other hand the rights of the subjects.

The idea that the state is an overarching societal relationship which includes all other relationships, is unacceptable, since it would amount to totalitarianism. Totalitarianism could also lead to the faulty view that the state is the *owner* of all possible rights and that the state also has the authority to *create* rights and *grant* them to individuals and other human relationships.

However, when such a totalitarian view is replaced by a pluralistic view of society, the state can only *formulate, recognise, protect and promote the inherent* rights of individuals and societal relationships. Then the state fills the role of a "balancing wheel" in society: it does not *create* rights but *balances* them. Since in real life there can be clashes between individuals and between different societal structures, the government must in its maintenance of public justice weigh and balance their different claims. This also applies to the various religions.

6.1.3 Religious freedom in the South African constitution

The following are the most important parts on religious freedom in the (new) South African constitution (1996):

Section 15(1) of Chapter 2 (The Bill of Human Rights) reads as follows: "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion".

This should be read in conjunction with Section 31 on "Cultural, religious and linguistic communities", which reads as follows:

(1) "Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community

(a) to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language; and
(b) to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.

(2) The rights in subsection (1) may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights".

Section 31 (1 and 2) is important, since it is not only the rights of individuals (section 15(1)) that matter but also those of religious groups.

6.1.4 The crux of the matter is in the interpretation

On paper the stipulations of the Constitution look fine. But the problem is that the various concepts and the sections themselves will have to be *interpreted* and *applied*. Since the Constitution only states the essential matters, words like “conscience”, “religion”, “thought”, “belief” and “opinion” will have to be explained and circumscribed. The Constitutional Court (and possibly other courts as well) will not be able to evade interpretation and definition when pronouncing judgement in a court case. Besides, it will have to be decided whether someone’s or some group’s claim to do something in the name of religious freedom (15.1) may not be an infringement on other parts of the constitution (cf. 31.2). However “neutral” our constitution may be towards religion, the people (lawyers) who have to apply it, are human beings and thus will not be able to make a neutral exegesis of it.

6.1.5 The American example a warning

Van der Vyver (1999:670) describes the South African Constitution as religiously *neutral* compared to the *secular* constitution of the USA. Also, Fourie (2003) is convinced that the South African Constitution is simply *neutral* towards religion and not *hostile* towards religion like the American Constitution. In simple language, “secular” or “hostile towards religion” means that the American courts do not primarily plead for freedom *to* (positive) practice any religion, but the freedom *from* (negative) any religion for the public domain.

Fourie (2003:95-96) first discusses the famous (“notorious” in the eyes of many Christians) “First Amendment” of the American Constitution and then (p.97-99) deals with the decision by American courts to prohibit the reading of the Bible and the Lord’s Prayer in schools. His conclusion is: “Judging from the hermeneutic history that developed around the First Amendment / Establishment Clause, the interpretation of this clause deviated more and more from its original aim of preserving and promoting religious pluralism of (minority) groups into advancing a different aim, namely that of individualistic secularism” (Fourie, 2003:98). He also quotes another writer (Gedicks) who says: “Why, can

Americans ask, is the Courts' sensitivity to coercion so high with respect to religious practices that threaten secular programs, and so low with respect to secular practices that threaten belief and practice?" (Fourie, 2003:99).

According to Fourie himself the problem with the American legal system is that it interprets religious freedom in such a way that it *limits* the role of religions in the public field, while it *promotes* the secular agenda. "Thus: not freedom *of* religion, but freedom *from* religion" (p.99).

The main question is whether the South African Constitution will not be interpreted in the same way. Although Fourie does not expect this – he does warn against it, however – he points out that a professor in law at the University of Cape Town (Denise Meyerson) has already tried to interpret the South African Constitution in a secular, individualistic way. Fourie seems to hope that section 31 which also mentions religious communities, will prevent such an individualistic interpretation. This section is undoubtedly important, but it remains to be seen if it will survive the onslaught of secularism. Although Fourie is not keen to admit that the South African is a secular constitution (according to him it is merely religiously neutral), it simply is a fact. It is not only its interpretation which could be secular. To explain this, we will have to make a more thorough investigation than merely looking at the formulation and interpretation of the Constitution.

6.1.6 A secular constitution

To determine whether a constitution is secular or not, the deepest foundations on which it is built have to be examined. Already amongst the ancient Greeks certain philosophers (inter alia Protagoras of Abdera) believed that man is a law into himself. Since the Renaissance, and especially since the rationalism of the 17th century, the Christian idea of God as the giver of law has been rejected and replaced by the idea of human autonomy (self-legislation). Since the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) the idea that man is his own legislator has determined all modern constitutions. The basis for human rights can be designated in different ways (e.g. will, conscience or the mind of man),

but in the end it is man himself. God and his commandments which apply to all aspects of life, no longer form the basis.

Accordingly the South African Constitution's bill of human rights is built on the values of human "dignity", "equality" and "freedom". Anybody knows that these three loaded concepts can have diverse meanings for different people. In order not to slip into relativism, one would have to ask: What is the basis of these values, what are their foundations? If they are regarded as "inalienable human qualities" who and what is the human being? What is the origin of these human qualities? Who will give a (correct) exposition of them? How can they be guaranteed? By a roundabout way we finally get back to the point that the human being is his own boss, his own legislator. And this (autonomy) is an essential trait of secularism.

6.1.7 A Biblical perspective

What then is the alternative to a secular constitution? It would not be a constitution rejecting religious freedom, but one in which human rights are founded on a different – and much firmer – basis (for detail, cf. Van der Walt, 1999).

A Christian may not (like a secularist) dissociate his rights and duties (his relationship with his neighbour) from his relationship with God. The central commandment of love (cf. Matt. 22:37-39) is a unity: love for God and for the neighbour are inseparable. They are so inseparable that one could say that in one's love for one's neighbour one also loves God, since it means obeying his commandment.

The unity may be expressed as follows: "On the one hand there are: (1) my responsibility towards others, (2) their responsibilities towards me, (3) both of which are subordinate to our joint responsibility towards God. On the other hand there are: (1) my claim/right towards my neighbour, (2) his/her claim on me (3) both of which are subordinate to God's all-encompassing claim on both of us" (Van der Walt, 2003: 330, 331).

Man's own will, insight, mind, conscience – or whatever aspect of man – offer only shifting sand as a foundation. God's will (which springs from his love) is in my opinion the only firm base or foundation for human rights, including the right to religious freedom. Although the Bible does not use the concept "human rights" the commandments of God presuppose certain human rights (cf. Van der Walt, 2003:331) – including the right to religious freedom.

Apart from giving us the only true foundation for human rights, the Bible points out that it expects *more* from us than respecting human rights in order to do real justice (the main aim of the state). Van der Walt (1999:96) gives examples of how human rights can be complied with according to the letter of the law without promoting justice. He even mentions cases where people have to step down from their rights in order for true justice to be done. Thus human rights make a (good) *beginning*, but are not *sufficient* for a just society.

6.1.8 Examples of discrimination in spite of religious freedom

After this essential detour (of 6.1.6 and 6.1.7) to prove that South Africa – even though it is not (yet) hostile towards religion as in the USA – does have a secular constitution, we name two examples to prove that religious freedom on paper (a constitution) does not mean that it is a full reality. The two examples given here deal with two aspects of education in schools.

State discrimination against religiously oriented schools

The first is the fact that the present South African government discriminate against religiously oriented schools, for example against Christian schools (so-called private schools), for they get only about 30% of state subsidy, while state schools (so-called public schools) are almost fully financed (up to 98%) Don't Christians have the right as a *community* (cf. section 31 of the constitution quoted above) to give structural form to their religious convictions? (Cf. confessional pluralism under 4.4.3.) Are they not recognised as citizens who have the right to educate their children according to their own discretion? Don't they, too, pay taxes? Is this not a clear example of religious discrimination in the

name of a secular (so-called neutral) religion which is being forced onto education?

Religion and religious instruction in schools

The second case (in 2002 and 2003) gave rise to quite long-drawn and fiery debates (cf. Du Preez, 2002a, 2002b). It is the question of religion in (state) schools which was finally solved in the following way: (1) Cultic religious ceremonies (reading from the Bible or other holy books, prayer and singing) is still admissible at school devotions, but equal turns to lead it have to be given to all religious leaders (ministers, rabbis, imams). (2) Teaching their own particular religion has been deleted from the syllabus and may only take place outside official school time. (3) In the formal curriculum comparative religious studies are now offered, in which all the various religions are dealt with in a "neutral" way.

One short remark only on (3), namely religious studies. Detailed criticism will follow under 6.2.4 and 6.2.5 below.

Here, too, it is clear that a secular state is not a neutral state. In this case it has abused its *juridical* power to pass a *religious* judgement – in other words in the so-called private domain. The judgement entails that all religions are regarded as equally true – or false? The different religious communities only – who will definitely not agree that their own religion is equally true/false as all the other – have the right to make such a decision.

With this kind of religious studies and decisions religions are not only *treated* equally (no-one would have a problem with that) but they are *made* equal. Juridical religious *freedom* and religious *equality* is now understood as something completely different, namely principial religious *equivalence*. For any believer (not only for Christians) this is unacceptable and a clear example of religious intolerance under the pretence of secular "tolerance".

6.1.9 The Christian answer

If Christians in South Africa believe that they have a fundamental duty – and right – to serve God not only in their homes and churches, but in all domains of life, what then should their strategy be?

It may be possible to link up with section 31 (1) (b) of the Constitution since the “associations and organs” mentioned there clearly point to the rights of groups, including religious groups.

As explained in previous chapters (cf. 4.4.3 and 5.2.2) not only structural diversity should be recognised (the existence of a great number of independent societal relationships). A second important kind of diversity which should be recognised, is religious or confessional plurality. (In this regard cf. the very clear exposition and its application to education by McCarthy *et al.*, 1981.)

The principle of confessional plurality amounts to this: that every human being or group of people should have the right to express his/their religious convictions in different societal contexts (not only in the so-called religious ones like the church). (Once more compare the previous chapter, 5.2.2 where the close link between the religious and the structural was explained.) For example, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etc. should have the right to have their own confessionally oriented schools, colleges, trade unions, political parties, and so forth.

Freedom of religion thus means much more than freedom *from* suppression (negative). It should include freedom *to* (positive) living one's own convictions in public. Further such confessionally or religiously oriented institutions and organisations (e.g. Christian trade unions, teachers' associations, political parties, etc.) should also share in all normal rights. If, for instance, the state subsidises or fully supports education, confessional schools should also have a right to it.

In agreement with its norm (namely public justice) the task of the state is limited to determining whether a school is a school, in other words whether it complies

with the basic structural prerequisites for a school, so that, as demanded by public justice, it will be able to provide good education. The state may not transcend its limits and (according to a secularist or any other worldview) lay down confessional prerequisites for a school, or penalise a school which do not meet its (secular) demands. What is applicable to the school, should also be applicable to other societal relationships.

6.1.10 Religion does not depend on a human right

Under 6.1.2 above it was already argued that the state, strictly spoken, cannot create and grant rights, but can only formulate, recognise, protect and promote (existing, inherent) rights. This is particularly valid for religious rights. The right and duty of people to serve God, in the last instance, is not dependent on the state or a bill of human rights. Even in countries where religious freedom is not recognised or applied in practice, believers still lay a “claim” to religious freedom simply by hanging onto their religion. The existence of a right does therefore not necessarily mean that it is contained in a bill! Christians will have to accept that Christ predicted for his followers intolerance and even persecution by others (cf. e.g. John 15:20; 16:33 and 2 Tim. 3:12). It may happen in spite of the most modern constitution. A true Christian who wants to be loyal to his King, should however, consider it a great honour to be insulted, persecuted and robbed of a fundamental right.

6.2 Religious equivalence

The question whether all religions are simply the same is, in the first instance, an existential-practical question. Many Christians – however strong their faith may be – sometimes have doubts about the truth of their faith, the Bible or even the existence or goodness of God. Closer contact with other religions can increase this doubt or, the opposite, strengthen one’s own faith. The fact that the constitutions of most countries today guarantee religious freedom, in other words that all religions must be regarded as *juridically* equal, can also give rise to the question whether they are equal in *principle*.

The question whether all religions are equal in principle, in the second instance, is also a difficult theoretical issue having many facets. In what follows, only the following will be dealt with: (1) the different viewpoints on this issue; (2) the origin of the idea that all religions are supposedly equal; (3) by way of illustration a fable which puts the viewpoint that all religions are equally true into words very well; (4) relativism in religious studies; (5) a South African example of religious studies; (6) the consequences of religious relativism for evangelisation; (7) the necessity of dialogue between religions; (8) immanent criticism on the view that all religions are equivalent, and (9) transcendent (principal) criticism on the idea.

6.2.1 Different viewpoints

Basically there are five possible answers to the question whether all religions are equivalent (cf. De Vos, 1962:24 *et seq.*): (1) The most common viewpoint (of most religions) is that their own religion is the only true religion. So *only one* of all the religions is true. (2) Among those who do not agree, the rationalists (from about 1600-1900 A.D.) believe that *none* of the religions is true, since they are simply founded on the human illusion that there is/are a god/gods or a supernatural world. (3) The more recent viewpoint of irrationalist philosophers (since the previous century) is that all religions are *equally true* (for the agnostics among them: *equally false*). (4) Still others believe that one religion is *more true* than the others. (5) With a last group the question on the truth of religions is left *unanswered*.

The first statement that only one religion is true, will be dealt with in the next chapter where the uniqueness of religion will be discussed. (To deal with the second statement that all religion is simply human projection, justifies a separate investigation.) Since the third viewpoint is the most commonly held today, we will focus on it.

Proponents of this viewpoint ask: Are all religions not simply different rivers which run into the same sea; different roads to the same mountain peak; different vehicles on their way to the same destination (cf. Verkuyl, 1984:21) or – the latest image – different kinds of painkillers for the same headache?

One's immediate reaction to such a view is that it is untenable. Why would people change their religious allegiance (be "converted") if religions were all the same? Why would different religions fight one another, even violently, if there are no differences between them? If all religions are equivalent, there can also be no criterion for choosing between true/false, good/better religions!

Since the equivalence of religions today is a commonly held belief with far-reaching consequences, it has to be discussed. This view, for instance, determines the way religion is studied today – in schools, too. It also has far-reaching consequences for evangelisation and dialogue between religions. Before looking at the consequences, we first have to answer where this viewpoint originated.

6.2.2 Historicism, the father of religious relativism

According to Klapwijk (1970a and 1970b) modern day relativism which determine our thoughts as well as our daily life practice, is rooted in historicism which has been influencing the Western world since the Renaissance. As the word "historicism" indicates, it is an –ism, it exaggerates or absolutises according to Dooyeweerd one aspect of reality (the historical) and tries to reduce the many other aspects of reality to this one and also uses it to explain other aspects. (Cf. in this regard also Strauss, 2005.)

What historicism entails

Klapwijk describes this trend as follows: "Since it places the human being and his culture on the axis and yardstick of time, in the all-encompassing perspective of history, it *ipso facto* reduces every viewpoint, every norm and conviction, however firmly believed, however ardently confessed, to a temporary phenomenon, an event of transient nature. It is held that everything is historically determined, seen as historically relative, in other words: *relativised*" (Klapwijk, 1970a:3 – translated from the Dutch.)

He points out further that historicism (since the Renaissance up to today) has developed through different stadia. Although historicism initially did not propose

hopeless relativism, it did end up there – with a complete anarchy of values. Since it takes the historic or time-bound aspect of everything as a point of departure, all things that were formerly regarded as absolute truths, infallible dogmas, eternal principles or firm norms were relentlessly relativised to things which could only be true for a specific time and for specific people.

Since the dynamic course of historicism from the 18th to the 20th century is mirrored in an accelerated tempo almost illustratively in the thoughts of Ernst Troeltsch, Klapwijk focuses in his book on Troeltsch's struggle with historicism. Troeltsch's great problem was how the Christian faith could be historically determined and yet be the absolute truth. It is important to him, for he believes, rightly, that no human being can live without the firm ground of an absolute ideal, a last truth which does not waver in the stream of time. For what is the sense in struggling today – even in dying – for a conviction of which I know it will no longer be true tomorrow (cf. Klapwijk, 1970b:22)?

Initially Troeltsch still believes in the "absoluteness" of Christianity, in other words that it is the highest truth. As he struggles with historicism through different phases in his development, his initial faith becomes weaker until at last he finds himself on the brink of religious relativism. Then he is convinced that, in stead of an absolute Christian faith, we are dealing with a European-determined religion. Christianity is still the "highest" religion, but only *for us* (the European people).

An answer to historicism

Although very briefly, Klapwijk as a Reformational philosopher does give an answer to relativist historicism (cf. Klapwijk, 1970b:32-33).

His first important statement is that the absoluteness of the Christian faith (Klapwijk correctly chooses rather to speak about the Gospel) confirms itself and is not confirmed by the history or philosophy of religion. Or, as the great evangelist Spurgeon said: "Do I have to defend the Bible? It is just like trying to defend a lion!"

The distinction Klapwijk makes here is of crucial importance: A clear distinction should be drawn between God's *Word* (his infallible revelation) and man's *answer* to it (fallible religion). Later on in this chapter more detailed attention will be given to this extremely important distinction between (1) the Gospel and (2) Christianity. (1) The truth of God's revelation can in no way (not scientifically either) be proved – meaning accepted or rejected – while (2) religion is our imperfect human response to it and thus may not be accepted without criticism.

Klapwijk's second statement links up with this and deals with historicism's relativising of all values – even religious ones. For to the Christian all values, however imperfectly they may be worded or lived, are rooted in God's Word. This plea is *fundamental* but not *sufficient* (as in the case of the fundamentalists). Because our formulation of God's will in the form of human values is imperfect, we have the task to give a new, appropriate elaboration of God's laws in the form of norms/values in each new historic and cultural situation.

In a subsequent statement Klapwijk warns that caution should be taken in working with the concept of "principles", popular in Reformed circles. The reason is that "principles" is a peculiar, mixed concept in which are melted together the laws of God and the human historical formulation thereof (values). The result is that principles in this tradition is easily accorded divine sanction.

In summary: To overcome the problems of historicism, it is essential to distinguish clearly between two matters: (1) God's revelation and the Christian faith as an answer to it. (2) God's will (formulated in his commands) and human positivation thereof in all kinds of norms and values.

Thus a third way is necessary with regard to two common extremes today, viz. absolutism and relativism. Absolutists (Klapwijk calls them "fundamentalists" in the passage quoted above) teach that principles/norms/values, since they are deduced from the Bible, are supra-temporal, permanent entities which have to be valid for all times and places. The relativists, again, believe that there are no fixed values, since they are simply the products of a particular culture, time and circumstances which do not last forever.

In my opinion both these views have to be rejected. Since our norms/values are *human answers* to God's will as formulated for a specific time and place, the absolutist view is wrong. But since we as Christians believe that our norms/values are the positivation (application) of *God's will* for our lives – however imperfect they may be – relativism has to be rejected.

Before going into the further consequences of relativism, first an interesting fable which gives an excellent explanation of what this worldview amounts to.

6.2.3 Intermezzo: The counsel of Nathan the Wise

A drama by G. E. Lessing (1729-1781) titled "Nathan the Wise" deals with the quest for truth with which the three well-known religions of the time were struggling. It takes place between a Jewish merchant (Nathan), a Muslim, sultan Saladin, and a number of Christian monks. In answer to the sultan's question what Nathan thought of the truth of the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christendom and Islam) Nathan tells the fable of the three rings. In a shortened form it runs thus (cf. Verkuyl, 1984:29-31 for detail):

Long, long ago there lived in the East a man who had an extremely valuable opal ring. The ring had the power to make the person wearing it beloved by God and the people. No wonder that the man left the ring to the son he loved best. Unfortunately in a later generation the ring was in possession of a father who loved all three his sons equally. During his lifetime he already promised each son separately – without the other two knowing about it – that he would inherit the ring. When his end drew near, he solved the problem by getting a goldsmith to make two duplicates which looked so exactly like the original ring that the father himself could not distinguish between the three rings. In secret he gave each son a ring.

After his death his sons were very surprised to learn that they had each inherited a ring. Although each one of them would have liked to believe that he had inherited the true ring, no one could prove it.

"In the same way," said Nathan to the sultan, "it is not possible either to prove which one of the three religions is the true one."

Of course the three sons were not satisfied with the uncertainty and appealed to a judge. The judgement he passed, however, was that the matter had to be left at that. Each one had to believe that his was the true ring. Each one of the three sons had to try and prove the genuineness of his ring by showing love, doing good deeds to others, by his tolerance towards his two brothers and by his surrender to (his) God. If the power of the ring would also be seen likewise in their descendants, the judge would charge them again in a thousand years' time to come before his tribunal. Then a judge wiser than himself would pronounce judgement!

This fable illustrates beautifully that it is impossible to prove (scientifically or from results in practice) that any religion is false or true. Further it also shows clearly how rationalism puts aside the question about truth – a kind of *mild* relativism. It was the forerunner of the later, more *radical* relativism of irrationalism, which we already got to know above. What was here told in the form of a fable, later became practice in religious studies.

6.2.4 Relativism in religious studies

An old but still used standard work *De godsdiensten der wereld* (Religions of the world) in two volumes by Van der Leeuw (1940 with several reprints) uses the comparative phenomenological method to study the great variety of religions. It consists two basic steps: *epoché* and *essence-revealing*.

Epoché means that the scientist has to listen impartially and unprejudiced to a certain religion without pronouncing any judgement. That a religious "phenomenon" has to be allowed to "speak" for itself, to "reveal" itself. A scientific judgement on the truth of a certain religion is not admissible. The second step is showing the essence of the religion. By means of eidetic reduction (*eidōs* is the Greek for "essence"), the essence, the typical or characteristic quality of a religion has to be described. An example is that a religion searches for the "holy" or is directed at the sense and meaning of life.

It is unnecessary to deliver detailed criticism on this method. Two critical questions will be adequate: (1) Can the *epoché* be successful, in other words is it possible to study religion(s) in such a neutral way? (2) What is the sense of revealing its essence? Usually the result is so general that it covers more than one religion. Besides, the fact that many religions are directed at (a) god, does not mean that their understanding of god is the same. Several religions speak of "revelation" but its contents differ. The same applies to the general concept of "redemption": there is no agreement among religions on what man has to be redeemed from and with what purpose.

6.2.5 A South African example

This phenomenological-comparative method according to which religions are regarded as equivalent, is not something of the past or merely a European phenomenon. A recent example of this in South Africa is Kruger (1982) and Kruger et al. (1996) which was written as a manual for teaching religious studies in schools and colleges.

How blind the supporters of this subject at school are for their own presuppositions, becomes apparent from the following words: "... religious studies/multireligious education is *not done from within one specific religion*" (Kruger *et al.*, 1996:24). This is preceded by the following words: "Religious studies is not intent on the furthering of any one specific religion in isolation. But neither is it intent on undermining any religion ... It is not the aim of religious studies/multireligious education to tell people what to believe or what faith to adopt, to teach them how to behave, or help them make choices in life" (Kruger *et al.*, 1996:24).

With reference to these two quotations attention should be drawn to the following: (1) The to my mind naïve idea that the phenomenological method is a neutral one. (2) The contestable statement that such a type of religious education would not promote any religion. Although it does not promote the ordinary kinds of religion, it definitely promotes (historicist) relativism. (3) The superficial idea that it would not undermine any other religion. It undermines all other religions –

except for the conviction that everything is relative. (4) It is also thoughtless to claim that such a type of religious studies would teach pupils nothing about life. It propagates clearly the modern (secularist) relativism which teaches that all religions are equally true or false – what difference does it make? (5) The supporters of this kind of religious studies are cutting off their noses to spite their faces: what sense is there in teaching pupils/students something which has no value for their everyday lives?

That this is not the way to handle religious diversity in a scientific manner is clear from the following (Van der Walt, 1999:69-71):

- The idea that one can dissociate one's scientific work – especially your reflection on religion – from your religion (not merely distinguish between them), is in principle impossible. In our post-modernist times it is also a viewpoint that is outdated. Thus it is not responsible to put across such a viewpoint as something "scientifically reliable" to learners.
- Packing out different religions one after the other on the "table of science", without helping learners to judge them (making their own choice) from their own religious convictions, does not mean being particularly scientific, but rather that the teacher as well as learner are evading responsibility.
- Since the comparative phenomenological method itself is not neutral (it is the product of the Western rationalistic philosophy of E. Husserl and others), the viewpoint of the teacher of religious studies on what religion is (read: should be) plays a determining role. In the end his investigation confirms exactly what he himself believed beforehand!
- Such an approach to religious plurality can do great damage to the faith of especially young, inexperienced and uninformed children/students who have not yet developed a clear worldview of their own. They may start to have doubts: maybe my faith seems to me to be true just because that is how my parents brought me up.

By these remarks I definitely do not mean that believers of different religions should not have knowledge of other religions (cf. 6.2.6 below as well as Weisse, 1995:275-276 for the pro's and con's of this type of education.)

6.2.6 Consequences for the proclamation of the Gospel

Religious relativism not only has far-reaching implications in the scientific field, but also for everyday practice.

If all religions are regarded as equal or more or less the same, it makes little sense to try and persuade someone to adopt your faith – so the necessity of Christian evangelisation falls away. It can be put in even stronger terms: to witness to your own faith means being arrogant. It betrays a kind of imperialism which does not fit in with the view that all religions are regarded as equally true.

But if one does not hold the view of the equivalence of all religions, one has a responsibility to try and convince others of the truth of one's own faith. Is this not arrogance? Two writers answer as follows:

Fernando (1987:151 et seq.) points out three key concepts: conviction, respect and voluntariness. Referring to 1 Peter 3 verse 15 he says that a Christian should be able to account for his faith. He should be intolerant of lies, but tell it to others humbly and with modesty and respect. People may not be manipulated either, for instance by stirring them up emotionally or giving favours in exchange for accepting the Gospel. A Christian spreads the good news not because he/she has so much authority but on the authority of the Gospel. (Proclaiming the Gospel, is like one beggar telling another beggar where bread can be found.) Authoritative proclamation of the Word takes courage and frankness but never pride.

Thus not the proclamation of the Gospel, but its rejection implies arrogance.

Verkuyl (1984:143 et seq.) emphasises the same, but treats in more detail the question on how the Gospel should be brought to people of other faiths – not only in word, but also in deed.

- Spreading the Gospel is not something voluntary. It is an imperative, a *command*. Therefore it can be done with conviction.
- However, it should be done in *great humility*. With right he warns against Christians who act as if they own the Gospel and have to give it out to others. We have nothing that we did not receive (1 Cor. 4:7-8). In this respect Paul is an example of both profound humility and clear conviction. He sees himself as a (justified) sinner, an (acquitted) criminal, a (freed) rebel. Since he is ashamed of himself, he is not ashamed of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16). Because he is so convinced (cf. Rom. 8:38a) he cannot help spreading the Gospel. According to Verkuyl humility also implies the willingness to listen to people of other faiths with empathy. Besides, it entails being prepared to correct oneself.
- Christian evangelisation should be *compelled* by love (2 Cor. 5:14). Love does not *force* anyone, but *implores*: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Thus the evangelist does not say like the relativist "let everyone find salvation in his own way". The right kind of evangelisation does have respect for people's convictions, but also puts them before a very definite choice.

Therefore people of other religions should not be approached with an attitude of "I have been saved, and you are lost". Verkuyl (1984:50) explains: "It is not the desire to threaten, strike terror into a person or frighten that is the source of real, true communication, but the experience of God's overwhelming love in Christ for people who are lost, the wish to call away all people from doom and destruction ... and counsel them to draw from the fountain of life which there is in Christ." (Translated from the Dutch.)

Thus Christians should not be driven by something *negative* (e.g. threats of hell and eternal damnation) but by something *positive*, by the love of Christ.

Christians do not have the right or duty to point out who is saved and who is lost. They themselves should make every effort to enter the kingdom (cf. Luke 13:23-30). The decision on who will be saved, must be left to God. His mercy in Christ can never be thought of too highly. Christ Himself says: "I stand at the door and

knock" (Rev. 3:20). He does not threaten or force open the door. But He does knock: incessantly, softly, patiently, full of love ...

6.2.7 Dialogue is essential

In the modern day world with its religious plurality, evangelisation without dialogue is almost unthinkable. But apart from evangelisation, dialogue between followers of diverse religions is of crucial importance for the sake of a just and peaceful society. That is, if one still believes that all religions are not in principle the same, for otherwise dialogue loses its importance.

On this Vroom (1996:164 *et seq.*) brings to the fore some important matters. Like Klapwijk (cf. 6.2.2 above) he also stresses the difference between God's revelation (as infallible) and human beings' religion as the (fallible) answer to it. The implication of this for dialogue is that a Christian may never enter into dialogue with people from other faiths with an attitude of superiority and pride – as if he/she holds a monopoly on truth. In such a dialogue the subject is not *who is right*, but *what the truth is*.

The (1) purpose, (2) nature, (3) contents and (4) criteria of such an inter-religious dialogue are important.

The purpose of dialogue

The aim is for people of different religions to learn from one another. If people can learn from one another in so many fields, why not in the field of faith, too? As examples Vroom (1996:166) mentions the following (translation from Dutch): "Buddhism has much to offer with respect to ... meditation, detachment ... and the concern for nature. The great points of Hinduism are the relatedness to all things, the acceptance of the place and task of the individual in the community, a sense of the closeness of the divinity ... Islam is inspiring in its seriousness with respect to the religious tradition and obedience, and the willingness to place the whole of life under the authority of God's commandments". According to Fernando (1987:110 *et seq.*) (Western) Christians can learn three things especially from the Eastern religions: "meditation, devotion and reverence."

According to these two Christian writers it is not the case that one religious tradition is perfect and others mean nothing – we can learn from one another.

People can also learn from one another without giving up their faith and going over to another faith. Even if something like this occurs, it is no argument against inter-religious dialogue. One can lose one's faith in many other ways, for instance by not practicing it, not reflecting on it and never sharing or discussing it with others.

It is apparent that dialogue can also have value for a Christian. It compels one to reflect on the essence of the Gospel; on why you yourself believe in it; and on what is unique to your own faith. In this way one can discover new depths in one's own religious tradition of which one was unaware formerly. Dialogue can strengthen one's faith! The purpose of dialogue is not to induce people to abandon their own faith or even to lessen the number of religions.

The true aim is (1) to try and lessen the tension between different religions and (2) to promote a peaceful and (3) a just society. This cannot occur without mutual understanding. And without dialogue understanding is impossible. The alternative is misunderstanding, conflict and violent clashes.

The nature

The nature of the dialogue will depend on where it takes place, e.g. in the family, in the workplace, on the street, during evangelisation or among (academic) representatives of the various religions. It should at least cover the following three aspects: (1) better knowledge of what is believed; (2) how the specific faith is experienced, and (3) what its influence is on various domains of life.

Contents

The contents of the dialogue should make room to do the following with the participating faiths: (1) discuss them; (2) study them; (3) think about them; (4) putting critical questions; (5) giving answers; (6) learning from one another.

Criteria

Some criteria for dialogue are highlighted by the following statements (cf. Vroom, 1996:5):

- Unless it is a sensitive but sincere investigation as to what the other believes, it is no dialogue but a monologue.
- Unless it helps one to articulate one's own faith in the process, it has little value.
- Unless there is openness to mutual criticism, it is just a superficial acquaintance.
- Unless the participants in the dialogue learn from one another, it is merely a voluntary exchange of thoughts.

If Christians take seriously religious diversity and our responsibility to proclaim the Gospel, they will not fear dialogue, but practice it. (Paul gave them an example on the Areopagus as recorded in Acts 17.)

6.2.8 Why the idea that religions are equivalent is untenable

In summary the following (immanent) criticism can be given of the view that all religions are equivalent:

- What is the sense in calling them equivalent unless the religions differ?
- Religious equivalence (relativism) precludes the possibility of criticism of any religion as well as any criterion for judging religions. All religions must simply be accepted (as right/true).
- Relativist religious pluralism itself is – in spite of the fact that it fights all kinds of religious dogmatism and absolutism – guilty of a hidden dogma. Its “dogma” is that all religions are in principle equal.
- As a result of this “dogmatism” religious relativists are not modest about their viewpoint either. This “religion” (that all religions are supposedly the same) is hostile towards the followers of all other religions who do not think the same but

are convinced of the correctness of their own religion. The "pluralists" tolerate only fellow pluralists and are intolerant towards those who do not share their belief.

- Finally religious relativism is not a practicable, viable solution for the problem of religious diversity. Followers of the various religions will keep on believing that their own religion is the only true religion and try to promote it in various ways in the public domain

6.2.9 Why the Christian faith is not equivalent to other religions

After the foregoing immanent criticism it is necessary in the last instance also to give a principal justification (transcendental criticism) why all religions in my opinion are not equivalent. (At the same time it serves as a transition to the next crucial problem, namely the uniqueness of the Christian faith.)

- It is impossible to prove in a scientific, rational manner that one's own religious convictions are true (and others false). The reason for this is that one's theoretical/logical proofs are not neutral, but based on and determined by a deeper (pre-scientific) belief. Such "proofs" simply "prove" what somebody believed all along.
- A Christian simply *believes* that – in spite of remarkable similarities – all religions are not equivalent. He *believes* it – in humble gratitude – because the Christian faith is based on the revelation of God. He also *believes* – though cannot prove – that God exists and that He reveals Himself to us.
- Although nobody can *prove* his faith rationally, he can (try and) *explain* why he believes it. To my mind the best way of doing this is not from a subjective, human religious conviction and experience or by comparing your own religion to other religions, but from the revelation of God. (On this crucial distinction between divine revelation and human religion we have repeatedly focused attention.)
- It cannot be denied that God has revealed Himself and still reveals Himself to people of other faiths – even so-called non-believers (cf. Rom. 1:19, 20). Since

God speaks daily, personally, actually and clearly to all people, the term "general" revelation is not very suitable. "Creational" revelation is a better term. (It still is not an ideal term, since all the different ways in which God reveals Himself do not take place otherwise than in/through creation: the Bible as a book is also part of creation and Christ became a human being.) However, as a result of the sinful nature of man, his answer to God's revelation in creation is to suppress it and replace it with his own "truth" (cf. Rom. 1:22-25). Religion (our answer to God's revelation) therefore is in essence always a mixture of truth and error. On the one hand, the history of Christianity proves that it is not immune against wrong and sinful beliefs and actions. On the other hand, there are elements of truth in other faiths. (For a good exposition on God's creational revelation according to the Scriptures and the consequences thereof for the various religions, cf. Verkuyl, 1984:105-138.)

- Christians are however extremely privileged, for they also know a second form of God's revelation, namely his written revelation in the Bible. After the fall God in a certain sense has "republished" his creational revelation in his Word. He helps people's deaf ears with the "hearing aid" of Scripture or their weak eyes with the "glasses" of the Bible.
- By means of the Bible and guided by the Holy Spirit, however, Christians know and believe in a third way in which God reveals Himself: his revelation incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. As a human being He lived on earth the way we should live – in complete obedience to God. Religion (the life-encompassing answer to God's threefold revelation) thus should be guided by and be obedient to God's will as revealed by Him. This is extremely important, since the opposite is often the case: People's own religious needs and aspirations determine the contents of what they regard as "revelation". This turning around of things does not only apply to non-Christian religions. Christians have also done and still do bad things in the name of God.
- The criterion to determine whether religions are equivalent, thus should not be what/how the Christian faith was/is, but what it should be in the light of God's

threefold revelation. Not all problems are solved in this way. Is it really possible to distinguish between God's "objective" revelation and its subjective interpretation by people and their reaction to it? However difficult (maybe impossible) it may be, it should be pursued.

By comparing the revelation of God with the "revelations" in which other religions believe, one is able all the better to see the uniqueness of this revelation which forms the foundation of the Christian faith - the topic of the next chapter.

(The bibliography will follow at the end of the next chapter.)

* * *

Chapter 7:

RELIGIOUS UNIQUENESS AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

This chapter builds on the previous two which discussed religious diversity, intolerance, freedom and equivalence. Two questions will be discussed. Firstly, if Christians reject the principial equivalence of all religions, in what sense should Christianity be regarded as unique? Secondly, in the light of the common phenomenon of intolerance, conflict and even violence (as indicated in the first chapter) what should be the ground(s) for and nature of religious tolerance? Can one be convinced (about the uniqueness of one's own religion) and at the same time be tolerant towards others?

7.1 Religious uniqueness

After the preparatory work already done in treating the issue of religious equivalence, the question of the uniqueness of the Christian faith does not need so much attention. The following aspects of this problem will be discussed: (1) that the uniqueness of Christianity is in the Name after which this faith is named; (2) that all Christians (unfortunately) no longer accept the central role of Christ in the Christian faith; (3) in which sense the Christian faith is exclusive and absolute, and (4) in which sense it can be called the best faith.

7.1.1 Faith in Jesus Christ makes the Christian religion unique

Fernando (1987:152) says "If Christianity is to remain as Christianity, it must maintain a belief in its uniqueness". Of what does this uniqueness consist? Every religion – each in its own way – is unique. But what is it that makes the Christian faith – as the true faith (compare the previous chapter) – something special?

If one wants to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Christian faith in comparison to other religions, it is better not to use Christendom as it *was* or *is* as a benchmark, but how it *should* be according to God's revelation.

The focus of the uniqueness

Most writers therefore do not see the uniqueness of Christianity in its historic form(s) but in the unique way in which the Bible sees redemption, deliverance and salvation (cf. e.g. Bediako, 1994/95 and Van der Walt, 1999:73). Salvation does not happen, as in Buddhism, by man climbing up and eventually being taken up into the absolute. Or as in Islam, according to which man must earn his salvation through absolute obedience to Allah. According to the (true) Christian faith God comes to man in Christ and grants salvation by grace.

Verkuyl (1984:117 *et seq.*) demonstrates how the non-Christian religions are all, in various ways (for instance through knowledge, good deeds, devotion or magical practices) efforts to self-salvation. The cross of Christ pronounces judgement on all these ways of self-salvation and at the same time provides what is lacking in these religions: "Repeatedly one comes across the dead end of the road to self-salvation. The Pharisees are not saved by their Pharisaic observance of the law. The mystics are not saved by their mystical experiences and their asceticism. The magicians are not saved by their magic (cf. the figure of Simon the Magician). The wise are not saved by their wisdom and knowledge (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-20). Knowledge, ascesis, pilgrimages, sacrifices are no keys by which the entrance into God's Kingdom is opened up for us." (Verkuyl, 1984:138 – translated from the Dutch.)

The most striking difference

The most striking difference between the Christian faith and all the other religions is God's revelation incarnate, Jesus Christ. No other faith knows about a God who sent his son to die for the sins of people so that the whole world can be renewed. There are many prophets (e.g. Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, etc.), but only one Prophet who also died as Priest – and rose from death – and who can also claim to be King of the world. He is the only Way, the only Truth and the only Life (John 14:6); the only Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), the only Name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12).

7.1.2 The meaning of Christ as Saviour scaled down

Up until the middle of the previous century most Christians still believed that there is no other Name but the Name of Christ by which salvation is possible. In 1963 Visser 't Hooft still wrote a book entitled *No other Name*. But in 1985 Knitter added a question mark to the name of his book bearing the same title: *No other Name?*

In the Roman Catholic Church for instance there was a gradual shift from salvation through the church alone (ecclesiocentrism), to salvation in Christ alone (Christocentrism), to salvation through faith in God, but not limited to the church and Christ (theocentrism). Hillman's book *Many paths* (1989) is representative of the view of many Catholic theologians on this point. Today there even is the necessity (cf. Breed, 2003:697 *et seq.*) to determine whether Reformed theologians still think in an exclusivist way (i.e. that only those believing in Jesus Christ can be saved), or whether they think inclusivistically or pluralistically.

The different kinds of views

Since Heim in his book *Is Christ the only way?* (1985, cf. also Heim, 1995 and Heim, 1998) gives such a good classification of the growing number of standpoints, it is given here briefly. He distinguishes two main groups (pluralists and particularists), each divided into three subgroups, in which Christ takes an increasingly lesser role or an increasingly important one.

Pluralism he divides as follows:

- *Parallel pluralism*

According to this viewpoint Christ is the only mediator *for Christians*. Other faiths could also have the same result (meaning deliverance) as the Christian faith. (Representative: Ernst Troeltsch.)

- *Puzzle pluralism*

Every religion contains only a fragment(s) of the full and final truth. They must all be brought together so that from the strong points of all the religions (the parts of the “puzzle”) a faith may originate for all nations. (Representative: John Hick.)

- *Gradual pluralism*

In some religions the final truth comes to the fore in a stronger way than in others. The Christian faith is true in the sense that it is the best, because Christ rises above all other religious leaders. He is the highest peak of all the mountain tops. (A representative: Schubert M. Agden.)

Apart from differing accents among themselves, the **particularists** (the second main group) all agree that God works in a decisive manner through Jesus Christ. To a greater or lesser degree they therefore reject the relativism of the pluralists. The following viewpoints can be distinguished according to Heim:

- *Magnetic particularism*

According to this view Christ works like a magnet, who draws all other religions to Him and fills them with his magnetic power. The grace emanating from Christ orientates people – even unwittingly – to God. His power flows through every religion and changes them to instruments of salvation if their followers answer it in faith. So no-one is saved without Christ, but they need not be Christians. They can be saved as Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. (Representative: Karl Rahner.)

- *Healing particularism*

The image here is of the vaccine which can heal anybody – even the dead. (The question is often raised what becomes of people who died very young or never had the opportunity of hearing about Christ.) This viewpoint differs from the previous one (which teaches that the meaning of Christ is canalised through other faiths) in that personal knowledge of God is necessary for it to be effective. (Representative, according to Heim: Karl Barth.)

- *Imperial particularism*

According to this viewpoint Christ is the only source of salvation and an intentional confession of Christ in this life is the only hope for salvation. (Representative: Leslie Newbigin.)

Applied to South Africa

As far as South Africa is concerned, several theologians at UNISA (e.g. Kruger, 1982, Kruger *et al.*, 1996 and Du Toit & Kruger, 1998) could be named pluralists. Even in spite of differences among them (cf. the discussion in *In die Skriflig*, 37(4):601-734, Dec.) theologians of the Reformed Churches in South Africa still hold the particularist view.

The particularists (also called "absolutists" by other writers) regard the pluralists as relativists and in the last instance as sceptics, because it is a small step from "all religions are (more or less) true" to the next step of "no religion is true/all are false".

The pluralists (sometimes called "egalitarians" or "inclusivists") in turn blame the particularists for exclusivism. Their standpoint is branded as arrogant, imperialistic, fanatic and even intolerant. We have mentioned these accusations before, but we need to go into them more deeply at this stage. It is done mostly with reference to the work by Vroom (1996).

7.1.3 In which sense Christianity is exclusive and/or absolute

Although the words "exclusive" and "absolute" are in common use, they should be handled with care.

Exclusive

The word "exclusive" is not very satisfactory for describing the viewpoint that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. To the question whether Christianity is exclusive, Vroom rightly answers (I translate) : "... exclusiveness is part and parcel of religious truth claims in general and are not solely the property of Christianity. If ... one wants to eliminate the absolute, exclusive content of belief

and discard it, then what is left of religion? I believe that his would result in religious people agreeing on something that is no longer of interest to anyone" (Vroom, 1996:129). And (on page 136): "Whatever is unique is always exclusive in a way". We have shown earlier that even the religious relativists also believe in their own viewpoint in a dogmatic – exclusivist – way.

Absolute

It is also preferable not to speak of Christianity as "absolute". With right Wentz (1987:69,71) says: "The only absolute is that there is no absolute ... To say that there is no God but God, is to understand that there are no absolutes".

Vroom puts this in even clearer language by distinguishing between God's revelation on the one hand and the Christian faith (as the answer to it) on the other hand: : "The gospel can be called absolute in the sense that the most profound truth about God, people, and the world can be known in Christ. But the word 'absolute' is often used in another way, namely to claim that Christians possess the entire truth ... This view of the absoluteness of Christianity is, in my opinion, incorrect. Christianity is not the absolute religion. Christians are, however, able to testify about what, in their conviction, is fundamental (and in that sense, absolute): Jesus Christ ..." (Vroom, 1996:136,137 – translation from Dutch).

Both extremes are unsatisfactory

The right way of dealing with religious (and other) differences, is not by just stressing the *similarities*, in other words, by thinking inclusively (or pluralistically). But the right way is neither stressing the *differences*, in other words standing on an exclusivist (or particularist) viewpoint. Both similarities and differences should get the necessary attention.

Therefore Vroom (1996:140) rejects both egalitarianism (which Heim designates as "pluralism" above) and exclusivism (Heim's particularism). Egalitarianism is unacceptable because it teaches that, since all faiths are equally true, nobody can claim a specific status for his own faith; that God cannot reveal Himself to

anyone in a unique way. However, even exclusivism is unsatisfactory, since it teaches that, because God has revealed Himself in a specific way to certain people (the Christians), those people's religion is the only one that contains the complete, whole truth and that other religions do not contain any (elements of) truth. According to Vroom (1996:140) it is not the case that only Christians and nobody else have knowledge of God. Religious convictions do *differ* – sometimes radically – but they can also *overlap*. These differences do imply, however, that one religion can have better insight into the truth than another.

God's involvement goes much wider

Vroom is convinced that God's involvement includes more people than old Israel, the Christians and the churches. He says (translated from the Dutch): "The boundaries of the kingdom of God are not necessarily equivalent to those of the church. Did Christ not say: 'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen' ... an entire series of people outside Judaism and the church ... are regarded as believers in the Bible. Salvation does apparently exist outside the church. Thus the doctrine 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus' ('outside the church, no salvation') is not an essential implication of the belief that God has revealed himself most completely in Jesus ... The goodness of God that is visible in Christ makes it highly unlikely – and even inconceivable – that God does not work outside the limits of the church as well. J.H. Bavinck states that God's concern reaches out to every person" (Vroom, 1996:141). For the standpoint of J.H. Bavinck (the respected Reformed missiologist) to whom Vroom refers here, cf. Bavinck, 1955 and 1981 and for an explication of Bavinck's viewpoint, compare Tuit (2001), Van Woudenberg (1991) and Visser, (1997).

Thus Vroom replaces the old statement "outside the church" with "outside Christ": "One could therefore replace the thesis *outside the church, no salvation* with the thesis *outside Christ, no salvation*. After all, if the heart of God is revealed in Christ and if Christ is in a sense the heart of God, then God's salvation is always Christ's salvation" (Vroom, 1996:142).

Salvation without Christ?

In the light of the above (the inseparable unity of the Father and the Son), we then have to ask the question whether people who did not know Christ, or do not know Him yet, can be saved as a result of their faith in God (the Father).

Vroom (1996:144 *et seq.*) admits that one cannot simply say that all religions honour the same God, since the contents of their ideas about God can be totally different from the biblical one. All non-Christian religions, may however not be treated alike and simply be run down as (pagan) idolatry. (For two moving examples to confirm this, cf. the prayers of a Muslim and a Hindu in Vroom, 1996:154,155.) There can be a "grey" area between true religion and something which is clearly idolatry. Vroom (1996:157) concludes: "But may we not acknowledge that Gods' attention goes beyond the church? That is why we can be certain of finding elements of truth and salvation beyond the scope of the Christian churches. The Spirit blows where it wills". (My own translation.)

Christianity itself under the magnifying glass

Directly after this follows a warning to Christians: "The Christian church has the gospel 'at its disposal' and 'knows' about the cross and resurrection. But what does that prove? How much has the Western church adapted to Western economy and technology? Have not Western Christians become so individualised that the solidarity in the community is threatened? The encounter with the wisdom, courage, obedience in faith, and the relatedness with all things in other religions is thought-provoking" (Vroom, 1996:157).

From this it once more becomes apparent how important the difference is that we have mentioned several times, namely between God's revelation and human religion. Verkuyl, too (cf. 1994:103 *et seq.*) deliberately does not speak about the relation between Christendom and other religions, but about the relation of the Gospel to other religions, because he does not want to equate Christendom with the Word of God. Christianity often is a mixture of truth and lies, of the Way and digressions.

In the light of the same perspective we finally have to answer the following question:

7.1.4 Is Christianity the best of all religions?

Of course there is a link between the uniqueness of Christianity (or better still: the Gospel) and this question. Still the two have to be distinguished: Christianity can be the true religion and yet not be the best in practice.

The Christian religion is the best if one really believes in the God who revealed Himself to us (in Creation and Scripture), who became a human being in Christ for the purpose of saving us, and who leads us through his Holy Spirit in obedience to his will.

But Christianity is bad when one boasts about it and is proud because one "owns" God's revelation. It is bad when a person lives an unconverted life. It is bad when one ignores love for the neighbour and takes part in racism, exploitation, suppression of the poor, of women, etc. Christianity wrongly understood and practised can be even worse than other faiths (cf. Vroom, 1996:162). People who know the Gospel, also have more responsibility than those who do not know it (cf. Matt. 11:20-24).

The Christian faith *can* be unique and *can* be the best. It *can* also have its own unique – the best – vision on religious tolerance – the next main point.

7.2 Religious tolerance

This final section reaches back to the previous chapters which dealt with (1) how religious diversity should be handled; (2) how religious intolerance and conflict should be limited; (3) how true religious freedom may be realised; (4) the question of truth when different religions meet and (5) the uniqueness of the Christian faith. Even when one believes in the uniqueness of one's own faith, one still has to live daily among a variety of other religions. The question is: How?

The following important matters will be dealt with here: (1) What tolerance is; (2) the different kinds of tolerance; (3) misunderstandings regarding tolerance or

what tolerance should not be; (4) the connection between truth and tolerance; (5) tolerance according to the Bible, and (6) a summary of the features of Christian tolerance.

7.2.1 A definition

The necessity for tolerance was motivated earlier (cf. 5.2.2 and 5.2.6 of the first chapter): Religious diversity will not disappear in this dispensation. Religious unity was only possible before the fall of man and will only be a reality after the consummation at the end of the world. In the meantime tolerance towards everyone is the only and the right attitude (cf. Mouw & Griffioen, 1993:175,176).

Marshall (1996:9) puts it in the following way: "We might hope for a world where there is agreement and acceptance, but it will not be here in the near future. In the meantime we need to find ways of living alongside one another without destroying one another and without ignoring or trivializing our differences. This is the genius of toleration".

A more detailed description

From the last sentence of this quotation something already emerges of what Marshall (a Reformational philosopher) does not understand by tolerance: It does not mean trying to ignore or trivialise religious differences.

From the words which follow it becomes clear what Marshall does understand by tolerance: "Its task is not overcoming all differences, but establishing our right to differ. It defends both truth and coexistence: this is why it deserves Christian support". As we will see, what he says here forms the heart of Christian tolerance.

Concisely put, tolerance can be described as follows: "... the degree to which we accept things of which we disapprove" (Marshall, 1996:3). This description coincides with that given by Steyn (1995:4), namely that tolerance means understanding one another's (religious) differences and learning how to differ from one another. (This does not exclude appreciation for the good in other religions – see previous chapter.)

Of course such a concise definition is liable to be misunderstood, for we are not to tolerate everything with which we do not agree. (That is why Marshall's definition begins with "the degree to which".) For instance, sexual abuse of children or human sacrifices to the gods is sinning against the sixth and the seventh commandments. Does it mean we must tolerate the persons who do it, but denounce their deeds?

Because of these difficulties some Christians are of the opinion that God only expects *love* and never *tolerance* from his believers. I hope to indicate that tolerance and love does not exclude each other.

An important shift in meaning

Today the concept of "tolerance" has however undergone a shift in meaning: from the original "to tolerate other people's ideas" to "being tolerable to others". Hunter (1984:366) calls it "the ethics of politeness/courtesy/decency". He describes it in the following way: "... the ethic of civility is an ethic of gentility and studied moderation. It speaks of a code of social discourse whereby religious beliefs and political convictions are to be expressed discretely and tactfully and in most cases, privately. Convictions are to be tempered by good taste and sensibility. It is an ethics that pleads 'no offence'. The greatest breach of these norms is belligerence and divisiveness; the greatest atrocity is to be offensive and thus intolerant".

Mouw analyses in detail this secular downscaling of the concept "tolerance" and describes it as follows: "Civility is public politeness. It means that we display tact, moderation, refinement and good manners towards people who are different from us". (Mouw, 1992:12).

According to Gaede (1993:27) the background of this view is modern day relativism: "Having no truths worth to defend, we have made non-defensiveness a mark of distinction". So the question is whether one can accept this new type of "tolerance" if you have strong religious convictions. People with weak convictions may find it easy to be civil and decent, while those with strong viewpoints will find it harder. (We will go into this problem below.)

From this short introduction to what tolerance is, it is not only clear that the concept can be understood differently by different people, but also that we have to distinguish between different types of tolerance.

7.2.2 Different types of tolerance

Tolerance can be practised in many different fields of life, as for instance in the religious domain (cf. Weisse, 1995), cultural terrain (cf. e.g. Gasser & Rowena, 1999 and Mangcu, 2001) and in the political field (cf. e.g. Gouws, 2001). Therefore the various forms of tolerance should be clearly distinguished and not be confused with one another.

When a person makes a racist remark (cultural intolerance) it does not necessarily mean that he has declared himself to be against Traditional African Religion (religious intolerance). Or, if in the present South Africa, one objects against abuse of power by the state and to corruption (something structural), it need not imply that he is a racist (something cultural).

However, anybody who has never rejected some or other religion, in my opinion is not "broad minded" but simply does not take religion seriously. It is clear that we need first to turn our attention to the many misconceptions on tolerance before proceeding to investigate what exactly the concept entails.

7.2.3 Misconceptions on tolerance

Tolerance is not something natural. With right Gouws (2001:117) remarks that it is one of the most difficult virtues to cultivate. According to her it is far easier to go from tolerance to intolerance than the other way round. Apart from the fact, says Gouws, that tolerance is one of the least developed virtues in our society, among many people – even among Christians – extensive misunderstanding of the concept is prevalent.

According to Marshall (1996:5-7) and other sources already quoted, the following may not be confused with tolerance. (Some are explained briefly while others should be clearly understood as they stand.)

- *Spiritual poverty* or a lack of convictions of one's own.
- Mere *decency or civility* (cf. "civility" and "political correctness" discussed above).
- Boundless and uncritical *religious openness* for other religions.
- The *secularist* idea that religion should be limited to the private sphere (of personal faith and church) and that in public life it should be tolerated (inter alia by religious freedom), but that it should have no influence in the public sphere.
- *Indifference or aloofness* means that something (e.g. another religion) does not concern one, one does not care about it. At present this is a very common attitude in the Western world (cf. secularism above) since the belief is held that religious differences (at least in the "public square") do not really matter. Contrary to this, real tolerance means to be really involved, to care, to be concerned about the great number of religions and what they preach.
- The viewpoint that differences – including religious ones – should rather be *appreciated* and *celebrated* (actively and positively) than (passively and negatively) *tolerated* does not hold water either. To celebrate something means to approve of it. Tolerance, however, (cf. above) is to accept things (not approving of them) with which we *do not* agree. One does not tolerate people (like one's wife and children) and things one loves – one simply loves them.
- *Religious freedom* is not the same as tolerance either. According to Marshall (1996:7) religious freedom includes the total amount of freedom that is tolerated: "It is the sum of what is tolerated, plus those things of which others are indifferent, plus about which they are relativist, plus what they can do nothing about, plus what they agree with".
- *Pride* is not tolerance either. With right Weisse (1995:273) says: "Toleration is not an attitude nourished by a consciousness of superiority ... towards others but exists in the light of God's commitments to all people ..."

- *Hypocrisy* which pretends liking everything and everybody with the intention of reaching one's own goals – even success in evangelisation.
- *Relativism* may not – if indeed it could exist – be confused with tolerance either. As was explained above, relativists believe that all religions are relative, that all religions thus could be just as true as my own and that they are all equivalent. According to this view true tolerance is actually not possible – or necessary either – for the other religion(s) do not form a challenge or a threat, since they are just another point of view. (Relativism therefore is similar to indifference – rejecting or judging another position is precluded.) Therefore tolerance can only exist when a relativist is *not* relative – which usually happens since no-one can consistently think relativistically.

Marshall (1996:7) summarises (some of) the above-mentioned wrong views on tolerance as follows: : "Indifference is safe, but what happens to things we are not indifferent about? Relativism seems benign, but has no serious differences to contend with. Celebration seems marvellous, but we can't celebrate everything. If we acknowledge that there are real and important differences between human beings on religious matters, and realise that these differences will not soon go away, then we need to face the strengths, and weaknesses, of toleration".

7.2.4 The connection between tolerance and truth

Since it is so topical today we have to conduct a more profound investigation into the last viewpoint mentioned above, namely relativism. From this it will become clear that tolerance cannot be dissociated from the question of truth. A brief look into history can be enlightening in this regard.

The original meaning

After many decades of violent – bloody – conflict between believers of different churches in Europe they finally adopted a policy of tolerance (e.g. The Act of Toleration of 1689 in Britain). Tolerance was born, trusting that the Gospel without force from church or state would defend and confirm itself. Thus in the

original Christian idea of tolerance the *foundation* for tolerance was the conviction of the truth (of God's revelation).

From exclusivism to inclusivism

Quite soon afterwards (18th and 19th century) a secular view of tolerance originated. Because it was not possible on reasonable grounds to determine which religion was true/false – it was the time of rationalism – everyone had to have the freedom to choose his own religion and the choices of others had to be tolerated. So the former *exclusivist* viewpoint (that only the Christian faith was true, excluding all others) was rejected in favour of *inclusivism*. A mild kind of relativism was the result.

From inclusivism to pluralism

Irrationalism of the 20th century developed from inclusivism to *pluralism*. While rationalism's viewpoint (approximately 1700-1900) was that we cannot know *which religion is the true one* (cf. the fable under 6.2.3 of previous chapter) and we therefore have to tolerate everybody, irrationalism (from about 1900) taught that *all religions are equally true*. Pluralism no longer implies (like inclusivism) just mild but *radical* relativism.

Van der Walt (2003:393) summarises the development as follows: "The two grounds for religious tolerance advocated in Western history were ... 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 ..."

From pluralism to intolerance

From what Marshall said above it is already clear that absolute (in the sense of consistent) relativism is impossible. If every religion or conviction is relative, then the (mild and radical) relativists would have to acknowledge that their own viewpoint itself is also relative. Since no-one can think consistently relativistically

– for then such a person would simply have to keep quiet! – the so-called relativists today even defend their standpoint in an intolerant way. Their so-called tolerance thus means intolerance towards all who do not share their point of view. The religious freedom for which their “tolerance” fought, is destroyed – ironically – by this same “tolerance”. On close analysis a “tolerance” which thinks relativistically about truth is by no means an example of “democracy” in the religious field. It makes the impression of being “enlightened” and very modest, but in essence relativism is just as arrogant as the other religions which are blamed for it.

Additional confirmation

To prevent the reader from thinking that the writer has an eccentric viewpoint on this, we refer to only one other writer for confirmation. Gaede (1993) first points out that the present relativist idea of tolerance cannot succeed - it simply implies superficial “civility” or “nondefensiveness” – and secondly he points out that it is a dangerous kind of intolerant tolerance.

He explains in detail: "Having pretty well decided that truth is not attainable we (the modern relativists – B.J. van der Walt) have made tolerance of a plurality of truths a virtue. Having no truths worth to defend, we have made nondefensiveness a mark of distinction" (Gaede, 1993:27). Further: "Tolerance of differences (the prevailing kind of “tolerance” – B.J. van der Walt) comes from those whose confidence in truth is shaky, who think truth depends on them. Thus it is not the genuine truth lover we ought to fear, but those whose love of truth is not genuine. And that includes the hypocrite and the cynic as well as the relativist" (Gaede, 1993:59).

Gaede also states very clearly that the truth (of the Gospel) is the only possible true ground for Christian tolerance: "It is our commitment to truth and justice that compels us to affirm ... tolerance, not our commitment to the modern value of tolerance or the need to be nonoffensive. And this is a crucial distinction" (Gaede, 1993:28).

Elsewhere he states it even more explicitly: "Any attempt to deal with the problem of tolerance must first appreciate the fact that it is fundamentally a problem of truth. Tolerance cannot be even understood or conceived as a problem in the first place ... unless one holds dear some measure of truth. And tolerance will not be put in its place unless truth is assumed to be the greatest value" (Gaede, 1993:88).

Unfortunately not all Christians have the insights of philosophers like Gaede, Mouw and Marshall. So they think it is true when they are accused of being "intolerant", "fanatic", sectarian", "fundamentalist" and still more vices when they dare to live according to their convictions – especially in public – or to try to persuade people of other faiths to better insights. They are regarded as the "heretics" of the 21st century. That is why today Christians are increasingly hesitant to come out for the truth and live accordingly. Many also fear that the Christian faith, since it has to be so tolerant (according to the relativist interpretation) will deteriorate.

Summary overview

Concerning the relation between truth and tolerance there are three possibilities:

(1) *Truth without tolerance*. Examples are the crusades and inquisition during the Middle Ages; the bloody persecutions among Christians themselves, like for instance the Anabaptists during the 16th and 17th centuries; the present struggle between Christians and for instance Muslims; Christians among themselves (e.g. Ireland); the persecution of Christians by other religions worldwide. These – and many more – has already caused death and misery to many people.

(2) *Tolerance without truth* (the present secularist view) – even though it is not admitted – is also a catastrophe, for it causes an even worse (spiritual) death, it undermines the deepest sense and meaning of life. If Christians could be tortured and murdered by the ancient Roman Empire because they did not want to become part of the inclusivist and pluralist pantheon (temple for all gods) is there a reason why it cannot happen again in future (cf. the book Revelation)?

(3) *Tolerance based on Truth* is the answer to the above two viewpoints. It is the only solution to protect not only Christianity but all other religions against the two dangers mentioned above. Only then will true tolerance be possible: the degree to which we can accept things which we do not approve of.

The word "Truth" in the third case above, is written with a capital letter, but not in the first and second case. The reason is that the foundation – and also the criterion – for what a person can tolerate and what not, may not be the subjective Christian truths of faith, but God's infallible Truth, his revelation. (The golden thread of the distinction between God's revelation and human religion – a leitmotif in all three chapters – is emphasised again.) In the first case above (truth without tolerance) cruel things were done not in the name of God's Truth (as the perpetrators of the cruelties thought), but in the name of human truth. In the second case (tolerance without truth) the Truth of God was simply rejected.

Up to now it has only been argued that Christian tolerance is founded on (the conviction regarding) the power of God's Truth. One important matter has not been attended to: Does this Truth itself teach something about the problem of tolerance?

7.2.5 Tolerance and the Bible

Although Christianity does not have a good historical record concerning tolerance, it does not mean that the Word of God does not teach it. Although it may sound like a contradiction to the people of our time, the Scriptures teach that both tolerance and conviction is possible. Thus it also confirms the foregoing argument that *being convinced* of the Truth (as the foundation) is inseparably, inherently a part of *tolerance*. For the sake of clarity a distinction is drawn between these two concepts.

Tolerance

The Bible teaches, firstly, that God is tolerant and, secondly, that tolerance is also expected from those who believe in Him.

God Himself is particularly tolerant towards those who do not belong to the people of Israel. He gives rain to the good and the bad, to the righteous and to the unrighteous (Matt .5:45). Romans 2 verse 4 speaks about God who is rich in kindness, tolerance and patience (cf. also Rom. 3:25,26). Paul says (in 1 Tim. 1:15,16) that Christ practised great patience in order to save him – the worst of sinners. As far as religious life is concerned, God is patient and gives people an opportunity to convert themselves (Rom. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). So God's "tolerance" does not mean that he accepts evil, but that he allows people a chance to change their lives. He offers room for all people to search for Him and serve Him and He also gives people the chance to go their own way (Acts 14:16). A very clear example of Christ's patience is described in Luke 9:52-56.

Skillen (1995:349) attaches great importance to the well-known parable of Matthew 13 verse 24-30 (about the wheat and the weeds in the same field). From this he not only deduces that the state should have room for all kinds of beliefs. He also sees in it God's tolerance towards people who do not (yet) believe in Him. God's endless tolerance is rooted in his great love.

The same is expected from the followers of Christ. As in the case of God and Christ love – and no other motive – should be the driving force behind their tolerance (1 Cor. 13:7; Eph. 4:2; cf. also 2 Cor. 6:6).

Therefore the deepest ground for human tolerance is not a human being's patience, obligingness or whatever, but God's tolerance. The way He treated people who did not recognise Him as God, Christians should also treat people who differ from them in religion.

We can also be taught from Scripture about *the way* people of other religions should be treated. This does not happen by force or power (Zech. 4:6) but through conviction and persuasion. The battle for the hearts of people is not fought – as so often in the past and even today – with fleshly (sinful) weapons. Since it is a spiritual battle there can only be hope for success when it is fought with spiritual weapons (the weapons which the Holy Spirit provides, cf. Eph. 6:12 *et seq.*).

With reference to this, Marshall says the following about religious tolerance: "It means letting others exist freely while seeking when necessary to oppose them by word. It means dealing with our religious differences by the sword of the spirit, not the sword of the state ... It is refraining from that for which we have the power but not the rightful authority. This also means that toleration necessarily needs to appeal to authority as distinct from mere power ... it forswears the use of force ..." (Marshall, 1996:8).

What Marshall says here is of the utmost importance. The power of Christians towards other religions is not situated in the *means of power* they try to use (sometimes with cruelty in the past and today in more sophisticated ways). It is situated in the *authority* with which they can act. This authority is not in themselves but is rooted in the Truth in which they believe. Because they have this authority, they can act with *conviction*.

Conviction in the Scriptures

The Bible is so full of the conviction in believers that these few flashes can serve only as a reminder. A well-known example is Elijah's fearlessness – while his life was in danger – on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). Not only does Paul show great patience with the many gods of the Athenians (Acts 17). He also tells them on the Areopagus in no uncertain terms that he does not approve of their polytheism. Christ shows great love and tolerance to the Samaritan woman (John 4:21-26), but at the right time He also tells her the truth about her sinful life, so that she can convert herself.

From the Scriptures it is clear that differences – religious ones, too – are suffered in true tolerance (cf. the definition of tolerance above), but it is always rooted in truth and its aim is not to leave the situation unchanged. *Loving tolerance* towards one's neighbour is always coupled with *holy intolerance* towards sin (cf. Anonymous, 1980:4).

Tolerance not only applicable to other religions

From what has been said up to now, the wrong impression could have been created that tolerance and conviction (authoritative witnessing) is something that goes outwards, only applicable in the case of other religions with which one does not agree. However, it also applies to one's own fellow believers, those who share one's faith. It must also be practised inwards.

The Scriptures not only encourage Christians who are subjected to injustice and suffering to have patience and tolerance (James 5:11). It also charges believers to be tolerant of one another (Eph. 4:2 and Col. 3:12, 13) – love endures all things (1 Cor. 13:7).

May tolerance towards fellow-believers be of a different kind (milder or softer) than the tolerance we have already described? In stead of milder, it should probably be more severe and strict. On the one hand it should be much easier for fellow-believers (since they share the same convictions) to tell the other when they do not agree with something. On the other hand it is harder – exactly because it concerns fellow-believers. Christians will have to summon the courage to witness with the same conviction (holy intolerance) to fellow-Christians when they are disobedient to God's will in their thoughts and acts.

7.2.6 Conclusion: true Christian tolerance

This short summary sets out on the one hand what tolerance should not be and on the other hand what true Christian tolerance should entail:

- It is not loveless and proud because it holds onto the Truth. It should be practised in true love and modesty. The Truth calls on Christians to love and in love they witness to the same Truth. This is done humbly, since the Truth is not dependent on them – they received it by grace.
- So tolerance does not mean indifference and aloofness, but involvement.
- It does not originate from opportunism which tolerate other religions merely for its own profit or for peace's sake. It takes a sincere interest in them and is eager to know as much as possible about them.

- Contrary to active intolerance, it is not something passive. It is an active deed of involvement in other people's struggle for truth.
- It does not originate from hesitation, but from a deep conviction.
- Tolerance is not something weak or sentimental. We could rather say that intolerance and fanaticism are signs of uncertainty and weakness. To endure things one does not approve of, one has to be strong.
- Finally Christian tolerance is not something negative. It is the prevailing, secular kind of tolerance which is negative, since it can say nothing more but that one should *not* be uncivil, discourteous, impolite, tactless, unpleasant or opposing. Christian tolerance originates in a positive attitude to life. Its purpose is a peaceful and just society.

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Chapter 8:

SECULARISM, THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES

(1) The threat

This book deals with secularism. The previous chapters often mentioned the word and its manifestations in society, but could not explain the phenomenon in detail. This chapter (the first of three) is, therefore, an effort to describe our contemporary secular age in order for us to be able to understand it better and to know how to act as Christians. To achieve this aim, attention is given to the following: (1) By way of introduction the phrase “the spirit of our times” is explained. (2) Then the question is discussed why secularism only recently became a fact in South Africa, and its main features are mentioned. (3) This is followed by a brief description of a much more advanced form of secularism in a country like the Netherlands. After being enriched by the ideas of others in this chapter, the next chapter presents my own philosophical characterisation of secularism as well as an explanation why secularism is such a great threat to Christianity. In the light of a Christian philosophy of society, a following chapter will make an in-depth analysis of the secularist distinction between private and public and its consequences for Christian education.

8.1 The spirit of our times

The injunction to the first Christians to test the spirits (cf. 1 John 4:1) has lost nothing of its topicality. On the contrary, it may be even more important today for us to find our way in a spiritual maze. All the same, it is a very difficult assignment to develop the necessary spiritual discernment. With what kind of spiritual seismograph could we best register the hidden tremors of the spirit of our times? By way of introduction we here provide answers only to two questions relating to the title of this chapter: What do we mean by “spirit”, and what is our attitude to our “times”?

8.1.1 The spirit of a time

Just as in the case of the concept "time" we know what we mean by the spirit of a time, but to put it in words is much more difficult. Not because it is fiction or not a reality. Hart (1968:1-17) offers valuable thoughts on this. He describes the spirit of a person, group or time as the characteristic "engine" which drives them and thus typifies everything they do. In a broader description Hart (cf. 1968:5) says the following: When one speaks of the spirit of someone or something (a movement or era) one speaks of his life, his way of doing things, his heart, that which makes him what he is. "Spirit" thus denotes inspiration, motivation, guidance and direction on a specific road. "Spirit" is the same as the deepest religious driving force or direction of something or someone. The spirit which is in us also determines how we look at reality around us, our worldview or perspective on life.

According to Hart (1968:9) spiritual discernment helps us to distinguish between the two basic antithetic spirits which take possession of the human spirit: the Holy Spirit and the spirit of evil (Satan). Thus the spirit of a time cannot be seen separately from who/what man regards as God/divine.

Since people usually obey the laws of what they regard as God/a god, Hart draws attention to a second important matter, namely the relation between spirit and law: "“Everything I do, everything that happens to me or through me, everything in which I am in any way involved, constitutes my experience, belongs to my life. But what makes my life my life is the spirit of it and the law which this spirit obeys” (Hart, 1968:14).

Thus the spirit of someone or something is determined by his concept of God/god and law. (This important perspective will be worked out further in the next chapter.)

8.1.2 Our times lack a name

Schwartz (1975:9) aptly remarks the following about modern times: "The famous post-eras (post-Christian, post-industrial, post-Constantinian, etc.) are indicative

of our state of mind. We feel that the old accustomed ways of life have gone, but we are very unsure how to map out what lies ahead of us, or even to name it". In Barr (1992:45) we get a similar idea, except that he adds a few more "posts": Post-communistic, post-ideological and post-modern.

So we don't even have a name to typify our own identity in the 21st century. And even when we characterise our own times today as "post-modern" the question is what exactly it means. Besides, post-modernism is not at all less secularist than the so-called modern times. (For criticism on the term "post-Christian" see the next chapter.) In extenuation we must admit that it is by no means easy to determine when a certain period in history started and when it ends. (See Van der Hoeven, 1974.)

Without any further motivation (the reason will become clear from next chapters) I give a name to our "nameless" times. I baptise it with the term "secularism", a time in which the secularist spirit increasingly determines our thoughts and acts. (Compare Van der Walt, 2002:367 *et seq.*) It could be a bold venture, for Dekker and Tennekes (1981:10-20) rightly remark that the term "secularism" is similar to the term "spirit" in so far that everybody knows more or less what it means until one is asked to define it. One important aim of this chapter is precisely this, namely to endeavour a clearer description of this elastic concept from a philosophic perspective.

8.1 Insight into growing secularism

It is a general fact that the bomb of secularism has only recently hit South Africa and Africa while in the Western world it was a fact already about fifty years ago.

8.2.1 Earlier awareness in the rest of the world

As early as the beginning of the previous century (1928) Jones made the following remarkable statement: "No student of the deeper problems of life can very well fail to see that the greatest rival of Christianity in the world today is not Mohammedanism, or Buddhism, or Hinduism, or Confucianism, but a world-wide secular way of life and interpretation of the nature of things" (Jones, 1928:284.

Cf. also Nijk, 1968:40). In a footnote Jones explains what he means by secularism: "I am using 'secular' here to mean a way of life and an interpretation of life that include only the natural order of things and that do not find God, or a realm of spiritual reality essential for life or thought" (Jones, 1928:284). Later on he (Jones, 1928:338) describes the threat of secularism as "powerful", "dangerous" and "insidious" – not merely for Christianity, but also for the other world religions which are usually regarded as the greatest competitors of Christianity,

In two respects the statements by Jones are remarkable. In the first instance that he discerned the secularist spirit of our times at such an early stage. (The term "secular" is much older, but the great debates about the secularist worldview only started 25 years later in Europe.) Secondly, he realised at that stage already what a great threat secularism would hold for all religions.

In this respect South Africa is far behind. Not being conscious of the secularist danger or ignoring it, however, means forsaking our calling to test the spirits and can only lead to our spiritual loss (1 John 4:1 *et seq.*). Although as a theologian Du Rand (2002) does not answer all our philosophical questions, he does offer valuable insights, which help to understand our present transitional situation to a secularist society.

8.2.2 Like a thief in the night

Some academics actually were conscious earlier of secularism (cf. e.g. Duvenage, 1965). However, Du Rand (2002:21, 53) is right when he states that it crept up on us like a thief in the night and it is only now that it looms large as life before us. As a result of the speed with which changes took place in the past ten years, we did not notice it. Now we have to face it. And the intensity with which secularisation takes place, is busy changing the public scene to something unrecognisable.

8.2.3 Why now?

South Africa's long isolation from the rest of the world is given as one of the reasons why until recently we were able to resist the tide of secularism. According to Du Rand a much more important reason is the "civil religion" in which no distinction was made between the interests of Christianity and those of the Afrikaner. (A similar situation as in the Western world where often inadequate distinction was drawn between the Gospel and Western culture.) In this ideology the idea of a national church played an important role. According to Du Rand (2002:31) it is a crying irony that the Afrikaner's weapon against secularism was in itself a kind of secularisation, for coupling the ideas of predestination and the covenant from Scripture with the national pursuit of the Afrikaner, was a profanation. The civil religion (of which the ideal of apartheid had become an inherent part) aided the myth that South Africa was a Christian country where Christian values were applied. In this way our country was withheld from being blatantly secular. Outwardly South Africa was a Constantinian *corpus Christianum* or Christian society.

8.2.4 The new secular situation

After 1994 the Afrikaners no longer had the political power to further their Christian convictions, or to put it the other way round, to support with Christianity their political domination. The idea of "a Christian society" disappeared. Du Rand (2002:52) describes the situation as follows (I translate): "For the first time in their existence the Afrikaans churches find themselves in a state which does not claim to be a Christian state, but to be an outspoken secular state, which without wasting words is definitely in favour of the public domain being secular, devoid of any religion or religious claims."

The contrast between the earlier situation and the present can be made clear amongst others in the following four points: (1) Government is now considered as a purely human institution which gets its legitimacy only from the people it governs. (2) The state is "neutral", meaning that it may not show preferential treatment to any religion. (3) This does not necessarily mean that the state is

hostile toward religion. (Article 15(2) of Chapter 2 of our new constitution allows religious ceremonies in purely state or state-supported institutions under certain conditions.) In the public sector, however, religion is reduced to the use it may have to motivate people to a better moral life (cf. Du Rand, 2002:56). (4) Religion is completely privatised, limited to the faith of the individual, in married life, family and church.

Thus far we focussed on the unique situation in South Africa. However, this chapter will also be relevant for the rest of Africa, as secularism is also increasing elsewhere on the continent (cf. Shorter & Onyancha, 1997). Even Christians in other parts of the world may react in the same way to secularism as South Africans do.

8.2.5 Christians' reactions to the new dispensation

According to Du Rand (2002) the new dispensation was an essential purifying process since it brought about the necessary distance between faith/church and politics/state. But coming from a Reformed tradition he cannot accept that God's rule as King is restricted to private life and the churches (cf. also Du Rand, 1978). Therefore he disapproves of the following two reactions to secularism.

In the first instance he considers it tragic (cf. Du Rand, 2002:60, 67) that many Christians in South Africa do exactly what secularism wants: They surrender the state and the rest of so-called public life to the spirit of secularism ("inward emigration"). This in no way offers an answer to secularism but leads to a schizophrenic existence. The Christian tries to lead a personal Christian life, but does not know how to find his way as a Christian in life "out there".

Du Rand spots a second undesirable reaction by Christian Afrikaners: an all too easy adaptation to the new secular dispensation. This option is not satisfactory either, for secular public life cannot be separated from personal, religious life, but influences it. And this influence is not for the best because – as Du Rand rightly says – public life is not and cannot be devoid of religious convictions, but is driven by a secular spirit (cf. Matt. 12:43-45).

Du Rand's own solution (opposed to either the tendency to flee or accept) is transformation. He concentrates on two matters: transformation of the church's confession and transformation of the missionary task of the churches to an inward mission (among our own people).

8.2.6 Evaluation

No one could have an objection to the answer Du Rand offers to secularism. Kritzinger (2002:5) for instance also draws attention to the most important challenge to the churches not being missionary work far away but nearby, within the church itself. However, the question is whether what Du Rand offers is adequate to show the Christian how to go about so that the Word of God and his law (authority) can once more govern our entire lives. Merely concentrating on what the churches – who have now been relegated to the private sphere – should be doing, is hopelessly inadequate to my mind. Maybe we should not expect more from theologians (who reflect on confession and church).

But I also suspect that Du Rand's "thin" answer to secularism is related to the fact that he did not fathom secularism itself deeply and broadly enough. As will be explained, secularism is much more than a decrease in religiosity (especially in the churches).

8.3 A Reformed interpretation of the situation

To help us along in understanding and describing our times, it could be enlightening to look at one of our countries of origin where the process of secularisation already began around World War II and thus has progressed much further than in South Africa and the rest of Africa. We listen to the insights of the Dutch Reformed sociologist of religion, Dekker, on the situation of the churches in his country. Once again our primary interest is in Dekker's viewpoint on secularism which also determines his reaction as a Christian.

8.2.1 Secularisation viewed as a decline in religiosity

In an early contribution from Dekker (cf. Dekker and Tennekes, 1981:9 *et seq.*) holds the opinion that secularisation (the process which results in secularism) is the decline or dwindling of religiosity.

My problem with such a view on secularism is that it does not make sufficiently clear that secularism – even if it denies the existence and/or relevance of God – is in itself in the deepest sense a religious conviction. It entails a *replacement* of Christianity (and other traditional religions) rather than being a mere *decline* in religiosity.

In this view I am supported by numerous recent writers of whom I only mention four by way of illustration. Gottfried (1999:326) sees secularism as a *shift away* from the sacred (to the mere natural) rather than a *removal* of the sacred. McClay (2000:59) says it is more accurate to call secularism a substitute or alternative religion. Gray (2002:73) speaks about the paradox of secularism, since it is supposed to leave behind all religions, but on looking closely only replaces them with its own (secularist) faith. And Azkoul (1978:9) explicitly states that secularism is a faith in man without God.

8.3.2 A different picture in practice

Apart from my principal objection, it can also be shown from practice that the old hypothesis on secularisation, namely that the world is becoming less and less religious, cannot be maintained. The real facts are that religions do not disappear and are even reviving. A few proofs of this are the articles of Gray (2002:72), Jakobsen and Pellegrini (2000:15,16) and McClay (2000:54 *et seq.*) The last-mentioned writer says the 21st century remains energetic and even manically religious. He even avers that not the (other) religions but secularism itself is declining, since today it is more popular to be “spiritual” than “secular”. (In my opinion this is somewhat naïve – this kind of spirituality is often no less secular.)

In an anonymous article in the *Christian Century* (1991:962) reference is made to an investigation which was done as early as 1990 in Europe and elsewhere

(following a similar investigation done in 1980) from which it becomes clear that Western societies are not becoming *less* religious but that their religious orientation is *changing*. Westerners do not reject religion as such, but they reject its expression in the churches since it is no longer relevant to their everyday problems. (This fact gives an additional reason why the offensive against secularism cannot be launched successfully solely from the churches or theology.)

At the risk that readers may think that the danger of secularism has disappeared, I quote some more statements from one of the best known authorities in this field. Berger (1999:2) says: "... the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today ... is as furiously religious as it ever was, in some places more so than ever". Elsewhere: "Counter-secularization is at least as important a phenomenon in the contemporary world as secularization" (Berger, 1999:6). Further: "The world today is massively religious, is anything but the secularized world that had been predicted ... by so many analysts of modernity" (Berger, 1999:9). And finally: "Those who neglect religion in their analysis of contemporary affairs, do so at great peril" (Berger, 1999:14).

According to Berger these facts do not mean that secularisation will not continue. What he does point out is that it will not happen as easily as was predicted fifty years ago. His reason (with which I agree) is that man is inherently a religious being who consequently seeks for sense and meaning which goes beyond his empirical existence. Deep down every human being needs greater security than that which the superficial secularist religious worldview can offer. Thus religious movements which can offer such security - or purports to do so - today have great appeal.

Berger (cf. 1999:14) comes to the conclusion that we are dealing with complex, manifold situations – moreover differing from one country to the next – so that a verdict which is generally applicable is impossible: Both religious revival and change and ongoing secularisation are (provisionally) typical of the 21st century.

8.3.3 Two forms of secularism

It is time to return to Dekker's vision on secularism. Most probably he has broadened his earlier view (of 1981), namely secularism as a decline in religiosity, in the light of the above-mentioned new facts. Since 1995 he distinguishes two forms of secularism: individual and social. (Is it possible that this distinction was induced by the typical secularist division between private and public?)

On the individual level Dekker still maintains that (Christian) religiosity is on the decline (cf. Dekker, 2000:27): fewer people is involved in religion in churches; they live less of what they believe; Christians are less critical of society; their faith is involved in fewer facets (becoming merely personal). He uses the word "churchification" to denote this process of escape or withdrawal by Christianity. (This kind of churchification is more or less the opposite of the former meaning when the term denoted that the church dominated the whole of society.) He does admit, however, that in this first form of secularisation (the individual) – especially if one looks at Christianity only – one could also speak of a change/replacement of religion in stead of merely seeing it as dwindling religiosity.

The second form of secularism entails the restriction of the influence of religion on the level of society. (In an earlier compilation of which Dekker was one of the co-editors, it is called the institutional or organisational level of secularisation. Cf. Dekker, Luidens and Rice, 1997.) While on the individual level it has not progressed so far, on the second level (which, apart from the church, includes other institutions like Christian schools, colleges and organisations in various other fields) widespread secularisation has taken place. In this process ever expanding parts of society become independent from religious and church influence which is driven back to the personal sphere (cf. Dekker, 2000:29 and 1995:24, 52 *et seq.*) Religion as the "cement" of society has disappeared.

As became evident above, the separation private-public which Dekker points out here is typical of modern day secularism. God and religion have been declared to be a "private matter" – something it by no means wishes to be.

Dekker rightly points out that the two forms of secularism cannot be separated into watertight compartments. Individual weakening of faith naturally has an impact on broader society. And of course a secularised society and culture cannot contribute to the flourishing of individuals' Christian faith in their families and churches.

About the churches Dekker says that they tend no longer to be involved in the complete lives of their members outside the churches, but only in their personal needs. For the members, too the church is only relevant when it addresses their own needs. This tendency undoubtedly links up with the strong individualistic tendency in present secularism. (A standard work on Western individualism and its consequences is Bellah *et al.*, 1996.) With right Dekker says (2000:75) that such a situation unfortunately further supports the secularist dogma that religion is only a private matter.

On the level of society the *legal* division between church and state has also become a *social* division replacing the former close contact. Consequently the church can exert little influence on societal life. Society outside the church today has greater influence on the church than the other way round (Dekker, 1995:154). And society no longer expects a critical, admonishing or reprimanding word from the churches. The most they can do is to fulfil the role of a source for moral values (cf. Dekker, 2000:23; 1995:131).

As the reader will have noted, there are many parallels between the South African situation and the Dutch one. Therefore we are eager also to hear Dekker's answer to secularism.

8.3.4 An answer to the challenge

According to Dekker many Christians are unhappy because the essential things with which they are faced in their everyday lives outside the church are not discussed in their churches. Other Christians have lost heart and accepted that the church is a peripheral phenomenon in society. (These tendencies can also be seen in South Africa.) In a volume of which Dekker was one of the editors (cf.

Dekker, Luidens and Rice, 1997) a pietistic reaction is mentioned, something similar to what Du Rand calls "inward emigration".

Dekker, who wants to retain a Biblical vision on the church, is placed in a difficult position by such reactions to secularism. According to him as a Reformed thinker (cf. Dekker, 2000:115, 122, 164) it is the task of Christians not only to *experience* faith in the church ("breathing in") but also to *live* it in the outside world ("breathing out"). Faith should be *practiced* and *exercised* in the church in order to *live* it in broader society. (The church is merely the "kitchen" for the "restaurant" of the world.) As a solution Dekker sees (1995:168-174 and 2000:205) three key roles for the church in answering to secularism: (1) orientation of faith, (2) ethical reflection and (3) the establishment of community.

8.3.5 Capitulating before the power of secularism?

In this threefold plan of action proposed by Dekker little can be seen of his definition of the church which should be there for the world. It is limited to (2) the ethical reflection by the churches, which implies that the churches should take part in the public debate on values. It would seem as if Dekker has simply accepted the restricted role given to the church by secularism, namely that of merely being a source of moral support.

Dekker's capitulation becomes more clearly visible in a still more recent article (cf. Dekker, 2001) in which he explicitly discusses the question whether the Reformed faith in God's sovereignty in all domains of life can survive in a post-modern, secular world. His answer is that it will be very difficult, if not totally impossible, because the secular culture is so powerful (cf. Dekker 2001:156). Where he formerly (up to 1995 and also in the joint work of 1997) was still critical to some extent of a pietistic faith (turned solely inwards), he now sets his hope on the possibility of the Reformed faith surviving in a pietistic form. Most probably his definition of secularism also plays a role here: Secularism is the decline of faith and its present pietistic revival is the answer to secularism.

As we have said this is not consistent with what he expects from the church. Neither with his statement that the secular, public sector does not leave personal faith intact. What is more: Is pietism a *form* of the Reformed faith or rather an *aberration* from it? In terms of the distinctions of the above-mentioned volume (Dekker *et al.*, 1997), we could pose the question whether renewal of faith in individuals (resacralisation on the individual level) is a strong enough antipode to stem the tide of secularism on the structural level. I do not believe so, and I suspect neither does Dekker. Is Dekker's trust in such a type of faith merely a last desperate effort or is it a clear sign that he, albeit unconsciously, has given in before the onslaught of secularism which wants to restrict faith and religion to the private sphere? (For the subsequent development in his viewpoint, cf. also Dekker, 2005 and Dekker 2006. He became so frustrated with the Protestant Church in the Netherlands that he resigned as member in 2006.)

8.3.6 The real challenge of secularism

We were able to learn a lot from Du Rand as well as Dekker to gain a better understanding of secularism. In my opinion the great void in the work of both of them is that they have not considered the matter profoundly and broadly enough. They regard secularism primarily as a decline in religiosity and the dwindling influence of the churches. That is why their solution is that the churches should do certain things to regain more members and a greater impact on society. Secularism then has to be fought from the church and by theology.

But both these Reformed writers know very well that faith (in the broader sense of all-encompassing religion) is not limited to the church and cannot be. Whether secularism is willing to recognise it or not, our religious orientation determines our total life, because God created us as religious beings. As was suggested above with reference to several writers, secularism itself would like to be much more than merely restricting religion to private life. It pursues the ideal (at least in the public field) of being the dominant faith.

Marshall (1991:7) formulates it sharply as follows: "The question of diversity is supposedly solved by eliminating ... the contending parties from the public realm.

The eradication of public religious expression is offered as a solution to the genuine problem of diversity of religions. However, this approach does not deal openly with diversity. It merely *excludes* religious diversity and establishes secularism in its place ... The problems of religious pluralism are very real and very difficult, but they are not to be solved by pretending that a secular society is genuinely pluralistic when secularism is in fact only one part of our plurality" (cf.. also Azkoul, 1978:9).

I prefer to call secularism an alternative worldview. (A worldview according to which God does not exist or – if He exists – is irrelevant. His laws are consequently not applicable to our lives.) For this reason it can only be both profoundly understood and answered from the perspective of a Christian worldview. A theological perspective which concentrates on faith in the church is not sufficient. Since philosophy is the scientific reflection on and explanation of worldviews, the help of a Christian philosophy is indispensable for us Christians when faced with secularism. Therefore in the next chapter the spirit of our times will be fathomed further with the aid of a philosophical "seismograph".

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* * *

Chapter 9:

SECULARISM, THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES

(2) Its characteristics

The previous (introductory) chapter concentrated on the threat which secularism presents to Christianity in South Africa and the rest of Africa. A description of a more advanced situation of secularisation in the Netherlands confirmed its danger elsewhere in the world.

This (second) chapter focuses on a more precise description of the characteristics of secularism. (1) It firstly provides a philosophical-historical perspective on secularism. (2) This is followed by a systematic-philosophical discussion of the secularist ideas about God, law and cosmos. (3) Subsequently the attractive and therefore seductive nature of secularism is investigated.

9.1 Introduction: the need of a philosophical approach

From the previous chapter it became clear that secularism started spreading swiftly in South Africa during the past decade. From a sketch of the situation in the Netherlands a clear indication was obtained of what we also will have to face in our country, on the continent of Africa and elsewhere in the world. With right Van Houten (1991:54, 57) says that secularism has led to the greatest crisis that (Western) Christianity has yet encountered. For when secularist privatisation has been completed, every religion will have lost its power. And when secularist relativism has been accomplished, every religion will have lost its unique character.

In this chapter we take a philosophically more profound look at the nature of secularism. With the aid of a Christian philosophical "seismograph" an attempt is made at giving a sharper delineation of this worldwide phenomenon. For without a good description of a dangerous temptation one does not know how to protect or arm oneself against it.

The Christian philosophical look at secularism is taken from two perspectives: historical and systematic. As will become clear, these two are not to be separated: the historical is done from a particular ontology (view of reality). Scholars in Reformational philosophy will soon note that my historical and systematic vision on secularism is derived from this philosophical tradition (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005a & 2005b).

9.2 A philosophical-historic perspective on secularism

As one could expect, there are numerous versions on the origin and development of secularism. Most of the articles on secularism also contain historical flashbacks. (Cf. Duvenage, 1965; Floor, 1996; Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2000; Keane, 2000; Keddie, 2003; Kennedy, 2000 and Pannenberg, 1996.) From these it becomes clear that secularism is a complicated matter. One could liken it to a great river with many tributaries feeding it. In the course of Western history many trends have merged, forming the mainstream of secularism.

An important aim of most of the historical investigations is to determine what the real reason or cause was that gave rise to secularism. On this there are widely divergent opinions. We here limit ourselves to the role of Christianity.

9.2.1 The role of Christianity

In popular literature secularism is usually depicted as the absolute antipole of Christianity. Seen thus there cannot possibly be a causal link between them. However, investigation has shown surprisingly that (at least some of) the causes of secularism are to be found not far from Christianity itself. Very briefly some of the theories are the following:

- **Secularism as the final outcome of the dualism of sacred-profane**

An outline of Western history is more or less the following: (1) for the Greeks of antiquity the (mythical) sacred mode of thought was more important than (rational) profane thought. (2) With the rise of rational philosophical thought (about 500 BC) the profane was elevated above the sacred of popular religion. (3) When the West was Christianised the age-old dualism of sacred-profane was

taken over, but was Christianised in the form of the nature-grace theme (about 500-1500 AD). (4) Since about 1500 AD (the Renaissance) the natural, profane or secular domain emancipated itself from the authority of the domain of grace or the sacred. (5) Today the secular/profane dominates the sacred/religious or, if studied closely, the profane has taken on a sacred character.

- **A direct link** between Christianity and secularism is found for instance in the works of Max Weber, according to whom capitalism has its origin in the Puritan form of Christianity.
- **An indirect link** is laid by theories according to which secularism is a secularisation of originally Christian beliefs. (The Western idea of progress, for example, is a profanation of the Christian expectation of a future life.)
- **A reactionary link** is suggested by secular writers who hold the opinion that secularism may be regarded, not as a parasite which preys on a few Christian relics, but as having emancipated itself *from* the Christian background.
- **A religious-political link is laid by researchers** who look for the origin of secularism in the 16th and 17th century during the religious wars in Europe. Because there no longer was unity in religious convictions after the Reformation (Protestants opposed Catholics and *visa versa*, and various persuasions within Protestantism were fighting one another), there could no longer be unity on the level of society. Consequently the secular, religiously neutral state was born which limited religion to the private sphere since it was regarded as suppressing, intolerant, divisive and detrimental to a healthy civil life.

Merely from these few theories it becomes apparent that even Christianity could have contributed (directly or indirectly) to the origin of secularism. Secularism is an (unplanned) child of Christianity – especially of an impure Christianity (cf. next chapter) – but then a child who would in the end betray its own mother.

This process of secularism did not remain restricted to the West. Today it has become a global phenomenon, partly as a result of Christian missionary work which usually accompanied Western colonisation. Ramachandra (2003:216) in

this regard speaks of the irony of missionary work in the Third World. On the one hand it brought many good things like redemption from heathen beliefs and customs, better health services and Western education, but on the other hand it transmitted secular Western scientific, political and other cultural ideas. : “The Christian missionary movement was the funeral of the great myth of Christendom, because mission took abroad the successful separation of church and state”. He therefore calls secularism the “prodigal son” (cf. Luke 15:11-31) of the Christian message.

9.2.2 The course of Western history in broad perspective

The origin of secularism can be understood better when it is placed in the wider perspective of the changes in the spirit of the times. At the beginning of the previous chapter it was said (cf. 8.1.1) that the spirit of a person or time is determined by his relationship to God (or what is regarded as god) and what he accepts as his authority for life (his idea of law). These two convictions together motivate the whole of life and determine the direction of a certain time. So it is possible to test the spirit or religious direction of a specific time or culture by simply asking the question what his attitude was/is towards the God of the Bible and his ordinances for life (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005a & 2005b). In the course of Western history we get the following four answers to this question (cf. Van der Walt, 1999a:382-384).

- **The Greek and Roman cultures** (±500 BC to ±100 AD) would have answered that they did not know the Bible and the God of the Bible. So these were *heathen cultures*.
- **The Patristic and Medieval cultures** (±200 to ±1400 AD) would have answered that apart from the old heathen cultures, they also knew the Bible and Christian culture and that they were trying to reconcile the two. This we call a *synthesised culture*. On the surface the world seems to be Christianised, but the pagan element was never totally eliminated, only suppressed. Christians lived *above* or *next* to the worldly or secular culture, in stead of reforming it fundamentally *from the inside*.

- **The 16th century Reformation** could not accept this dualism. It rejected the synthesising mentality of the Roman Catholic Church, since it wished to be obedient only to God and his law. The heathen element of the synthesising culture (the original Graeco-Roman culture) was rejected in order to serve God with one's whole life in all fields and not only in the church. We call this a *reformational* viewpoint. This reform movement never was a dominant trend within Western culture. But although it did have its lows it did not come to an end either. Current Reformational philosophy is one of its fruits.

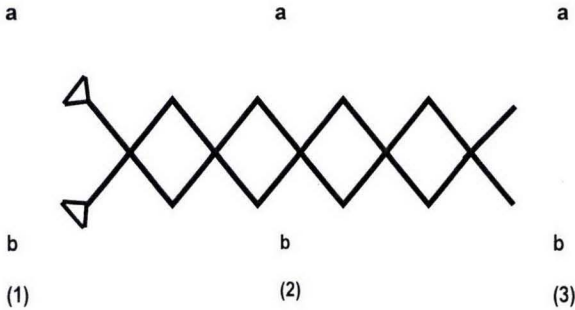
- **During the Renaissance (16th century)**, however, a different movement was started which would later on dominate Western culture. The philosophers of the Renaissance were no longer happy with the Medieval synthesising culture. But their motive for breaking with it was the exact opposite of that of the 16th century reformers. The people of the Renaissance broke with the synthesis because they wanted to get rid of the Christian element in Medieval culture. They wanted to reinstate the original pagan (Graeco-Roman) culture in all its glory. As the word *renaissance* shows, human beings had to be reborn or renewed in their own strength, without the power of God's Word and his Spirit. Here we have the beginning of the dechristianisation or *secularisation* of our Western culture, which ended in a modern heathendom.

With the Medieval *synthesising* culture as the point of departure, the ancient Greek and Roman cultures could be denoted as *presynthetic*, the Reformation as *correctly antisynthetic* (obedient) and the Renaissance as *wrongly antisynthetic* (disobedient to God).

In summary we can distinguish the following four main periods in the development of Western culture during the past 2500 years: (1) *the ancient pagan, presynthetic culture*, before the coming of Christ; (2) a halfhearted *Christian synthesising culture* after the spread of the Gospel to the whole of Europe and the Christianising of the West; (3) *a Christian antisynthetic view of culture*, which strives to serve and honour Christ in all aspects of life, and (4) a

modern, heathen, antisynthetic culture which deliberately rejects Christ and in his stead puts man on the throne.

The course of this development can be visualised in the following diagramme:



(1) = Pre-synthesis culture: ± 500 BC – ±100 AD

a Israel and the Old Testament culture (Biblical trend) and the

b Greek and Roman cultures (extra-Biblical trend) still separated

(2) = Synthesising culture: ± 200 AD – ±1400 AD

a The Christian element and

b The secular (of Graeco-Roman origin) intermingled in a synthesis

(3) = Anti-synthesis culture: ±1500 AD – the present

a The correct anti-synthesis (Reformational trend) and

b the wrong anti-synthesis (secularism since the Renaissance) separate from one another, each taking its own direction.

So Western culture has almost completed a full circle. (1) It began with a pre-Christian period (ancient Greek and Roman culture); (2) then it was Christianised

and we got a predominantly Christian civilisation (the early Christian and Medieval period); (3) gradual dechristianisation took place (\pm 1600 – 1900 AD) and (4) in the 20th and 21st century we once more live among a secular, heathen culture. The clock of history has completed a circle of 24 hours!

Do we again live in a *pre*-Christian cultural period today? No, for the clock of history can never be turned back. The contemporary secular paganism therefore has a completely different character from the ancient, *pre*-Christian one.

Would it then be better to call our times the *post*-Christian era like many people do (cf. 8.1.2 in the previous chapter)? Since my diagram above may create the impression that I myself regard our times as *post*-Christian, I need to make a short remark here.

With the spread of the Gospel over the whole of the Western world, Western culture was profoundly changed. So if one would hold that the West today is *post*-Christian, because it has returned to its *pre*-Christian state, the past would be undone and the penetrating power of God's Word would be underestimated.

What we could say is that the West today is predominantly *non*-Christian, since it has rejected God's revelation in the Bible as its compass for life. But to become unfaithful to the Gospel is different – and worse – than never having known it. Neither can anyone ever shake it off completely. The West permanently bears the accusation of the Gospel against the guilt of its rejection (cf. Heb. 6:4-8). So the situation of the West today is more serious – because of its guilt – than before the Gospel became known.

Even the most consistently anti-Christian thinking or action is not *post*-Christian. Even those who do not want to know about the Bible still live – even though they may not realise it – in a culture which has been influenced by the Gospel. Our contemporary secular culture is impossible and unintelligible without the (rejected) Biblical Christian tradition.

What one could say is that Western culture is *post-Corpus Christianum*. The predominantly Christian-Western society of early Christianity and the Middle Ages (\pm 500 to 1500 AD) is something of the past. But thereby the “Christian” part is not past – even though Western people no longer have any concept of it, and even though the Christian influence is limited. Besides, there still are millions who believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

9.3 A systematic perspective on secularism

The foregoing broad historical perspective in which the spirit of our times was pointed out, should be supplemented, given a more concrete content and thus deepened by a systematic perspective. (As has been said the two perspectives are closely linked.) According to the ontology of the Reformational philosophy three realities should be distinguished: (1) God, (2) his creation and (3) his ordinances which are valid for (lay down limitations and give direction to) his creation. Every person and every worldview – even the secular – is confronted by these three realities. What was the answer of secularism, how do its worldview and philosophy see these three realities?

9.3.1 The secularist view of God

Secularism is not identical to atheism (see below), but atheism nevertheless played a pertinent role in the development of Western secularism. An excellent book to understand the origin, development and decline of atheism is the book by McGrath: *The twilight of atheism; the rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world* (2004). He traces the history of disbelief in God as it is symbolised (at its beginning) by the fall of the Bastille (1789) and (at its end) the fall of the Berlin Wall. The first was a symbol of the viability and creativity of a godless world, while the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolised its failure.

Also Van Riessen (1967:46 and 1974:24) rightly points out that Western atheistic philosophers played an important role in the origin of secularism. (Van der Walt, 1999b:229-250 gives an overview of the most important atheistic philosophers.)

These philosophers rejected belief in God as fiction (a mere projection of man) in a variety of ways. An important contributing factor to which Van Riessen also devotes much attention is that modern man, compared to his predecessors, has, with the aid of science, technology and organisation, become a particularly powerful person and has drawn from this the (faulty) conclusion that he no longer needs God.

Harkness (1978:11) therefore gives the following short but very apt definition of secularism: "Secularism is the organization of life as if God did not exist." Therefore Van Riessen says (1974:24) that the secularist lives in a closed world without a transcendent horizon.

Today we no longer realise what an epochmaking step Western man has taken with this new worldview. Vahanian (1967:xiii) draws attention to this: "Ours is the first attempt in the recorded history to build a culture on the premise that God is dead". He also says that the death of God initially had more of an anti-Christian meaning, but later a more post-Christian, since it was considered as unimportant, even ridiculous to fight *against* something (God) which does not exist.

But is our time unique in this respect? Long ago (for example in the ancient Greek philosophy) there were atheists too. What is new in the present secularism (cf. Van Riessen, 1974:25) is that, first, the belief in a dead God has never been so widely spread. Secondly, it has placed an indelible stamp on *culture*. What was formerly just the *belief* of a few atheists, has now become the *condition* or *character* of the whole of life (Van Riessen, 1974:27). One could say that the theories of a few have become practice for the masses. This situation has great influence on each one of us. For although it is a delusion that God does not exist, the world today looks as if He is absent. The semblance or fabrication is a *working* semblance (Van Riessen, 1967:117).

Dekker (2003:114) for instance, indicates why many Christian churches and Christianity in general could not survive the onslaught of secularism: because

they could no longer rely on the confirmation and support of a religious (Christian) social environment.

Since the human being as a religious being cannot live without someone or something higher and greater than himself, something/somebody must take the place of God. (Albert Camus says somewhere that murdering God, means becoming a god oneself.) The primeval sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:5), namely the desire to be like God, be a god themselves, deciding for themselves what is good for them (autonomy) once more typifies secularism today. As will become apparent later on (cf. 9.3.3 below), not only is man elevated to divine status, but aspects of the non-human creation (for instance technology, science, economy) are absolutised or idolised as well.

For this reason modern idols are different from those of ancient times and man's attitude towards them is different from that of the heathen idol-worshippers in old times. The gods of today are impersonal things (because the supernatural is no longer considered to exist). Neither are these surrounded any longer by a sphere of mystery, mysticism and magic. The attitude of modern humans to their gods is much more impersonal and cold. It is not necessarily accompanied by all kinds of religious ritual. All of this does not mean that idolatry has disappeared in our secularist times – it has merely changed form.

9.3.2 The secularist view of the law

Although researchers usually link secularism with proclaiming the death of God, the rejection of God's law for life – especially in everyday practice – may play a much more serious role. As we have pointed out earlier, not only the concept of a god, but also the concept of law plays a vital role in determining the spirit of a time, since laws set boundaries, lay down what is good and evil, right and wrong and thus give direction in all areas of life.

Graaffland (1975) correctly states that secularism is unacceptable, because in essence it entails disobedience to God's ordinances for life. He calls it sin, a revolt against God. As a result of their rejection of God's law secularists also

have to reject basic Biblical doctrines like creation, the fall of man into sin and redemption.

The divine ordinances for life are not only *rejected* but – just as in the case of the concept of God – *substituted*. Since man has replaced God, the human being is now its own lawgiver (autonomy) (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005a:75). In Reformational philosophy this phenomenon is called “subjectivism” which means that someone or something which is a subject (subordinate) of the law is itself elevated to be a law. We could name numerous instances of this today. For instance, competition in economy is not judged normatively but is regarded as a norm in itself. The same applies to democracy, development, globalisation, etcetera.

As was the case with the concept of God, there also has been development in the secularist concept of law. During the time of rationalism (circa 1600-1900) human reason still tried to give direction. But since the time of irrationalism (circa the middle of the 20th century) the relativist viewpoint reigns that “everything goes”. Dostoyevsky’s well-known words have been proven right, namely that if God is dead, then anything is permissible. (As detailed description of continuously changing viewpoints on the law throughout Western history is provided by Vollenhoven, 2005a & 2005b.)

9.3.3 The secularist view on creation

As explained in previous chapters, there is an inseparable link between one’s concept of God and one’s vision of oneself and how one acts in creation. Not only do people make idols or invent idolatrous systems. Just as a Christian is called to be renewed to the image of Christ (1 John 3:2; Rom. 8:29), the worshipper of an idol resembles more and more the god he/she honours or absolutises. (With right Goethe said somewhere that a human being is moulded to the image of that which he loves or to which he has given his heart.) In his turn man creates things (e.g. societal relationships, like a family, church and state) according to his own image of what a human being should look like. In retrospect one could therefore deduct from the things people create how they see

themselves and what their view of God/a god is. Our deepest religious convictions are reflected in what our culture and society look like.

At the beginning of the process of secularisation it was not so clear-cut what the consequences of disobedience to God and his directions for life (laws) would be. From the Bible and also from practical experience (founded on the revelation of God in his creation) we do know, however, that holding in contempt God's ordinances always has its consequences. Only those who respect them, can hope for a rich, full life. Only within the boundaries of and according to the direction given in his laws (as revealed in both creation and Scripture) can true freedom, fulfilment, health, happiness, well-being, peace and many other blessings be enjoyed. Without obedience there is a lack of freedom, emptiness, pain and suffering of all kinds in all fields of life. Those who do not know and recognise the commandments of God must be prepared to accept a moaning creation as "normal".

Thus the "acid" of the secularist worldview not only erodes our belief in God and his law, but in a devastating way it also affects creation itself in which we live. Because the secularist worldview includes a specific *way of life*, it determines the *conditions* or *character* of the culture in which we live daily, as explained by Van Riessen above.

In his book on secularism Alexander (1993) explains why and how modern (especially Western) culture has lost its depth to become very shallow and empty. People today experience not only shallowness in the world outside, but also deep within themselves.

The Reformational philosophy's doctrine of modalities (distinguishing various aspects of earthly reality) affords a useful instrument for investigating the nature and impact of the secularist religion and worldview in different fields of life. It is impossible to attain comprehensiveness in this regard. What follows is more by way of illustration. It can serve as examples of how the nature and influence of secularism can be categorised more clearly, in stead of merely speaking about it in vague terms.

The aspect of faith

From the above it has already become clear that secularism demands the privatisation of all faith – except its own. Faith must be restricted to the personal sphere, since it will allegedly cause division on the level of society. A secularist order is supposed to eliminate conflict and promote tolerance – the solution for modern day plural societies with a variety of religions.

However, secularism does not protect religious variety, but rather destroys it. Neither does it eliminate conflict, but generates new conflict between itself and other religions. Under the cloak of tolerance it can be very intolerant. The secularist distinction between private (faith) and public (a neutral area) thus does not hold water. Our conclusion: the reductionist idea held by secularism on religion affects this highest human function so that it cannot really develop and flourish as explained in chapter 1.

The ethical aspect

In this field the influence of the relativism of late secularism (irrationalism) is clear. Of course rationalism was not a solution, but after even reason was rejected, there are no more laws or norms left. Only some “values”, which are moreover determined in an egotistic way according to personal taste and desire. Examples of moral degeneration (permissiveness, licentiousness, infidelity, fraud, corruption and naked hedonism) in social life (the public sphere) need not even be enumerated here, since the media are full of it daily. Almost anything becomes permissible – and even justified. Without being alarmistic, it can be said that ethical degeneration and even bankruptcy are looming before mankind. Naturally not all the blame for this can be laid on secularism, but it would be hard to deny that it makes an important contribution to the modern day moral crisis. (Cf. also chapter 14 on modern-day evolutionistic, secular sexual ethics.)

The juridical-political aspect

The vacuum left in the public domain by the disappearance of Christianity was filled in most countries by the secular state and its judicial system, guided by a

liberal, humanistic constitution. The courts interpret and propagate this secular system. What they have legalised, must be accepted as moral even though it may be decisions (on for instance pornography, abortion, euthanasia, prostitution, easy divorce, gay/lesbian "marriages", violation of Sundays, etc.) which conflict directly with the Christian and many other religions. Human rights, that much has gradually become evident, do not have only a positive but also a negative side, because they rest on the sand of mere human values like human dignity, in stead of on the sturdy foundation of a deeper (transcendent) justice. More and more critical voices point out how the ideology of human rights leads to self-centredness and gives little attention to a person's obligation towards fellow human beings. For a truly healthy society, human rights are necessary but not sufficient. In many cases there is a lack of suitable punishment which can bring people to reflect and force them back to obedience. In stead even the consequences of the misdeeds are often alleviated for the guilty. Since in many instances action is only taken about symptoms in stead of deeper causes (like condoms against aids), the wrong behaviour is promoted in stead of discouraged. Skeptics are of the opinion that, in spite of high ideals for human rights, "justice" and "righteousness" is determined in the end by political-economic power.

The aesthetic aspect

In the various art forms the deepest spirit of a culture is given sound, words and images. They are the mirrors of the society in which we live. Though naturally there are exceptions, the message proclaimed by modern art in general (especially conveyed through the media) is not elevating or inspiring, but for the greater part superficial, often vulgar, empty, senseless and nihilistic (cf. again Alexander, 1993). (This criticism is not necessarily founded on the old-fashioned idea that all that matters in art is to portray what is beautiful.) It extends so far that philosophers (cf. Rookmaaker, 1970) regard modern art as a clear symbol of a dying Western culture. In the media the main concern today is no longer primarily about contents but about the image (cf. Schulze *et al.*, 1991).

The economic aspect

In the modern day world the economy has become one of the great powers. As a result of globalisation in many cases it dominates national political power. It is a competing, aggressive, imperialistic economy which rules the media, technology, academy and science – in short, the whole of life. According to the model of the neo-capitalist ideology the entire life – the human body, health, education – is fully commercialised, meaning that the richness of life is reduced to money value. Managing models drawn up for the business world are thus applied more and more to other non-economic domains. In other words, areas of life which are not at all economic by nature are forced into the economic corset and are evaluated in monetary terms. (The first great commandment today is: be as profitable or useful as possible.) Human *well-being* (which has many sides) thus is understood unilaterally as material *prosperity*. Even our language is commercialised. Students and patients have lost their identity, for they are now called “clients”. People are denoted as social “capital”. Naked materialism is the order of the day – which means an immense impoverishment of what being human really entails. For a detailed description and critique of the secular neo-capitalist economic system, see Van der Walt (2006:97-112).

In their study Shorter & Onyancha (1997) distinguish the following forms of secularism on the contemporary African continent: (1) secularism as a worldview, which in theory and practice denies God's presence in the world (p. 14); (2) secularism as a division between a private sphere of subjective opinion and a sphere of public truth (p. 16,20); (3) secularism as religious indifference (p. 22); (4) secularism as consumer materialism (p. 22-25). According to them the last-mentioned is the most prevalent. Africa seems to be powerless against the economic forces of Western capitalism.

According to Shorter & Onyancha (1997:23) “Economism is a system which proclaims the overriding importance of the economic factor. It generates its own rituals and symbols and creates its own cultural myths of power, success, growth and prosperity. Economic issues prevail everywhere... Economic factors are

assumed to be the main source of meaning and value. Virtue is defined by economic success, profitability, cost-effectiveness and growth”.

The social aspect

Individualism is one of the traits of modern day secularism which has catastrophic results for the community. Social relationships, even marriage, are regarded as nothing more than a contract between individuals – which lasts only as long as it goes well with the marriage. Philosophers lament the loss of community spirit which can bond people together and in this way ensure a healthy society. As a result of this loss, efforts are made to ensure a measure of unity by all kinds of organisational means. In the end, however, bureaucracy rules in stead of organisation serving the particular social relationship by helping it to function better. The secular state propagating a “naked public square” does not promote a feeling of unity in society either, since such a unity requires a deeper ground or norm.

Language

The lingual aspect of culture is one of the most important, and this applies to contemporary secular culture as well. In previous ages our language still had a strong confessional element. Letters from my parents were for instance begun with words like “By the grace of our Heavenly Father we are all well.” Or births were announced in words like : “On ... (date) we received from the Lord a healthy daughter, ...” Nowadays such language use is mostly avoided since it sounds too old-fashioned. The real reason, however, is that the spiritual climate in which we live does not tolerate such religious language. So too, the subjects about which people talk, are mostly “worldly” things: relaxation, sport, entertainment, food, wealth and motor cars. People conversing on deeply religious problems today are the exception.

Technical power

Not without reason do several writers on secularism call technology one of the great powers of our times. On the one hand technology promotes secularism

because man (wrongly) believes that his unheard of technological possibilities have made God superfluous. On the other hand the secularist pursuit of power, of being the shaper of one's own future, stimulates technological development. In stead of a mere means therefore, technology becomes an object of reverence. But expecting too much from a part of creation (believing in it) means idolatry, technicism in this case (cf. Schuurman, 2005). Any ideology – including technicism – operates like a boomerang: What has been idolised eventually returns to harm the idolator. Since transcendently founded norms have disappeared, technology is no longer judged normatively, but is itself elevated to a norm in a subjectivist way. That which *can* be attained technically, is also *permissible*. (For instance, if a destructive weapon *can* be manufactured, it *may* also be done.) All that remains is “be as efficient or effective as possible”. This has a close link with another secular norm: “be as scientific as possible” – our next point.

The logical-scientific domain

One of the most valuable expositions of how science gradually became secularised, is the article by Dooyeweerd (1965). Early on in Western history reason was already pitted against faith. During rationalism (circa 1600-1900) the mind triumphed over faith in the form of an idolised reason. (To be exact: faith in reason itself supplanted the former faith in God.) The sciences developed swiftly and rendered phenomenal results. Today science is one of the great powers which control our times. Since up to recently it was considered as a neutral, value-free enterprise (God and his laws were not allowed to play a role in it), it promotes secularism. The other way round secularism finds in secular science a useful ally to propagate its worldview. Secular sciences act as the prophets of secularism. Someone who does not believe what modern science proclaims, who does not partake in the idolisation of science, is branded as a modern heretic. Irrationalistically tainted post-modernists do criticise the supposed neutrality and general validity of Western science, but they do not think in a less secularist way. If examined closely, their relativism holds an even greater danger for any effort to think in a Christian way.

The psychic-emotional aspect

Secularism hardly has the ability to bring happiness. Not without reason does the Word of God warn that man cannot live by bread alone (the material things). Something more than that which secularism offers, something greater than oneself is needed to make life meaningful and thus worthwhile. It is no wonder that life nowadays, in spite of material abundance in the West, is full of all forms of escape, unhappiness, emotional tension, psychic disorders, experiences of meaninglessness and other kinds of illnesses. This pain has to be numbed with all kinds of chemical substances. The newest fad is the therapeutic culture which in various ways has to make people feel better about themselves. The general slogan is: "Feel good about yourself". (Cf. the television advertisements geared to persuading viewers that they deserve a certain product.) The so-called mature, but deeply unhappy, sinful human being no longer knows the confession of sins, conversion and rebirth. Sin is no longer called by the name either. It is called "aberrations" or at most "disorders". The consequence is symptomatic relief of the results instead of going down to the root of the problem.

The biological-physical aspect

In the sciences (as in the physical and medical sciences but also in socio-biology) human life in its fullness has been reduced to the physical and chemical. Since human beings are *regarded* in this way, they are increasingly *treated* as such. Respect and reverence for human life is disappearing. Everywhere there is a frantic search for ethics to lead modern medical technology, but what will such medical ethics look like if founded on such a one-sided view of humankind? Care-giving occupations are no longer popular. The influence of the materialistic worldview of secularism comes to the fore not merely in the economic field – it is threatening our existence as a whole.

The numerical aspect

Since higher norms which are rooted in God's ordinances have disappeared, numerical norms are applied today to almost everything. (The phenomenon is linked to commercialisation as described above.) Not *quality*, but *quantity* is

measured first. That which cannot be counted simply does not count. This too, implies a far-reaching reduction, impoverishment and warping of the multicoloured or multisided human existence. (As in the field of religion, secularism purports to be a champion of variety, but in reality is an enemy thereof.) Although the numerical aspect is part of our lives and many things can be measured, there are certain higher aspects of life (from the psychic to faith) which are not quantifiable, since other norms than the numerical (counting less or more) are valid.

The above were a few flashes to show that secularism is not merely a phenomenon confined to the church or religion, or political, social or economic in nature. It is an all-encompassing religion which motivates man and inspires him to apply his secularist convictions in all areas of life. It puts its stamp on the whole of modern-day culture.

Since secularism lives in a *closed* world (without God's revelation) it often becomes a *reduced* world too. The multidimensional nature of reality is not recognised. One or more aspects are highlighted and absolutised and the other aspects are reduced to it. Such one-sided overemphasis leads to all sorts of -isms (materialism, economism, technicism, scientism), which can develop into full-blooded ideologies and be forced onto people. In this way secularism is fertile soil for ideological impoverishment and suppression. We do not yet live in a world free from ideology, for even the powerful modern human being cannot of himself resist the strong temptation of idolatry.

This brings us to the next section:

9.4 The attractive but seductive power of secularism

After the extensive preceding exposition, we first brush up our memory with the following summary description of secularism: "The definitive feature of secularism is not the denial of God or of the sacred but the separation of the secular and the sacred, of everyday knowledge and religious faith. Secularism does not banish all belief in God. It recognises the validity of religious faith as a legitimate option for the individual but assigns this faith to a spiritual sphere of human experience separate from the secular sphere of everyday affairs. It makes belief and

disbelief in God equally irrelevant to the practice of everyday life – in agriculture and farming, in politics, commerce and industry, in sports and recreation, and in academic disciplines other than theology. In these areas autonomous human authority reigns supreme” (Fowler, 2002:8). A small remark here is that one should *not* exclude theology from the danger of the desire to be autonomous, even holy.

In his work Fowler gives several reasons (supplemented by myself) why secularism is so attractive and consequently so forceful – and therefore perilous to the Christian faith.

9.4.1 It is the dominant spirit of world culture

As was shown above, it is the character or condition of culture worldwide today. It does not only apply to Western countries. Even on a continent like our own secularism is growing fast, especially as a result of the influence of professional Africans with a secular Western education (cf. Shorter & Onyancha, 1997:19-22). Just as one is unaware of the air one breathes, many people breathe the spirit of secularism without ever having heard the word “secularism”. Gradually traditional African culture is inundated by the flood of secularism. How blind we are to this becomes apparent from the fact that many missionaries and theologians are merely worried about the danger of syncretism between traditional African religions and Christianity. Seldom however, do they warn against an equally dangerous form of syncretism, namely that between secular Western culture and the Christian faith.

9.4.2 Christians have not fathomed secularism profoundly enough

Many Christians are still inclined to measure the influence of secularism by its symptoms only. This is proved by questions like the following: How many people still go to church? Is the Name of God still used in public? To what extent do Christian moral values still apply? In this way we miss the fundamental character of secularism as an alternative religion and worldview which tends to replace the Christian one.

9.4.3 Secularism creates the illusion that all religion has disappeared from public life

Secularist terminology merely covers up its own faith but cannot actually hide it. As we have shown, it has merely ousted the other religions from the public sector to replace it with its own.

9.4.4 Secularism does not appear openly as an enemy

Secularism feigns respect for a variety of religions. To Christianity, too, it gives a comfortable place under the sun in the private sphere. However, it comes at a considerable price: no place in the broader public sphere.

9.4.5 Secularism does not expect open worship to evil spiritual powers the way the old heathendom did

All the secularist expects from Christians is the acceptance of the "selfevidence" of his secularist worldview. In this way many are blinded, since much more is at stake.

In the first place we should bear in mind that the powers of darkness do not always appear in evil, sinister forms. Satan can masquerade as a servant of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14).

In the second instance one can also serve spiritual powers without taking part in any deliberate religious rituals. (We have explained above that secularism, unlike ancient paganism, is a much more impersonal religion.) Since there are only two possibilities – obedience or disobedience to God – a person who no longer subjects himself/herself to the authority (law) and rule of the true God, simply comes under the influence of evil powers. Then one has lost one's armour against the spiritual forces of evil (cf. Eph. 6:10-12). Adam and Eve did not deliberately try to serve Satan. But by declaring themselves autonomous against God, they – and all the world afterwards – came under the power of the devil (cf. 1 John 5:19). The Bible teaches that even in spite of formal Christian religious rites a person can be controlled by idolatry.

Fowler (2002:34) puts it sharply: "One of the greatest triumphs of secularism has been to banish belief in spiritual powers in relation to the world of secular reality, confining them to a separate realm. This is a powerful master lie from the father of lies. When people deny that spiritual powers exist in the secular world, they become blind to their presence and power in that world. Yet even Christians have come to believe that the spiritual powers of darkness have little power in modern secular societies. One hears Christians in secular Western societies saying that one needs to go to Africa to see the real power of these powers of spiritual darkness".

9.4.6 Secularism poses as something normal, good and right

Like any worldview, secularism blows its own trumpet: It is modern (compared to old-fashioned), rational (compared to irrational), brings enlightenment (in stead of religious constraint and indoctrination), is progressive (in stead of regressive) and a champion for freedom (compared to the dogmatist suppression of religion). According to Fowler behind this smoke-screen there lurks deep darkness. In spite of the above slogans secularism does not succeed in ensuring a full, rich life – on the contrary, it rather ruins life (cf. 9.3.3 above).

9.4.7 Secularism does not appear as a dangerous spiritual force, but it is spread by means of influential ideas

We must admit that many of the things secularism offers (like freedom, power, prosperity) are not necessarily wrong.

However, as a result of their vision on or ideas about these things, freedom, power, prosperity, etcetera are warped and contorted and set apart from their true nature and goal as God ordained it (the reductions which were pointed out above). For instance, in contrast to Galatians 5:13 freedom is seen as the right of the individual to pursue his own interests as he thinks fit. In contrast to Matthew 10:25-28 power is regarded as autonomous human control. Prosperity is regarded as the satisfaction of human desires by means of abundant consumption. This stands in shrill contrast to the Word of God as emerges from

Matthew 6:25, Luke 12:15 and 1 Timothy 6:8,9. On the face of it these secularist ideas on freedom, power, prosperity and many more things, do not seem to be evil forces, but they do have feet, they roam all over the present-day world.

9.4.8 Secularism is reconcilable to the Christian faith

As a result of everything that has been mentioned thus far, secularism seems so attractive and its lure is so great that many Christians do not see it as a danger, but consider it as reconcilable with their faith. This happens because in the thoughts of most Christians and Christian theologians there is a deeply hidden, yet real and influential dualism.

A simple practical example of this is that Christians still distinguish between "spiritual" occupations (in which God can be served full-time) and "worldly" occupations (in which He can only be served part of the time on a Sunday). Another example is the stubborn belief that politics (since it is inherently unclean) should be kept out of the church (which is naturally holy). Or the opposite: churches should keep out of political matters. A last illustration of how easily dualistic Christianity can be reconciled to the secularist medical science, is the idea that people are normally cured by medicine. God can, however, sometimes intervene and effect miraculous healing. The right view is that God is present in every cure – the medical, too. To use God like a *deus ex machina* only in difficult situations where human help fails, is to fall into the trap of secularism. For we live every moment of our lives in everything we do – even at times and places where He seems to be totally absent – *coram Deo*, in the presence of God.

9.4.9 Postmodern secularism more acceptable

Many present day Christians and Christian theologians are of the opinion that the present, so-called postmodernism is *less* secularist than its modernistic predecessor. In my opinion this is not the case – postmodernism is merely a *new form* of secularism and thus cannot be seen as an ally of Christians against secularism. Sampson, and others (1994:44) agree: "The greatest irony would be for Christians uncritically to join the assault on a dying modernity only to find

ourselves as but one story among many, unintentionally reinforcing the irrationalism of post-modernity”.

While modernistic (rationalistic) secularism still believed in a *moderate* relativism, postmodernist (irrational) secularism supports a *radical* relativism, usually called “pluralism”. (Newbigin, 1989 deals in detail with this phenomenon.) The older kind of secularists believed that *no* religion can really be true, therefore they had to be neutral or impartial. The younger secularists teach that *all* religions are true so that one may not judge other religions. However, in practice there is little difference between modernism and postmodernism: imparitality (neutrality) and indifference are twin brothers. (Van der Walt, 1999b:84-91 offers a perspective on postmodernism in which the dangers of this modern day trend are distinguished. Cf. also 6.2.2 above.)

9.5 Three steps in a Christian offensive

At the end of this section on the alluring power of secularism we once more give the word to Fowler to emphasise the seriousness of the situation: : “Secularism ... may well be the most effective strategy yet devised by the powers of darkness for limiting the effectiveness of Christian witness in the world” (Fowler, 2002:27).

Exposing the seeming attractiveness of secularism is, however, only the first step in a Christian offensive. Christians themselves will have to change to be armed (the second step) before they can refute the secularist worldview (the third step). Anything less than this is doomed to failure. Secularism must be opposed in its roots, as a worldview from an alternative, better, Christian worldview.

With right Van Houten (1991:84) says that if secularism had only reasoned in an illogical way, we could have exposed its fallacies. If it only comprised an unhealthy lifestyle, we could have proposed something better. If it meant only a decline in church attendance, we could polish up on our evangelisation work to get the churches full again. If it merely led to abuse of creation, we could have emphasised the necessity of responsible ecological action. But secularism is not only one of these things, but all together and much more. Secularism for instance does influence the thoughts of people, but in the deepest sense it is a matter of

the heart. As a religious conviction it determines how one thinks about life (worldview) and how one lives (lifestyle).

In the next chapter therefore we will firstly investigate how Christians themselves have to change to arm themselves (step 2 above) and then the secularist worldview will be confronted from our own Scripturally founded worldview (step 3 above).

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Chapter 10:

SECULARISM, THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES

(3) A response

The previous chapter already started providing in broad outlines a Christian response to secularism. This chapter investigates in more detail the secularist view of society, viz. its division between private and public life. From a Christian philosophy of society this secularist approach to social life is challenged. (1) In the first place it indicates what should be changed amongst Christians themselves to be able to face the challenge of secularism. (2) This is followed by explaining why the secularist perspective of societal life is untenable and unacceptable. (3) The next section is an exposition of a Reformational philosophy of society as a response to the secularist viewpoint. (4) In the following section the implications of both a secularist and a Christian-Reformational perspective on society for (Christian) education are investigated.

* * *

From the two preceding chapters it has transpired how secularised the West has already become. Wessels (1996:2) illustrates it with an encompassing investigation which was done at the end of the previous century. From this it was learned that 92% (of the 7000 people who partook) recognised the logo of the Olympic Games, 88% the trade marks of Shell and McDonalds, but only 54% still knew the cross as the Christian symbol! Apart from being widely spread, secularisation also spread very fast. As an example Wessels (1996:35) quotes the two huge floods which hit the Netherlands in 1953 and 1995. While the first disaster elicited quite a number of debates on God's providence and punishments, the second – a mere 40 years later – was attributed solely to the negligence of people in a purely secular manner.

Ironically even the decolonised non-Western countries today accept more than ever – and much faster than was the case in the West – secularised Western culture (Ramachandra, 2003:214). This also applies to Africa.

In this chapter an endeavour is made to give an answer to the view of society that this influential and fast growing secular worldview has. Since Christianity itself is not without blame when it comes to the origin of secularism (cf. previous chapters), and since Christians should also be self-critical, the chapter begins with some thoughts on how Christians themselves should change to face up to the challenge of secularism.

10.1 How Christians themselves should change

Before attacking secularism, Christendom will have to be armed. This taking up of arms is summarised in the following five key words: (1) authentic Christians, (2) Christians of the kingdom, (3) Christians with an office, (4) Christians with a vision and (5) organised Christians.

10.1.1 Authentic Christians

Secularism displays many traits of an authentic religion. For instance, it puts its final trust in somebody – man. It believes in revelation – secular science. It has its own prophets and priests – secular scientists and lawyers. It has its own form of “evangelisation” – the public school and tertiary education. It occupies public life with its own icons. And it also has its own expectation for the future, namely progress here and now. Van Houten calls it an alternative religion and then he says “modern society is increasingly displaying the characteristics of the oldest religion that has existed, namely paganism. It appears in the guise of secularism” (Van Houten, 1991:63).

If secularism is an authentic religion, it cannot be refuted by anything less than an authentic, convinced Christian faith.

The Christian historian, Butterfield (1949:135), makes the interesting remark that secularism in a sense also set Christendom free. Today, after 1500 years of a “Christian civilisation” (cf. previous chapter), it is no longer necessary for anyone

to be a Christian because of compulsion by the authorities; or to be taken into consideration for a public office; to be favoured in a court of law; because he/she would lose clients by not going to church; or just being a Christian because public opinion demands it. This important fact makes our secular times “the most important and the most exhilarating period in the history of Christianity for fifteen hundred years ... We are back for the first time in something like the earliest centuries of Christianity” (Butterfield, 1949:135).

The early Christians were not half-hearted Christians like when Christianity became the official religion of the state. Just like us today they did not enjoy the protection of “Christian” governments. Since we have been freed from superfluous baggage, we can today again become authentic Christians in stead of Christians in name.

In a recent visit to India I became aware of another “blessing” of secularism, especially in countries where Christians belong to a minority religion. I was told that (to a certain extent) a secular constitution may – in spite of advancing secularism – at least protect the (private) religious freedom of Christians as well as other religious groups, in this way advancing the peace among different religions.

10.1.2 Christians of the kingdom

This is the second prerequisite for arming ourselves against secularism. We will have to get rid of a deeply rooted dualism in our way of thinking. Hart (1968:100) puts his finger on the pulse by saying: “By far the majority of all Protestant denominations work within the framework of the sacred and the secular, the church and the world, faith and reason, theology and philosophy, soul and body, clergy and laymen, grace and nature”. Christians think they are orthodox (biblical) because they emphasise the first pole of dualism, while dualism itself is unbiblical.

Christians do not realise that secularism is basically thinking in terms of the same dualism, albeit in a new form (the dualism between private and public). While Christian dualists emphasise the sacred, secularists stress the secular!

The Scriptures know no dualistic, split life, but only an integral life of total love for and commitment to God and our fellow human beings. With right Hart says (1968:98) "Any religion which has as its main concern heaven, the soul and sound doctrine is a religion which preaches secularisation by default".

Van Houten (1991:87) formulates the biblical vision as follows: "The Bible speaks of grace as the opposite of wrath, not of nature. What is spiritual is opposed to what is fleshly, not what is secular ... we have ascribed to some cultural *areas* of life qualities that rightly may be given only to conflicting religious *directions* in life. In biblical terms the spiritual person is one who is led by the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8) without reference to the profession he/she pursues or the area of life in which one is engaged ... Of course there are some businesses like prostitution, drug traffic and organized crime which are so completely controlled by a sinful direction that they can only be considered excluded. In these instances the good gifts of God's creation (human sexuality, drugs, commerce) have been so thoroughly misused that businesses engaging in these must be rejected". So Christians do not live in a different (supernatural) world, but in the same one, albeit in a different way.

At impressive mass meetings thousands of people are invited (often emotionally manipulated) to be converted and make a choice for King Jesus. Why? Merely afterwards to ask more people to do the same, so that they can be redeemed from their sins. Being redeemed from sin is the right start, but it is still only a start. The biblical concept "redemption" may not be limited to this beginning, but should be realised in the *whole* of life, in *all* fields of life.

Van Houten (cf. 1991:92) rightly distinguishes between two kinds of conversion. The first is to turn to God and away from worldly (sinful) things (being reborn by the Holy Spirit). The second is turning to the world (as God's creation) in which one has to fulfil one's calling in obedience to God's ordinances.

It can hardly be overemphasised that the greatest error within Christianity – up to this day – is identifying the kingdom of God with and narrowing it down to the

organised church as an institution (cf. Hart, 1968:132). This is the reason why many consider only those who work for the church to be busy with work for the kingdom. Or when an appeal is directed at the *Christians* to work for a certain cause, it is translated as what the *churches* should do.

The Biblical distinction between the kingdom of God (the fact that God is King over everything as well as all the blessings it entails) and the church (the cultic expression of belief in God) is explained in more philosophical language by means of the distinction between, on the one hand, all-encompassing religion and, on the other hand, faith which is only *one aspect* of our lives.

Only as Christians of the kingdom – and definitely not as dualistic Christians – we are adequately armed for addressing the secularist division between private (religious) life and public (secular) existence.

10.1.3 Christians with an office

Not only for Biblical reasons, but especially since secularism has deprived office-bearers of the church of their influence in public life, the functioning of the office of the believer has today once more become extremely important (cf. Ramachandra, 2003:229).

In his encompassing kingdom which includes all areas of life, God calls each one to an office. We do not all hold the same office, but no one is without a calling to a specific office. Neither is one office (e.g. in the church) holier or more important than another (e.g. in a business concern). Office does not mean status, power or self-enrichment either, but service to one's fellow human beings.

A person who holds an office without having insight in the divine norms valid for the specific field (politics, economics, arts, media, education, agriculture) is not worthy of the office. Such a person may hold an office, but has no authority. Authority supposes insight in and obedience to the specific norms which are valid for a certain field of life, so that it may fulfil its God-given task and aim. (Van der Walt, 2003a:148-167 deals in detail with the Biblical vision of office, authority,

power and responsibility. See also sections 4.3.8 to 4.3.11 of chapter 4 in this volume.)

Therefore merely saying that the office of the believers (prophet, priest and king) should be revived, is not sufficient. Christians who want to fulfil their offices in broader society can only be effective by way of a sound knowledge of the particular field in which they hold their office. In our times knowledge of the right norms is especially important. For nothing is more characteristic of true Christians than their recognition of normative authority.

Every office has a prophetic, a priestly and a kingly side to it. Often only one of the three facets is emphasised in a unilateral way, like the priestly, when Christians concentrate solely on poverty relief. In all occupations the prophetic facet should receive more attention today. Prophets see things for which others are blind – and speak out about it. In all domains of life we should see the seductive, deceptive influence of secularism. Neither do Christian prophets only expose what is false. They are also called to proclaim to the world the only perspective which gives true meaning to life – our next point.

10.1.4 Christians with a vision

"Christians with a vision" refers to how we see our situation and our task in it. It requires a worldview which determines how one looks at reality (God, law and creation) and at one's own place and calling in this reality. (Cf. Van der Walt, 1999a:47-60 and 2002:39-55 for a description of a worldview and Van der Walt, 2003b:512-552 for the main traits of a Christian worldview.) Without a reliable worldview neither individual human beings nor society can exist.

A worldview is something natural to everybody, and not something scientific (theological or philosophical). Since it is by nature something deeply religious and non-scientific, it would be difficult to convince a person with logical scientific arguments of a wrong perspective on life. We should therefore not nourish the

hope that secularism could be overthrown by mere logical arguments. A change in worldview requires nothing less than conversion.

Thus the task of Christians is a twofold one. In the first instance we should arm ourselves against the seductive force of a secularist worldview with a broad, inspiring worldview which has its roots in the Bible. In the second instance our own worldview and actions should emanate such quality and allure that secularists would be persuaded to adopt it.

Although a worldview is something typical of a human being, it does not develop automatically. It has to be fostered from childhood (cf. chapter 1). And this is where Christianity in our times has failed lamentably. Two prominent writers support this statement – one from Europe and one from Africa:

Blamires, who studied intensively the secularisation of Europe (cf. Blamires, 1980 and 1981) says the following in an early publication: "There is no longer a Christian mind. There is still, of course, a Christian ethic, a Christian practice, and a Christian spirituality. As a moral being, the modern Christian subscribes to a code other than that of the non-Christian. As a member of the church, he undertakes obligations and observations ignored by non-Christians. As a spiritual being, in prayer and meditation, he strives to cultivate a dimension of life unexplored by the non-Christian. But as a *thinking* being, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularization" (Blamires, 1963:3).

A decade ago Adeyemo (1993:4) already wrote more or less the same about Christianity in Africa: "For decades in Africa, evangelism and missionary activities have been directed at getting people saved (i.e. spiritually) but losing their minds. Consequently we have a continent South of the Sahara that boasts an over 50% Christian population on the average, but with little or no impact on society".

A worldview normally comprises the following elements: (1) an idea about God/a god, (2) a concept of law, (3) an anthropology, (4) a vision of society (5) a concept of time and history and (6) a concept of nature (of the non-human part of

the creation). It is impossible to deal with all six components here. For two reasons only the concept of society (see below in this chapter) will be dealt with. In the first place because it forms such an important part of the secularist worldview, and in the second because it is so underdeveloped in Christianity. Adeyemo (cf. 1993:227) indeed sees the development of a Christian philosophy of society as the most important facet of a Christian worldview. Ramachandra (cf. 2003:228) emphasises the same need although using a different term ("social ethics") to denote it.

This need does not exist in Africa only. Most Christians have not succeeded in replacing the old idea of "a Christian society" with something new. Later on in this chapter (cf. 10.2 below) we will therefore first explain why the vision of society that secularism propagates is unacceptable, and thereafter (cf.10.3) we will spell out a Christian alternative.

An important warning should conclude this section: an integral worldview would be a useless antipode for secularism if it remains a pretty "theory" and it does not have practical effects in everyday life.

10.1.5 Organised Christians

Ramachandra (2003:229) aptly remarks that formerly churches did a lot to help the lower classes and particularly the poor, but today they cannot afford to neglect the middle class of professional people. These people are caught in the midst of a secularist technical- and profit-oriented society every day, while the churches have very little to say about how they should live as Christians *in* their occupations. Neither do evangelists who attract great crowds fulfil this need. "In our technology- and market-driven environment, the real ... challenges are being faced by our children and by Christians working in secular occupations. ... they are asking questions ... of a profound character that (we) need to address" (Ramachandra, 2003:233).

As economists, doctors, artists, etcetera, people want to know how they can serve the Lord *today in* their occupations from a Christian perspective. Questions about the internet, biotechnology, neocapitalism, globalisation and a lot more are calling out for Christian answers, for these are the things which will determine the future of the non-Western countries, no longer the old traditional, non-Christian religions about which many Christians excite themselves.

Ramachandra does right in emphasising the importance of the office of believers once more (cf. 10.1.3 above). Christian philosophers, he says, must empower Christians in leading positions to obey God *every day in* their occupations (not *alongside*, in the church only). Unfortunately Ramachandra himself does not go far enough. Christians individually can exert a measure of influence on society. Churches, too, have a role to make an effort to stem the tide of secularism. But neither of these two ways is sufficient. Christians will have to muster their forces in an organised way.

Reformational philosophy of society indicates a unique way in which it tries to change society: through Christian organisations and institutions in various domains of life *outside* the church. This method of changing society is founded on the belief that *confessional* variety should become visible in the *structural* variety of Christian teaching associations, political parties, economic pressure groups, development organisations, relief organisations for the poor and for people who suffer from aids, Christian schools, colleges, universities, etc. Such organisations/institutions unite Christians across denominational boundaries with a specific aim in mind (cf. Hart, 1968:143-147 and Vroom, 1996:48-49). They stand "between" the "private and "public" domain of secularism and enable Christians once more to fulfil their office as believers (cf. 10.1.3 above) in a specific strategic field in so-called public life. (Since people of other religions may do the same, the playing field is level.)

By "strategic fields" I mean the following. Secularism uses certain "bearers" or "gateways" by means of which it promotes its ideology. A few of these are: the

media and the arts, all levels of education, politics, courts of law, technology and economics. Since Christian actions cannot be equally intensive in all fields, priorities must be set and they must focus primarily on these strategic fields. "Being organised Christians" thus also means "being focused Christians".

Since the next chapter (11) gives a detailed exposition of the strategic value of such Christian organisations and institutions in our secular times, we leave it at this and proceed to point out a last essential change that Christians themselves should make.

10.1.6 Neither desperate nor exultant

This change has to do with the attitude of Christians in their onslaught on secularism. Currently there are two opposite attitudes found in many Christians that we both have to reject: despair and exultation.

Despair

Despair in Christians facing the mighty and growing impact of secularism is an understandable, purely human reaction. For we cannot expect our efforts to arm ourselves (as just described, and as will still be said) will turn the spirit of the tide. Despair can easily lead to escapism (cf. Chapter 8).

But Christians can live in expectation. This hope, however, is not rooted in our own efforts: He who is in and with us is greater and stronger than the powers of evil (1 John 4:4). Anyone who is a child of God has already overcome the sinful world through faith (1 John 5:4,5). We can do everything through Him who gives us the strength (Phil. 4:13).

According to the Scriptures there are at least three reasons why Christ's victory over evil is of the utmost importance for Christians and excludes despair: (1) It is a fact that Christ has already overcome sin – even though we are still waiting for the final triumph at his second coming. (2) Christ's followers are heirs (beneficiaries) of his cosmic victory over evil. (3) Our own lives should be a testimony to his victory on the cross and one day at the end of the world.

Exultation

Those who are not trying in despair to escape the struggle with secularism, but on the contrary want to enter the battle with a vengeance, run the risk of this second danger. This attitude prevails where Christians think that the best way of demonstrating their faith in the victory of Christ, is to take possession beforehand of his booty. The certainty that Christ has overcome and will overcome, gives them the right to act as if also they themselves have triumphed already. If the whole of creation is his kingdom – and it is – then we are charged to occupy it in his Name.

We see something of this wrong attitude in the liberation theologians, in the “spiritual warfare” of some charismatic groups according to which a person or community has to be “purified” and – alas – also in some Calvinist groups.

When the Bible encourages us to have faith in Christ's victory, it does not mean that we can also claim beforehand the prize of victory – in spite of the fact that it belongs to us. It means being prepared – in the full conviction that He guarantees victory – to suffer for it as He himself has done.

The right attitude

A correct Christian attitude simultaneously implies firm trust and humble modesty. Hart (1968:79) says with right that, although we will not succeed in this dispensation, it in no way releases us from the responsibility to start being faithful servants of our King, who without doubt will bring his kingdom to perfection. Fowler too (2002:49) says that the success of our efforts should not be measured by the extent to which we will succeed in changing the direction of our current secular culture – for it would quickly lead to despair – but it should be measured by the faithfulness of our words and deeds. Therefore Van Houten (1991:91) encourages Christians to erect signs of God's coming kingdom in the secularised world, trusting that our humble work will not be in vain (1 Cor. 15:58), and that God Himself will let his kingdom come in its full glory. Such simple signs to the kingdom of God (cf. e.g. 10.1.5 above) will not only stimulate our hunger for it, but also inspire us with courage on our way to the undoubted destination.

Now that it has become clear *how* Christians should arm themselves in the struggle against a secularist world, we can concentrate on *what* needs to be done. We start by looking at the secularist view of society.

10.2 Why the secularist view of society is untenable and unacceptable

First a brief summary again of the secularist view of society as worded by Van Houten (1991:53): "Church and faith are increasingly privatized. On the one side is the world of indisputable facts. Science and technology have achieved spectacular results through their objectivity. But on the other side we have the world of subjective personal values. Worship and faith have a place in this world only as subjective values. Although churches may still be located in the heart of a city or village they are no longer its heart. Public life is the 'real' world and confronts us with the 'real' questions". The core of the secularist view of society thus is their division between private/personal and public life.

10.2.1 A false solution

The reason usually given for this division is the religious (and with it the cultural) pluriformity of our modern day societies. It started with a distinction between state and church, so that the state would not determine matters of faith by, for instance, prescribing what people should believe. Religious freedom is a good thing, but today it has led to a division between personal and public life. Where previously the power of the state was restricted, it is now the other way round: The church and faith should not have an influence on the rest of society. The state and the rest of the so-called public domain should be neutral or without worldview. In this way secularism is regarded as the logical – and only – solution to religious, structural and cultural diversity

From the following points it will, however, become clear that such a view of society entails no real solution but a false one.

- **Even as a private matter religion always has a wider influence.** It is the individualistic character of secularism that makes the *personal* character of religion into something *individualistic*.

- **Religion is something not practised by individuals only, but usually by groups.** And for religious communities their convictions are not a mere personal matter – it gives form to the whole of their lives.

- **The public sphere is also dependent on religious and worldviewish convictions.** Without normative convictions the most simple but at the same time extremely important question, namely what is good and right for a society, cannot be answered. Secular democracy for instance is founded on a humanistic anthropology which supposes certain values like freedom, equality, justice and human dignity. Without some or other common normative foundation a society cannot exist.

Since secularism has removed the religious and worldviewish “cement” from society, and we now have a society “without horizon” the common and unifying factor is increasingly sought in a national constitution and especially in legislation and the maintenance of the law based on it. A bill of human rights and various verdicts and punishments by courts of law, however, cannot teach people to love their fellow human beings and work for the good of all of society.

- **The secularist view of society does not foster diversity but suppresses it.** The secularist solution to a real problem (pluriformity) is the levelling of all religions (relativism). Neutrality and relativism, however, are also viewpoints. Therefore neutral people are never consistently neutral, but only as long as their own neutralistic vision is accepted. Relativists, too never are either consistent (for then they would have to keep quiet) or tolerant (for they do not really tolerate all viewpoints).

Because secularist relativism may not recognise any binding norms for good and right, at the end of the day it promotes only the power of its own privileged position. Might becomes right. It is a simple fact that when the question of truth is avoided, it is power and not right which prevails. (Cf. Pilate throwing overboard his own question on what truth is, and using his power to sentence Christ to death.) Secularism follows the same primeval route. It does not listen – as could be expected from a “neutral” democratic system – to all religions, but only to one

– its own – which is proclaimed as the one universal faith. (Cf. Vroom, 1992:10, 52, 109.) In spite of what the secularists pretend, they do not really recognise variety, but suppress it from the framework of their own convictions.

10.2.2 On the way to a solution

Vroom (1992:128) rightly looks for the solution to our pluriform society by way of the recognition of both unity and diversity.

A chaos of viewpoints in the public domain can be a curse. Therefore by means of joint, friendly talks in the public field, we should seek for common shared values on what would be good for everybody.

Since uniformity can also be a curse, there should at the same time be room for pluriformity. The diversity of convictions should be recognised and people should be given the opportunity to put their deepest convictions into words and discuss them with one another.

Unless this happens (1) minority groups are estranged and (2) it is denied that one's own convictions have implications for how people regard broad society and live in it. (3) A true democratic society should have respect for all convictions and welcome mutual critique. (4) What is more: If no special trouble is taken to further the diversity, society falls into a confusing relativism and every viewpoint is undermined.

With such criticism on the contemporary secularist society we have made some progress, but not enough. What is lacking is more clarity on the various kinds of diversity and the implications they hold for a Christian philosophy of society.

10.3 The main outlines of a Christian philosophy of society

We have already emphasised that secularism expects from Christianity (and from all other religions) something which formerly was considered unthinkable and impossible: "... that each sect is to remain the one true and revealed faith for itself and in private, but each must *behave in the public arena as if* its truth were as tentative as an esthetic opinion or a scientific theory" (Mouw en Griffioen, 1993:6).

10.3.1 Why the secularist view is unthinkable

Four reasons are mentioned why the secularist vision does not offer a solution (some of them have already emerged): (1) Religion influences all aspects of life. The Christian faith and secularism are not private matters – they are competing, life-inclusive visions. (2) No state or public sector can be fully secular in the sense that those who hold authority have no faith in what is true or hold no convictions on what is good and right. No politician can ignore matters of ultimate importance. Some time or other he has to choose and pass judgement. (3) Therefore not only religious leaders but also politicians make total universal demands and vie for power accordingly. (4) The public domain may, moreover, not be identified with the state. It is much broader. The state shares the public sphere with numerous other societal relationships (including the church) which have a role in determining the public domain, and without which the state would as it were float in the air. The division private-public thus is extremely artificial and not founded on social realities. In stead of such a rigid, unnatural division the various societal relationships rather exist as a continuum in an unbroken cohesion from more or less “private” to more or less “public”.

10.3.2 A better solution

How can we ensure that true justice is done in a society with such diversity? If the public sector cannot be without religion, what then is the solution? Above we have pointed out that Vroom (1992) sets his hope in dialogue and the consensus of common values. Whether such an option would succeed, remains an open question. Would it not be a better way to recognise openly the plurality of convictions?

Mouw and Griffioen (1993) and Griffioen (2003:13,98,172 and 2006:7) in their reflection on this problem work with three “pluralisms”: (1) religious (“directional”), (2) structural (“associational”) and (3) cultural (“contextual”) diversity. These three should be distinguished but not separated. The structural diversity (the variety of societal relationships) serve a variety of religious convictions. We could also put it the other way round: religious visions shape structural forms. The religious is

also the core or driving force behind cultural diversity. Seen from the opposite angle, religious convictions take on various cultural forms.

From this perspective the religious cannot – as secularism would have it – be considered of less importance or cut out of the public sector. Therefore it is important to take a more profound look at these three forms of diversity. The first is:

10.3.3 Structural diversity

Basically there are only four viewpoints about society. (1) the liberalistic-individualistic, (2) the collectivist, (3) the communalistic (or communitarian) and (4) the pluralistic. (Numerous combinations are possible among them. For an exposition of the various philosophies of society, cf. Skillen & McCarthy, 1991:3, McCarthy *et al.*, 1981:13-30 and Van der Walt, 2002:265-280.) The common root of the first three is the idea that individual autonomous man (in the first case) or the group (in the second and third case) structure society according to their own insights.

Liberalism, collectivism and communalism

According to *liberalism* the only irreducible reality is the individual. Human institutions or societal relationships are either illusions or merely the manifestation of agreements or contracts between individuals. Societal relationships are nothing more than combinations of individuals. So individual freedom takes priority and justice means primarily protecting the rights of individuals.

According to *collectivism* every human being and institution is regarded as a mere part of the unifying whole. The (mostly political) unity is primary. It gives identity to the "parts". Individual freedom is not so important and justice means what is good for the the whole.

The view traditional Africa has of society is neither individualistic nor collectivist, but *communalistic*. Not the state (as in the case of collectivism) but an undefined "society" is the all-encompassing. If we put this into an image, the home of

society would be a traditional hut with only one "room" which supplies all the needs of the inhabitants like eating, sleeping, washing, socialising, etcetera. (The "house" in the case of a pluralistic philosophy of society, on the other hand, would have a separate dining room, bedroom, laundry and lounge.)

All three these visions of society – the liberalist, too, indirectly – end up in totalitarianism. Therefore today there is a search for new views of society. Various forms of pluralism are suggested which I cannot explore further at this point (cf. Skillen & McCarthy, 1991 and McCarthy *et al.*, 1981:30-36.) One of these is the Reformational, which already has a long tradition. (The person within this tradition who has worked it out in detail is Dooyeweerd, 1957:157-626 and 1986. For an elementary introduction, compare Van der Walt, 1999b, 23-24.)

Reformational pluralism

Reformational pluralism rejects the idea that man as an individual or as a group could direct society. For all things that were created God set norms, for each according to its own class – and so, too, for the various human relationships/institutions. These norms have a transcendent, non-arbitrary origin, since God introduces them to us in his order for creation and "republished" them in the Bible. Put simply: Man has the task of positivising or giving form to God's central commandment of love in different ways in different societal relationships (for instance fidelity in marriage, acting as a steward in business, justice in the state) so that the structures of society are in accordance with God's will for society.

According to this viewpoint a variety of societal relationships or institutions are recognised, each with a norm of its own, a unique task, and its own offices and authority. They are much more than mere "contracts" between individuals (as with liberalism) neither are they merely "parts" of a greater whole (as with collectivism and communalism). Each is sovereign in its own sphere. At the same time they are not isolated from one another. The different "rooms" of the "house" (cf. image above) are connected by means of a passage and doors.

Thus a pluralistic vision of society recognises variety *in* unity and unity *in* variety. It guarantees true freedom in society in stead of totalitarian compulsion.

In this way the life of human beings is not fragmented or divided dichotomously between a private and a public field. The unity is guaranteed by the religious direction, which is not an extra addition, but has already been "built into" every societal context. (Cf. above where it was stated that the structural is an embodiment of the religious or confessional.) In the case of a Christian philosophy of society the religious perspective of unity is the all-encompassing kingdom of God. The aim of every separate societal relationship and of all of them together is the promotion of his kingdom.

As is the case with the Christian faith, other religious convictions are also concretised in structures of society. It is no use covering up this fact. It is much better to admit and allow it openly.

10.3.4 Cultural diversity

This is the second important kind of diversity. As stated already in a previous chapter (cf. 3.3.3), historical, geographical and cultural circumstances play an important role in the formulation of norms. An example from the Bible is Ruth 4:7,8, where a man removed his sandal and gave it to the buyer to legalise the transfer of property. Different forms of marriage ceremonies are examples from traditional and contemporary Africa.

Today it is fashionable to be a cultural relativist, in other words to regard all cultures as equally true and right. However, this stand cannot be maintained consistently, because it would exclude the evaluation and criticism of cultures – of our own as well as other people's.

As we have stated above, certain cultural groups join the structural and religious dimensions to form their own unique cultural configurations. Culture lends a certain form to the religious and structural aspects.

Since the cultural element cannot be seen separately from the religious, a Christian can appreciate cultures and cultural diversity without lapsing into

relativism. Not only can cultures be judged normatively from their religious core, but they actually *should* be evaluated thus. In other words: The truth of the culture (or context) is not determined by the culture (context) itself, but by its religious "soul" which directs it.

A further consequence is that, because cultural dimensions take on structural form (as in the various societal relationships), it cannot be restricted to something personal/private.

10.3.5 Religious diversity

This is the third important kind of diversity. If we acknowledge the close connection between the structural, cultural and religious aspects, it is clear that the secularist ideal of effecting structural unity in the public sphere by cutting out religion is doomed to failure.

As has become clear the secularists could not do it either. For from their own limited view they search for the essential social unity. This secular kind of unity, however, has a negative and even destructive effect on religious diversity in the public sphere. In the end secularist "tolerance" shows its true colours and people have to be "forced to be free".

In opposition to the secularist search for an immanent source of unity (their own worldview) we must state that true religious unity can only come from a source which transcends the limits of human society.

The question is whether this is possible in the present dispensation. Mouw & Griffioen (1993:17,18) have no objection against *descriptive* structural, cultural and religious diversity, in other words simply describing the factual situation. Since they are not relativists, they have no problem either supporting *normative* structural and cultural diversity. But they do have a problem with *normative religious* diversity, since it would approve of religious diversity, while there can only be one true religion, namely obedience to the true God who reveals Himself to us in the Bible. Normative religious diversity would amount to religious relativism.

The question (above) whether true religious unity (in the “public” field) is possible in this dispensation (between the coming of Christ and his second return) thus have to be answered in the negative. For now we live in a world of many religions. Religious unity, as it was before the fall of man, will only become a reality again at the end of the world. In the meantime no religion – neither the secular nor the Christian (for instance in the form of a theocracy) – may be forced on society.

So for Mouw & Griffioen (1999:175,176) the only way out is to accept religious diversity, respect it and be tolerant towards other religions. However, Christian tolerance does not mean being unconcerned and resigned and accepting anything as right or fair – the way it is with current secularism. “To tolerate something, of course, is not to accept it as justified. The tolerance we are prescribing does not rule out a genuine apprehension of the harmful, even destructive, consequences that may well attend the promotion of certain visions of life. What will (for instance) the ideology of secular liberalism do to the public square? ... Tolerance does not mean acquiescence” (Mouw & Griffioen, 1993:176).

From the foregoing exposition it has become clear how complicated society really is in consequence of the intertwined nature of structural, cultural and religious diversity. The simplistic solution of secularism (a division between private and public) could not possibly do justice to it.

Since education is one of most important “bearers” of secularism we will in the following section apply the theoretical insights of a Reformational philosophy of society to this field. From this the value a Christian perspective can have in practice will become clearer still.

10.4 The right to confessional education

According to numerous sources education is one of the most important means by which the secularist vision is spread in society all over the world. Van Houten (1991:71) for instance calls education “the carrier of an unholy spirit, namely secularism.” One could say that the present generation of Christian parents is the

first in history since early Christianity who have to educate their children in religion without the support of society. Most of the former social support for the important task of education has disappeared. It can no longer be assumed that the local community or the school will foster a Christian consciousness in our children or that people will be faithful church members (cf. Van Houten, 1991:90).

In what follows below, we will learn how Christians elsewhere in the world approach education within a secular society.

10.4.1 Discrimination by the state against independent schools

McCarthy *et al.* (1981) discuss in detail the private-public dichotomy as well as the practical effects on the rights of societal institutions and associations like schools in America. The private-public division (rooted in the sacred-secular dualism) are the cause that governments in the USA do not financially support private or independent schools with a religious orientation of their own. Thus only very rich people can afford such schools. It is hard for people from the middle income group, and the poor have no other choice than to send their children to secular government schools (McCarthy *et al.*, 1981:106,107). It is seen as an injustice that parents – who also pay taxes to the state – cannot claim state subsidy just because they choose schools for their children which fit their own religious orientation in the home. With right the writers of the book argue that all education – even secular government education – is religiously determined and not only those types of education which openly admit to it (cf. McCarthy *et al.*, 1981:107).

10.4.2 Two kinds of diversity

Although formulated in other terms, the Reformational writers of this volume, just like their fellow Christians, Mouw and Griffioen (cf. above) advocate both structural and confessional (religious) diversity as well as the intertwined nature of both. (They do not mention the third, namely cultural diversity.) The value of the book by McCarthy *et al.* is that it points out very clearly that a Christian (they call it a “pluralistic”) philosophy of society is possible. It moreover has deep roots

in the Biblical view of reality as well as a long tradition, e.g. Calvin, Althusius, Kuyper and Dooyeweerd (cf. McCarthy *et al.*, 1981:40-46 and 145-165).

10.4.3 Structural pluralism applied to schools

If we apply the principle of structural diversity to schools the following is important (cf. McCarthy *et al.*, 1981:166 *et seq.*): (1) Confusion between state and school is excluded, for the state and the school each has its own, unique identity, task, sovereignty, offices and rights. (2) Thus the state does not have a monopoly on (primary, secondary, tertiary) education – parents and churches also have an interest in schools. (3) The state is not the national educator, but has a very limited task, namely: (a) to protect the right and freedom of schools to follow their own educational philosophies; (b) to see to it that schools have the necessary means to teach properly. This not only entails financial support, but also seeing to the order, safety and health of children and teachers, since the state has public justice as its task. (c) The state may indeed set certain general standards for schools, but specific educational and academic matters should be left to representatives of the teaching community.

In summary, in accordance with its norm (of public justice) the task of the state is limited to determining whether a school is a school, in other words whether it meets the basic *structural* needs for a school, so that it would be able to offer good teaching as demanded by public justice. The state may not exceed its boundaries by laying down *confessional* requirements for a school (according to the secularist worldview or any other) or by penalising a school which does not meet its (secularist) requirements.

10.4.4 Confessional pluralism applied to schools

With confessional diversity we thus mean much more than mere formal recognition of religious freedom (as in Chapter 2, section 15(2) of the South African Constitution). Religious freedom must also be allowed to take visible form in religiously oriented schools. Besides, such independent, free schools should be recognised by law and be allowed to claim the accompanying rights (like financial state support). Furthermore, it should apply equally and impartially

to all religiously oriented schools like, for instance, for Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and secularists. Because all schools are basically of a religious nature, all schools must be recognised as “public” schools as opposed to a single (public) school system (government schools).

But confessional schools will not come down from heaven one fine day – if we pray for it long enough. We will have to roll up our sleeves and work and battle for it. Together with our prayers, organised Christian action (cf. 10.1.5 above) is a *sine qua non*. Christian parent-teacher societies and organisations for Christian higher education is a requirement – without them our struggle against secularism is doomed to be lost even before we start.

10.4.5 Some more (practical) arguments in favour of religious-educational diversity

Apart from the foregoing more principal considerations, McCarthy et al. (1981:136 et seq.) mention other more practical arguments in favour of free, Christian schools. I would like to point out in passing that although this chapter is focused on (primary and secondary) education in schools, what is said here is almost completely applicable to tertiary education (colleges, technikons and universities). Van der Walt (2001) is helpful in understanding what is meant by Christian higher education and Christian scientific endeavour.

The practical arguments in favour of confessional education are:

- **Confessional education is a common phenomenon in many other countries.**

McCarthy *et al.* name as examples of countries which accept religiously oriented teaching and support it financially Canada, Israel, England, Belgium and the Netherlands. In the more recent two-volume publication by Glenn and De Groof (2002) the education policy of a large number of countries is investigated with regard to freedom of groups to organise for schools which are distinct from state schools (on religious or pedagogical grounds) and the corresponding right of the parents to choose the most fitting school for their children. The reason for their

investigation is that any democracy should recognise the right of parents to decide for themselves on the perspective from which their children are taught. (According to the above-mentioned authors good education always entails some or other worldview and thus does not deal with "mere facts".)

The champions of secular education will immediately ask : doesn't it lead to a "balkanised" (divided) society, the multiplication of small schools of low standards, racial and class discrimination? The investigation by Glenn and De Groof in 28 countries came to the following conclusion: (1) In most democratic countries – though sometimes it happened only after long debates – a choice of schools is now recognised as a basic right for parents. (2) In most of these countries the state also supports the free choice of the parents by partly or even fully funding these free, independent schools. (3) In a variety of ways governments have already seen to it that the above-mentioned questions (on accountability, national unity, quality and justice towards different races and levels of society) were addressed.

So the American and also our own South African (apartheid and post-apartheid) school system which believes that the state should control education, so that it can mould the way citizens think, is not the rule but rather the exception.

- **Independent schools is a feasible ideal.** From the two sources mentioned above (McCarthy *et al.*, 1981 and Glenn & De Groof, 2002) it is apparent that free, independent schools is no utopic dream but a reality in numerous countries. Indeed both sources point out that it is often a difficult struggle when secular schools are already a fact to get the legislation changed. (For behind the legislation there lurks the secular belief dividing private and public, which is hard to eradicate.)

- **Independent schools do not further division but make an important contribution in society.** Smith (2000) takes up the gauntlet against a secular philosopher who typically believes that religious convictions should not be allowed in schools, since such perspectives are, according to him, restricting, exclusive and fictitious. First Smith convincingly refutes all three of these

negative arguments on the influence of religion on education. Then he asks with right why only some religious perspectives are restricting, exclusive and fictitious while it does not apply to secularism too. Would not parents and children of diverse other religious convictions experience secular education negatively?

According to Smith the secularist arguments against religious educational perspectives merely bear witness to their own prejudices and lack of a self-critical attitude. So Smith is not convinced by any of the secularist arguments for "neutral" schools – unless he himself first accepts the idea of neutrality. He does admit that religious convictions can sometimes be restrictive (otherwise it would not be pointing a direction), but that it has not been proved yet that it is naturally or per definition the case.

Smith (2000:36) further refutes the secularist argument that diversity of religions would necessitate a secular public sector (including schools). Or to put it in other words: As soon as competing religious perspectives are removed from the public playing field (*in casu* schools), the playing field would be level for everybody. He illustrates it with the following example: A group of youngsters are arguing about which game they will play. Some want to do hockey, others prefer rugby, others soccer, while one would rather not play at all. Since they cannot reach consensus, the last-mentioned person suggests that the only fair solution is to play nothing at all. The person does not see – or does not admit openly – that his "solution" is not fair at all. He is merely causing his own preference (he has decided beforehand not to join in a game) to prevail, in the light thereof rejecting all other options to enforce his own.

There are many more ways in which free schools can contribute to a broader society apart from the fact that they ensure essential diversity. Mere competition with government schools already has the important function of ensuring quality education. Besides, in developing countries in Africa and elsewhere there is such a need for education on all levels that the government who cannot provide it all, should actually welcome with open arms the contribution made by independent schools.

- **Independent schools comply with true democracy.** Democracy stands for freedom and freedom implies amongst other things the possibility of choice, something which does not exist when state schools are the only possibility. The acceptance of structural and confessional diversity in the field of education will however enable people to choose in a democratic way.

Neither would implementing a Reformational philosophy of society in the field of education disadvantage state schools in an unfair way. Except that the principles of this philosophy of society approve of their own education for other confessional groups (see above) it would not try to thwart, harm or detract from their task public government schools. In the spirit of true democracy it desires equal opportunities for all schools.

- **Independent schools can promote cultural identity.** To my mind there is nothing wrong with state schools being (normally) expected to accept children from any culture. However, it is not always an ideal situation, especially not on a primary level. The medium of instruction (language) is only one of the obvious problems.

At the moment however, the South African government does not pay much attention to cultural diversity, amongst other reasons probably because apartheid in the past was so closely linked with cultural differences. Thus education has to ignore cultural differences, it should be "multi-cultural".

Mouw and Griffioen (cf. above), however, also see cultural diversity as a normative dimension on a par with structural and religious diversity. Per implication it should also receive its due in the field of education. How it could be done in the present South Africa without being blamed for new apartheid and even racism is hard to tell. But this is no reason for scrapping it permanently from the agenda.

10.4.6 How it affects South Africa

Since the foregoing exposition is directly applicable to the South African circumstances not much more need be said. The reader is referred back to

chapter 6 (section 6.1.8, 6.2.4 and 6.2.5), where I have discussed state subsidies for confessional schools as well as the relativist kind of religious studies prescribed by the South African government.

10.5 The secularist idea of tolerance is unacceptable

Secularism's "tolerant" treatment of all religions finally demands a Christian reflection on the concept of tolerance. As this was already done extensively in a previous chapter (see the whole section 7.2 of chapter 7), it will not be repeated. I will only mention briefly how secularists view tolerance and then indicate its negative consequences.

10.5.1 Secularist ideas about tolerance

Synonyms for the word "tolerance" today are "politeness", "courtesy", "decency", and "friendliness". Nowadays the term "political correctness" is used particularly often. All these concepts entail that one may not say something or do something which would offend or hurt a person or group belonging to a different culture or religion. The rule of etiquette for modern day secularism (to my mind a very negative one) is: do not criticise other people or point out their mistakes. In this way a pluriform society is to be made livable.

10.5.2 Negative consequences of the secularist idea of tolerance

From the following flashes it will become apparent that the secularist kind of tolerance is unacceptable to Christians.

- **"How" dominates "what"**. Silence would be consistent, perfect relativism. Although it has not gone that far yet – who is always consistent? – *how* (the way in which) one says something becomes more important than *what* one says (contents). Superficial communication is the result.
- **Religion is removed from any criticism**. Relativist tolerance which prevents religious criticism, is dangerous. For a person can be fully convinced of his own religious perception and yet be totally wrong. Does it mean that one may not use any criterium for truth in the field of religion and judge thereby that one religion is

better or purer and that the others are false? Merely comparing religions we already need a benchmark, more so when we have to judge between them.

- **It becomes difficult to fight for what is right.** To do justice, one has to distinguish between right and wrong, true and false and be able to tell it to others – for their own good. But today this could easily be labelled as politically wrong intolerance.

- **It stands in the way of a good society.** How can we tolerate one another if we have no fixed benchmark of what is good? Thus what one person regards as politically correct, is offensive to another. We could go deeper: Why should one treat other people well? As long as this question is not answered, a good society remains a mere mirage, for then “good” is simply what benefits myself.

- **The intolerance of tolerance.** Since no-one can think consistently relativistically, the supporters of a secular form of tolerance also believe in a minimum truth: For such people all truth is relative, except the truth that everything is relative. Not only do they believe in this minimalist “truth”, but like typical human beings, they fight for retention of the straw to which they are clinging. So these people are not nearly as tolerant as they pretend. Especially towards those who do not share their idea of tolerance, they can be openly intolerant.

- **In the end might becomes right.** Since no (transcendent) basis (like for instance, the commandments of God) are recognised to judge between good and bad, right and wrong, in the end those with the most power decide for all the rest what would be right and good for them. This power not only includes things like the majority of votes, money or weapons, but also prevailing ideologies like secularism.

- **Reticence and fear.** Because Christians who dare to live their convictions in public and try to win others over to their faith, are easily accused of arrogant intolerance, they react in two ways (cf. Newbigin, 1989:242-244): increasing

reticence to come up for the truth and live accordingly and worry, even fear, that the Christian faith may deteriorate quickly because it has to be so “tolerant”.

In the light of the above the conclusion is justified that tolerance as propagated by the secularists is more of a vice than a virtue – even a danger.

10.6 A review

In the previous three chapters we have tried to plumb the spirit of our time – secularism – to its deepest roots. The following main issues were discussed: (1) the threat of this dangerous worldview to people all over the world; (2) the incorrect ways Christians mostly react to it; (3) secularism's origin and its historical development in Western philosophy; (4) its basic characteristics (denial of God and his laws and its consequences for the entire creation); (5) its attractive but seductive power; (6) the different ways Christians should arm themselves against its destructive influence; (7) the reasons why a secularist philosophy of society is untenable; (8) the alternative of a Reformational view of society as a viable solution; (9) indications of how the challenge of secularism in the field of education can be met from a Christian perspective; (10) the replacement of the so-called tolerance of secularism with a Biblical perspective of how to be tolerant in a multireligious and multicultural society.

For the author himself it was a long and difficult struggle to understand the nature of this dominant but deceptive worldview and religion of our time. It is not offered as a final word. But if this overview has enabled his readers to obey their God-given task to test the spirit of their age (1 John 4:1), his own effort to do so was not in vain.

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Chapter 11:

IDENTITY AND RELEVANCE

The urgent need for Christian organisations and institutions in an increasing secular world

The aim of this chapter is to determine how Christians can, especially by way of Christian organisations, be relevant to our contemporary, secular society without the danger of losing their Christian identity. To answer this question attention is given to the following: (1) the phenomenon and the challenge of secularism; (2) different ways (by individuals, churches and by way of Christian organisations) to respond to the challenge; (3) wrong motives for the establishment and/or maintaining of Christian organisations; (4) the correct motives for doing so; (5) the different categories of Christian organisations and institutions and (6) some concluding remarks.

11.1 The phenomenon and challenge of secularism

The intention of this paper is not to go in detail into the worldwide process of secularisation and the resulting secularism (cf. chapter 8,9,10 for details). Much has already been written on the origin, development and character of this phenomenon. (A few sources written from a Christian perspective are: Blamires, 1956; Dekker, 1995; Dekker, 2000; Dekker & Tennekes, 1981; Dekker, Luidens en Rice, 1997; Graafland 1975; Mulder, 1981; Van der Walt, 1999: 193-201 en 2002: 367-374; Van Houten, 1991.) We will give only a short description of it and for the rest discuss the reactions of Christians to secularism.

11.1.1 An indisputable fact

By way of introduction it should be emphasised that after centuries of isolation from the rest of the world the secular lifeview has become a fact in South Africa today. For several reasons the process gathered enormous momentum after 1994 and we are confronted daily with its actual consequences. (For particulars, cf. Du Rand, 2002.) The fact that South Africa is no longer a "Christian" country, but is fast becoming a secular country, has hit us hard. Christians and churches

struggle with the question what their attitude should be. Can this mighty ideology, which purports to be the self-evident, indisputable, only solution for the problems of this and other countries, be fought and if so, how should it be done?

11.1.2 A brief description

Secularism as we experience it today, is the result of at least three centuries of development in Western culture. However, it took on clear form at the beginning of the previous century. At the World Mission conference held in 1928 in Jerusalem warnings were heard that the greatest competitor and danger for Christianity was not Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or Confucianism, but a worldwide secular way of living and of interpreting the world.

Van der Walt (1999:202) describes the secular ideology as follows: "Secularism, born from the atheistic notions of three centuries, is a subjectivist, relativist and utilitarian lifeview – as well as the resulting state of affairs – according to which man is so-called free, independent and having come of age. Because of the particular powers which he has at his disposal, he has taken the place of God, who in his view has become superfluous, so that he can now live solely out of, by and towards this life which is closed off in itself."

A shorter and simpler definition could run as follows: "Secularism would have man live as if God and his commandments are either non-existent, or in any case have no meaning for public life (meaning all of society except religious life)."

So secularists – and many dualistically thinking Christians preceded them in this – have a "two storey" vision on reality and on man's actions: It consists of a small sacred or holy "storey" to which religion (including Christian religion) is limited, and for the rest a spacious secular, public "storey" encompassing all the rest of society (politics, economy, education, etcetera). This terrain is usually depicted as being neutral as far as religion is concerned. In effect, however, it is governed by the secular ideology or religion, supported by a materialistic economy, science and technology. Consequently the relationship that Christians have with God (it also applies to other religions) is tolerated but "privatised" – while it should be seen in everything we do. Christian witness in public life is thus often limited to the extent

to which it can still make a contribution to the solution of moral questions. Even this is not always the case, if we keep in mind how governments make laws and allows immoral activities which are directly opposed to Christian moral values.

11.1.3 The reactions of Christians to secularism

In 1997 already Dekker, Luidens and Rice investigated the reaction of (in particular Reformed) Christians worldwide. I will draw attention to only three important points : (1) the different reactions, (2) the end result, (3) an evaluation.

Different reactions

The writers (Dekker *et al.*, 1997:3): distinguish between the following two basic reactions. The first is *isolation*, which has the advantage that Christians and churches retain their identity, but brings with it the danger of losing their relevance for a wider society. The second reaction is *accommodation* (or *adjustment*) to a secularised society with the result that they do not lose their influence (altogether), but with the risk of loss of their own identity and of capitulation to a secular order.

These two different reactions are related, according to the book, to two kinds of (Reformed) religiousness (Dekker *et al.*, 1997:4): a pietistic and a non-pietistic. The *pietistic* emphasise a personal relationship with God and an inner (inwardly directed) life of faith. It easily leads to avoidance of the (sinful) world, to passivity in the public domains of politics, economy, etcetera. *Non-pietistic* groups, on the contrary, emphasise that Christian faith is meaningful for the whole of man and should be actively applied to and lived in all domains .

Subsequently their strategies also differ. The pietistic tendency is more inclined to a *defensive* attitude according to which all the old values have to be preserved in thinking and doing. (It could be illustrated with the image of a fortress or a ghetto.) The non-pietistic groups rather maintain an *offensive* strategy according to which secular society has to be regained in the name of the Christian faith.(The relevant image here is that of a crusade.) The last-mentioned tendency is, however, confronted by the problem that it is not possible to *influence* society without in

some degree *adjusting* to it. How can one play a significant role in a worldly society without abandoning your Christian uniqueness?

The result

After an overview of the different reactions in different parts of the world, the writers of the mentioned volume come to the following general conclusion regarding the confrontation with secularism. They differentiate between secularisation on two levels: the individual and the social or structural. On an individual level secularisation means the regression or disappearance of religiousness in individuals, while structural secularisation entails the limitation or total absence of religion in the social domain.

The result is the following: although there has been widespread secularisation on an institutional or organisational level, it has not yet happened on the individual or personal level.

The institutional or structural level does not only include the church, but also other institutions like Christian schools, colleges and Christian organisations in different fields. For instance, churches have lost their (institutional) hold on their members and their influence on society in the broader sense, or it has diminished drastically. Church members or members of Christian organisations no longer depend – as in the past – on these institutions for their values. The institutions have lost their “sacralising” authority. On the individual level, however, there are many examples of renewal of faith and creativity.

Evaluation

At the end of the book the writers (Dekker *et al.*, 1997:283) rightly ask whether this result (capitulation to secularism on the institutional level and revival of the Christian faith only on the individual level) is just the last line of battle in a struggle which has already been lost. Can a highly *individualistic* Christianity still really be called a *Reformational* Christianity? (It has always been the distinguishing feature of the Reformational faith that it believed that God should be served in every field – not merely the personal.) To quote their own words, the question is “... whether

or not sacralisation in individual terms is a sufficient antidote to stem the tide of secularisation in structural terms.”

My own answer to this is that it is no solution. Such a “solution” would mean that we would think and act more and more pietistic in stead of Reformational.

This study simply confirms that Christians (in this case even Reformed Christians) have capitulated to modern secularism which makes a clear division between private and public life. On a private level there is room for one’s personal convictions of faith (i.e. also the Christian faith). But on the condition that one should keep it out of the public field, that in public life the belief of secularism be adopted.

Such a mutilated, dualistic, schizophrenic Christianity – which by the way is nothing new in history – is unacceptable in the light of Scripture. According to the Bible the Christian religion is radical, integral and all-encompassing. It includes the service of God in *all* fields. For: Christ is either King of everything or He is not King!

One example to illustrate my conviction that “public” and “private” cannot be separated: Hardly had South Africans been freed from the ideology of apartheid, when they became slaves of the neo-capitalistic free market economy. This ideology behind the present process of globalisation does not only dictate the economy “out there”, it also has an enormous influence on our personal lives and our families. For instance, it propagates a competition morale which is inculcated into our children from their early days and – except for a few advantages – has many negatives consequences.

Thus it is impossible to separate private and public life. Neither is it possible to limit the results of secularism (living as if God does not exist) to the public field of life. Our conclusion is that, Christian norms for our personal life are not sufficient. We also need norms to act as Christians in the wider field of society (economy, politics, education, culture, etc.) We cannot simply accept the principles of the world in these fields. For they are not “neutral”, they also have a religious origin –

the secular religion which believes that God and his commandments are not important and need not be obeyed.

11.2 Possible Christian answers to secularism

The various reactions of Christians to secularism as described by Dekker et al. (1997) are definitely not encouraging. However, this does not mean that we have to look on passively, embarrassed and dismayed. When the name of God is dishonoured, Christians – if they are indeed Christians – may not keep quiet. What “armour” do we have – apart from God’s promises – at our disposal?

In the *first instance* there is a need for convinced Christians who is not willing to lock up their Christian faith “safely” in an inner personal sanctuary or in the church. Personal integrity in the business world, a thrifty lifestyle, compassion for the poor, protest against injustice by way of a letter in a newspaper are all examples of how Christians can make a difference in our modern sick and rotten society.

In the *second instance* the church as the community of believers has a role not only with regard to its own members (like equipping them with basic norms for life in the wider society) but it also has to give a prophetic testimony and clearly practise what is preached (cf. chapter 4 for more details about the role of the church and Church in society).

However, the greater part of our lives are enacted outside the walls of the church. By means of the media, in the workplace, in the economic, political, educational and other fields the direction of our modern culture is determined. If we limit our efforts as Christians to the church, our cultural and social relevance will be very restricted. Neither should we fight the battle against the secular spirit of our times in isolation from other Christians in other churches.

We need a *third “weapon”*: Christian organisations and institutions. Such organisations, which are independent from the church, offer the advantage on the one hand of strengthening the testimony of individual believers in word and acts, while on the other hand broadening, deepening and rendering more relevant the

work of the churches in society. To put it simply, Christian organisations and institutions can give individual believers and churches extra eyes, ears, mouths, hands and feet.

It is this "third way" which we want to give serious consideration in this chapter (cf. Van der Walt, 1993). In this way we can tackle the problem of identity and relevance. (Compare for instance Buijs, 2001 as an example of how Christian development organisations in the Netherlands today experience an identity crisis as well as a relevance crisis. Buijs *et al.* 2003 also discuss the question of identity in other kinds of Christian organisations and institutions.) It could bring us nearer to the ideal of being Christians to the full and simultaneously mean something for the secular world in which we spend our daily lives.

It is impossible to treat everything in connection with Christian organisations (for instance their structures and practical *modi operandi*) since it differs from one organisation to the next. We will limit ourselves to two basic matters, namely the motivation for setting them up and maintaining them as well as a short overview of the different kinds of Christian organisations.

Naturally Christian organisations/institutions are not made Christian only by Christian motivation. As a result of (1) a Christian *motivation*, (2) according to Christian *norms*. (3) a specific *goal* is pursued. So at least three matters determine the Christian character of an organisation: (1) what it *originated* from (the *motive*), (2) it wants to work for (the *goal* or *content*), and (3) its *lodestar* (the *norm*). These three elements cannot be separated into watertight compartments. In the motives, for instance certain norms are already present.

The particular identity of Christian organisations therefore are not to be found merely in their motivation, but also in the norms which guide them and it should also become clear in the goal they work for. Their relevance will, however, come to the fore mainly in their goal or the actual content of their work.

We will focus on the general motivation for setting up/maintaining most Christian organisations, because the norms as well as the specific goals differ in the many

possible kinds of Christian organisations (for instance, political, economical, educational, etcetera).

It is important to reflect on the motivation for Christian movements, organisations and institutions, since behind the ostensibly noble motives there may lurk hidden additional motives – Christians are also sinful people. Such wrong motives are dangerous, for the inspiration behind a movement to a great extent determines its identity.

11.3 Wrong motives for Christian organisations

I name seven such unacceptable motivations. (Some of them have been taken from Klapwijk, 1995:93-110, but they have been worked over and reformulated.)

11.3.1 The motive of embarrassment

Dekker (1995:44) justifiably states that many Christians are not *unwilling*, but feel *powerless* towards the mighty process of secularisation. They would like to live as Christians in different fields in society, but they (no longer) know what exactly this would entail. This is also true about many Christians in Africa and elsewhere in the world. To feel more or less powerless and not to know exactly what to do and how to go about checking the storm of secularisation, could be a good *beginning*. It may cause us as Christians to realise that in our own power we will not be capable of doing much. Of course as a *principal* and *permanent* motive this is not sufficient.

11.3.2 The motive of escape

Separate Christian organisations can also be viewed as a means of protecting myself and those who believe and think the way I do, by retreating into our organisation and withdrawing from the world. For example, in the South Africa after 1994 white Christians are often inclined to limit themselves to private life. Black Christians also, are often inclined to see their churches as refuges where they – for a short while on Sundays – can forget the misery around them. If this is the motivation behind Christian organisations then they do not obey Christ's

command that believers should be present *in* the world like taste-giving salt and illuminating light (Matt. 5:13-16).

11.3.3 The motive of pride

If we think we are better or “holier” than people with other convictions or other Christians who prefer not working through specifically Christian organisations, we are simply proud – which is not a Christian virtue and therefore does not suit a Christian organisation.

11.3.4 The egotistic motive

In this case – although it is mostly neatly concealed – the motive is the interests of a certain population group or a political party or a certain occupation (like farmers, politicians, teachers). Interests do play a part in the creation of any organisation. However, in the case of an outspoken Christian organisation it should in the first and last instance be about the interests of the kingdom of Christ and not for mere selfish reasons of own interest.

11.3.5 The motive of power

Naturally a Christian organisation wants to influence and hopefully better its environment in a specific field, like politics, education, farming, media. It should be able to speak with justifiable authority. This influence and authority should, however, always be *servicing* and not *ruling* (the pursuit of *power*). Even a Christian political party does not have the task in the first place to try and win an election and in this way to gain control of a country.

11.3.6 The motive of absolutising the organisation

By this is meant that however successful and established it may be, a Christian organisation should never become an *end* in itself. It should always be seen as a *means* to bring glory to God and render loving service to our fellow humans. It is a very real danger that, in stead of making a clear distinction between the two, we

merge "our cause" with "God's cause". Not only the Christian church, but also a Christian organisation ultimately belongs not to us but to Christ.

11.3.7 The utopian motive

Both escapism (11.3.2 above) and unfounded optimism is wrong. Christian organisations who think they will be able to overpower the secular world, are dreaming of a utopia. Even less may we think that we can bring about the advent of God's perfect kingdom by means of Christian organisation. At most we can erect hopeful signs of his kingdom in various walks of life.

Existing organisations and those who are to be erected should ask themselves continuously whether some of these wrong motives in a subtle way play a role in their organisation or have begun to play a role as time passed.

11.4 The right motives for Christian organisations

In setting out the wrong motives, we have already revealed something of the correct motives, but we will now treat them more explicitly. Since Christian organisations develop and change, the original motives for their establishment may fade with time. So continually asking: "*Why* do we do what we are doing?" is no luxury. As is the case with the wrong motives, the correct motives are often closely linked. We also distinguish seven different motives here. (Here, too, I have been stimulated by Klapwijk's ideas [1995:93-115], but their description are my own.)

11.4.1 The religious motive

Every human being – whether he/she admits it or not – is a religious being. Even the atheist *believes* that God does not exist. Every person serves either the true God or an idol (something in creation instead) in *everything* he/she does. Christians can therefore not accept the secularist separation between "public" and "private".

We question the (religious) conviction of secularism that the state and the economy should control everything and the other human societal relationships (family, church, etcetera) are merely unimportant or "private" branches of society. We reject this as totalitarianism. Christians think in an anti-totalitarian way: Every societal relationship – however small and unimportant – should be permitted the right and authority to organise its own affairs. They prefer a philosophy of society which acknowledges both structural and confessional plurality. (Cf. *Inter alia* McCarthy, *et al.*, 1981; Skillen & McCarthy, 1991; Spykman, 1989; Van der Walt, 1999:387-416 and 2002: 259-335.)

We also reject the arrogant and intolerant idea that only secular religion be allowed to play a role in public life and all other religions be limited to private life. . . Not only Christians but also Jews, Hindus, Muslims and followers of Traditional African Religion should, for instance, have the right to their own religiously oriented schools and other institutions of education. The Reformational principle of confessional pluralism (cf. previous chapters) gives us the right to establish our own Christian organisations/institutions.

11.4.2 The kingdom motive

Christian organisations in various fields are the logical consequence of our faith in the sovereign rule of God over everything. They result from the wish of Christians to live the will of God in a specific area. They are instruments for bringing the kingship and glory of God into domains of society outside the church.

This goal may be reached in many ways – from informal conversations to formally structured organisations and institutions. *Workplace groups* of Christians in the same office, school or factory may, for instance, gather to support one another, to plan action, to influence important decisions or combat injustice. *Specialised study and action groups* can unite Christian farmers, lawyers, politicians, doctors, artists, engineers, trade union members, nurses, teachers, and more to reflect on a Christian perspective on their specific occupation. They can equip and inspire one another to influence their work environment. *Alternative Christian organisations* go even further than mere support, study or action groups. Their

goal is to establish *separate* Christian organisations and even institutions like a Christian trade union, political party, school, college or business concern. Their aim is to erect structures where Christians have the opportunity for practising politics, business or education in a Christian way.

11.4.3 The motive of vocation

This motive is a further explanation of the previous one. God calls all of us to serve Him in his encompassing kingdom. He gives us a task. But He does not call all people for the same office or task. According to our talents and circumstances He wants to use us in a variety of occupations. And – most important – they are all equal in value. Being a minister is not the only full-time vocation in his service!

However, it is not always easy to know exactly how my vocation fits into God's kingdom, how I can practise my profession according to his will and thus to his honour. For this we need the counsel and advice of fellow believers, especially those in the same occupation or working in the same field. Hence the necessity of the above-mentioned groups and organisations for conversation, study and action. They are different ways in which Christians can stand, think and act together in a more organised way.

Is it not the task of the church to equip its members in this way? The churches do have an important task – which regrettably is often neglected. But a minister cannot be a specialist in all fields so that he could explain, for instance, to a farmer or a doctor how to practice their occupations as Christians. He can merely give broad guidelines from the Scriptures.

Witnessing (the prophetic calling) done by the church in the domains of politics, economy, labour, etcetera entails admonition or encouragement more or less from *the outside*. But Christian organisations and their members are capable of changing *from within* political, economic and other domains of life. For example, a Christian politician does not talk “pulpit language” but “political language”. He knows this domain from the inside, therefore has more authority and thus has a chance that secular politicians will take his message seriously.

11.4.4 The motive of dechurchification

This motive has to see to it that we resist the general tendency for the church to swallow up the whole of life . The word “dechurchification” has a negative connotation, but I will explain what I have in mind. From what was already said above, as well as in previous chapters (cf. e.g. 4.2.1 and 4.2.3), it should be evident that we must make a clear distinction – without separating them – between “church” and “kingdom”. The kingdom of God is his encompassing rule in all fields of life. The church is a part of the kingdom and it has an important task regarding the kingdom, but should never be equated or identified with the kingdom. Unfortunately it happens in the thinking of many Christians that the church as it were “swallows” the kingdom of God.

One often hears how the question “What should we *Christians* do regarding a specific matter or problem” is translated immediately to “What should the *church* do about it?” This is proof that we Christians have lost the broad vision of the kingdom – which takes a central place right through the Bible.

With “dechurchification”, therefore, I mean that we may not hold the church responsible for everything bearing the name “Christian”. “Dechurchification” also includes declericalisation which means that the office bearers of the church need not be present everywhere either. The reason is that the church has a specific vocation and task which also applies to its office bearers (cf. again chapter 4). Its calling is to proclaim the Word of God or the Gospel of the all-encompassing kingdom. The church should edify its own members and equip them with this faith.

The church *cannot*, however, be involved in everything which is Christian, because then its task would be impossibly wide. But, more importantly, it *may not* be involved in everything and control it. (There is no necessity for a minister or an elder to serve in an association of farmers or a school committee.) The Middle Ages as well as the old South Africa have proved sufficiently that a *churchification* of society is no guarantee for a *Christian* society. A Christian agricultural

association or a Christian political party is not a “small church” outside the church. It has its own unique calling, task, offices and structure.

11.4.5 The ecumenical motive

Christians not only have a need of fellowship and unity *in* their churches, but also *outside* the church. Add to this the strategic consideration that a modern secular state and society, in which majorities play such an important role, may listen more readily to the united voice of many Christians than to a statement made by the synod or general assembly of one church.

In contrast to the unhealthy tendency of church members to regard their own church as the only true and infallible one, which gives rise to pride, indifference, exclusivism and negativism among believers of different churches, Christian organisations afford Christians the opportunity to work together for a particular cause, thereby revealing the unity or ecumenicity of all believers.

In this sense ecumenicity does not mean vagueness but rather greater clarity. While the message of the church is general – unfortunately sometimes so general that it is vague and meaningless – Christian organisations seek the will of God for a *specific* domain or problem. Thus it can give shape to the message of the Gospel to the world outside the church in a sharper, more concrete and more effective way.

11.4.6 The motive of the full Gospel

Census statistics on the number of Christians in South Africa are not reliable and even misleading. I think the percentage of real Christians is much smaller than is generally accepted (75%) because many are only Christians in name. What is more, the number of church members and Christians in South Africa is decreasing (for particulars, see Kritzinger, 2002, especially chapters 1 and 2). Why is this? I name only one of the many reasons.

Thousands of Christians in many parts of the world leave the church and even the Christian faith for the simple reason that the much reduced, minimalistic Gospel

they hear every Sunday does not offer them enough guidance and direction in their often difficult everyday work. People nowadays do not have time for something which has no meaning or relevance for them. So we can expect that Christianity, which grew at such a phenomenal rate in Africa, may possibly decline in the future. Should this happen, blame should be laid not on secularism or some other "enemy" only, but also on the church itself.

As indicated previously, it is important to note that Paul (1) called people to conversion and (2) established churches where fellowship of the believers could be practised. But his work did not end there. Particularly in his letters to different congregations an indispensable last step followed: (3) he explained to the believers what the *meaning or implication* of their faith was for their everyday life and their occupations. To personal *conversion* and the community of the *church* is added the perspective on the *kingdom*! In modern language we would say: an integral Christian worldview founded on the *full* Gospel.

But listening to the Bible only and obeying it is not yet the full Word of God, for He also reveals Himself to us in his creation. Outside the church God speaks to the farmer for instance through the regularity and order of creation, so that the farmer knows how to plough, what and when to plant and sow and how to harvest (Isaiah 28:23-29). In the different walks of life outside the church, in the practice of different occupations, we are confronted with the word God speaks through creation (a non-lingual word, Ps. 19:4,5), which asks as much attention of the faithful as the study of the Bible. As Calvin already emphasised, the study of God's creational revelation should always be done in the light of His revelation in the Bible.

In summary: To guarantee our Christian identity as well as our relevance for the whole of life, we should know and live in obedience to God's *full* Word (in the Scriptures and in creation). In this we can be helped by an *encompassing, integral* Christian worldview. But in our times of increasing specialisation we must also be *specific*. To succeed in this challenge, Christian organisations in various fields have an enormous task.

11.4.7 The motive of empowerment

This last motive for Christian organisations links up with the idea which is strongly emphasised nowadays, namely that people on grass roots level should empower themselves. Our people are too much inclined still to expect everything "from the top down" (from the state and its political leaders or the church and its office bearers or assemblies). The government, however, can not solve the numerous problems we have. Individuals on grass roots level should take the initiative themselves in taking matters in hand in an organised way.

Christian organisations fit in extremely well with this strategy. They are not dependent on the churches, neither do they lean on government leaders or other élite. They think and act independently.

The Bible itself advises us not to underestimate the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10) nor ourselves – however insignificant and powerless we may feel in the face of the enormous problems we have to face. The reason: God does not underestimate us. He chooses the weak and lowly to do his great work (cf. 1 Cor 1:26-31 and James 2:1-7). The first disciples of Christ were all ordinary people from various walks of life, even simple fishermen.

Since a Christian organisation should always be motivated by love, service, care and justice to the neighbour, it does not mean that self-empowerment is the only aim. By means of Christian organisations we strengthen ourselves (the means) in order to strengthen others (the goal).

Millions of poor, hungry, ill, jobless, weak and despondent children, men and women and aged all over the world are waiting for the message of hope and encouragement which can emanate from motivated Christian organisations and institutions.

11.4.8 Not the only option

The above seven motivations underline the importance of Christian organisations in the times we live in, in which profound spiritual landslides are taking place. They can give new direction and guidance. Through their work the Christian faith

can be made more relevant for our times and circumstances, while we as Christians need not give up our identity.

However, this does not mean that Christian organisations are an absolute necessity under all circumstances. A careful analysis of the specific circumstances is important, too. Christians in a specific country may be a minority and Christian organisations prohibited. A Christian may find him/her in a position where he/she can have a more effective influence without associating with a Christian group. Or it may be a better strategy to work within a so-called general (secular) organisation for a particular cause. Even if there is no Christian organisation which can give us support in our work, we need not sit back and do nothing.

It should, however, be borne in mind that “general” or secular organisations are not neutral organisations. Every organisation rests upon a religious-worldviewish motivation. So a Christian who works in non-confessional organisations should seriously consider whether he/she is spiritually strong enough to withstand the suction exerted by convictions which are foreign to the Bible. Relevance and identity should go together – we may not give up one for the sake of the other.

11.5 Different types of Christian organisations

The range of Christian organisations is great. Yet it is important to know which kinds can be distinguished and what the possibilities and potential dangers attached to each type is.

According to Buijs *et al.* (2003:16) organisations can in different ways express their Christian identity: (1) a supporter-identity (based on the constituency's aims), (2) a foundational identity (the worldview on which their identity is founded), (3) a ritual identity (based on specific behaviours or habits), (4) a target-group identity (whom they want to serve) and (5) a methodological identity (the *modus operandi* of the organisation).

There can be no watertight distinctions, but Klapwijk (1995:119-121) divides Christian organisations into the following four basic categories: (1) organisations

for Christian interests; (2) organisations directed by churches; (3) Christian social relief organisations and (4) Christian cultural guiding organisations. We give a brief explanation of each category.

11.5.1 Organisations for Christian interests

Under this category falls e.g. Christian sport, acting, music, singing and even travel organisations. Klapwijk does not consider these as very important. The reason is that these organisations often serve only the interests of a small group of Christians (they focus on themselves), who withdraw from wider society and have no relevance for the outside world.

11.5.2 Christian organisations directed by a church

Examples of these are convents, mission organisations, diaconal groups, (church) women's and youth societies, etcetera. These societies emanating from the church have done good and important work through the ages, but they do not belong to the category of independent Christian organisations, which are not initiated and supervised by the church as we suggested.

11.5.3 Christian social relief organisations

These are organisations which bring relief to their own members or others and do this with a Christian attitude or in a Christian climate. Under these are reckoned Christian hospitals, institutions for charity, poverty relief, development, homes for the aged and care centres for the disabled and the seriously ill like AIDS patients. With right Klapwijk says that political and economic pressure today cause many of these organisations/institutions to be taken over by "neutral" government institutions and in this way they lose their unique Christian direction and "climate". Numerous other Christian NGO's have survived, however.

11.5.4 Christian cultural guiding organisations

This kind of Christian organisation tries to influence and give direction to society and culture from a Christian conviction or worldview. It can be done in different ways in different organisations: through principial political struggle (a Christian political party), social action (a Christian trade union), opinion forming (Christian

media societies) or Christian worldviewish training of the youth (Christian education on different levels).

According to Klapwijk particularly this kind of Christian organisations/institutions in the Netherlands came under fire. There are many reasons for this (cf. Dekker, 1995:40-48), inter alia the internal decline of the organisations themselves. In other countries (like the USA and Canada) they, however, continue to play an important role. Klapwijk is of the opinion – and I agree with him – that it is exactly such organisations we need urgently in our atheistic, secular culture. They can make an important contribution, amongst others, to a truly integral and radical Christian anthropology and view on society and culture – indispensable for a foundational critique of secularism.

11.6 A challenge to Christians

Many questions could not be broached in this short chapter. One of these is, for instance, what a secular governments' attitude will be towards organisations/institutions inspired by the Christian religion (and also other religions), since they cannot easily be categorised according to the distinction between either public (secular) or private (religious).

And should they be classified as "private" would religiously oriented schools and other service organisations be entitled to subsidies from the state? (Compare for this problem chapter 10, section 10.4 of this book as well as Van der Walt and Venter, 1995 which also refer to examples overseas of how Christians in other countries have solved this problem or are trying to solve it.)

However, the aim of this contribution was not to go into *practical* details. We merely wanted to offer a *principial* justification for Christian organisations and institutions. We hope it may serve as an inspiration for Christians to take action and establish more such organisations. For if the existence of God, his Word, commandments and authority are denied, limited or regarded as irrelevant in our secular world, we as his children have no choice; we must enter the struggle *pro Rege* (for the King).

For this struggle we can also draw on history for inspiration. During the course of history Christianity has – in spite of many failures – played an important orienting role during several radical culture shifts. It was a shining light during the decaying ancient Graeco-Roman culture. After the Middle Ages Christianity formed the forefront on the way to modern times. Now the march has started anew to the secular society of the future. If ever there was a time when Christians could play an important role in giving direction – also by means of Christian organisations – it is today.

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Chapter 12

INTEGRATION OR TRANSFORMATION?

“Faith and scholarship” or “faith-directed scholarship” as a starting-point for integral Christian scientific endeavour.

To be discussed in this chapter is the question whether the contemporary model of integration can be accepted as a valid way towards genuine Christian scholarship. To find an answer to this problem, the following steps are taken. (1) In the introduction attention is asked for the present popularity – overseas as well as in South Africa – of this model of “faith *and* science”. (2) Next the meaning of “integration” as viewed by its proponents is explained. (3) In the following section different arguments are advanced against the integration model. The conclusion is that such a model for Christian scientific endeavour should not be regarded as the ideal. (4) In the case of the alternative, viz. integral Christian scholarship, Christian belief is not merely *added* to “standard” science. The *contents* of the different disciplines should be *transformed* in the light of God’s revelation, a Christian worldview, a Christian philosophy, subject philosophy and subject theory.

12.1. The integration of faith and science: a topical issue

When Christian academics speak about Christian science or scholarship, they may mean diverging things. In the field of philosophy Coletto (2002) for instance distinguishes five different models for a Christian pursuit of this subject. Some of the ideas on what Christian science entails, are even considered as caricatures by Van de Walt (2001). In this article the focus is on only one, very popular approach called the “integration model”. First we will show how popular the model is. From this it will also transpire what this approach entails.

12.1.1 Popular in North America

In a review of the situation in the USA and Canada Botha (2004:13,14) draws attention to the popularity – especially among Evangelicals – of the integration model. She contrasts it with the Reformational model, which from a more integral

view rejects the dualistic background of this integration model. The former (*integration*) attempts to adapt/fit in the Christian faith to/with current science while the latter (the *integral*) pursues a reformation of science by faith from the inside.

The popularity and aims of this vision of integration will now be demonstrated briefly from a few texts. It becomes particularly clear from a series of books on different fields of science under the general title "...*through the eyes of faith*" published by the Christian College Coalition (CCC) in the U.S.A..

- Concerning a Christian approach to Music, it is clear that Best (cf. 1993:xi) departs from the integration of Christian faith and science. In contrast, the work of DeMol (1993) is an attempt at a more integral approach.
- For Meyers & Jeeves (cf. 1987:1-4) too, the pivotal problem is what the relationship between faith and science (*in casu* Psychology) should be. They reject the idea that there should be conflict between the two and search for integration: Christian science should "explain" what goes on in Psychology and (the other way round) Psychology should elucidate the convictions and conduct of Christians. In opposition to this Van Belle (cf. 2005) and Bouma-Prediger (cf. 1990) defend a more integral model for a true Christian Psychology.
- In the volume on Sociology in the same series ...*through the eyes of faith* Fraser & Campolo (1992:xx) for instance say the following: "Thinking Christianly about society requires the delicate task of *blending* (italics added) sociology and faith. This book is an invitation to the adventure of *combining* (italics added) the heights of human thought about society with the depths of Christian faith. The *mixture* (italics added), we believe, can be an explosive *concoction* (italics added)".
- In the book *Biology through the eyes of faith* by Wright (1989) it is stated in the preface already (p.x) that faith and science do not stand in isolation or in opposition to one another, but that it is the task of the Christian scholar to investigate "how his faith and his biology *fit together*" (italics added). Elsewhere

(xi) this task is described as "a burden to bring knowledge of God's world into *harmony* (italics added) with knowledge from God's Word."

- The tension between the integration and integral models can sometimes be discerned in one and the same author, as for instance in the case of the book by Byl (2001) on Cosmology. He distinguishes (cf. p.2) three models to solve the problem of the relationship between Christian faith and the science Cosmology: (1) concordism, an attempt to interpret the Bible in such a way that it harmonises with modern Cosmology; (2) the opposite method, namely to try and adapt modern Cosmology to the Word of God; (3) the complementary model according to which Cosmology and the Christian faith (for Byl the same as Theology) are independent of one another since they deal with different kinds of problems. The former has to answer questions like When? and How? (did the world come into being) while the latter has to answer the questions Who created the earth? and Why ? Byl (2001:3-13) criticises positions (1) and (3) and prefers (2) since he wants to maintain fully the authority of Scripture.

This does not alter the fact that he also favours the integration model. For instance (cf. p.125) he speaks about the *interaction* between Theology and Cosmology or the *reconciliation* of Scripture and science. But sometimes the tension in his thoughts become clear when it seems (cf. p. 224, 225) as if he rejects the integration model, since for him – quite rightly - it amounts to the accommodation of Christian faith to a secular Cosmology. His condition is that more attention should be paid to differentiation, for "only then can genuine integration be attained" (p. 225)! So he probably wants to ensure that in the integration of the two poles (Theology and Cosmology) Theology will get priority – Cosmology should be adapted to Theology (identified with the Bible) and not the other way round.

Over against all five the above-mentioned examples of integration there are however writers like Clouser (1991), Fowler (2001), Kok (2004) and Sinnema (2001) who clearly propagate a more integral approach (what we called above the "Reformational" model). Most likely there also is a middle group, like Van

Brummelen (2001) and Zylstra (1997) who with their "faith-based learning" have not made a clear choice between the integral and the integration models.

What is the situation in South Africa?

12.1.2 Examples of integration in South Africa

There are more examples to cite, but I limit myself to the "Potchefstroom circle" since this university up to recently (2003) still professed an explicitly Christian character. (From 2004 it was renamed as the North-West University.)

On a more popular level there is a clear difference between Van der Walt (2004:17-10) and Erasmus & Kruger (2004:30-32) on how the relationship between faith and science should be viewed. Van der Walt rejects it as an unnecessary dilemma and simply speaks of "gelowige wetenskap" or "faith-directed science" (in the case of Christians as well as people of other convictions), while the other two writers maintain the complementary model (cf. above). According to their viewpoint the Christian faith should give the answer to *Who* created the earth, while (evolutionistic) Biology should say *how* it happened.

In the academic sphere (in the School for Philosophy of the new North-West University) the contrast clearly emerges in two recent dissertations for master's degrees. Coletto (cf. 2002: 114-128) is clearly a champion for the more integral model for a Christian philosophy. Kruger (cf. 2003:134-137) leans strongly towards the integration model.

The popularity of the *integration* model can also be seen in the fact that on the Potchefstroom campus of the new North-West University there is a Centre for Faith *and* Science. An *integral* model would rather have called such a centre "The Centre for *faith-based* Science".

12.1.3 Problem and hypothesis

From the above it becomes clear that the two approaches to Christian science (*integration* and the *integral* model of transformation) differ. The former tries to reconcile faith and science, while the latter is of the opinion that every science – the Christian as well as the neutral or secular – can do nothing but depart from

(pre-scientific) presuppositions of faith, since faith forms an integral part of every scientific endeavour. The former vision therefore is one of “faith *and* science” while the latter viewpoint is that of “faith-*directed* science”. The former wants to Christianise (secular) science from the *outside*, while the latter wants to transform it from the *inside*.

The problem is: Which one of the two is the correct approach? My preliminary hunch (hypothesis) is that one should choose the transformational model. To be able to confirm the supposition, we subsequently answer the following three questions: (1) What exactly does this integration model comprise? (2) What is its (historical) origin ? (3) Can it stand a principal test?

12.2. What the integration model comprises

By way of introduction we must first say clearly what is *not* meant by integration and is therefore not queried.

12.2.1 What is not meant

The following four matters are significant:

- Because of over-specialisation it is urgent to attempt to integrate the fragmented scientific knowledge in an interdisciplinary way. Interdisciplinary dialogue can help Christian scientists to stay aware of the broader contexts and also restrict reductionism (the tendency of most scientists to explain everything from the perspective of their own subject, for example the economic, psychological, etc.) To discover the unity in the midst of the complex diversity is, however, something different from the integration of faith and science.
- Rejecting the integration model does not mean denying the necessity for dialogue with scientists of other convictions than the Christian.
- Neither does it mean that it is unimportant to study thoroughly the nature of faith and science, religion and rationality – as two different, but not isolated human functions.

- As a consequence of the imperfection (resulting from sin) of the life of the Christian scientist, he/she may not consciously try to give form to his/her convictions of faith on the scientific terrain – as should be done in all areas of life. In many cases the necessary training (worldviewish and philosophical) to do it is lacking. But In such cases an encouragement to integration will be of no use.

What, then, is meant by “integration”?

12.2.2 The integration of faith and science

Under 1 above it has already transpired that integration takes on a variety of forms. Basically the integration model amounts to the following "... in the integration model it is assumed that the Christian faith and academic disciplines are two *separate* components whose relationship needs to be recognized and developed. Though sometimes it is agreed that for God there is a unity of truth, for humans, at least faith and learning are *separated* and need to be integrated" (Sinnema, 2001:189).

It is interesting that for many of the proponents of this model the final purpose of integration seems to be that the Christian faith should “permeate” or transform science. (For this reason some integrationists emphasise that it should be a critical integration and not unquestioning accommodation.) However, the main point that Sinnema brings to the attention is whether such a *final purpose* can be reached if the *point of departure* of all views of integration is that the (Christian) faith and the science(s) are two completely separate domains.

Sinnema (cf. also Heie & Wolfe, 1987) points out that there are different strategies to implement the integration model. It depends on how the relationship between faith and science is seen. Sinnema mentions the following: (1) they are in *conflict*, (2) they *overlap*, (3) are in *dialogue/interaction* with one another.

Some of the proponents of the integration model do concede that scholarship cannot take place without presuppositions of faith. Still, they keep maintaining the basic model by saying that Christian scientists should discover the nature of integration and promote it.

The second question was what the historic origin of the integration model is.

12.3 The historic background of the integration viewpoint

If we look at its history, the idea of integration is not new – it has a long history of almost 2000 years, which started with Early Christian (Patristic) philosophy (cf. Vollenhoven, 2005; Wolters, 1990 and Van der Walt, 1976 and 1986). The epistemological problem of faith and knowledge can be followed through the Middle Ages, struggling with it continued during the 16th Century Reformation (cf. Van der Walt, 2005:9-11) up to the present day (cf. Van der Walt, 2005:17-22).

12.3.1 The consequence of a deep-seated dualism

It is important to understand that this epistemological problem is rooted in a deep-seated ontological dualism and an anthropological dichotomy – for these determine one's epistemology.

Van der Walt (2000b:130 *et seq.*) shows that most Christian worldviews are built on an inherent dualism. Because Christians are conscious of the fall of man and the brokenness of creation, they are inclined to depreciate a part of creation, disparage it or even see it as inherently bad. According to Scripture no facet of creation, however, is either fully evil or perfectly good. After the fall everything in creation partakes of both the bad and (as a result of Christ's redemption) of the good. Therefore the border between good and bad does not lie somewhere between certain facets or domains of creation. The distinction between good-evil indicates a *religious* difference (which denotes the *direction* of creation, namely obedience or disobedience to God's law) and not an *ontological* separation (which concerns the *structure* of creation).

Creation may therefore not be divided (as in the case of many Christian worldviews and especially theologies) into a supernatural, sacred domain of grace and a natural, secular field. This dualistic doctrine of two domains is an unbiblical idea. According to the Scriptures grace is not opposed to nature, but to God's wrath. So redemption is not something that stands *apart* from creation, but is meant *for* creation, the salvation *of* creation.

12.3.2 Various dualistic worldviews

In the course of the long history of Christianity various kinds of dualisms originated, occurring from early Christendom up to the present. The five basic types are the following (cf. Van der Walt, 2000b:134 *et seq.*): (1) redemption *opposed to* creation; (2) redemption *alongside* creation; (3) redemption *above* creation; (4) redemption *originating from* creation and (5) redemption *in or for* creation, to renew it. Van der Walt (cf. 2000b:134-138) shows how these basic points of departure determine all aspects of human thought. It also determines the Christian's standpoint concerning scholarship.

12.3.3 The implication for Christian scholarship

The implications of the above five worldviews are the following:

- According to position (1) above, a Christian would set himself *in opposition to* science. Faith does not need a scientific base/explanation. One is either a believer *or* a scientist.
- According to the second view above a Christian believer finds himself *alongside* science. This means that he/she may on Sunday be a believer in church, but not from Monday to Saturday in his study or laboratory. The two "regions" of his life exist parallel to each other. According to this view one is a believer *and* a scientist.
- The implication of the third point of departure is that the Christian faith is something *higher than* or *above* science. From *outside* a Christian may therefore try to influence science. This can happen by means of adding moral values (an ethical "sauce") to the standard science (e.g. an ethics for economics, the media, agriculture, etc.). But since it comes from *outside*, it cannot really change secular science *from the inside*. In other cases a theological perspective is worked out for the different subjects departing from Theology - which naturally would be Christian. (Cf. for instance the popularity of "theological economics", "theological ecology" and many more.) These theological "sauces" however, cannot lead to

an integral Christian economics, ecology, *et cetera* either – it remains a sugar coating or varnish on secular ideas.

- According to the fourth point of departure (redemption *originating from* creation) the Christian simply accepts or “baptises” (condones) the standard, secular science, for if it is of a high quality (cf. the contemporary emphasis on “excellence”), it would naturally also be Christian. A Christian approach to science thus makes no real difference and is superfluous.
- The last (fifth) worldview is not the most simple one (since reality itself and the acquisition of knowledge of it is not simple), but in my view this is the correct one. Since scientific work is not good as a matter of course – in the Biblical sense, namely obedient to God’s commands (view 4), or evil as such (view 1), a Christian scientist cannot simply either accept it as it is, or reject it. It has to be *reformed*. He/she cannot be satisfied to be a Christian *and* a scientist either (views 2 and 3), but should pursue being truly a Christian scientist – someone who lives integrally and does not take a schizophrenic existence for granted.

This calling to a *scientia reformata* can not be accomplished easily and can also be misunderstood. For instance, the ideal of Christian scholarship does not deny that “unbelieving” scientists or scholars with a different belief can also be correct in what they observe. (In the Old Testament pagans helped to build the temple and performed an excellent job!)

Important is also how parts or components of scientific theories are integrated into one’s broader view about reality. For example, definite similarities exist between the blood circulation, kidneys etc. of mammals and human beings. According to two different views of the human being this fact could either be explained by saying (1) that human beings are nothing but animals or (2) human beings share biotic life with mammals, but being human entails much more, and therefore humans are totally different from animals.

12.3.4 Conclusion

The integration model can take both stances (2) and (3) above. The very brief historical survey thus shows that: (1) the integration model is not an altogether new approach to the problem of Christian scholarship; (2) neither is it the only approach in the long Christian tradition. Even more important is the third question (cf. 12.1.3 above) namely whether it can pass a more principal test.

12.4 The integration model judged on principal grounds

For someone who truly pursues *integral* Christian scholarship, the *integration* model is insufficient for the following reasons:

12.4.1 The nature of science itself makes possible true Christian scholarship

Heyns (1999:110) rightly states that one need not, like the integrationists, *add* something (the Christian faith) to the "ordinary" science to make it Christian. The perspectival nature of science *itself* (the fact that it is a theoretical elaboration of a specific pre-scientific worldview) makes this possible. Since it is such an important point, Heyns is quoted at length (I translate):

"Sometimes proponents of Christian science are asked to demonstrate the 'Christianness' of the science they practice. The Christian scholar then has to show that his specific results look 'different' from the way the rest of the scientific community see the matter. The supposition is that 'Christianness' adds something more or different to the mere neutral science that everybody knows. If a Christian rises to this (false) challenge, he will try and demonstrate that there are additional truths which are only at his disposal since he is a Christian. It could, for instance, be something that theology offers him with which he can make the discipline he practices Christian. In that case it may be argued that the Bible is an additional kind of source of knowledge for science. But this approach rests on the false assumption that the Christian character of science must be seen in terms of an addition to mere or normal science. Hereby it is actually

admitted that being Christian has nothing to do with science, for "Christianness" is simply glued onto science. This kind of Christian scholarship therefore ends in a mere Christian sauce poured over the otherwise secular science. The alternative to the "Christian-sauce-theory" is to argue that the structure of science itself leaves room for a Christian science" (Heyns, 1999:110).

12.4.2 Faith lies at the base of all scientific work

Even in spite of the brokenness of our existence, faith and science are not two separate poles of the human experience. They are not separated, not even when the influence of faith is not directly visible. The Word of God – and the Reformational tradition which follows it – teaches that one's religious convictions (the direction or course of one's heart) influence one's life *in total* for better or for worse.

As became evident above, religious presuppositions are an *inherent, integral* part of every scientific activity and result. Each discipline is founded on (unsubstantiated, accepted in faith) ontological, anthropological and epistemological points of departure, which also determine the scientific theories, methodologies (e.g. selection of data) and the purpose of the science(s). Clouser (1991:3) for instance says "... one religious belief or another controls theory making in such a way that the contents of the theories differ depending on the contents of the religious belief they propose".

Sinnema (cf. 2001:193) adds three important remarks. (1) In the first place religion/faith does not concern God/gods or the "supernatural" only, but also this world. So, for instance, one has to believe in the inherent order of the reality one studies.

(2) In the second instance, since secular science no less than Christian science is founded on an (apostate) belief, the clash is not one – as often depicted by integrationists – between faith and science. At the root of the matter it is a clash between two or more beliefs. Heyns (1999:120) agrees: "It means that the struggle actually is not between faith and science, but between different scientific systems, each of which originates from a religious basis. It means that several

religions exist within the sphere of science. Science is practised in the midst of a struggle between religions.”

Therefore, (3) in the third instance, faith and science need not be integrated, since they already are. One should rather ask *which kind* of faith lies at the base of a specific science. Vollenhoven (2005), for instance, indicates that a philosophical conception (consisting of a specific type as well as current) underlies every scientific theory.

12.4.3 The underlying dualism can never really be defeated

Although the *purpose* of the integration model is the unity of faith and science (i.e. faith-based science) it can hardly be successful. For the dualistic point of departure (the idea that faith is something *outside of* or *foreign to* scientific activity) obstructs this commendable goal. As long as the view is prevalent that the Christian faith is something extrinsic to academic work – which necessitates a “reconciliation” between the two entities – Christian science in the true sense of the word will remain a mirage. At most it may be possible (according to Sinnema, 2001:194) to reach a weak dualistic integration.

12.4.4 Structure and direction confused

As we have said, the intention of the integrationists is a good one. In our modern world where secular thinking tries to separate faith – all other beliefs except their own secular faith! – from scholarship, and where science has become fragmented as a result of over-specialisation, the proponents of integration are trying to recreate unity. Their basic mistake, however, is first – to put it simply – approving the separation (dualism) and then trying to bridge it. In the words of Spykman: “Dualism gives the spiritual antithesis ontological status by defining some parts, aspects, sectors, activities or realms of life (the ministeries of the church – *or the Christian faith*) as good and others (politics – *or science*) 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 (religious) antithesis is read back into the very structure of creation”. (Spykman, 1992:67).

12.4.5 Only partial integration possible

Even the proponents of the integration model would have to admit that full integration between the Christian faith and the "standard" sciences is not possible or desirable. Current scientific practise, which for the greater part is based on secular belief (that God does not exist and his commandments are irrelevant), in many cases is in direct conflict with the most basic points of the Christian faith. For this reason the integrationists are usually inclined – even over-keen – to look for "similarities" between the Christian faith and the accepted disciplines. The result is nevertheless only a partial integration.

12.4.6 The role of theological science in integration

Very often the integration between faith and science is narrowed down to the integration between Theology and other sciences (cf. e.g. Byl, 2001 discussed above). Mutual "pollination" is proposed: Theology has to influence the other disciplines and the other way round they should enrich Theology. We have no objection against interdisciplinary contact *as such* – it is absolutely essential (cf. 2.1.1 above). But within the context of the integration model there are serious risks.

In the first place (cf. Sinnema, 2001:195) the influence of Theology is still extrinsic – no *intrinsic* Christian approach is possible to non-theological subjects. (An example: a "*theological economics*" still is not a *Christian economics*, merely a *theologised economics*.)

In the second place we are concerned with what is to my mind an incorrect – though very common - view of Theology, namely that it is identified with faith/religion. Faith in God's revelation, however, is something pre-theoretical (and thus also pre-theological), while Theology is the theoretical reflection on faith. It is very important that the two should clearly be distinguished. Furthermore Theology is not, as a matter of course Christian in nature, because it is supposed to have God, or the Scriptures as its field of investigation. It is after

all not the *field* of investigation, but the *perspective* from which a discipline is practised that makes it Christian. (Cf. Van der Walt, 2005:158-165 for a more correct view on the task and place of Theology in the practising of Christian scholarship.) This explains the possibility of so-called purely scientific, neutral or secular theologies studying the Bible!

12.4.7 The integration model offers no solution to the post-modern threat

The conclusion of the historic investigation was (cf. 12.3.4 above) that the integration model is very *old* already. In this principal reflection we have to state that it is also *out-dated*, not abreast of the times. The integration model seems still to depart from the assumption that science is more or less neutral and consequently that it can be integrated with the Christian faith.

However, today the current trend is post-modernism. As any informed reader would know, this strain of thought does not favour neutralism. After about four centuries during which the idea of a value-free, objective, neutral science was prevalent, it is generally admitted nowadays that such a kind of scientific endeavour is impossible.

On the one hand postmodernists will be amazed by Christians who want to integrate their faith with science – for the two things are of course inseparably linked. On the other hand Christian integrationists should realise that they live and practise science in a totally different spiritual climate today. Instead of flogging a dead horse (the modernistic idea of neutrality), they will have to devise new weapons against this rival (postmodernism) which is new, alive – and much more of a threat to Christian science.

After the historic elucidation (12.3) and principal critique (12.4) the time has arrived to look for an alternative to the integration model.

12.5 The alternative of integral Christian scholarship

A truly integral, Christian scholarship is much more complicated and therefore much more difficult than following the simple integration model. Van der Walt (cf. 2005:150 *et seq.*) mentions five "building blocks" which are required: It should (1)

be done in the light of God's revelation. It requires (2) a Christian worldview; (3) a Christian philosophical basis; (4) a subject philosophy and (5) subject theory. Only the first three are addressed, since they are normally the most neglected, or incorrectly understood by integrationists.

12.5.1 The "light" of God's revelation for science

The integration model is inclined to stress only the integration of one facet of God's revelation (that found in the Bible) with science. The Reformational approach differentiates – and emphasises – three facets in the one revelation of God: (1) in creation, (2) in the Scriptures and (3) in Christ. (The term "creational revelation" is not wholly satisfactory since the threefold revelation takes place through creation alone – even in the case of the Bible in human language, while Christ also became a human being.)

God's threefold revelation and science

God's revelation through creation does not – as is often supposed – offer information solely on his character (cf. Rom. 1:20). In it is also revealed his will for everything that is created – so clearly that even those who do not believe in Him can know it (cf. Rom. 2:14,15). God's creational revelation offers a complex set of laws by which He made, ordered and maintains creation. They are not merely "laws of *nature*" but are the expression of *God's* will for the structure of the different creatures.

Creation itself however, reveals these laws or ordinations for the different things only in a "latent" manner by the way the created things function. From this orderliness of creation scientists should attempt to deduce, understand and formulate God's order for creation.

Usually it goes as follows: (1) a scientist studies different matters in his subject field; (2) he observes a basic orderly pattern in it; (3) comes to the conclusion that there are "laws" which govern such regularities, and (4) attempts to describe these laws. Such scientific formulations however, remain fallible approaches to God's laws which have divine authority.

In the second place, while creational revelation is "latent" and of a non-lingual nature (cf. the "speechless voice" of Ps. 19:4), there also is God's revelation through his Word which is written in human language. The scope of the Scriptures is also more limited, primarily focused on God's message of salvation for creation. Therefore it normally does not repeat things which God reveals in his creation. (Scientists e.g. have to discover for themselves the structure of the atom.)

In a selective way, however, Scripture articulates some of the themes from God's creational revelation. For instance, a political scientist may by his study of political relationships discover what justice is, but the Bible also reveals the nature of true justice. For this reason it can be said that the Bible is like spectacles which help man's eyes, which have been weakened by sin, to "read" better the creational revelation of God.

In the third place – since, as a result of sin, man has become blind and deaf for the former two ways of revelation – God's revelation comes to the fore more clearly still in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). He reminded us once again of God's revelation in creation and his Word, and as our Example He lived the way man/woman should – according to God's will.

Since integrationists attempt in particular to integrate the Bible with science, we will now explain how the Bible may and may not be used.

How the Bible should not be used

One can either expect *too little* from the Bible (by keeping it locked in your heart as something meant only for your "spiritual" life, without meaning for the rest of your life) or expect *too much* from it (by attempting to get from it answers to all your scientific questions). The integration model (in which God's creational revelation does not figure at all or not enough) tends to the latter extreme. Both those "with the Bible in the *heart*" and the others "with the Bible in the *hand*" (who make it into a *manual* instead of a *light* for scientific study) are in error. On the incorrect use of the Bible by the latter we have two comments.

One should not attempt to “prove” everything by means of texts (“proof-texting”) from the Bible. Parts of Scripture may not be quoted at will out of context. Furthermore Christian scholarship does not always require – most of the time it does not – the explicit quotation of specific Bible texts. Often a general reference to a part of Scripture or a theme or perspective from Scripture is sufficient. Much more important for science is that one’s overall worldview (view of reality) should be based on the Biblical message (cf. 12.5.2 below).

As said above, the Bible is not in the first place an (additional) *source* of knowledge (which should be integrated with scientific knowledge). It rather serves as a *light* on the road to the acquisition of knowledge; it provides a *perspective*. The “road” is creation which has to be studied. The Bible sheds light on it, it helps one to understand better the contours of God’s creational revelation. Like a mineworker with a lamp on his forehead, the Christian scientist does not look *into* the light of God’s Word (to find answers to his questions there), but he studies the earthly reality *by* this light.

How we may use the Bible in our scientific endeavours

Much has been written about this, so that we quote only Sinnema (2001:203,204) as an example. He shows how the Scriptures can play an enlightening, normative role on different levels in Christian scientific activities.

- According to Scripture’s focus on redemption it calls man to faith in and obedience to the only true God, who has to figure in everything he does – in his scientific work too.
- The Bible also teaches the necessity of and offers the basic building blocks for a Christian worldview (see below under 12.5.2). Some of these building blocks are the central Biblical concepts of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. (Apart from these *directional* building blocks, Vollenhoven, 2005 also emphasises the *structural* distinction between God, his laws and the cosmos.)

- Furthermore it offers guidelines or norms for specific subject fields. These norms, as said before, can be discovered by means of the careful observance of God's creational revelation, but some of them are repeated explicitly in the Bible. So, for instance, the politician or student of political science learns in the Scriptures about justice, the economist learns what stewardship means, the sociologist what the essence of marriage (mutual fidelity) is, the psychologist what being human entails.
- The Scriptures also teach certain virtues applicable to good scientific practice, like intellectual integrity, an inquiring mind, patience, humility and justice towards those from whom one differs.
- Moreover, a non-normative use of the Scriptures is also possible. Apart from the message of redemption, it also gives incidental information which could be of importance to various subject fields, but which is not of a normative character. Although permissible, this kind of information does not – as some integrationists think – make a science Christian. Examples of this is that a Christian architect may be interested in the structure of Solomon's temple; a dietician in the eating habits of ancient Israel; a medical scientist in the diseases and medicines mentioned in the Bible; a naval engineer in what Noah's ark looked like; an economist in the commerce of the times or a linguist in the Hebrew and Greek languages.

12.5.2 The broadening of a Christian worldview

The second necessary building block for an integral Christian scholarship (cf. 12.5 above) is an integral, holistic worldview. It is not something scientific, but is of a pre-scientific nature. It determines how one looks at everything. A worldview is described differently by various people but the following is a simple definition: It is the fundamental, conceptual framework through which one looks at, interprets and makes sense of the whole of reality (God, creation and God's laws for creation) and one's place and task in the world.

It is therefore a perspective on the whole of reality. Because God is a reality for Christians their worldview, apart from a view of the earthly reality, includes an

idea of God and of God's laws which apply to the earthly reality. The idea of God is thus not "added", as in the case of the integrationists. According to the Bible creation may never be seen as something independent, separated from its Creator.

As we have shown already, creation is also a unity and it may not be divided into a profane or secular (lower) domain and a sacred, holy (higher) domain. According to the Scriptures creation develops through the following phases: (1) creation, (2) fall of man, (3) redemption and (4) consummation. One could also describe it as (1) formation, (2) deformation (3) reformation and (4) consummation.

Since much has been written from a Christian perspective on the necessity and features of a worldview in general and specifically a Christian worldview we need not say any more about it. We merely draw attention to the way Sinnema (cf. 2001:199-201) points out how the idea of God, creation, fall, redemption and a new creation can in a concrete way influence the scholarship of a Christian. (Because a Christian worldview is of such pivotal importance in any attempt at Christian science, I mention the following from a long list of sources which are worthwhile studying: Colson & Pearcey, 1999; Chaplin et al., 1986; Goudzwaard, 1984; Marshall *et al.*, 1989; Marshall & Gilbert, 1998; Naugle, 2002; Pearcey, 2004; Sire, 1976 and 1990; Van der Walt, 2000c; Walsh & Middleton, 1984 and Wolters, 1985.)

12.5.3 Deepening by means of a Christian Philosophy

This is the third requirement for an integral approach. While a worldview is something pre-scientific and most (normal) people consciously or – most of the time – unconsciously think and act according to a certain view, philosophy is the scientific, systematic reflection on one's own and other worldviews. As shown above in connection with a Christian worldview, also a Christian philosophy would include certain ideas on God, creation and his laws for creation (usually called philosophical ontology). Further it would maintain its own view of being human (anthropology) and theory of knowledge (epistemology). All these

divisions of philosophy are of significance for scholars in the other disciplines who strive towards Christian scholarship. A Christian philosophy therefore is a third, indispensable building block for integral Christian science in any field.

We will not pay attention to the last two building blocks, namely (4) a specific subject philosophy and (5) subject theory, since that would be venturing on the domain of the various disciplines.

12.5.4 Conclusion

The view of Christian scholarship as set out immediately above, differs from most integration models (for a diagrammatic explanation, cf. Van der Walt, 2005:149 and 151). While the basic building blocks should be (1) God's revelation, (2) a Christian worldview, (3) a Christian philosophy, (4) subject philosophy, (5) subject theory and (6) a specific science (as the final result), the integrationists leave out (2) and (3) (often also (4) and (5)) with the aim of reaching a *direct* integration between (1) faith in God's revelation (mostly only the Bible or Theology which is wrongly identified with Scripture) and (6) the science involved. All the "filters" which lie in between – inherent facets of the normal scientific process – are omitted. One could therefore pose the question whether the integrationists have first bought the idea of neutrality and then (afterwards) attempted to neutralise it by means of the Bible.

12.6. Designations for integral Christian scholarship

Finally one last matter begs for attention: How can such an integral approach to Christian science best be designated?

12.6.1 Unsatisfactory names

Because a name should designate something as clearly as possible, this is no insignificant matter. The following names, however, do not seem to meet the ideal.

- It cannot merely be called "*believing*" or "*faith-based*" science (cf. Zylstra, 1997 and Van Brummelen, 2001 above) for – as has been pointed out – it

is not only applicable to Christian science – no science is devoid of presuppositions or beliefs.

- Neither is “*Biblical science*” an adequate term, since it has been clearly shown what an important role the creational revelation of God has in any scholarship. Further most Christians will appeal to the Bible.
- Other possibilities are “*Christian science*” or “*a Christian perspective of science*”. In this case the problem is that the name is too inclusive. It would for instance include the Lutheran and Catholic scientists, whose scholarship (cf. above) is mostly dualistic and accommodating and not integral and reformational.

12.6.2 Other proposed names

In the course of history different other names have been proposed to describe this specific Christian tradition which holds a world-transforming view.

- During the sixteenth century Reformation it was often described as “*Evangelical*” since the Reformers laid all emphasis on the divine authority of the Gospel (*sola Scriptura* – the Scriptures alone). Today, however, the word “Evangelical” has a different, often dualistic meaning. (Most of them are proponents of the integration model.)
- Early in the previous century “*Reformed*” was often used. (For the history of the concept “reformation”, from which “reformed” is inferred, cf. Ladner, 1967 and Van der Walt, 1991, 2000a and 2002.) Many Christian organisations have made it part of their names. Later on it was realised – by especially non-denominational Christian organisations and educational institutions – that the concept was too much restricted to a specific church.
- Thus for some time the word “Calvinistic” was in general use. The problem with it was that it had been derived from the name of a person (Calvin). So it could amount to the glorification of a human being. Besides, Calvin did not have the last word on everything. (He actually said himself that what had been reformed had to be reformed all the time to prevent it from being deforming.) Moreover, he had contemporaries and followers who also thought Biblically.

- Therefore since more or less 1960 “Calvinistic” was replaced by the word “*Reformational*.” Calvin Seerveld (2000:3) was the first to use this term. From the following words of the editor it is clear what content Seerveld gave to it: "The term 'Reformational' was coined by Seerveld in 1959 to catch several related meanings. It identifies, firstly, a life that seeks to be reformed by the renewal of our consciousness so that we can discern God's will for action on earth. Secondly, it identifies an approach that knows the genius of the Reformation, further developed by Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper in the nineteenth century, as a distinct tradition out of which one can richly serve the Lord. Thirdly, it identifies a concern to communally keep reforming rather than get stuck in the past. In this sense Seerveld considers the philosophical work of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven as continued reformation of the neocalvinistic tradition" (Seerveld, 2000:3).

Thus “Reformational” does not refer to a static and restricted ecclesiastical or dogmatic position, but to a dynamic and encompassing Christian worldview, philosophy and scholarship which strive to have an impact on all facets of life.

- The latest terms are “*transformation*”/“*transformational*”/“*transformative*”. Apart from the fact that it is a fashionable word in everyday speech – just think what a great role it has been playing since 1994 in South Africa – this concept also has the advantage that it cannot give rise to the misunderstanding which could be attached to the earlier term “reformed” or even the word “reformational” : (1) that it could be a mere repetition of what existed earlier – repristination – and thus does not introduce anything new; (2) that it is something completed, a task finished in the past.

The most important reason why Christians also use it nowadays, is because they are of the opinion that “reformation” implies only that what exists is changed, while “transformation” rejects what is wrong and replaces it with something new and is consequently more directed at the future.

Du Rand (2002:17), for instance, motivates his choice for this term as follows (I translate): "The word 'transformation' has a meaning which cannot be deduced so directly from 'reformation'. Judging by its sound, the latter points to the past. It points to things that went wrong in the past and now have to be corrected. 'Transformation', on the other hand, also refers to the past in this sense, but it has a bearing not only on the past. It also unlocks the future. For in *transformation* the *trans* refers to what lies on the other side – the new form to emerge from the old."

More detail about a transformational approach was already given at the beginning in the *Introduction* to this book. An example of what transformation implies in scholarship in the case of Philosophy can be found in Klapwijk (1987, 1991, 1995 as well as Vos, 1997).

12.7 Conclusion: not integration but transformation

In line with its title this chapter asked the *question* at the beginning whether the integration model or the more integral transformational model should be the ideal for practising Christian science. After careful consideration it was found that integration is not a suitable ideal. Therefore the transformational model was given as an *answer* to the question. Although the model will have to be considered more thoroughly, it looks promising. In any case, provisionally it seems like a step in the right direction on the difficult but always fascinating way to a true *scientia transformanda*.

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Chapter 13:

SPOTLIGHT ON SPORT

A Christian worldviewish-philosophical reflection

The problem dealt with in this chapter is the fact that most people are involved in sport (as participants or spectators) without knowing *what* kind of activity it is or should be and *how* they should participate. Such a situation may result in the many defects sport is suffering from today. By way of a Christian-philosophical analysis of this prominent phenomenon in modern society an attempt is made to provide an answer. To attain this goal, the following steps are followed: (1) A brief overview of the present situation in sport serves as an introduction. (2) This is followed by three current wrong attitudes toward sport. (3) Attention is then asked for the fact that, in spite of the deterioration in sport ethics, the necessary theoretical reflection – also amongst Christians – is lacking. The theoretical exploration which follows includes the following: (4) A review of some Biblical perspectives and the influence of different Christian worldviews on sport. (5) An effort to determine the nature of sport from a comparison between leisure, play, game and sport. (6) Then follows a philosophical analysis of the structure and direction of sport with a few examples of the practical implications of such a theoretical approach.

13.1 Problem, hypothesis and method

Worldwide millions of people – more than ever before – are involved in various kinds of sport – as participants and as spectators. And then there are the coaches and the great number of professionals involved in sport, like psychologists, dieticians, sports doctors, physiotherapists, biokineticists and other sport scientists. It is also generally accepted that sport has a great influence on our contemporary society. Sport is synonymous with money, fame and health. Certificates, diplomas and academic schooling in sport science are offered by technikons and universities. A football, rugby or hockey “academy” enhances the prestige of such institutions. But more and more voices are heard

saying that sport does not firstly bring to the fore the good in a person but rather the bad. Sport evils occur in most kinds of sport. People complain that sport is no longer really sport, but has become a belligerent activity. Hoogland (1998:21) for instance regards sport as a “useless activity” and Evink (1998:17) says that some kinds of sport (like soccer) is merely a provocation to criminality.

On closer inspection people no longer know *what* sport is and therefore they do not know *how* it should be practised either. The presupposition or hypothesis of this investigation is that philosophical-theoretical reflection on the what and how of sport may help combat the problems surrounding this activity. The method will be to analyse the structure of the phenomenon (what it is) and its direction (what it should be) from the angle of a Christian philosophy.

Before starting on it, much more background is needed for a proper analysis.

13.2 Background sketch of the present-day sport scene

In order to understand better the problems surrounding sport we will (1) first give a short historical survey; (2) subsequently we will point out what an important place sport fills today; (3) then some reasons will be given why sport plays such an exceptionally important role in contemporary society.

13.2.1 A short history

Looking at history there is much to be learnt on how work and rest (including sport) was regarded through the ages.

- *Ancient Greece* is the cradle not only of Western thought, but also of sport. Competitive sport had already become important at that time. The ancient Olympic Games – dedicated to the chief god Zeus from 776 BC – is an outstanding example of this. Furthermore fame and hero worship already played an important part: the victors were for instance crowned with wild olive leaves, got material gain and were honoured in temples (cf. Verhoogt, 1998:11). These games were prohibited in 393 AD by Emperor Theodosius and took place for the last time in 394. In this way a tradition of more than a thousand years was interrupted until it was re-instated with the modern Olympic Games (from 1896).

- The *Romans* were more soldiers and jurists than sportsmen. In their time however, an element of our contemporary sport emerged, namely the role of the spectators. In the Roman circus there were many more spectators than participants. They had to be amused by a few participants.

Marshall (1991:2-3) shows that with both Greeks and Romans those who could afford leisure time, did not hold work in high esteem. It can be seen for instance in the fact that the Greeks did have a word for "leisure" (*skole*) but not a separate word for work. Work (*ascolia*) was simply the opposite. In Latin we find the same: *otium* (relaxation) and the opposite, work, is non-relaxation (*negotium*)! Activities of the spirit were also regarded as having higher value than manual work – a thought taken over by Christian philosophers in early Christian thought (e.g. Augustine) and in the Middle Ages (e.g. Thomas Aquinas).

- During the *Middle Ages* (approximately 500-1500 AD) it was actually only the privileged class of the knights that participated in sport. Ordinary people did not have the time or opportunity and the clergy did not consider physical activity of any great value – the *vita contemplativa* was much more eminent than the *vita activa*.

- Among the 16th century *Reformers* we find a more balanced view (cf. Marshall, 1991:4). Work as well as contemplation and relaxation were seen as good gifts from God, a part of man's divine calling. According to Luther (cf. Marshall, 1991:23) contemplation is not something better than manual labour, which can also be done to the honour of God. Also Calvin regarded all kinds of work – not only the "spiritual" – as divine callings (cf. again Marshall, 1991:23 for references).

- The *Renaissance* (1600-1700) reverted to ancient Greek culture, including their emphasis on physical education. Ball games for instance became popular in Italy and spread from there across Europe and to England.

- As early as the 18th century hand ball, cricket, basketball and gymnastics were practised *in Europe*. But up to the beginning of the 20th century sport

remained a peripheral phenomenon for the better part, only the privilege of the élite society.

- After the Second World War, i.e. more or less since the second half of the previous century, sport flourished. Some speak about an "unprecedented zest for living" which took hold of mankind after the carnage of two wars. The important place that sport took since then in the West gradually spread to the rest of the world.

Since people's views on sport and on work have a mutual influence, we have to add something concerning the modern outlook on work. Marshall (1991:5 *et seq.*) shows how present-day man – in contrast to the ancient Greeks – attach a beatific or redeeming, almost religious value to work: . "... the society we live in, is focussed on and centered around work. Our hope is a hope in work. Work defines our ultimate concern" (p. 8). Johnston (1994:11) says: "... we have allowed ... commitment to work to become our ideology".

Further work has become commercialised, so that only paid work is still regarded as work. However, it does not bring satisfaction: "Work has ceased to be a calling, and become a pain, and money is the compensation for it" (Marshall, 1991:14). No wonder that people today live for the sport and relaxation of the weekend. "We manufacture distractions and entertainments, we live for Friday and Saturday nights, we count the days to vacations. These activities try to negate work and, hence, are controlled by it. Our most characteristic 'leisure activity' is consumption, an activity that has itself become more hectic and more akin to work" (Marshall, 1991:19).

13.2.2 The situation today: the great influence of sport in society

A quarter of a century ago Opperman (1969:183) called sport "the mightiest social power in this world" and said: "In comparison with other cultural activities sport enjoys by far the greatest support among participants as well as those interested in it" (Translated from Afrikaans).

Later writers confirm this statement. Visser (1994:164) said that sport today has a greater impact on our lives than during any previous time in history. It influences our time, energy and finances. Other writers in the same volume even call sport an obsession with many Americans.

This fact is confirmed by Timmer (1999a:137) when he points out that sports news (especially on TV) is nowadays regarded as more important than political, economic and cultural news. Sports heroes are held in greater esteem than eminent leaders in the political, scientific and other fields. According to him sport is now the greatest common factor among people – it unites them and it is the subject of most conversations.

MacFarland (1999:155) summarises it as follows: : “Everywhere we turn, we experience sport. We schedule our church and family time around the media sporting event of the week. We idolize men and women who display superior athletic ability. We spend thousands of dollars annually to purchase shoes and clothing which represent us as athletes. We miss church services... We socialize our children into the realm of sport... Sport constitutes much of our conversation, media attention, reading material, leisure activity and discretionary spending... We have eagerly embraced this social phenomenon with little or no discussion or evaluation”. With right he questions for such an obsession.

Another writer demonstrates the result of this obsession: : “... sport is not leisure anymore. Sport has become a ... new cultural currency, a kind of social cement binding a diverse society together. Instead of... family or religion, increasingly large numbers of Americans are choosing sport as the focus of their lives” (Hall, 1994:214).

This obsession is coupled with great passion: : “The passion raised by sports in our community are amongst the sharpest and strongest of all passions. More of us get worked up, more quickly, over sport than over any other aspect of life, including work, religion and politics. This strongly suggests that the attachment we have to sports borders the idolatrous...” (Gidman & Turkington, 1999:189).

Other writers go even further: sport not only borders on idolatry, it is idolatry, the secular religion of contemporary society (cf. Evink, 1998:18). Van Reken (1999:230, 231) describes this religion in the following words: "Fans and players alike are sometimes so devoted to their team that it becomes their religion or object of worship. Then pep rallies are orchestrated rituals of allegiance. In them homage is paid to the heroes, and the faithful are encouraged. Bumper stickers become professions of faith. Tail-gathering lunch in the parking lot before the game with hot dogs and beer is a kind of sacramental rite. Proclaiming the mighty deeds of your team to others is evangelism... In our culture sport celebrities are turned into gods and all-star teams as pantheons". With right he adds: "This religious fervor for sports is neither innocent nor benign". Sport is no longer for the benefit of the human being, it is the other way round: the human being is captured in the service of the sport god.

The great influence of, for example, soccer is described by authors like Roques (2003), Kuper (2006) and Foer (2005).

Although most of these writers are describing the situation in the USA, it also applies to other parts of the world. Rugby, cricket and soccer crazy South Africa is only one example that confirms it. The power that sport can wield in society – in this case in the field of politics – was clear during the time of apartheid with various sport boycotts against South Africa.

13.2.3 Possible reasons for the great influence sport has on contemporary society

Sport and broader society can be differentiated, but not separated. Sport not only influences society, but also reflects its environment at the same time. This environment is characterised (cf. Ryken, 1994:36) by amongst other things unlimited competition, the worship of success and the pursuit of money which dominates everything – all characteristics which are also found in sport. Therefore we will subsequently look at factors in contemporary society which contribute to the prominent place sport occupies.

More leisure time

During the sixties and seventies of the previous century attention was drawn to the fact that people would have more leisure time as a result of, *inter alia*, the following: shorter working hours (a five-day working week), more regular vacations, a definite retirement age and numerous time-saving inventions. Today, however, it seems as if this is no longer true. For instance, in the volume edited by Heintzman *et al.* (1994:44, 79, 85) it says that the leisure time of Americans has not increased, but has decreased with 10 hours a week. Since 1990 they work harder and longer. . "More Americans are working than ever before and many of them are working more hours, days, and years than a decade ago. Furthermore, the 'leisure revolution' has itself (how ironic!) become a major generator of jobs" (p. 85).

Many other factors

Other factors which are mentioned, are the following: (1) the artificial working conditions (e.g. the sitting position of many occupations) and the huge demands made by contemporary occupations on body and soul; (2) little joy in routine work results in escape outside work; (3) huge-scale urbanisation which causes people to escape during weekends; (4) the rushed pace and stress of modern culture; (5) faster traffic and communication facilitates events; (6) schools, colleges and universities stimulate sport from an early age.

Commercialisation

One of the weightiest factors seems to be the increased wealth and the accompanying commercialisation of all facets of life – including sport. With right Timmer (1999a:139) remarks: "Sport at the professional level is a business. The product to be sold is the specific sport and, therefore, every item connected to the business is used to make money, including the players in the arena. In this sense the players become commodities and are therefore in danger of being dehumanized". The players become mere producers and the spectators mere consumers! (For further reflection on professional or paid sport, cf. Van Zijl & Putter, 1992:129 *et seq.*)

Deeper reasons

Having mentioned all the above possible reasons, we have not yet touched on the deeper worldvewish reasons for the great influence of sport in society. When we pointed out above that sport has begun to play a religious role, something of this was mentioned. Modern secular life has renounced the old "spiritual" religions. We live in an increasingly materialistic-naturalistic spiritual climate. The earlier contempt for the body has been rejected and the vacuum left has been filled by a new religion of worshipping the body. This will become clearer still when we subsequently discuss three different attitudes towards sport.

13.3 Three diverging stands on sport

Various writers distinguish the following three main stands – or rather attitudes, for few people really reflect consciously on sport: (1) The *workaholics* expect too little from sport – this is something unworthy especially for Christians – because they put all emphasis on work. (2) The *hedonists* again expect too much from sport, because for them it has become a religion. (Hoffman [1994:139] calls sport "...the newest and fastest growing religion in America, far outdistancing whatever is in the second place".) (3) The *utilitarianists* take up a position between the two extremes. They neither despise nor worship sport, but see it as a means of reaching higher goals. It is important to understand fully what each of these viewpoints entails.

13.3.1 Workaholism

Not only was sport and relaxation considered as of minor importance by many Christians (cf. 13.2.1). Ten years ago Ryken (1994:48) still wrote: "Leisure is the subject of neglect in the contemporary church. When did you hear a sermon on the subject...?" With right he remarks that such an attitude is wrong. Not only work but also relaxation and sport is an inherent part of our divine cultural mandate and stewardship.

Heintzman (1994:27) confirms this impression when he writes that Christians in the USA usually have a well-developed theology on work, but not on rest,

relaxation and sport. From the Netherlands Hoogland (1998:22) writes that sport is too serious a phenomenon for Christians and churches not to reflect in earnest about it. Dahl (1994:89) is of the opinion that Protestants are still afraid of the three s's: sexuality, the sensual and silence (rest, relaxation). For if something feels good (the sensual) then it must be sinful!

The consequence of this viewpoint is that many books are written on work ethics but very few – if any – on the ethics of relaxation/sport. (At the Institute for Reformational Studies, for instance, there appeared studies no. 188, 254, 281, 311, 329 and 346 on work ethics and only one (no.354) on relaxation, play and sport!)

13.3.2 Hedonism

Dahl (1994:87) points out the following significant shift that has taken place (at least in the USA already). Work is regarded as boring and senseless and has thus begun to lose its traditional value. It is no longer – as earlier – regarded as a calling or at least an important means to self-realisation and enhancing one's own identity. These values are now sought in something much more pleasant – relaxation and sport. Thus sport is also no longer considered as a means to recovery (recreation) after work, but as an aim in itself – something in which one can express and develop oneself, feel valuable and find true satisfaction.

Timmer (1999a:142, 146) joins in this viewpoint, but does not speak of hedonism. He uses the term "narcism". By this he means that the individual himself/herself becomes the central focus point in sport. One sees it particularly in talented athletes how they become more and more self-centred and expect to get far more attention than ordinary people. They live in the dream world of the "celebrities". They are brimming over with themselves, over-evaluate themselves and in comparison to other – more important occupations – also earn far too much (cf. Hawthorne & Hawthorne, 1995).

Being directed at the self and self-gratification is coupled (according to Byl and Visker, 1999:62) with an idolisation of the human body – especially the youthful body. Modern-day people strive for eternal youth.

In opposition to the work ethics of the workaholics we get the "worth-ethics" of the hedonists (cf. Dahl, 1994:85 *et seq.*) Anyone who watches the television advertisements in South Africa and many other countries will know what is meant by this. One should smell good, look beautiful and young and afford many other things "because you are worth it".

The irony of the hedonistic view is that something like sport which should be relaxing, now becomes a new effort. ("Americans work at their play.") As a result of the commercialisation of sport, this exertion amounts to ever greater production (by the athletes) and greater consumption (by the spectators).

13.3.3 Utilitarianism

As we have stated, this vision amounts to a position between that of expecting too little and too much from sport, between rejection and idolisation. This too, is not a correct attitude, because the inherent worth of sport is not recognised – sport is only acceptable because it can be useful for something else. External aims are for instance the following: sport is supposed to promote bodily health, psychic welfare or important virtues. Among the virtues or characteristics which are usually enumerated (cf. Opperman, 1969:387) are the following: a healthy lifestyle, co-operation, camaraderie, good social relations, reliability, honesty, mutual respect, self-restraint, a spirit of sportsmanship, courage, perseverance, obedience to rules, competitiveness, learning to lose and other "values" which can build character.

Various sport scientists (e.g. Miller & Jarma, 1988; Pooley, 1984; Priest *et al.*, 1999 and Walton, 1992) have great expectations about the physical, psychic, moral and other values of sport. These high ideals about the value of sport have in the meantime proved to be a mirage.

In the first instance it must be stated that sport is not merely good because it enables a person to work better. Rest, relaxation and sport have their own value and meaning. To enjoy it, is not wrong either. If sport were only to be used in the service of "higher" goals, it would erode the value of sport itself (cf. Evink, 1998:17).

In the second instance empirical research has proved that sport does not necessarily contribute to physical and psychic health or character building. Hoffman (1994:144) points out the opposite. As a result of the wining mania and the increasing violence in sport more and more serious injuries occur (cf. also Scholtz, 1992:161 *et seq.*). Besides modern-day sport rather excite strong passions than calming them down. The moral value of sport, too, namely that it supposedly promotes certain virtues, is today questioned. Research shows (cf. Hoffman, 1994:144) that the influence of sport to instil good values is "dismal, even alarming". Hoffman (1994:144) even quotes with approval someone who says: "Sport: if you want to build character, try something else."

Timmer, too (1999b:265) confirms that there is unfortunately no empirical proof for the earlier idea that sport improves one's character or behaviour.

The conclusion is that sport – just like other activities – can indeed promote certain virtues, but does not necessarily do so. In any case there is no direct link between sport and an upright life. Current research rather uncovers many vices and sport evils. (Actually it is no surprise. Depending on the religious direction – see below, 13.7.2 – sport can, like any human activity, be either good or bad and therefore have either a good or a bad influence.)

Finally we have to mention that sport can also be used in a utilitarian way as a means to many other goals, as to canvas students, make money and even to spread the gospel. Concerning the last, Van der Walt (1992:13 *et seq.*) points out that the challenge to Christians is not to serve God *before* or *after* a match, but *in* the way they practise their sport. In the same volume Van Tonder (1992:175 *et seq.*) gives a balanced viewpoint on this popular tendency, especially among young Christian sportsmen, to use sport for evangelisation.

If the conclusion is that none of these three views on sport is acceptable, what then is the correct one? Before turning to that we first have to say more on current sport evils and how little (Christian) reflection is done about it.

13.4 A crisis in sport ethics – with little reflection

To speak about a crisis in sport may sound like an overstatement. Therefore a few authorities are quoted.

13.4.1 Many evils

Concerning sport in the USA, Zuidema mentions the following evils "... the stress on winning-at-all-costs, the increasing incidence of violence, a stress on combativeness, the promotion of games as only entertainment for fans, and an over-emphasis on personal glory". In the same volume by Heintzman *et al.* (1994:201) the following structural evils are also mentioned: "racism, sexism, cheating, irresponsibility, the abuse of drugs and steroids...".

Further on (Heintzman, 1994:214) it even says: "Serious sport... has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard for rules, and sadistic pleasure in violence; in other words, it is war without the shooting". Still more writers in the same volume claim that sport does not bring to the fore the good in people but rather the bad (p.317).

If there is one fault which almost all the writers point out, it is the first one mentioned above, namely the obsession to win at all costs. Hall (1994:215) writes: "Winning seems to be the great American obsession, and our win-at-all-costs philosophy has distorted our sense of values". In the volume edited by Byl and Visker (1999:180) the following is said about this: "Our society applauds the biggest, the best and the first... For many athletes, self-worth is derived from the number of victories obtained. If you do not win, you are worse than a non-winner, you are a loser... An over-emphasis on winning demeans the best characteristic of play, that is enjoyment".

In South Africa the situation is no different. All the above-mentioned sport evils are found among us. If the Springboks, Proteas or Bafana-Bafana win an international game, they are heroes: if they lose, it is regarded as a national catastrophe and they are jeered at.

More than ten years ago Putter (1992:44) already wrote: "In sport, too, the chaos of sin can be clearly seen. We see it in bribery, in dishonest refereeing, in the use of stimulants, in the violation of rules, in the worship of the scoreboard, in the humiliation of the opponent, in self-exaltation, in arrogance and in many other forms" (Translated from Afrikaans). Even earlier Scholtz (1977) found it essential to write about an exaggerated spirit of competition leading to aggression. Aggression is not limited to the participants, but also occurs between participants and referees, and among spectators (cf. Scholtz & Willemse, 1991).

13.4.2 Very little Christian reflection

Amid all such malpractices very little theoretical – particularly Christian – reflection takes place. Works like those by Groenman (1976), Van der Walt (1992), Heintzman, Van Andel & Visker (1994), Visker & Hoffman (1997), Byl & Visker (1999) and Roques (2003) are valuable exceptions which are only known in a limited circle.

Visker (1994:164) hits the nail on the head when he writes: "For the most part, we have allowed this phenomenon to permeate our lives without giving adequate attention as to how it ties into a biblically directed life style. Little effort has been made to determine the proper place for such activities or just how a Christian ought to behave while participating in sport events. The attempts to integrate one's faith life with sport participation has too often resulted in nothing more than a pre-game invocation".

Christians in South Africa and other places in the world would also agree fully with the following words: "It is ironic that the aspect of leisure... which has experienced the greatest participation rates, has been neglected the most by Christian scholars. With few exceptions, play, sport and athletics have not been scrutinized as to their appropriateness for Christian involvement. Consequently we run the risk of adopting secular standards for our participation in this area" (Visker, 1994:138).

He proceeds with what is exactly the goal of this chapter: "Clearly, what is needed is a philosophical basis for participation in play, sport and athletics which is firmly based in the Holy Scriptures" (p. 138).

13.4.3 A sports ethics alone is not enough

Usually the solutions to all the evils in sport is sought in sport ethics. So an internet search produces within minutes a wealth of recent data on "sport(s) ethics" or "ethics in sport". It is a general tendency today when in a certain field things are not as they should be, to take refuge in an ethics for the specific field. The writer deliberately avoids this "solution" since in many cases it merely amounts to a "moral sauce" without any inherent change in sport itself (cf. Van der Walt, 2000b:305 *et seq.*). One will have to dig down deeper!

13.5 Biblical and Christian perspectives

First some Biblical guidelines are mentioned. Then we point out the implications of various Christian worldviews for sport. Subsequently attention is given to a Christian view of humanity – as a foundation for a view of sport.

13.5.1 Biblical perspectives

A difference can here be made between specific texts and broader Biblical perspectives.

Texts

In their search for guidance on how to take part in sport Christians often look for specific texts. Then they quote for instance Eccl.9:10-11 (an injunction to enjoy life). Or they refer to various places in the New Testament where a life of faith is compared to different kinds of sport: 1 Cor. 9:24-27 (an athlete and a boxer), 2 Tim. 4:7 (a race) and Hebrews 12:1,2 (once more the metaphor of an athlete partaking in a race). Unfortunately not much can be inferred from such texts, since they use images from the world of sport and give no guidelines for sport itself.

Since sport is a bodily activity, parts of Scripture which point out how one should treat one's body is of more value. Examples are 1 Cor. 3:16 (our bodies belong

to the Lord); 1 Cor. 6:13, 19, 20 (our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we should glorify God in our bodies); Eph. 5:29 (one does not hate one's own body). These texts do not provide guidance specifically on sport either. So we have to look for more relevant Biblical perspectives.

Broader Biblical perspectives

We mention only three more inclusive perspectives without elaborating on them: the Sabbath, rest and the cultural mandate.

Sabbath

Heintzman (1994:17-26) discusses in detail the different Biblical sabbaths (the seventh day, seventh year and fiftieth year). According to him the Biblical idea of the sabbath denotes both a particular life rhythm (rest-work-rest) and a specific attitude. About the former he says: "... the Sabbath as a day of abstaining from work, is not entirely for the purpose of restoring one's strength and enhancing the efficiency of one's future work. Rather than an interlude between periods of work, it is the climax of living... a taste of eternity – the world to come" (p. 26). About the latter he says: "... it inculcates a spiritual attitude of rest, joy, freedom and the celebration in God and the gift of creation" (p. 32).

Rest

He also discusses (p.26-32) with reference to different sections of Scripture the Biblical concept "rest" and says it denotes "a pleasant, secure, and blessed life in the land ... peace and contentment of body, soul and mind in God" (p. 32).

From the laws on the Sabbath and Biblical emphasis on the necessity of rest (cf. Christ's invitation in Matthew 11:28-30) he therefore reaches the conclusion that relaxation, play and sport is something essential and important to Christians.

Cultural mandate

Often the cultural mandate (of Genesis 1:28 and 2:15) is understood in such a way that human beings only get a command to work. In the light of the rest of the revelation in Scripture rest and relaxation, however, form part of the cultural mandate to human beings (cf. e.g. Cooper, 1999:17). With right Marshall says

(1991:18): "one part of our calling is the calling to rest." He proceeds to say something so significant that we quote it in full:

"Thus rest is more than recuperation from and preparation for work. It is a God-given human response in its own right. ... it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, a week-end or a vacation... rest and work may involve similar activities, but activities done in a different spirit... Resting is tied to faith – which is one reason why most of us avoid rest. ... The Scriptures frequently relate lack of rest to unbelief (Ps. 95:8-11; Heb. 3:7, 4:10)" (Marshall, 1991:19).

He goes on to explain: "When we rest we acknowledge that all our striving will, of itself, do nothing. It means letting the world pass us by for a time. Genuine rest requires acknowledgement that God, and our brothers and sisters, can survive without us. It requires a recognition of our own insufficiency... It is a real surrender to the ways of God. It is a moment of celebration when we acknowledge that blessing comes only from the hand of God. This is why rest requires faith... When we rest we accept God's grace: we do not seek to earn, we receive; we do not justify, we are justified" (Marshall, 1991:19).

13.5.2 Various Christian worldviews

Apart from Bible texts and broader Biblical perspectives, Christian sportsmen can also be guided by a Christian worldview. This is the way in which as a believer one views and interprets reality, and makes choices.

Although all Christian worldviews appeal to the Scriptures, they do not all see the Christian's place and task in reality in the same way. Byl (1999:311 *et seq.*), for instance, shows how Calvinists and Mennonites in the USA hold diverging views on the Christian and sport.

Van der Walt (2000a:133 *et seq.*) differentiates (with reference to different views on the relation between creation and redemption) between different Christian worldviews and also shows what their implications are for the Christian's attitude towards for instance politics, technology, scholarship, etc. If his classification is applied to sport (cf. also 'van der Walt, 1992:13 *et seq.*), we get the following:

- Where redemption is set *over against* creation, it means that the Christian stands *opposed to* sport. Since it is something inferior that does not suit a Christian, he must abstain from it.
- When redemption is set *next to* creation, the implication is that to be a Christian and to practice a sport are two distinctly different matters which each have a right of existence, but have nothing to do the one with the other. One can be a Christian *and* a sportsman/sportswoman, but not a Christian sportsman/sportswoman. Sport is something neutral – it has nothing to do with one's Christian faith.
- If (in the next view) a Christian is elevated *above* sport, we can pray *before* or *after* a match (religion as a little "icing") but sport *itself* cannot really be done in a Christian way. Sport does have a right of existence only when it is utilised for some higher goal – like evangelisation.
- The fourth (Reformational) worldview teaches that redemption is meant *for* creation – to renew, re-create and transform it. The ideal for Christian sportsmen therefore is not to be *either* Christian *or* sportsman (the first view above). Neither to be both Christian *and* sportswoman (the second and third worldviews above). This is the integral viewpoint of the Christian sportsman/sportswoman – someone who does not seek to serve God *besides* his sport activities, but *in* them.

13.5.3 A Christian anthropology

Every worldview comprises at least the following six components: (1) an idea of God, (2) an idea of the law, (3) a view on being human (anthropology), (4) a view on the community, (5) an idea of time and history and (6) a view of nature. Although all of these influence one's view on sport, the view on the human being is probably the most important. Although sport is not only something of the body, but one is involved in it with one's whole being (cf. Spykman, 1994:59), the bodily aspect is nevertheless very prominent.

Therefore Cooper (1999:7 *et seq.*) and Williams (1999:21 *et seq.*) trace what the Bible reveals about the human body. In contrast to the belief held by many

Christians that the Scriptures talk primarily about the soul or spiritual aspect, they demonstrate that the Word of the Lord lays great emphasis on one's physical needs, like food, clothes, health, a place to live, et cetera. That the bodily facet of being human is important to God, transpires from the Scripture's teaching on the resurrection of the body from death. And further from the incarnation of Christ. By numerous examples Williams further show (cf. p. 21-29) how much emphasis the Gospel of Luke puts on bodily matters.

The fact that the bodily facet should not be despised (the past) does not mean, however, that it may be worshipped (today). Several writers stress that in the numerous contemporary "wellness" programmes we encounter a "deified body". The most important of all is that one should feel good about one's body and experience bodily self-fulfilment.

I use the word "bodily" and not "body" on purpose to help avoid the age-old misconception that the body is supposedly a separate substance apart from the soul or spirit. Van der Walt (2000a:336) explains that Biblical concepts like "soul", "spirit", "body", "flesh", "heart" and others are all different *angles or perspectives* from which the Bible speaks about the total human being. These concepts therefore do not denote *separate parts* of being human. As we have just seen above, there is no question of the "soul" or "spirit" being higher or more important as opposed to the "body" as the inferior or less important part.

The implication of this is that a predominantly bodily activity like sport is not inferior to, for instance, an intellectual or artistic activity or even the confessional (faith). All these activities are part of one's inclusive religious life and can therefore be practised to the honour or dishonour of God.

What has been said up to now, was important preparation for placing sport in a broader perspective. It is now time to reflect on what sport is and should be.

13.6 The nature of sport inferred from a comparison with leisure and play

The word "sport", which first appears in literature in 1303, is probably (according to the *Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary*, 1987) derived from a Middle English

word *disporten* which means “divert” or “amuse”. Most sources consulted accordingly attempt to determine the particular nature of sport by comparing it with three related activities, namely leisure, play and match or competition (game). From the difference and connection between the four concepts they then attempt to specify what the particular features of sport are. (Often – since relaxation/leisure can also entail effort – a further distinction is made between “leisure” and “recreation”. “Leisure” would then denote the element of time, while “recreation” denotes how the spare time is spent.)

13.6.1 Three examples

We mention three examples of such an approach.

Byl (1994:157) uses a schematic representation to distinguish between play, game and sport. Play to him means something which is chosen freely and enjoyed. Competition is a voluntary attempt to overcome non-essential obstacles. Sport is an “extension” of play and competition, in which non-essential obstacles have to be overcome successfully with still greater dedication.

Timmer (1999a:138) also says: “... sport is fundamentally an extension of play.” Consequently he criticises current sport which ignores the element of play, since it has made a job out of sport. He will therefore also have problems to accept professional sport as sport. Apart from (1) the element of play Timmer (1999a:138) mentions the following three features which characterise sport: (2) it is competition – there are losers and winners; (3) it is regulated by rules; (4) it demands physical skill. The question is whether (2) and (3) are indeed typical of sport alone. Does it not apply to a game like “monopoly” too?

Visker (1994:170-174) follows the same scheme, but makes a much clearer distinction between the three. He says: “In summary, the structure of *play* was described by eight characteristics: (1) freely chosen; (2) has its own place in time; (3) is seriously engaged in; (4) is tran-serious; (5) autotelic; (6) has outcomes such as pleasure, joy, fulfilment, and renewal; (7) creates order; and (8) is fun. *Game* has all the characteristics of play in addition to more restrictive rules, established goals, obstacles to achieving goals, and possibly competition.

The structure of *sport* entails all the characteristics of play and game with some modifications: more restrictive rules, more difficulty in achieving goals, the development of physical skills and use of physical exertion, and the necessity of competition”.

Most probably we have to differentiate in this context between different levels or degrees of sport. Coetzee (2000:162-3) for instance differentiates between top sport, achievement sport or professional sport (in which achievement and the motive to win are foremost) and ordinary sport (which is geared towards achievement and victory to a lesser degree, since the emphasis falls more on relaxation and social contact.)

13.6.2 Why the distinction does not satisfy

Although it is important to differentiate between relaxation, play, competition and sport, the question is whether such a comparison succeeds in bringing out what is typical of sport (what exactly it is). From the above it emerges how volatile the borders are. (One could say that sport is more than play but less than war!)

Further the impression is created that on a scale of leisure-play-competition-sport, sport is the best developed. Is this really the case? Is a game of chess not something intricate too? In my opinion the difference between the four activities is not merely a difference of degree, but is something more *essential* – each one is an activity *of its own kind*.

Besides we have to pose the question whether any sport that meets the above characteristics is also *good* sport. We demonstrated above that the competition element, for instance, can degenerate to an obsession with winning at all costs. In the light of many other sport evils we have already mentioned, the normative question of *how* sport should be practised should not be neglected.

This type of analysis of what sport is therefore does not answer in a satisfactory way the two basic questions put at the beginning, namely exactly *what* sport is, and *how* it should be practised. A deeper philosophical reflection is needed.

13.7 An analysis of the structure and direction of sport according to Reformational philosophy

Interesting research has been done on the influence of bodily development on the flourishing of the human person (cf. e.g. Kugel, 1979, 1982 and 1989). According to a Christian Reformational philosophy (as developed by D.H.Th. Vollenhoven, H. Dooyeweerd and H.G. Stoker and further developed by their followers) there should be a clear differentiation – without separation – between the *structure* and *direction*. “Structure” denotes the form or nature of something – it is either this or that. “Direction” denotes the good-evil determination of everything. At creation everything was good, directed to God in obedience. At the fall of Adam and Eve evil was introduced. As a result of Christ’s work of redemption the unfaithful direction however, can be changed into a good one – obedience to God’s will for life. What the implications of this distinction are for sport, will now be investigated.

13.7.1 The structure of sport

Sport is much more than an attitude or an activity. As we have shown above, it plays a huge role in our society next to political, church and economic life. Therefore Spykman (1994:56) and Timmer (1999a:146) speak of it as a social relationship. Sport not only differs in degree (cf. 13:6 above) but also essentially from leisure, play and competition – the last three are not separate societal relationships.

Different social relationships

According to the Reformational philosophy – even though they are connected – a clear distinction has to be drawn between different social relationships. A marriage is not the same as a family; a church is not a social club; sport is not an economic enterprise. (For an elementary introduction to the Reformational philosophy of society cf. Van der Walt, 2000a:387-416 and McCarthy *et al.*, 1982. More advanced works are those by Dooyeweerd, 1975 and 1986 as well as by Skillen & McCarthy, 1991.)

To explain the difference between the separate social relationships the doctrine of different modalities is used. Modalities are different facets or aspects of reality. (The distinction between *this-that* denotes different structures. The *good-evil* determination denotes two religious directions. The distinction between *one aspect or another* differentiate between the dimensions or facets of reality.) The following aspects can be distinguished: the arithmetic, physical, biotic, lingual, social, historical, economic, aesthetic, judicial, ethical and the aspect of faith.

Foundation and destination

Every social relationship reveals all these facets. Two of these modalities, however, play a more important role since they characterise the specific social relationship and are therefore distinguish it from other relationships. These two aspects are called (1) the founding and (2) the leading, qualifying or determining function.

For instance, a marriage is biotically founded (in the sexual), but is led or characterised by the ethical (mutual fidelity); the sexual aspect is necessary, but is not the most important.

Application to sport

Since it is a differentiating characteristic of sport that it demands bodily fitness and skill (cf. above under 13.6) the physical-biotic can be regarded as its founding aspect. (It differs, for instance, from a logical or a language game.)

It is harder to determine the leading or qualifying element of sport. It has become clear above that sport – just like work – is part of man's cultural mandate. But this historic forming ability is valid for all human activities. Of all the higher modalities the social seems the most suitable to characterise sport further. Even though today sport is commercialised to a business, it still does not mean that it is naturally something economic.

Sport also has a psychic side (emotions), a lingual (sport terminology), economic (cost implications) a judicial (sport rules). ethical (e.g. integrity) and an aspect of

faith (sports people's relationship with God). Not one of these facets may be ignored in sport. However, they do not typify this activity and social relationship.

Practical implications

It has already become clear that this theoretical reflection on the structure of sport is not without practical benefit when we referred to the commercialisation of sport. If sport is socially qualified, the contemporary sport business implies a serious distortion of what sport actually should be.

The emphasis on winning at all costs is another example. Social contact and the joy flowing from it, should be much more important than winning. Byl (1994:159) rightly points out that the word "competition" is derived from the Latin *cum* (together) and *petere* (strive, pursue). Thus it means pursuing a goal *together with* – not in the first place *against* – someone. In accordance with this Zylstra (1999:123) suggests the following new definition of competition: "Each of us doing our best in order to prod the ones with whom we compete to do their best while they do the same for us".

The spirit of competition and especially the winning mania is clearly a product of modern Western individualism. Among traditional, non-Western people one often still finds the social, communal character of leisure and "sport". The writer witnessed a first race for Bushmen organised in Namibia. All competitors reached the finishing line almost simultaneously. When the one who was clearly the fastest and who could have won, was asked why he was not first, he answered that he thought he had to wait for the others so that they could reach the goal together and all be happy!

From the reflection on what sport should be there already follow important implications for its transformation. This necessity will become clearer still when we subsequently investigate the direction (the *how*) of sport.

13.7.2 The direction of sport

Not man, but God's will indicates the direction of the whole of life and therefore also of sport. His will clearly comes to the fore in various laws and mandates in

the Scriptures. So for instance in the ten commandments (Ex. 20:1-17), the sermon on the mountain (Matt. 5-7), the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22) as well as in important virtues which are commended (e.g. Phil. 4:8).

The ten commandments as indicators

According to Visser (1994:175-179) much can be inferred from the well-known ten commandments which also applies to sport. (In case of some of the commandments (e.g. the fourth and seventh) his application to sport may be somewhat forced and therefore problematic.) The first and second commandments for instance warn against sport being deified – the way it is today – and therefore becoming a substitute for God. The third commandment prohibits not only the abuse of his Name (e.g. in expletives or swear words), but also superficial prayers – even to be granted victory – before matches. The fourth commandment stresses a balance between work and rest. So sport should not – the way it is done today – be turned into work.

From the fifth to the tenth commandment much can be inferred on how sports people should act towards their “opponents”. The fifth deals with recognising authority and rules. In the sixth not only murder but (implicitly) anything that could lead to it is prohibited. Therefore hate, anger, revenge, violence and winning at all costs are forbidden. The seventh commandment not only applies to married life (sexuality), but it forbids everything that is unethical. The eighth forbids amongst other things that victory be “stolen” in a dishonest way. The ninth stresses that the truth should not be distorted (e.g. fiddling with the score). Finally the tenth commandment warns against jealousy and envy. A Christian should be able to win with humility and be a good loser – otherwise the joy and fulfilment which sport may offer are obstructed.

Structural laws, the law of love, and positive laws

The idea of God's laws as indicators for life could be elaborated even further in a philosophical manner. Vollenhoven, for instance, differentiates (cf. Toll & Bril, 1992) between God's threefold sovereignty which He applies by means of three kinds of laws.

(1) In creation God reveals his *structural laws*, clearly visible in the orderly functioning of the various creatures. (2) In his Word he lays down the *law of love* which points the direction for us (e.g. Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10). (3) Human beings (especially bearers of authority in the various societal relationships) have to formulate *positive laws* (norms) for the different human activities and social relationships, taking into account the structural laws and the law of love. (Therefore the positive laws or human norms form the “bridge” between the structural law and the law of love.) To do this properly, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is indispensable.

Simply put, it means that God’s fundamental commandment of love should take form and be lived in its own unique way in different societal relationships. In marriage love takes form in mutual fidelity. In the state (politics) it takes the form of justice. The same should happen in the case of sport. If love were to take its own particular form in this part of our lives most of the sport evils mentioned above would no longer be there.

Sport values

Since sport is most likely socially qualified (cf. above) social values are of special importance. A few of these are: respect for fellow sportsmen, referees and spectators, loyalty, goodwill, co-operation, friendliness, reliability and unselfishness.

Although they are not always in the foreground, other life values should be pursued *together* with social values. (Values of faith, for example, do not play a role only before or after a match.) Some of these are the following:

- **Biotic values:** respect for one’s body, health and life as well as for those of fellow human beings.
- **Psychic values:** emotional balance, sensitivity, self-restraint, perseverance.
- **Analytical values:** power of discernment, clarity of thought.
- **Language and communicative values:** clarity, truth, credibility.

- **Economic values:** responsible stewardship, which includes sobriety in spending and concern for those who have less.
- **Aesthetical values:** harmony and graceful movement
- **Judicial values:** justice, fairness, equity, obedience to rules and respect for authority.
- **Moral values:** fidelity, integrity, honesty.
- **Values of faith:** trust, dedication, surrender, service to God *while* practising sport.

13.8 In retrospect: redeemed sport

At the onset we stated that sport currently faces *great problems*: it often elicits the bad rather than the good in human beings. The *hypothesis* was that a reason for the problem could be that people do not really know *what* sport is and *how* it should be practised. After giving important background data on sport to understand the issue better, a *method* was followed according to which the structure and direction of sport could be ascertained. Without being in a position to work it out in detail, we found that the *result* of the theoretical investigation was that it held surprising practical implications for the contemporary sport world. Many sport evils can be combated with these new insights.

There is no reason why sport should develop into a secular endeavour. Viewed and practised correctly, it can become a very important part of the Christian's calling in God's kingdom.

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Chapter 14:

CONTEMPORARY GUIDANCE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE

Reflections on an evolutionistic ethics

This investigation is undertaken for the following reasons: The theoretical question about the nature and meaning of human sexuality is, firstly, important because sexuality is an essential element of being human. Secondly, it is also a practical problem. How do a "normal" man and woman differ from each other? How can one know that you are behaving properly as a man/woman? A third reason for this exploration is the fact that much of the scientific research done on this issue is nowadays popularised in all kinds of articles and books providing practical guidance for one's conduct as a man/woman. Many of these publications are, however, inspired by Darwinism. The problem of sexuality is accordingly tackled in the following steps: (1) As an introduction a distinction is made between sex, sexuality and gender. (2) Then the message of a popular book about the issue is discussed. (3) This is followed by identifying the world-viewish and philosophical background of such kinds of books. The first section is closed by way of a few preliminary conclusions. (4) In the next main section the socio-biological background of the evolutionistic view on sexuality is investigated. (5) This chapter is concluded with a Christian philosophical alternative.

14.1 Introduction: sex, sexuality and gender.

Gender is an essential part of being human. A human being is (usually) born either male or female. Therefore the question on what exactly it means to be man/woman never ceases to occupy one's mind. But it is difficult – maybe impossible? – to formulate precisely *what* human sexuality entails. There are diverse opinions on this question. This investigation therefore focuses on one view, namely the evolutionistic. As will become evident, this is today one of the most popular "explanations" for the mystery of gender.

14.1.1 Three key concepts

To prevent a confusion of concepts, we have to differentiate clearly beforehand between three key concepts, namely sexuality, sex, and gender – without separating them.

Not all the many diverging viewpoints from the various disciplines will be discussed here. The views of a Christian philosopher (Fowler, 2004:51), a Christian theologian (Verkerk, 1997: 199-201) and a Christian psychologist (Van Leeuwen, 1990:53, 200) are summarised here in order to give a certain direction to the rest of the investigation. All three of them are of the opinion that these three facets of being human (sexuality, sex and gender) do differ, but are at the same time inextricably related. We first look at the *difference* and then point out that they may not be *separated*.

14.1.2 The differences

From the following definitions the differences become clear:

- **Sexuality** is the complex of feelings, thoughts and behaviour which causes the two sexes to feel attracted to one another and which in the end leads to the deed.
- **Sex** is the biological-physical sex deed in which genes, hormones, brain anatomy etc. play an important part.
- **Gender** indicates the higher facets of being men or women, like the psychic, logical, judicial, ethical, aesthetical and religious. Over and above the biological “nature” of sexuality and sex, gender, according to most writers indicates “nurture”, that which is learned (e.g. by education), which is linked to one's personality and therefore can show great variety.

14.1.3 No separation

Why is it so significant that these different facets may not be separated in theoretical reflection?

If sex/sexuality (the physical-biological) has to be separated from gender, we run two risks. It is then taken (as happened in the Christian tradition) as a mere means for the procreation of the human race. Or (as happens commonly today) it is seen as merely the gratification of (one's own) physical pleasure.

Human sex/uality however, differs from that of animals. So if it is merely seen as a means to reproduction it is debased to the level of animal sex.

Neither should it be considered something purely physical. "Authentic human sexual intercourse is much more than a physical union; it has profound meaning involving the most intimate knowledge of the other person ... This intimacy of knowing can never come to us if sexual intercourse is treated as ... mutual self-gratification. It can come only if it is a union of two people, in the fullness of their personhood, united in the life-long bond of unreserved love that gives myself to and for the other without qualification" (Fowler, 2004:53).

So separating these three sides of humanity usually leads to over-emphasis of one of them to the detriment of the others and therefore obstructs a correct vision of man as a sexual being. The popular book which we will now discuss is a clear example: Sex and sexuality are separated from gender and absolutised.

14.2 A popular book on the differences between men and women

By way of introduction first a short motivation for the choice of this particular book.

14.2.1 It is essential to take cognizance

The book by Pease & Pease (2000) *Why men don't listen and women can't read maps*, which will be discussed is not an exception, but only one example of numerous similar books (cf. A & B Moir, 1998 and Gray, 1994 and 1995) which give guidance in the field of sex. These books are based on the biological differences between the two sexes in the supposition that this (the "nature") also determines the human being's gender ("nurture"). "Gender cultural terms ... are used interchangeably with biological terms ... with predictable results (Storkey, 2001:63).

Among the ordinary public these kind of books are – at least in the Western world – popular. The reason why we deal with such a book is to draw the attention of theologians, ministers and other spiritual leaders – all Christians – to the kind of sexual guidance to which their students and church members are increasingly exposed. Thus the book by Pease & Pease is not merely set up as an easy puppet which can just as easily be shot to pieces merely for one's own intellectual satisfaction. Much more is at stake here – a Reformational worldview and lifestyle.

A last introductory remark. Some of the viewpoints held by Pease & Pease (2000) may possibly not be supported by the latest research of evolutionistic scientists. However, this facet falls outside the scope of this chapter, since it concentrates on what the two writers present to the public – even though it may not be confirmed by the latest scientific research.

In order to give my account of the two writers as objectively as possible, the main lines of their book will be given in their own words.

14.2.2 No difference between human beings and animals

Probably since it is a popular book, the writers simply accept the Darwinian evolution theory (cf. Pease & Pease, 200:189) as their point of departure. However, it not merely remains a theory, but becomes a worldview and propagates a specific lifestyle and ethics.

Man not only had his origin in animals, but “we are just another animal” (p. 13). This statement is “proved” by stating that 96% of what is found in the human body is also found in pigs and horses (p.14). Human beings have to accept that they are merely animals (p.15). The implication is that animal behaviour is also normative for human behaviour – man's biology dictates how he should live his sexual life. “Herein lies the way to true happiness” (p.15).

14.2.3 View of the human being: biologically programmed and determined

Over and over it is emphasised that the chemical-biological (bodily) facet not only *influences* man's behaviour (which could be true) but also *determines* it.

"Research shows that we are ... products of biology ..." (p.9). Or: "We are the result of our chemistry ..." (p.54). Expressed even more forcibly: "People today are still slaves of their biology" (p.168).

As happens mostly in these popular books, the writers appeal to scientific research (without criticism) and especially to well-known scientists. Pease and Pease for instance have recourse to Nobel Prize winner Francis Crick (who cracked the DNA code) when they say: "You, your joys, sorrows, memories, ambitions, your sense of identity, free will, and love are no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells" (p. 156).

Subsequently these arguments are applied to actual cases. Because genes and hormones determine the functioning of the brain, they are the causes why people steal and even commit murder (p.160). Homosexuals, lesbian and transsexual people are the way they are as a result of their biology (p.172), "prisoners of their (biological) make-up" (p.184).

14.2.4 View of masculinity

Since the book deals with the relationship between the two sexes, great stress is laid on the biological nature of the man – so that women can understand him better. In evolutionistic terms it is said that the man's sexual drive has only one aim, that of spreading as much semen as possible, thereby guaranteeing the survival of his kind): "A man is a sperm-donor" (p. 231). "A man's brain needs variety. Like most mammals, a man is prewired to seek out and mate with as many healthy females as possible" (p. 203, also p. 216 and 240). Stated in a different way: "Promiscuity is wired into a man's brain and is a legacy of his evolutionary past" (p. 199). Or: "Human males fit the physical specifications of polygamous species; it's no wonder that men have a constant battle to stay monogamous" (p. 199).

14.2.5 View of marriage

While men are evolutionistically viewed as hunters, providers of food and sperm, the woman is seen as protector of the "nest" with young. All she can do, is to try

and ensure that her inherently polygamous husband stays with her as long as possible to help raising the children (cf. p. 216).

According to these naturalistic "ethics" marriage cannot have much value. It is regarded as a Jewish-Christian invention to ensure the increase of Christians (sic!). But it is an invention "contrary to our biology ... intended to make people do something they would not naturally do" (p. 223). How can one for example persuade a ram to be satisfied with one ewe? (cf. p. 223). Marriage has no advantages, except that it proves how society wants to control biologically promiscuous men. Pease and Pease spell it out flatly: "Marriage is the price men pay for sex" (p.223).

14.2.6 View of sex and love

Sex is therefore valued highly: " there are few problems a man can have that great sex cannot fix" (p. 213). Sex is also a warrant for good health (cf. p. 224). And besides, sex is the key to love (cf. 212).

But what is love? According to this view it has to be something purely biological and it therefore must be possible to localise it somewhere in the brain chemistry. Although the writers know where in the brain sex has its origin, they can unfortunately not determine where love comes from (cf. p. 229).

What remains of true love in the end, is nothing more than mere infatuation which can only last from 3 to 12 months (cf. p.227) and which is described as follows: "Infatuation is nature's biological trick to guarantee that a man and a woman are thrown together long enough to procreate" (p. 227).

14.2.7 A one-dimensional, biologicalist view

While researchers today (cf. above) emphasise that one's biological nature (sex) and one's gender cannot be separated since these two facets of being human exert a mutual influence, Pease and Pease simply reject gender (or the "cultural" aspect as described above). "Research shows that we are more products of our

biology than the victims of social stereotypes" (p. 9). Elsewhere they minimise the cultural differences (which prescribe different gender roles for men and women): "Humans may look a little different from one culture to another, but underneath our biological needs and urges are the same" (p. 11).

This view is also applied to actual cases. Men's aggression for instance cannot be attributed to social conditioning (cf. p. 163). And they also deny any scientific proof that education can play a role in the phenomenon of homosexuality (cf. p.173).

14.2.8 Human responsibility in the balance

If all the above is true, the question has to be posed whether the possibility of choice together with freedom and responsibility exists for humans. For above it was maintained that freedom of will is nothing more than or different from the conduct of brain cells (cf. p.156). Since polygamy is not acceptable nowadays – at least not in the Western world – the writers are for instance confronted by the issue related to the so-called innate polygamous tendencies of the male. Because their deterministic biologism leaves no room for human responsibility, their only solution is to make a man monogamous by means of castration! (cf. p.205).

However, sometimes it is evident in this book how hard it is to ignore human choice and responsibility entirely. Their answer to the question "Are we slaves of our biology?" is that man indeed differs from the animals(!) since he has intelligence. Humans therefore differ from animals in that "we are just another animal with a smart brain" (p. 184). Since humans can think, earlier statements, as that man is a *prisoner* of his biology, are now scaled down to "... our biology is the *motivation* behind many of the choices we make ..." (p. 184).

14.2.9 Inconsistency

Even when writing on marriage Pease and Pease are not consistent. (Most probably because they cannot or will not totally exclude human responsibility.) For instance, they say (p.200): "... in discussing men's urge to be promiscuous, we are talking about biological *inclinations*. We are not promoting promiscuous behaviour or providing men with an excuse for infidelity". And then – remarkably – follow the words: "The fact that something is instinctive or natural doesn't mean that its good for us" (p. 200).

The reason for this remarkable change of course is equally surprising: We live in a world that is completely different from that of our past, and our own biology is often completely at odds with our expectations and the demands made by this new environment (cf. p. 200). Earlier (cf. above) the biological nature of man (sex) was considered the only important fact about man and the social-cultural circumstances (gender) were rejected. Now the latter unexpectedly plays a role again. First man was a prisoner of his nature (sex). Now culture has to release him from being a captive of his evolutionistic past!

In the light of what has already been said (under 14.1 above) this inconsistency can be explained. Gender relates to all the higher modalities of being human – those respects in which we clearly differ from animals. In these higher modalities God's laws do not have a *compelling* character (which is typical of natural laws) but a *demanding* character. This implies human freedom (choice) and responsibility – which clashes with the naturalistic-biological determinism of the writers.

Although after this significant intermezzo Pease and Pease fall back into their simple paradigm, it keeps worrying them. Their theory does not tally completely – yet they will not discard it. Their problem is (p.247) that man's "lofty ideals and concepts of behaviour" (i.e. culture) "are millions of years ahead of their genetic reality" (i.e. nature). One would like to ask whether this is not distinct proof that the evolutionistic worldview of the writers is completely out of date. For they admit: "... our biology is at odds with our current environment" (p.249). However,

since their worldview precludes higher dimensions in the life of man, they have to stick to it (p.248). But such a statement does contain the implicit recognition that the differences between the two sexes cannot rest merely on biological sex.

14.2.10 A critical review

We have interrupted the argumentation of *Why men don't listen and women can't read maps* as little as possible and given it in the writers' own words to afford the reader the opportunity for forming a clear image of the writers' viewpoint. But we cannot leave it at that without some preliminary questions. For brevity's sake we do it point by point:

- Is it permissible to work with stereotypes of the sexes? For history has demonstrated that stereotypes led to the unequal treatment of men and women – especially women.
- Are the differences between men and women not over-emphasised at the expense of their huge similarities as human beings?
- Even though the book has two writers (a man and a woman) has it not been written mainly from a male perspective?
- Is not this work strongly biological-reductionistic? Does it not follow too simplistic a method by reducing everything to sex differences? Most probably this happens because it is easier to think from the sexual angle only (cf. point 14.1 above) than from the angles of sex, sexuality and gender and their complex interactions. (Genes, chromosomes, anatomical and reproductive differences are easier to discern and study.)
- Has it been considered that, as far as their gender is concerned, there may be greater differences between men and women of diverging cultures than between a man and a woman from the same culture?
- One cannot speak generally about “animal behaviour” and make it applicable to that of humans. The behaviour of baboons, for instance, differs from that of gibbons.

- It is even more important to determine from which paradigmatic frame of reference a book like this was written – the next main section.

14.3 The evolutionistic worldviewish and scientific presuppositions

Articles and books like the one just reviewed, are common nowadays and often best-sellers. They are eagerly read, since they allegedly contain the latest “scientific data” on male and female sex. Although not everything written in this kind of book is wrong when seen from a Christian perspective, their basic message is not very edifying. Not only Christians but also people from other faiths could regard such books as immoral.

Since ordinary men and women on the street do not have the training (to differentiate) it is the responsibility of those who do, to warn them: Have the “scientific facts” on which these books are based, been proven? Another question that is more profound, is: What worldview lurks behind these sciences?

14.3.1 Naturalism

As far back as the ancient (pre-Christian) Greek and Roman philosophers there were naturalists, like Epicurus, Lucretius and Demokritus. Plantinga (1995:30) however, speaks of “perennial naturalism” since this phenomenon keeps recurring from time to time during the course of history. But while in the past it was limited to the studies of a few philosophers, today it enjoys recognition from many Western scientists.

The basic tenet in naturalism (cf. Plantinga, 1995:31) is that apart from the physical-biological nature nothing else – no God either – exists. Man cannot therefore be the image of God, but has to be understood in the light of the rest of nature. The things we think distinctive about ourselves – religion, language, morality, thought, politics – all must be understood in natural terms. Today that means particularly in evolutionistic terms. In Socio-biology, for instance, purely naturalistic explanations are provided for knowledge, thought, language, morality and religion.

14.3.2 Contemporary influence of the evolution theory

As transpires from the work by Plantinga, age-old naturalism currently wears evolutionistic clothes. This is confirmed by popular writings. In a recent edition of the well-known journal *National Geographic* (Nov. 2004:2-35) Quammen argues that the evolution theory is nowadays generally accepted, for "the evidence is there – it's buried deep in the rocks of ages" (p.31). This "rocks of ages" has replaced the other "Rock of ages" for evolution/evolutionism is "the best available view of reality" (p.6).

Scientific literature, too, confirms the enormous influence of evolutionism today. Bolyanatz (2001:435) for instance, says that already in the waning years of the twentieth century, post-modernism was replaced by biologically informed "new modernism". He even regards it as a complete paradigm shift (cf. p.450).

Pearcy (2004:207) claims that we are entering a time of "universal Darwinism". She demonstrates (p.208-247) how Western culture is becoming "Darwinised" – this worldview is currently being made applicable to all walks of life.

Earlier still Wright (1989:113) said that from a worldviewish angle the West will experience "a Darwinistic revolution". According to him it is, in contrast to the revolution in the physical sciences (Copernicus, Newton, Einstein, Heisenberg) the greatest scientific revolution yet. The reason is that Darwinism raises such profound questions concerning man's faith and ethical values – it demands a complete rethinking about man's concept of the world and of himself. "Darwin's new paradigm ... represented a most revolutionary worldview" (p. 113).

14.3.3 Evolution and evolutionism

Up to now the terms "evolution" and "evolutionism" have been used alternatively, but they do have to be *differentiated*. The former is a scientific theory and the latter a prescientific worldview.

The Christian philosopher, Vollenhoven, assists us to distinguish clearly between *evolution* and *evolutionism*. Evolution (development, change) is according to him (cf. Tol & Bril, 1992:180) acceptable *within* the kingdoms of

matter, plants, animals and humans. (In this respect he differs from the viewpoint of Dooyeweerd, who believes in the unchangeable character of the species within a kingdom.)

An example of evolution is the resistance which bacteria can develop against antibiotics. Or that, as a result of the doubling of chromosomes, a new kind of plant can evolve. Why and how this happens can be determined by the scientific study of the different kingdoms in sciences like botany, biology, zoology and anthropology. Such research should not be questioned by Christians.

However, according to Vollenhoven (cf. Tol & Bril, 1992:320), evolutionism should be rejected by Christians. The reason is that evolutionism wants to deal with relationships not *within* but *between* the kingdoms. And its aim is to explain the one from the other, for instance how humans developed from the animal kingdom.

In the last case one is not dealing any longer merely with a scientific (e.g. biological) problem, but with a much deeper philosophical issue. Evolutionism is a worldview (and in its scientific form a philosophy) which denies according to Vollenhoven the God-ordained borders and differences between kingdoms. Thus it is an unacceptable viewpoint.

This important distinction between evolution as theory and evolutionism as a worldview/philosophy is, unfortunately, mostly not maintained. Many – almost all – theories of evolution are determined by or the result of a pre-scientific evolutionistic worldview. Conversely, it may also be argued that, because evolution is a proven fact, evolutionism should also be an acceptable position.

The conclusion is therefore that both an *evolutionistic* evolutionary theory as well as an *evolutionistic* worldview and philosophy cannot be acceptable to Christians as both deny God as Creator and Maintainer of the differences between the kingdoms.

Such a viewpoint does not entail the rejection of the study of evolution within the kingdoms as illegitimate for Christians. An example from another discipline is

that we believe that God provides rain, but we also listen to the weather forecast of the meteorologist.

As mentioned already, the real problem lies in the fact that usually the (scientific) theory of evolution and the (pre-scientific) evolutionistic worldview are intertwined. This was already the case with the father of the theory of evolution.

With Darwin himself his naturalistic evolutionistic worldview and philosophy formed the basis for his theory. The other way round his theory had to confirm his philosophical stand (cf. Percy, 2004:170 *et seq.*) By means of numerous examples Percy demonstrates that the same applies to contemporary evolutionists: Their scientific results are nothing less than "applied naturalism" Some prominent figures (like Richard Dawkins amongst others) therefore say that, even if there were no proofs for Darwinism, it would still be better to accept it above other theories (cf. Percy, 2004: 168).

In the light of this the following question is important:

14.3.4 How should Christian scholars tackle the problem?

Some Christian natural scientists, theologians and other scientists try to form a compromise between "faith and science". How do they do this?

How it is done

Wright (cf. 1989:132, 133) explains one of the most common methods as follows. On the upper level is the belief *that* and *why* God created. On the lower level he places evolutionistic science which explains *when* and *how* it happened. These two levels do not exclude one another, but complement one another. Since the Scriptures only answer the *who* and the *why* (and not the *when* and the *how*) he says it is not a question of creation versus evolution, but of faith in a creator versus faith in no creator. Thus "Darwinian evolution is God's basic creative method" (Wright, 1989: 132). Similar viewpoints have been defended by a theologian Du Toit (1964) and a biologist, Lever (1956) and recently by a natural scientist and a theologian jointly (cf. Erasmus and Kruger, 2004:30-32). Such a view is usually called "theistic evolution".

Some questions

As mentioned already evolutionistic science cannot easily be isolated from the evolutionistic belief on which it is based. And even if it could be done, there are many questions remaining.

In faith (and theology) the Bible and even the existence of God (giving the answer to the *who*) have been saved. It sounds good, but in such a dualistic view (in spite of the statement that the *who* and *how* should be integrated) the *who* stands isolated from the *how*. Does not such a view imply that (evolutionistic) science may prescribe *how* one should live?

It became clear above (while dealing with Pease & Pease) that in the evolutionistic *how* (one should live) there is no room for the central Biblical ideas of creation (giving an answer to the *Who*), the fall of man and redemption and consequently no room for any norms and for human responsibility over and above the physical-biological.

Possible criticism

Only one author will be cited to demonstrate how unsatisfactory such a Christian reply to the problem can be. Percy (2004:203-204) demonstrates that the viewpoint of theistic evolutionists often amounts to the following: Although they do not accept *metaphysical naturalism* (the atheistic view that nature is all that exists), they do accept a *methodological naturalism* (that science is limited to natural causes and consequences). This means that the theists accept the same scientific theories as the atheistic evolutionistic naturalists. The only difference is that they add a theological meaning – which can only be known in faith. Therefore they allow naturalists to define scientific knowledge – as long as theology can cover it in a “religious sauce”. However, it is not worth much – a mere “subjective gloss”, “a merely symbolic religion” or “an overlay of value on otherwise value-free facts” (p. 203). God’s existence and revelation do not make a single essential difference in such a science. Naturalists themselves regard it as “a harmless delusion for those who need that kind of crutch” (p.204).

Real integration not possible

Van Wyk (2004:190) rightly discerns these problems when he says that the greatest challenges before a theistic “evolutionism” is how the Biblical ideas of fall and redemption can be integrated into the evolution process.

In conclusion to this cursory and therefore incomplete reflection we refer to the Christian biologist Zijlstra (2004:179 and 2005:11) who differentiates between evolution as a *pattern*, process and mechanism as a possible solution for the difficult questions in this field. According to him there is enough empirical evidence for evolution as a *pattern* in for instance the fossil records, morphological and DNA resemblance. This fact usually causes scientists to decide that all living organisms should have a common origin. For evolution as a *process* (the actual steps which brought about the evolution pattern) the empirical evidence, however is “scant”. Although there are actual cases which support the role of natural selection, the direct empirical evidence on the actual *mechanism* which had evolution as a result, is also “scant”.

The correct Christian response to the problems posed by evolutionary *theories* clearly needs further reflection in a separate article. The rest of this chapter will be confined to a brief critique of the evolutionistic *worldview* propagated by Pease & Pease.

14.3.4 The evolutionistic worldview questioned

Because the theory of evolution and evolutionism as a worldview are intertwined, the well-known science philosopher, Popper (cf. De Vries, 2005:20 and Van den Beukel, 2005: 108) comes to the conclusion that Darwinism is not a testable scientific theory, but a metaphysical research programme. Such a pre-scientific worldview can therefore not easily be refuted with scientific arguments. People will – in spite of scientific arguments against it – keep on believing in it (cf. also Pearcy, 2004: 168-173).

Immanent criticism

Immanent critique, however, is not without significance. Percy (2004: 316, 317) gives two examples of such critique on evolutionism.

In the first instance the question can be posed whether evolutionism does not fall into its own trap. If all man's ideas and behaviour are mere products of evolution, does this not apply also to the worldview itself?

A second form of immanent critique is to ascertain whether evolutionists are capable or prepared to live consistently according to their naturalistic biological principles. In the book by Pease & Pease (200) discussed above, it became clear how ill at ease they were at times taking their ideas to the full consequences. Percy (2004: 217-218) demonstrates by means of examples that this applies to most evolutionists. In the end they make an irrational leap from their deterministic thought to something like love, sense, responsibility, etc.

Facts and the interpretation of facts

Percy (2004: 157 *et seq.*) discusses several of the "hard" facts which are supposed to prove (macro)evolution (the evolution from one kingdom to another), but finds them unconvincing. But since her voice may be neglected (she is not a biologist) we give the word to two biologists on the so-called "transitional forms" or "missing links" between the kingdoms of animals and humans.

Van den Beukel (2005: 105-106) says that it already caused problems for Darwin himself that the fossil records do not contain clear proofs that the various kinds of living things developed during a long process, the one from the other. After extensive paleontological research this situation has hardly changed today after 140 years.

Wright, too (1989:123) says that many of the problems which confronted evolutionists in the nineteenth century, are still unsolved today. Regarding the "transitional forms" (between species and kingdoms) he says the following: "Fossils are the only truly historical evidence for evolution, yet the fossil record is a record of discontinuity rather than the continuous change suggested by

Darwinian gradualism. Gaps are more common than transitional forms; mass extinctions occur; complex forms appear quite suddenly in the fossil record; other forms exist for millions of years without appreciable change" (Wright, 1989:126).

In the light of this, deduction (a normal process in any science) plays a particularly great part in evolutionistic palaeontology (cf. Wright, 1989:123). De Vries (2005:11) explains that the only empirical material is remains from the distant past. The (evolutionistic) scientist can therefore not experiment and observe, but only interpret – and speculate? According to De Vries palaeontology therefore looks more like the science of history than a natural science. This may possibly be the reason why nowadays evolutionists no longer base their theories only on paleontological research, but rather on research in for instance molecular biology.

More penetrating questions

From a philosophical angle further weaknesses could be pointed out in evolutionism (cf. Van der Walt, 1988, and Duyvené De Wit, s.a.): Do *similarities* necessarily prove that living beings are *the same*? (Analogy is not the same as identity.) If there is similarity, does it necessarily mean that the one kingdom *originated from* the other? Is it justified to draw such a conclusion of macro-evolution merely on the grounds of *physical* resemblance (in palaeontology) or *biological* resemblance (in molecular biology), while it is clear that a human being is much more than a mere physical-biological being?

A last question: Is there no limit to scientific knowledge? Can it really say something meaningful on the *origin* of reality? Does not this problem in principle lie outside the field of investigation of any science? In the Reformational tradition it is usually taught that science has to study God's revelation in the creation in the light of his revelation in the Scriptures. Amongst other things this means there are certain basic questions about the creation which can only be answered in this light. One such question is the one on the origin of the creation. In my opinion this question can only be answered by faith and God's revelation (cf. John 1:1-3

and especially Hebrews 11:3). Stafleu confirms this viewpoint when he says: "... the coming into existence of mankind cannot be traced in a scientific way" (Stafleu, 1991:129).

Unless the limits of science are respected, the result is not science but speculation. Since Darwin, as a positivistic thinker, did not want to use myths (among which he also classified God's revelation) as an explanation (the way mythologising thinkers do), he thought cosmogonically – he speculated on the genesis (coming into being) of the cosmos. (Cf. Brill, 1986:211-223, 1993 for a full characterization of Darwin's philosophical conception.) On closer inspection the Biblical revelation about the origin of the creation is replaced by a speculative science as "revelation" (cf. Duyvené De Wit, 1956).

14.4 Preliminary conclusion

The above critical treatment of the scientific and worldviewish backgrounds of works like that by Pease & Pease (2000) was – though short and incomplete – an attempt to uncover its true foundation seen from a Christian Reformational perspective.

The most important results can finally be summarised as follows:

- First, popular books like the one by Pease & Pease (2000) lapse into stereotyping of the two sexes. Men and women do not only differ, but as human beings are the same in most respects.
- In the second instance, the writers concentrate solely on the sexual while its complex interaction with gender is ignored.
- Thirdly, the significant differences between human beings and animals are denied as a result of their evolutionistic point of departure, with the result that human responsibility is liable to be pushed aside.
- In the fourth instance evolutionistic biology and its worldview are accepted without criticism as the basis of this type of work. If the evolutionistic evolution theory/philosophy is not accepted by Christians on good grounds, it also means

that they deny the authority of such books to offer ethical guidance to the two sexes.

On discarding evolutionism the serious and difficult question whether human biology does play a part in his ethical behaviour has not been answered yet. Pease & Pease (2000:10) take recourse to Socio-biology which purports to give empirical proof for the biological basis of moral behaviour. Therefore this science will be examined critically in the following section. A Christian philosophical alternative to the issue of human sexuality and gender will afterwards serve to round off the whole chapter.

14.5 The origin, points of departure and contents of Sociobiology

It was already demonstrated how great the influence of Darwinism is currently both in science and in practice. Western culture is being "Darwinised" (cf. Augner, 2001). Evolutionistic ideas formerly limited to the biological sciences are currently applied to fields like art, ethics, politics, law and religion. Human culture is regarded as a mere product of biological evolutionary powers. A new science, Sociobiology, plays an important part in this (cf. Kaye, 1997). In it the older Darwinian idea of self-interest (the survival of the fittest) was replaced by the "selfish gene" (cf. Dawkins, 1976 and Wright, 1994).

14.5.1 Origin

The book *Sociobiology* (1975) by the American biologist, E.O. Wilson, is usually regarded as the starting point of this science and he himself as its "father". Although Wilson was brought up as a Christian, as a young student he chose evolutionism as a better explanation of reality. (For biographical data, cf. Pearcey, 2004:224 and Jochemsen, 2005:268). He advocated a humanistic biology (Wilson, 1982) and a naturalistic worldview (Wilson, 1994). In the latter book (p.45) he says for instance that religion and morality "... had to be explained as material process, from the bottom up, atoms to genes to the human spirit. It had to be embraced by a single grand naturalistic image of man" (cf. also Wilson & Ruse, 1991). Religious and ethical opinions therefore do not originate from

above downwards (God or some other non-material source via culture), but from below upwards (from human biology to his culture).

Van der Meer (2005:236) says with right that the status of the explanations given by Sociobiology or Evolutionistic Psychology (called thus when Sociobiology is applied to the field of morals) depends on the status assigned to the evolutionistic theory and evolutionistic worldview discussed above. Before evaluating critically Sociobiology, however, we need to say more about the points of departure and contents of this science.

14.5.2 Points of departure

Wilson (1975:4) defines Sociobiology as follows: "... the study of the biological basis of all social behaviour." The point of departure of this science is that all human behaviour (culture) can be explained from the evolutionary prehistory of man in which natural selection played a significant role. Behaviour which promotes human survival, persists. That which a person or group regards as good (moral codes) is in actual fact the rules for behaviour born from the struggle for existence. The typical evolutionistic supposition (going back to Darwin) is also supported, namely that although the human being is something special, he/she only differs in *degree* and not *essentially* from other living organisms. Man is merely a more developed animal.

Although the application of evolutionism to human culture is particularly clear from Wilson's later book *On human nature* (1979), we will give some key thoughts from his first book, *Sociobiology* (1975).

14.5.3 Questions and answers

Wilson (1975: 565 *et seq.*) is confronted by the following three fundamental questions regarding the evolution of man: (1) Why did only part of the pre-human animals develop into human beings (*homo sapiens*)? (2) Why were they able to develop so far above their (non-human) ancestors? (3) What was the "trigger device" which caused the process? As could be expected, all these fundamental questions are simply "explained" from environmental factors. The same method

is followed regarding human beings' social life, language, art, sexuality and religion.

The greater plasticity and complexity of human social association is simply the result of genetic differences between insects, animals and man (p.449-551). Although human language is something unique – an enormous leap in the evolution process (p. 556) – it is also (just like the arts) simply a higher development of sounds made by insects and animals. But Wilson cannot explain why and when exactly human language developed (p. 559).

For this investigation Wilson's view of religion and sexuality (two facets which are closely linked) is of special importance.

14.5.4 Religion

Religion, according to him, is merely the result of man's environment and religious differences the result of environmental differences (p.560). The idea of a "moral God" who created the earth "most commonly arises with a pastoral way of life. The greater the dependence on herding, the more likely the belief in a shepherd God of the Judaeo-Christian model... Because the Hebrews were originally a herding people, the Bible describes God as a shepherd and the chosen people as his sheep." (Wilson, 1975:560-561).

Thus in religion the main issue is the tribe/group itself which indoctrinates its members for the sake of survival (p.562). In this way Wilson "explains" why religion – which according to him is mostly a fraud – can play such an important role.

14.5.5 Sexuality

According to Wilson (p.564) "an evolutionary approach to ethics (is) self-evident". From all the possible kinds of ethics he chooses for a genetically developed or biologically founded ethics. "Scientists and humanists should consider together the possibility that the time has come for ethics to be removed from the hands of the philosophers and biologized" (p. 562).

Such a "genetically accurate and hence completely fair code of ethics" (p. 574) would only be reached – Wilson hoped within 100 years – when scientists will have full knowledge of the genes and neurones of the human brain.

However, this does not mean that Wilson has no clear viewpoint on sexuality and other ethical problems. We quote a few examples. When treating sexuality (p. 314 *et seq.*) attention is given to (biological) sex alone and not to gender. Fundamental questions such as why there are two sexes, is explained genetically (p. 316) and sexual selection serves as an explanation why they differ (p. 318).

The phenomena of both polygamy and monogamy are explained in a naturalistic way (327 *et seq.*). As it became clear in the previous chapter already, the male sex is considered as naturally polygamous (p. 554). Homosexuality, too, results from purely genetic causes (p. 555).

Wilson, just like Pease & Pease (2000), as we indicated already, finally does recognise that some forms of biologically determined ethical behaviour do not fit in with our modern circumstances (p.563). But he is convinced that new moral codes, too, should be genetically programmed.

It is clear why Pease & Pease (2000) could have recourse to Sociobiology to give guidance to the public on how the two sexes differ and how they should behave in accordance with their biology.

14.6 A critical look at Sociobiology

Sociobiology – which was worked out further by other scientists after Wilson's book – without doubt contains some moments of truth. One's biology does influence the rest of one's life as a human being. (A chemical imbalance/shortage can e.g. lead to serious depression and even suicide.) The great problem with most works on Sociobiology, however, is that it over-emphasises the physical-chemical-biological facet of being human and consequently in this way tries to explain all other sides of human existence.

In this section we first give the evaluation of a psychologist, a biologist and an ethicist (originally a molecular biologist) before drawing some conclusions. None of these writers summarily condemns Sociobiology. They attempt to react meaningfully to it from a Christian scientific perspective.

14.6.1 Van Leeuwen (1990)

As a psychologist Van Leeuwen looks into the question (cf. p.18) whether the differences between male and female sex have its roots only in human biology (sex) or possibly in biology as well as culture (nature and nurture). When both factors are taken into account, the problem becomes more complicated. For how could one decide how many of the differences between male and female have to be attributed to each of the factors?

Three important points

But there is no other way out, for (cf. Van Leeuwen, 1990:54): (1) Men and women are both biologically and psychically more similar than different. (2) (Biological) sex and (cultural) gender have a mutual influence on one another. It is not a case that nature limits nurture. The other way round one's social-cultural environment also influences one's biology. (3) Freedom of choice, accountability and a sense of gender identity may not be denied.

These three points are illustrated and confirmed by means of numerous examples by Van Leeuwen. According to her there are more similarities than differences between the two sexes. Sometimes there even are more differences between men/women of different cultures than between men and women of the same culture.

About the connection between genes and behaviour (of the sexes) she says: "... while biology does not rigidly determine every detail of our behaviour, it is fair to say that in general, with individual variations, it can nuance that behaviour" (Van Leeuwen, 1990:77).

The result concerning the third point above she regards as much more complicated than most popular books paint it. Human accountability has to be

understood in its complex interaction with both sex and gender (p.78). Biological anomalies undoubtedly make some forms of behaviour more probable (p. 81). But even when a (moral or other) weakness has a genetic base, according to her it still does not free such a person from his/her responsibility.

Van Leeuwen's investigation into hormones and the hemispheres of the brain yields similar results. Although sexually related hormones do influence behaviour, it does not happen according to the prevailing stereotyping of men and women, for the chemistry of the human body is extremely complex (p. 100). In this case, too, hormones or the chemistry of the brain may not be used as an excuse for unethical (and even violent) conduct (p.101).

Conclusion

Her conclusion runs as follows: "... in al three areas we have examined – genes, hormones and hemispheres – we have found that the differences, when they occur, are both smaller and more complex than we thought. In most cases they are impossible to separate from the effects of learning. Moreover, we cannot invoke biology to excuse our moral failures as men and women. Our lives are permeated by a God-ordained freedom and accountability that works through, but at the same time transcends, our biological assets and liabilities" (Van Leeuwen, 1990:105).

14.6.2 Van der Meer (2005)

As a biologist Van der Meer tests the Sociobiological science according to this science's own (evolutionistic) presuppositions. To be liable for an evolutionistic explanation, behaviour has to meet at least the three following conditions: (1) heredity, (2) variation and (3) a causal connection between (1) and (2) and the number of offspring (p. 237).

Results

Regarding the first, Van der Meer (p. 239) finds that hereditary influence on morality is merely indirect. A person may be prone to certain patterns of behaviour, but the specific contents of the behaviour is determined by the milieu

like education, etc. (Alcohol addiction can be taken as an example.) Regarding the second point (hereditary variation) no evidence can be produced since the ancestors no longer are alive and a comparison with the present generation is therefore impossible (p. 240). The third requirement for an evolutionistic explanation of moral conduct is that the members of a certain group exhibit specific moral behaviour in their normal environment and as a result would have more offspring than other groups. Van der Meer (p. 241) finds this improbable.

Further Van der Meer investigates the much discussed issue of altruism, something for which evolutionistic Sociobiologists can hardly find a satisfactory explanation as a result of their basic assumption of the survival of the best adapted. His general conclusion is " ... that evolutionary explanations of moral conduct at this point are entirely hypothetical" (Van der Meer, 2005:245, translated from the Dutch).

Threefold reduction

In summary Van der Meer's critique on Sociobiology (p. 248 *et seq.*) is that it is warped by three kinds of reductions: (1) *Reduction of concept*: morality is reduced to something biological. (2) *Reduction of theory*: moral conduct is explained with reference to biological factors only. (3) *Reduction of reality*: a Naturalistic-materialistic ontology (view of reality) is the basic assumption, which leaves no room for human norms apart from biological (natural) laws.

Van der Meer himself thinks along anti-reductionist lines. According to him human morality needs an explanation giving recognition to genetic, neural, cognitive, emotional, social, religious and other factors (p.250). Genes do not *determine*, but merely *influence* morality *via* personality, feeling, intelligence and so forth (p. 250). According to him morality has a multidimensional character.

Accountability

On human accountability his stand is the following: Research on human biology does offer knowledge of the biological origin and conditions for moral conduct, but not of good and evil (p. 254). So the specific content of moral conduct is not

genetically determined. Good behaviour does not have a biological cause, according to him. Moral (good or bad) behaviour can only be explained on social, cultural and religious grounds. This explains why different cultures and religions propagate different ethical norms. If conduct were purely biologically determined, all cultures and religions would have believed in more or less the same norms.

14.6.3 Jochemsen (2005)

Like the previous two writers this molecularbiologist and ethicist does not right from the start reject the importance of research by evolutionistic ethics on biological influences on human, specifically ethical, conduct either. For man is also a biological being (p. 271). He tests the Sociobiological theories and results and finds (like Van Leeuwen and Van der Meer) that these theories have serious shortcomings. (Since it would entail repetition it is omitted here).

Not fully-fledged ethics

An important new contribution made by his article is his focus on ethics as a science (p.260 *et seq.*). Does ethics (as fully-fledged science) come into its own in Sociobiology? Jochemsen gives three reasons why he thinks this is not the case:

First behaviour (in general) and ethical behaviour is not the same. Various kinds of conduct (economical, judicial, ethical, social, religious, etc.) have to be differentiated. One of the characteristics of ethical conduct is the ability to evaluate or assess behaviour. The conduct of organisms (like insects and animals) which cannot reflect in this way on their own conduct, can therefore not be regarded as "ethical". So animal behaviour cannot be taken as a basis for human (moral) conduct.

In the second place the science of ethics cannot be regarded as a subdivision of biology (p. 272). Ethics has for very long been an independent discipline and should remain so.

An insoluble dilemma

In the third place Sociobiological "ethics" is an incomplete "ethics". According to Jochemsen (p.271) evolutionistic ethics is confronted by the following dilemma: to be either solely descriptive or to be prescriptive as well. Merely describing what exists, however, means that it is not really ethics, since this discipline typically does not accept existing behaviour as morally good without criticism. The other option is that it is pronounced "morally" correct by the "norms" formed by evolution and consequently there is a shift from *descriptive* to *prescriptive* ethics. But in this case that which ought to be is deduced from the factual state of affairs (the so-called naturalistic illusionary argument) This would mean amongst other things that in the case of abnormal human embryos prenatal abortion may be done. Or that abnormal babies and retarded children may be killed. Or that (especially) male promiscuity has to be accepted as normal and good (cf. the viewpoint of Pease & Pease and Wilson treated earlier).

14.6.4 Some conclusions

Apart from the critique given earlier, the following conclusions on evolutionistic Sociobiology are significant. (For more detailed critique the books by Clayton & Schloss, 2004 and Jeeves, 2004 may be consulted.)

- It tends to generalise (create stereotypes).
- Apart from being reductionistic in the sense mentioned above (cf. Van der Meer) it is also reductionistic in the sense that it ignores the important historical and cultural variations in sexual moral conduct.
- In many cases their evidence is based on the study of animal behaviour. Apart from variations in animal behaviour, the huge differences between human beings and animals are not taken into account.
- It tries to explain complex human behaviour by having recourse to evolutionistic adaptations for survival and suitability which took place in the distant past. The result is that Sociobiological theories cannot really be tested. (The theories of Sociobiology for instance begins with the observation that men

are more aggressive than women. From this they work back millions of years to create an "explanation" for the present situation.)

- Sociobiologists use methods which would be called defective by responsible biologists and other scientists. For instance it is claimed that men today still carry in their genes that fact that originally they had to provide food by hunting so that their family/group could survive. However, anthropologists who studied the eating habits of "primitive" people, have ascertained that hunting was merely a sporadic activity for men. The bulk of the food was gathered daily by the women.

So if Sociobiology as seen in the light of the foregoing cannot be regarded as a faithful guide to determining the moral conduct in men and women, is there an alternative?

14.7 A Christian perspective on the relationship between the sexes

In working out what follows the writer was in particular stimulated by the works of Storkey (2001), Van Leeuwen (1990) and Verkerk (1997). (For more details on the place and role of women according to the Bible, cf. Van der Walt, 2006: 228-280). First we look at some basic Biblical perspectives. Then we give an indication of how they can be elaborated in a scientific way. In a concluding perspective we return to the two serious questions to which Sociobiology could not offer a solution.

14.7.1 Basic Biblical perspectives

From Van Leeuwen (1990:34-51) it becomes clear how important the basic Biblical perspectives of creation, the fall of man and redemption is for the current issue. In the very first three chapters of Genesis some fundamental viewpoints emerge.

Creation

At creation the following is clear about men and women: (1) their *similarities*, (2) their *differences* and (3) the *complementary* nature of the one to the other.

- **Similarity**

From Genesis it is clear that, since they are both human beings, man and woman are more alike than different. Adam did not find among the animals anyone like himself, his equal (2:20). The woman is created from the man (2:21) and Adam recognises her – in contrast to the animals – as one who is like himself (2:23). Both have been created in the image of God (1:27), they get the same mandate to cultivate the earth (1:28) and both have to live according to God's command (2:16). This perspective is confirmed in the rest of the Bible (for instance at the event on Pentecost, cf. Acts 2 and Gal. 3:28).

- **Difference**

The same chapters in Genesis, however, do not deny that there are sexual differences. Eve, although Adam's equal, is someone else, someone who as his helper can complement him as a human being. She gets a different name, Eve, and is explicitly called "woman" (2:23).

The importance of maintaining these first two biblical perspectives together, becomes clear in various feministic movements (cf. Verkerk, 1997: 59 *et seq.*). The earlier feministic movements wanted to free the woman by emphasising the differences between the sexes, while a second feministic wave put all emphasis on the similarities. (Feminism is treated in more detail by Storkey, 2001. In this connection Van Leeuwen, 1993 and Stuart & Thatcher, 1996 are valuable too.)

- **Complementarity**

Difference in similarity/similarity in difference come together in the third Biblical perspective of the complementarity of the sexes. From Genesis it is clear that God's creation would have been incomplete without the woman. It is stated specifically that it was not good that the man was alone (2:18). Adam himself felt a void (2:20). therefore Adam received from the Lord someone who was different and yet similar, a helper.

The word "helper" denotes the complementary relationship between the two sexes. From the rest of the Scriptures it emerges that not only has the woman to

“complement” the man, but that it should also be the other way round. The word “helper” should not be understood in the sense that Eve is Adam’s subordinate either. What is clear is not her inferiority, but rather that she is indispensable. This emerges, for example from the fact that the word “helper” (*ezer*) is used most of the time about God (as man’s Helper, e.g. Ps. 121:2) From this we could not possibly conclude that God is inferior to man (Van Leeuwen, 1990:42).

Verkerk (1997: 217) explains: “What is pivotal is the deed, helping, supporting. It characterises the activity, not the identity of the helper. It denotes that the male human being can only reach his destination if he is supported by the female human being. He is dependent on her. He cannot go it alone. And she? She was created in involvement with him. It is precisely in this man-woman relationship that we see the aspect of mutual dependence and involvement emerging clearly.” (cf. also Van Leeuwen, 1990:42 and Storkey, 2001:130).

It is important to note that the mutual complementation does not apply to marriage only. Even outside married life the two sexes should complement one another – though it is in ways that differ from those in marriage. To explain the uniqueness of the marriage relationship, Storkey (2001:131) uses apart from the “paradigms” of similarity, difference and complementation a fourth one, namely unity. Man and woman become such a unity that they no longer have the sole control over their sexuality. They must also mutually submit to one another (Eph.5:21).

When they fell into sin, however, the situation changed entirely.

Fall

As sin affected everything in creation, so too the three basic guidelines (similarity, difference and complementation) in the relationship between the sexes were separated from one another and thus distorted.

The similarities are separated from the differences and consequently man and woman are viewed as being the same. Or the differences are set aside by themselves and therefore over-emphasised, which leads to the well-known

stereotypes of the sexes. In neither case can the third Biblical principle of complementarity therefore receive its due.

From Genesis 3 it is clear that discord and the wrong kind of competition had taken the place of mutual help and complementation. Adam blames Eve (3:12). Eve still desires Adam, but he no longer wishes to complement her, rather dominate her (3:16b).

This may be the reason why Olthuis (1997:146) in stead of complementarity prefers to take mutuality as a norm for the relationship of the two sexes. It should serve as a corrective for the self-centredness which came to the fore in both man and woman after the fall.

Van Leeuwen (cf. 1990:44) even argues that the way God punishes man and woman, is linked to their sexuality. In the case of the man (healthy) ruling over creation is changed to (wrong) domination over the woman and the rest of creation. In the case of the woman her social character ("sociability") is changed to "social enmeshment".

Redemption

Redemption in Christ means that by the power of the Holy Spirit human beings can again live according to God's original creational guidelines. The woman's punishment (namely that the man will dominate her) also has to change. (The *fact* of God's punishment should not be taken as a *norm*.) Regarding ultimate life on a new earth, the Bible says that marriage will no longer be necessary. The fact that God's redemption means recreation, however, does not necessarily imply that sexual differences will disappear.

14.7.2 Further scientific elaboration needed

As far as could be ascertained, the above perspectives on sexuality have not been worked out and applied in detail. Verkerk (cf. p.201 *et seq.*) took the first step in this direction.

In the first instance he reflects on the meaning of sexual differences. All of creation is meaningful since it is unfulfilled in itself (dependent on God) and

therefore point to Him. But all created things are also interdependent and mutually involved and in this way complement one another. (Cf. the above-mentioned perspective of complementarity between the sexes.)

In the second instance Verkerk offers (from the philosophy of H. Dooyeweerd) a broader anthropological basis for the issue of sexuality and gender. According to him being human consists of (more or less) fifteen modalities. With this anthropology the one-dimensional, naturalistic anthropology of Sociobiology is replaced by a multi-dimensional anthropology. Sex is connected to the earlier modalities (numerical, spatial, physical, chemical and biological). Gender is connected to the later modalities or aspects which follow the biological (the psychic, logical, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetical, judicial, ethical and religious aspects).

While the later modalities are rooted in the earlier ones, the former are developed in the later. In this way an explanation is given why there is mutual influence between sex and gender while each has its own character.

Apart from the fact that human beings are functionally much richer than animals, an even greater, prefunctional (directional) difference should be emphasised: Human beings are created in the image of God, they are religious beings. This implies *inter alia* that they can distinguish between good and evil and that they are responsible to obey God's fundamental law of love – which should indicate the direction of our lives.

14.8 Conclusion: the calling of man and woman

Sociobiology attempts (especially in Evolutionary Psychology) to answer two important questions: What is the difference between the two sexes? How does one know that one is behaving properly as a man/woman? (cf. e.g. Wislon, 1975:316-318).

A Christian answer to the first problem has been dealt with in the foregoing pages. Male and female sex, sexuality and gender differ, but are also closely

connected. This is a much more valuable answer than the one that can be offered from a reductionistic evolutionistic perspective.

The answer to the second more practical question (how the two sexes should act) finally has to be worked out in more detail.

14.8.1 Response, office and vocation

Verkerk (1997:209) departs from the assumption that in everything a human being does he/she has to respond to the Word of God. Being human means in the most profound sense to be "one who responds" (cf. also Buijs *et al.* 2005). Responding also implies responsibility. Since the two sexes are unique, their responsibility also has a specific character of its own.

Van Leeuwen (1990:70) proposes similar ideas. She takes as a point of departure that God calls man to various offices. The most important, inclusive office is – for both sexes – the office of loving service in the all-encompassing kingdom of God. Besides this there are "secondary" offices, like that of parents (a man becomes a father and a woman becomes a mother), of the government, and so forth. The specific office of being man and woman is "to express complementarity and mutuality" (p. 70).

The above two trains of thought (of response and office) are here summarised by myself in the idea of vocation. The vocation or calling of being a man and being a woman has to be carried out with the three basic biblical perspectives of similarity, difference and complementarity.

14.8.2 Three guidelines

The first guideline (*similarity*) means that the vocation of the man is not higher or more important than that of the woman or the other way round (cf. Gal. 3:28 and Col. 3:11). As indicated above, both have a primary vocation in the kingdom of God and afterwards also a vocation in different societal contexts (e.g. that of parents in a family, or government and subjects in a state, etc.)

The idea of vocation may, however, not ignore the significant fact that every human being is a unique person with unique gifts and talents. Besides, every man and woman has to carry out his/her vocation under unique circumstances.

The implication of the second guideline (of *differences* in sex, sexuality and gender) is that man and woman cannot and may not carry out their personal calling in an identical way. With right Fowler (2004:5) says: "The rejection of gender stereotypes does not involve a denial of gender differences. It simply celebrates the rich complexity and diversity of the human person in both its female and male forms."

Neither may the third guideline be neglected. *Complementarity* brings both similarities and differences between the sexes to a synthesis on a third level of fulfilling their vocation. It puts in perspective the sexual differences so that the sexes will not fight one another or lapse into unhealthy competition (on the grounds of the differences). Neither may the similarities between the sexes be over-emphasised so that the differences are ignored. The basic similarity, too, has to be seen in perspective so that the two sexes can complement one another.

14.8.3 Not prescriptive

Is all this still too abstract? Can one not be more specific on how man and woman should carry out their vocation? Because of the complex interaction between sex, sexuality and gender nothing more *can* be said. And on account of the uniqueness of every man and woman and every situation one *may* not be prescriptive.

Every person has his/ her own secret. Olthuis (2005:77) says with right: "Each of us is a non-exchangeable, ultimately mysterious, unspeakably precious, unique person ...". Thus every man/woman will have to make out *coram Deo* (in the presence of God) what his/her specific calling entails. Likewise every man/woman – taking into account their unique aptitude, gifts and circumstances – has to decide for themselves how they can best serve God and their fellow human beings. Once more Olthuis aptly puts it: "Each of us, male and female, in

our singular and particular destinies are called to work out what it means that we are generically men or generically women ... belonging to a gender represents a universal that exists prior to me. I have to accomplish it in relation to my particular destiny" (Olthuis, 2005:78).

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Chapter 15

Retrospective conclusion:

A TRANSFORMED CHRISTIANITY FOR A NEW SOCIETY

The aim of this retrospective conclusion is to leave behind all the often complicated and difficult theoretical material of the previous chapters. The intention is to explain and summarise in a straight forward, more concrete and practical way the basic message of *Transforming Power*.

Human beings – Christians included – often tend to look at factors *outside* themselves (e.g. the secular political, economic and social life) which are viewed as responsible for the bad state of social life. We are hypocrites when we blame others (politicians, economists, development workers, etc.) or circumstances (poverty or the environment), while ignoring our own faults (cf. Matthew 7:3-5). This chapter, therefore, also intends to have an *inward* look, to do some introspection. With utmost sincerity we have to ask ourselves as Christians the following question: Is our Christianity part of the *solution* or perhaps part of our *problem(s)*? (1) This chapter will first state the problem of the passivity of Christianity. (2) Then it will summarise the basic Biblical perspective from which the issue should be viewed. (3) Next the weak points of Christianity will be enumerated. (4) This is followed by ten agenda points for a new Christianity, relevant for societal life.

15.1 Introduction: the problem

What will happen if today all the Christian ministers, pastors and priests go on strike? If they do not put down their tools like the workers or down their chalk like the teachers, but stop preaching? What will happen if ordinary church members (77% of the population in South Africa) follow suit? Will our country or continent or the entire world come to a standstill? Or will we not even notice such a religious strike?

I ask this question to draw attention to the small impact which Christians make on society. Of course it is difficult to exactly measure the influence of something like religion on something else as wide as "society". I am becoming more and more convinced, however, that Christianity is not what it ought to be.

15.1.1 Passivity

The following metaphors are used by different authors to bring the point of our passivity and small influence - if any - clearly home:

- Do we as Christians want to remain in the passengers' seats or take over the driver's seat?
- Are we satisfied to belong to the passive spectators or do we need to become active players?
- Like a thermometer we simply register what happens around us instead of regulating, like a thermostat, the "temperature" of society.
- We are willing to be hammered upon like an anvil. Why don't we become the hammer itself?

Most of these critical writers are of the opinion that Christians are far too passive. Passivity does not imply neutrality. It can be very dangerous, because it may condone a *bad* status quo. Christianity therefore does not automatically have a beneficial influence on society, because Christianity itself can deteriorate, even become an ideology.

15.1.2 Merely freedom from

In the past, Christianity played an important role in inspiring nations in different countries - also in South Africa - for the liberation struggle from colonialism. It activated peoples' conscience to struggle *against* Western imperialism and apartheid. This negative freedom *from* is an important aspect of freedom, but does not guarantee full freedom. Freedom *towards* service of God and our fellow human beings is the positive side of the coin which we need to achieve complete freedom. *After liberation* we have to *rebuild* our countries. In South Africa in 1994 we therefore attained only part of real freedom, only one facet of a new South Africa. It will not remain "new" if we do not actively pursue the rest of the long road towards real freedom.

I get the impression that Christians are strong when it is necessary to struggle against what is wrong. This was not only evidenced during the anti-apartheid struggle, but also today many Christians are against abortion on demand, against pornography, homosexuality, etcetera. I also reject such evils. One, however, often get the impression that to be an "anti-Christian" (to be negative), is more popular than to be a "pro-Christian", a positive Christian.

15.1.3 A time for reconstruction

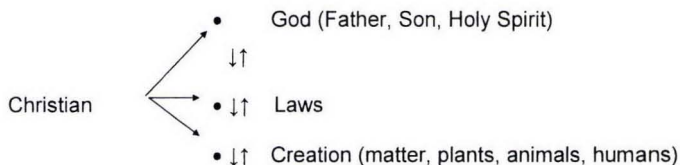
As indicated, the clock of history has moved away from the time of dismantling and destruction. It now indicates time for reconstruction. To use another metaphor: Like Israel we are already liberated from the oppression of Egypt. We have not yet reached the promised land, however. We are still wandering in the desert, learning - both as oppressors and oppressed - to be converted from slaves to a nation; learning not to accept everything passively or expect our government or "the church" to do it, but to become actively involved in ensuring a better future; learning - above all - to live positively according to the same laws God gave the Israelites at Mount Sinai long ago.

Such "in between" times can be full of confusion, uncertainty, even anxiety. Like the Israelites even the danger of repositionation - longing for the past - lurks. If there is any time in our history in which we badly need a new Christianity to provide inspiration and direction, it was not primarily the past, but today. Don't allow future generations to conclude that Christianity is useless, because it let our emerging African and other nations down at the most crucial juncture of their history!

This chapter will therefore, first, have an indepth look at ten reasons for the present sad state of Christianity in South Africa, elsewhere in Africa and other parts of the world. Secondly, it will try to indicate what a new kind of transformed, Biblical Christianity should look like.

15.2. The basic perspective

In order to understand my criticism of present Christianity as well as my view on the new type of Christianity which we need, first something about my own perspective. What I think we need, is a *deep* and *broad* Christianity, one which is correct both in its *focus* and *scope*. The perspective from which we will try to achieve this goal is visualised in the following diagram:



According to this basic perspective a Christian should not focus on only *one* reality (God or his laws or his creation). She/he should simultaneously stand in a *threefold* relationship to God, his creation and his laws for creation. The reason is that God, law

and creation are different entities, but at the same time inseparable. (See arrows in two directions between each of them.) An example: one cannot have a "beautiful relation" to God alone. Such a relation can only materialise *in* creation and *according* to God's laws.

15.3 The weak points of present-day Christianity: ten -isms

An -ism indicates an overemphasis, an absolutisation and, therefore, a distortion. I will mention ten -isms which together are responsible for the meagre impact of Christianity on society. They are closely related to each other. They should be distinguished but cannot be separated. My brief description will assist you to recognise each of them in your own community. (Because this concluding chapter summarises many preceding chapters, repetition will be unavoidable.)

15.3.1 Nominalism

Nominalism indicates that not all Christians are reborn, committed, but they only have the name of being Christians. It is, for example, estimated that, from the approximate 77% of South African citizens who carry the name of Christ, about 60% are nominal Christians, leaving us with a mere 17% "real" Christians!

The many reasons for this sad state of affairs cannot be mentioned. I only mention two of them. Amongst white Christians the reason often is that people regard it as customary or fashionable to be a Christian. In the black churches Christianity is often simply *added* to or *accommodated with* traditional African religion, without real deep *conversion* to Christ.

In both cases the results are (1) a divided soul (in the case of whites between Christian belief and secular religion and in the case of blacks between the Gospel and traditional animistic beliefs), (2) luke-warmness, (3) beautiful words without any confirming deeds and (4) no missionary zeal amongst its members. A nominal church is a dying church!

15.3.2 Pietism

This -ism (from the Latin *pietas*=piety) indicates a wrong kind of piety. In many white churches things which are emphasised today are: a good relationship with God, that one has to feel good about one's own religious life and be assured of one's eternal salvation. Also amongst many black churches the pietistic-charismatic influence of missionary and para-church organisations from the West have a similar, strong impact.

Our relationship with Christ is of vital importance - without that one should not call oneself a Christian. However, we cannot place a full stop at this point. The diagram above (15.2) clearly indicates that our relationship to God is inseparable from creation.

When we analyse pietism from this perspective, we find the following characteristics (1) The emphasis is on the *individual* Christian, who should live a personal pious life. Also the church is a community of individual souls and faith is reserved for the inner chamber of the soul. (2) One stands in an individual relationship to *God*, which can sometimes be a very - too - familiar relationship, without awareness of the fact that God is God, totally different from us human beings. In this relationship personal holiness is emphasised, without cognisance that the whole world should be holy unto God. (3) Apart from a few, personal, negative norms (like don't steal, smoke, drink, commit adultery) God's *laws* do not play a very important role in this kind of pietism. No clear guidelines are provided of how, as a Christian, one should be involved in society outside marriage, family life and the church. (4) *Creation* plays an even more insignificant role in this type of Christianity, because of its one-sided focus on God and heaven - as if we can serve Him outside this world!

The basic reason is that pietism replaced the Biblical view on reality (consisting of God, law and creation, cf. diagram above) with a dualistic view which looks more or less like this:

God - heaven - spiritual - soul - church – theology - missions

Cosmos - earth - material - body - world - other sciences - culture

The mistake of pietism is twofold. In the first place pietists do not distinguish clearly between two totally different meanings of the word "world" in the Bible: (1) The world as such, as God's creation, the object of his love (its structural or ontological meaning) and (2) the world under dominion of sin, the object of God's wrath (its directional or religious meaning). Secondly (because they do not distinguish between the two), they confuse the ontological and religious meanings of "world": They try to establish ontological boundaries to divide reality (God, laws and cosmos) into a by nature good, holy and a by nature bad, secular realm. The sacral part of reality is the higher and the secular part is the lower sphere. The Christian should focus on the higher, holier sphere: God, heaven, spiritual things, the church and missions to win souls for Christ.

Many favourite Christian hymns, books and poems are testimonies of this emphasis on heaven, away from the earth, which is only regarded as a preamble to eternal life. Compare, for instance, John Bunyan's *The pilgrim's progress* (towards heaven) and the Afrikaans poet, Totius' poem *Die wêreld is ons woning nie* (This world is not our home).

Because we do not read the Bible as a *tabula rasa* (without any presuppositions), it is not surprising that pietists are able to "confirm" their dualistic worldview from the Bible. They will, for instance, quote the following texts: Don't be concerned about food, clothes etcetera, but about the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 6:25-34). Don't look for treasures on earth, but in heaven (Matt. 6:9-21). God's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Put your heart on heavenly things (Col. 3:1-2), etcetera. (For a correct interpretation of these texts, cf. 15.4.2 below.)

This is also the reason why pietists would usually put great emphasis on Christ's so-called Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20), but will not be aware of God's very First Command to humankind, his cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). The consequence is great missionary zeal to save souls from eternal perdition, but no real involvement in this world.

Many of my students in the past would come to tell me that they have decided to either "give one year of their life to the Lord" or even to "go into full-time service of the Lord". I explained to them that evangelistic work - usually in a far-off country - is not the only way we can serve the Lord, but that they are already (as students, preparing themselves for a vocation in life) in his service. In some cases I succeeded to break through their pietistic, dualistic worldview and they continued their studies. In the case of others I could not convince them. Many of those who cancelled their studies, however, returned frustrated after a year or more, because they were not really called by the Lord to be missionaries or evangelists. Their churches misled them because of their wrong viewpoint that only by proclaiming the Gospel to unbelievers can we really be serving God.

15.3.3 Escapism

Sociologists of religion have clearly indicated that religion can become a refuge, a hiding place in difficult times of poverty, famine, war etcetera. We can, therefore, expect it also to happen on the African continent with all its many problems and hardships.

A few examples are the following:

- The *eschatological type of Christianity*, which believes that all the bad things we are experiencing today are God's signs of the end-times, which we simply have to accept - perhaps even with gratitude that finally this terrible world will come to an end. The consequence is that we simply have to sit and wait. We should not become involved and try to change the situation.
- The *Gospel of prosperity* holds the viewpoint that a real Christian should be a rich Christian. Also this viewpoint will not encourage a critical involvement in an (unjust) society. One would rather try to enrich oneself - in order to prove that one is a "genuine Christian".
- Another type of Christianity has the tendency to *blame demons/or the ancestors* for all the bad things we experience. Attention is focused on these culprits to such an extent, that we don't realise that we as human beings as well as the social structures we create can be sinful.

Amongst some white and black churches we experience the same escapist phenomenon. They withdraw - like Alice in Wonderland - into the last safe ghetto (their church) so as not to see and not to become involved in the poverty and deprivation of their fellow citizens.

As will become clear in the course of this chapter, such Christians are deceiving themselves. As a human, earthly being it is impossible to escape reality - apart from the fact that a Christian should never try to do so. The ancient monasteries could not evade the world. The modern cloisters of escapism will also not succeed (see 15.4.3).

15.3.4 Denominationalism

We will only briefly mention some of the causes and consequences of denominationalism because it is (like nominalism) a well-known trend.

Two of the main causes of denominationalism are the following. In the first place the fact that the Western ecclesiastical divisions were simply transplanted by the missionaries belonging to these different denominations to Africa and many other parts of the world. In many cases the young African Christians were not even knowledgeable or concerned about these historical differences.

In the second place Africans themselves are also to be blamed, because every new "prophet" will soon establish a new church - even if it consists only of a few members.

The consequences of denominationalism are devastating: exclusivism, arrogance, pride, negativism (against other denominations), indifference (towards other Christians

and their churches) and finally the loss of golden opportunities to co-operate with other churches – which could have resulted in a much stronger impact on society (cf. 15.4.4 below).

15.3.5 Institutionalism

With this -ism I have in mind the belief of many Christians that the whole of our lives should be *centred* on the church institution: its well-being, income, organisation and more. The reverse of this view is that everything is also *expected* from the church, it should be involved in all areas of life and provide in all the Christian's needs.

Often when somebody asks: "What should Christians do in this situation?" it is immediately translated as "What should the church(es) do?" Christianity is narrowed down to church activities. Stated differently: the church usurps the entire life of the Christian.

The basic mistake of institutionalism (or ecclesiocentrism) is that it does not see the important Biblical difference between the church and the kingdom of God. Institutionalists identify the church with the much broader, encompassing, eternal kingdom.

An example is what we may call the religious professional pyramid. From the top to the bottom of the triangle you may list the following professions: missionary, minister/pastor/priest, missionary doctor, "ordinary" medical doctor, nurse, teacher, artist, business woman/man, attorney, streetsweeper. The "higher" professions are considered to be closer to the church and more acceptable to God!

The detrimental consequences are twofold: (1) The "churchification" of everything, e.g. a *church* school, a political party dominated by the church, etcetera. (2) A very superficial Christianity, because a *churchified* institution is not really a *Christian* institution. Ecclesiastical supervision or dominance often merely adds a thin layer of church varnish – like icing on the cake. (For the Biblical viewpoint, cf. 15.4.5 below.)

15.3.6 Secularism

Two forms of this -ism can be distinguished: (1) A radical (atheistic) type which implies that people live as if God does not exist or, if He is there, does not matter any way. (2) A more moderate type - but no less dangerous - which teaches that God and belief in Him does matter in private, devotional life and in the church, but not in the "public square", society at large, which should be a secular sphere.

Because there is not much difference between the second form of secularism and pietistic dualism, it can become an easy trap for Christians to accept and live according to a secularist worldview. In present-day Africa we witness how secularism is

conquering its millions: People who are good family and church members, but in their "public" life they commit every kind of sin. We should strongly reject this attitude: If Christ is not King of all of our life, He cannot be King at all.

To my mind secularism is more dangerous than any kind of other religion. Often Christians fight against the Islam, but they do not realise how much more dangerous secularism is, because: (1) It is not the open enemy of any religion, and may even encourage private religious practices, as long as one accepts that secular religion is permitted to determine public life. (2) It is a misleading religion because it is Biblically not permissible to divorce one's private from one's public life. Life *as such* is religion. The dichotomy (public-private) is also questionable: what exactly is "private" and what is "public"? (3) Secularism slowly and quietly infiltrates, like a virus, our way of thinking and finally paralyses Christian faith and action. (For the antidote to secularism, see 15.4.6 below.)

15.3.7 Subjectivism

The implications of this -ism is relativism, a lack of direction amongst Christians. Anything becomes acceptable. Or it results in pragmatism or utilism (if something is useful, it is also correct). Its consequence may even be hedonism (when my own desires, needs or pleasures become the norms of conduct).

Subjectivism simply means that the subject (everything in creation) which is to be subjected to God's laws, becomes a law itself. Our diagram (in 15.2) clearly distinguishes (without separating) God's laws from his creation. Everything in creation should "obey" specific laws given by God. In nature it happens more or less automatically (e.g. the law of gravity), while as human beings we ought to do so - we have a choice.

Because modern man does not know and acknowledge God any more, he does not want to accept the fact of God's ordinances. He, therefore, has to devise other means to establish his own norms or values. No human being can live without direction. He/she has to choose between different possibilities. Today this is often done in the following ways:

- Do as the majority does. If the majority decides abortion is acceptable, it becomes the norm.
- Do as your own feelings or intellect tells you to do. If you feel good doing something, it is fine.

- Take recourse to a human authority, like science, on which one's final trust and security rests.

It will be clear that in all these cases what is regarded as "normal" becomes the norm, instead of the obverse, viz. that norms should decide what "normal" should be. The majority, our feeling, intellect and science are subjects and therefore cannot be regarded as norms, but should be normatively evaluated.

Subjectivism today reigns supreme both inside and outside the churches. In some churches "experience" is elevated to the status of a norm, while in other "rationality" (doctrine) acquires the status. In the world outside the church development, progress, competition and self-satisfaction are regarded as "values" to be uncritically accepted. Because of the disappearance of real norms, no one asks the question whether development is good or bad, beneficial or harmful. However, in this sinful world no subject (thing) *as such* can simply be good. (A normative approach should take the place of subjectivism – cf. 15.4.7.)

15.3.8 Eurocentrism

This -ism indicates the predominantly Western character of Christianity. We all know that Christianity started as a Jewish (Eastern) religion. Soon, however, it became Hellenised and finally completely Westernised – the Christianisation of the West also implied the Westernisation of Christianity. This has already been the case for two thousand years.

When the missionaries evangelised the African people and other nations, they transplanted Christianity to our continent in Western cultural "clothes". Even today different Western denominations and para-church organisations have a powerful influence on the forms of Christianity in Africa and other parts of the non-Western world. While the Independent African Churches are more African (but often syncretistic), the mainline churches are still very Western (and therefore often irrelevant).

This should not be the case. Every Christian wants to serve the Lord *in* his own culture and not *outside* it. We, for instance, need a typical African way of worship. There is no perfect or primitive culture - every culture has its strong points or "peaks" and its weak points or "valleys". Every culture also has its "blind spots" with the result that it cannot fully understand the message of the Gospel if it isolates itself from other cultures. A purely Eurocentric Christianity will not survive in (South) Africa or the rest of the large, non-Western world. (See further 15.4.8.)

15.3.9 Myopism

What we urgently need at this moment in our history is not the old type of freedom fighters, but a *new* generation of Christian leaders who can inspire people with a vision bigger than themselves, providing real meaning to life.

What we have today, however, is myopic leaders, characterised by their short-sightedness, with a very limited perspective on the implication of salvation and a very narrow scope - if any - of Christian involvement in society. They are not really leaders, because - like everybody else - they *ad hoc* through life in an inconsistent, uncertain way.

That is also the reason why their leadership - and their followers - are often very defensive or negative and not constructive. They will fight *against* all kinds of evils in society without any *positive* suggestion of how to solve these problems. (They are, for example, against abortion, but don't take the initiative to care for the unmarried mothers and their "unwanted" children.) The basic reason is that they are not guided by a clear and consistent Christian worldview. A worldview is the network of beliefs which shape the way(s) in which we view and experience reality and our task in the world. Its important guiding and directing function is clear from the following metaphors: a compass, anchor, map, square and a dynamo. Like a magnifying glass or a wide-angle camera it can help us to get rid of our myopic Christianity. (For a further elaboration see 15.4.9.)

15.3.10 Syncretism

With this last -ism I do not have the usual meaning of the word in mind (the mixing of different religious viewpoints), but the uncritical acceptance by Christians of non-compatible views of society.

Some Christians are of the opinion that they do not need a view or philosophy of society, because Christianity is understood individualistically and only concerns eternal salvation. Others realise that such a viewpoint cannot be accepted. They, however, uncritically or with only superficial modification, accept a basically unbiblical philosophy of society. During the Cold War and struggle against apartheid Marxism and neo-Marxism was in vogue. At present it is replaced by the ideology of free market neo-capitalism. Previously Marxism was accommodated to Christianity and today the free market ideology is regarded by many Christians as a Biblical perspective. In reality they are mirror reflections of each other: the one emphasises society while the other emphasises the reverse, the individual. Both are distorted views of society.

We cannot (re)build a new country, a new nation and society – or 'n whole continent – without a truly Christian philosophy of society based on what the Bible teaches about being human. Such a (pluralist) view of society is available. If we do not make use of it we will soon be engulfed in one or other form of totalitarianism again. (See also 5.4.10.)

15.4 En route to a new transformed Christianity: ten agenda points

As alternatives to the ten -isms, I propose the following, (1) a committed, (2) an integral, (3) an involved, (4) an ecumenical, (5) a kingdom, (6) a radical, (7) a normative, (8) an African, (9) a visionary and (10) a socially involved Christianity.

15.4.1 A committed Christianity

We do not need to spend much time on this first requirement for a new Christianity (in the place of nominal Christianity, cf. 15.3.4). The reason is not that it is not important, but simply that a Christian who is not really committed cannot be a real Christian.

While the nominal Christian has double focus spectacles (other gods plus the true God) and in this way robs the Gospel of its power, the committed Christian has single-focus spectacles. He focuses on the only true God to whom he/she fully commits him/herself. He rejects all double-heartedness and luke-warmness. He does not love with a divided soul (an impossibility, Matt. 6:24) but he loves "the Lord with *all* his heart, with *all* his soul and with *all* his mind" (Matt. 22:37 N.I.V.).

From such a Christian we can also expect that she or he will be a Christian who acts, one with whom words are accompanied by deeds. He/she will really follow Christ, whose deeds even preceded his words (cf. Acts 1:1).

15.4.2 An integral Christianity

This is our proposal to replace pietistic, dualistic, other-worldly, individualistic Christianity. Integral Christianity emphasises unity, wholeness, completeness - the whole Gospel for the whole of life!

From such a perspective we will read the same texts (on which pietism built its dualistic worldview – cf. 15.3.2 above) differently:

- The expression "kingdom of *heaven*" is only used in the Gospel of Matthew because he wrote his gospel to Jewish people who did not use the sacred word *God*, but always replaced it with *heaven*. The other gospels use the expression "kingdom of God".

- The origin of God's kingdom is not *from* this world, but in heaven (the dwelling place of God), but at the same time it is fully directed *at*, meant *for* this world.
- The "treasures of heaven" will be found here on earth - through hard work (Matt. 13:14). We will find them when we obey God's commandments.
- Paul's injunction to set our hearts on "things above" (Col. 3:1,2) should also not be contrasted with things from this earth *as such* but with *sinful* things from this world (cf. Col. 3:5-9).
- The Bible is clear that we should not separate us from the world *as such* but from the *sinful, worldly* world (1 John 2:15 and 16).

Pietism puts grace (salvation or the Gospel) *next to* or *against* nature (creation). Grace, however, is not against nature, but against *sin* in nature. Grace, therefore, does not *abolish* nature, but affirms it by *renewing* and *restoring* it.

Pietists may have the correct *focus* (the correct relationship with God), but because they downgrade creation, their *scope* is too narrow. Their missionary enthusiasm, for instance, is commendable but one-sided. The same great commission (Matt. 28:19, 20) includes (in verse 20) the command to teach the nations to *obey everything* God has commanded. We could thus view the great commission as a "republication" of God's original cultural mandate in Genesis (1:28; 2:15) which is not confined to the "spiritual realm" - it does not even mention church activities!

Only by acknowledging the *full* Gospel can it again become a *powerful* Gospel with impact on every area of life. Only then will we arrive at a really new, transformed Christianity after 2000 years during which it was paralysed by double-focus, dualistic worldviews of different kinds.

Two examples will illustrate the difference between a pietistic and an integral Christianity:

- Christians will no longer be *against* involvement in politics, they will also not be *both* politician *and* Christian, but try to practise an integral *Christian politics*, to be themselves integral *Christian politicians*.
- One will not have to choose between being a sportsman *and* a Christian, but try to be a Christian sportsman/woman. *In* your sporting activities you will serve the Lord and not only *prior* to it (by way of a prayer) or *afterwards* (by way of an evangelistic testimony).

15.4.3 An involved Christianity

This has to be the alternative for an escapist Christianity (cf. 14.3.3 above). As we have seen, this type of Christianity, like pietism, tries to escape creation with all of its problems.

It is true that the sinfulness in and around ourselves may often result in the feeling that we as Christians are strangers, refugees, pilgrims, aliens in this world. Such a *feeling* doesn't make it a *fact* that we are cosmic foreigners. As Christians we are not like Muslim pilgrims on their way to Mecca, Jewish wanderers on their way to the promised land or like contemporary secular nomads on their way to nowhere. We belong to this earth. This world *is* our home! We are not saved *out of* the earth, but *on* this earth for service *in* God's world.

If we want to arrive at a real new Christianity, we will have to reject the following false dilemma: "Either (try to) escape from the earth in order to serve God, or betray God in order to be present in the world." If one seeks Christ without the world or seeks the world without Christ, one is deceiving oneself. Our involvement in the world does not divide us from Christ and our Christianity does not separate us from the world. Belonging to Christ, we stand at the same time wholly in this world. The irony is that any attempt to withdraw or escape from the world will sooner or later be paid for with a sinful surrender to the world.

This is what we tried to explain at the beginning of this chapter (15.2) by way of a simple diagram: Real Christianity acknowledges a *simultaneous* relationship to God, his laws and creation.

Biblical revelation is very clear on this point:

- The Word of God is concerned about the *whole* of our daily lives: eating, drinking, defecation, the building of houses, care of land, animals and humans, war, taxes, commerce, poverty, wealth, marriage, family life, daily work, corruption, civil responsibilities and many more.
- God loved the world so much that He sent his only Son to it to become a human being and to die for its redemption.
- We are created from this earth, we live as earthlings and will one day be resurrected to live on a new earth.

- At the consummation God Himself will live with us on this earth (Rev. 21:1-4) and welcome the cultural treasures of centuries (Rev. 21:24, 26) - the result of his cultural mandate to work and take care of the earth (Genesis).

Our only conclusion could be that if God is so positive about his creation, it will be blatant ungratefulness if we try to escape it. This applies even more in difficult times: If we then try to escape the difficulties by hiding in our religion, it will be the most serious negligence of our responsibility as Christians.

15.4.4 An ecumenical Christianity

This should replace denominationalism (15.3.4). I do not have an ecclesiastical ecumenicity (the ideal of *one* church organisation) in mind, but the co-operation of Christians *outside* their churches.

The principal motivation is that the office of believer includes much more than his/her church membership. The office of prophet, priest and king is not confined to the church office of minister, deacon and elder. We therefore reject the abovementioned vocational pyramid (cf. 15.3.5) according to which offices more closely related to the church are considered to be higher and better, more acceptable to God.

Furthermore God's kingship is not confined to the church - He is also sovereign King *outside* the church!

Let me mention a few examples to illustrate how this idea can be realised:

- Establish workplace groups (in the office, factory, school, hospital, sports club) where Christians (from different denominations) can meet regularly to support each other and discuss issues arising from their daily work from a Biblical perspective.
- Organise study and action groups for Christians from the same profession (like doctors, ministers, academics, housewives, farmers etc.) to investigate a Christian perspective on their profession.
- Join alternative Christian organisations and institutions to build a Christian community and to penetrate secular culture in specific areas (e.g. a Christian political party, a Christian school or labour union).

We can no longer afford the "luxury" of narrow-minded denominationalism. Actions like the above will not make churches redundant, but will liberate us from ecclesiastical authoritarianism, arrogance, pride and indifference.

15.4.5 A kingdom Christianity

The wide perspective of service in God's all-encompassing kingdom should replace narrow institutionalism (15.3.5 above).

That the Gospel is not merely something personal or ecclesiastical, but the Gospel of the kingdom, is very clear from Paul's missionary method: (1) Real, personal conversion was a *sine qua non* - otherwise his evangelism was useless. (2) It was followed by church planting - otherwise his work would have been incomplete. (3) Then Paul (especially in his letters to the different congregations he established) taught the young Christians what life in God's kingdom is about. Life is religion. Everything should be done to honour and glorify the King (cf. Rom. 14:7, 8; 1 Cor. 10:31 and Col. 3:17, 23).

Unfortunately, most Christian churches stopped after Paul's second step. They became church-Christians, not kingdom-Christians. The result was fatal - an introverted church, only concerned about its own well-being, not able to see beyond its narrow walls. It reminds one of a sports team which exercises every day but never participates in a real match. Likewise we play "church-church" without ever becoming involved in the real struggle to advance God's kingdom.

It is very important to remember the following:

- The kingdom is more important than the church.
- The church exists to serve God's kingdom and not *vice versa*.
- The church should establish promising, liberating signs of God's kingdom of peace, justice, reconciliation.
- The church is the mobilisation point where "soldiers" for God's kingdom are trained.
- It is also a refreshing point on the first day of the week - to enable us to do kingdom work during the six other days of the week. In the church we should inhale the "oxygen" of the Gospel to "exhale" it in society at large.
- While the church has a limited task, the scope of the kingdom is as wide as creation itself.
- Finally: the church is something temporary (according to some Christian scholars there will be no church on the new earth), while God's kingdom, his reign has no end - it is everlasting.

15.4.6 A radical Christianity

A radical Christianity is what we need instead of secularism (explained under 15.3.6 above). "Radical" indicates something fundamental, going to the roots, changing life completely.

True, real Christianity is a pervasive, penetrating religion. Many people regard revolution as radical, because of its use of power and violence. In fact it is very superficial, because it may overthrow social structures, but it cannot change the hearts of human beings. Reformation (the Biblical model) starts from deep inside, a reborn, converted heart, in order also to change the structures which we create. Therefore reformation goes much deeper and changes life in a more comprehensive way.

The strategies which are employed are also different. Reformation does not destroy like acid, but prevents decay like salt; it does not burn like fire, but enlightens like a lamp; it does not destroy in violence but builds in love.

Lastly, radical Christianity implies the rejection of all kinds of pragmatic, opportunistic efforts to accommodate beliefs and ideologies which are clearly opposing the Gospel. Radical Christianity demands a definite choice for or against. We cannot serve two gods!

15.4.7 A normative Christianity

With a normative Christianity we want to challenge present-day subjectivism (15.3.7). Perhaps our greatest need in contemporary (South) Africa and many other countries world-wide is new, positive, Christian values to guide our societies. Without clear norms we are lost, because norms provide direction; they indicate limits; teach us the wisdom to be able to choose between good and bad and therefore indicate *how* we should serve God and our fellow humans in creation.

The urgency of this task is clear from the following two examples: (1) The Ten Commandments are *read* in most churches every Sunday, but their *implications* for the whole of life are often not explained. (2) The little normative guidance given is often very negative ("don't do this", "don't do that") while God's laws do not only *prohibit* (the negative), but also *command* (the positive).

We refer to our diagram (15.2) again, from which it is clear that we cannot have a relationship with *God* or serve Him in *creation* without obeying his *laws*. A Christianity which withdraws from creation falls victim to pietism. But a world (creation) which tries to stand on its own, in isolation from God's laws, falls victim to licence and self-will.

It is, for example, impossible to say "I have a beautiful relationship with God" without listening to his laws. It is also wrong to think that real Christianity is to *imitate* Christ instead of *following* Him by fully obeying God's commands - as Christ did through his entire life on earth.

The important question is *how* we will be able to find new Christian norms if it is not done in the subjectivistic way described (under 15.3.7) above. The answer is that our norms/values should be derived from God's laws. We have to positivise or concretise God's age-old commandments anew to guide us through the modern world.

God's laws are *explicitly* stated in many places in Scripture, like the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20), the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5-7) and the fruits of the Spirit as the result of obedience (Gal. 5:22). We also find God's laws *implicitly* in many Biblical histories as well as the life of Christ described in the four Gospels. All of these commandments are *summarised* in the basic, central, encompassing commandment of love (Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-40; cf. Matt. 7:12; Mark 12:21-28; Luke 10:25-28; Rom. 13:9; Gal.5:14; James 2:8) which should direct *all* of our activities. The *direction* of our lives is the most important, and not the fact that everything is neatly conceptualised, analytically valid.

The crux of the matter, however, is *how* love should guide us in the *different* areas of life - otherwise love remains something abstract and vague. It brings us to the crucial issue that the central love commandment should be *diversified* in order to arrive at *concrete, real* norms or values.

Different relationships require different norms. We should have a caring and enriching (not exploiting) relationship towards nature. Sharing, giving and serving should characterise our relationship to other human beings. Also life in the different societal relationships require different guiding norms, like fidelity in marriage, (public) justice in the state and truth in tertiary education. From the perspective of the different facets of being human, we may arrive at more norms: wellness (the physical), sensitivity (the emotional), validity (the analytical), clarity (language, communication), respect, kindness, humility (the social), stewardship and compassion (the economic), lawfulness, justice (the legal), integrity, trustworthiness, fidelity (the moral), beauty, harmony (the aesthetic), and godliness, devotion, praise and worship (the confessional).

Our norms and values cannot like God's laws, be eternal or universally applicable. They are human, fallible responses to God's laws, which should continuously be improved and applied to new times and situations. Many Christians confuse the

erstwhile *form* and the real *norm* when they, for instance, insist that today we should still obey Christ's command to his disciples to wash each other's feet. At the time of Christ (with dirt roads, open sandals, travelling by foot) it was a gesture of humble service. Today (tar roads, modern shoes, travelling by car) we should find a different way in which to obey the same command.

I elaborated more extensively on the need for a normative Christianity, because it is one of the keys to a real new, fully involved Christianity.

15.4.8 An African Christianity

Paul and other apostles struggled to liberate Christianity from its Jewish cultural captivity (e.g. all the laws devised by the Pharisees), only to be entangled in Western culture - for two millenia already. We have to advocate (apart from religious and structural plurality) also cultural plurality or diversity (cf. 10.3.2 and 10.3.4). We therefore have to replace Eurocentric Christianity with an African or an Asian Christianity.

Gradually we begin to realise the following:

- We can only really serve God *in* our own culture and not *outside* it, in the garb of a foreign culture. Only then can it touch us deeply in our hearts and at the same time be relevant for our everyday lives.
- At the same time we cannot *identify* the Gospel with (a specific) culture. The Gospel associates with a specific culture not to become its captive, but to transform and liberate it.
- This critical relationship between Gospel and culture is necessary because, apart from its own beauty and dignity (which should be enhanced), every culture also lacks beauty and dignity and therefore has to be transformed.
- In the past Christianity (from its Eurocentric orientation) focused mainly on the "dark" sides of African culture. It is now time to emphasise and rescue its good aspects from the danger of the steam-roller of Western, secular culture. If we are honest, we will acknowledge that many facets of traditional African culture are much closer - even identical - to the Gospel than contemporary, secularised Western culture.
- Both the "mainline" churches (from Western origin) and the "independent" African churches will, therefore, have to change. On the one hand, the mainline churches are far too uncritical about Western culture while, on the other hand, the independent

churches are too uncritical about traditional African culture. We could call both of them - not only the independents – syncretistic.

A crucial question to be answered is exactly *how* this transformation of (any) culture through the renewing power of the Gospel should be achieved. In the past many over-critical missionaries simply rejected African culture. Today the opposite is fashionable: in an uncritical way the Gospel is simply *added* or *accommodated* to traditional African culture.

My own viewpoint is influenced by a well-known Biblical metaphor which indicates gradual, organic change under guidance of the Word and Spirit. According to Romans 11:17-24 the shoot of a wild live tree (culture) is grafted on to a cultivated one (the Gospel). The "wild" branches share in the nourishment from the cultivated tree and bear good fruit.

This is exactly the opposite of the present popular accommodation theory, according to which the Gospel is *added to* traditional culture and religion: "You (the wild shoot) do not support the root (of the cultivated tree), but the root supports you" (Rom. 11:18). African culture - like the shoot - will, on the one hand, remain the same (we do not change from human beings to something else when we become Christians) but, on the other hand, it will also be transformed, changed, different. The same also has to happen in the case of the Western or any other culture.

15.4.9 A visionary Christianity

It was already indicated that, in the place of myopic Christianity, we need a Christian worldview, faithful to the Bible (cf. 15.3.9 above). Such a worldview could help us to get new answers to the many new problems of the new world of the 21st century – the old answers are no longer applicable. It should provide an anchor of certainty, a compass for direction, a map to orientate ourselves.

Of the many Christian worldviews available, to my mind the Reformational (or Transformational) one is the best equipped to take up this task. The reasons for my choice are the following:

- It is the only worldview *which can challenge the ten weaknesses (isms) of contemporary Christianity in a radical, fundamental way*. It is not a pietist, not an escapist etcetera, worldview ... It is not necessary to go through the whole list again. Let me therefore remove two possible misunderstandings: it is not denominational and not Eurocentric.

"Reformational" does not indicate the Reformed churches or their confessions. The word is not used here as an *ecclesiastical* or *dogmatic* indication, but in a *worldviewish* sense. A Reformational worldview, therefore, cannot be confined to specific (Reformed) churches. Christians of different denominations may adhere to/accept a Reformational or transformational worldview.

Furthermore, the Reformational worldview is not Eurocentric but Biblical. It is not captured in Western culture. From the publications of many of its adherents their critical stance towards secular Western culture is abundantly clear.

- The second reason for my choice of the Reformational worldview is that it is a *complete and, therefore, balanced worldview*. It is not theocentric (focused only on God), or nomocentric (concerned only about the law), or cosmocentric (attention only on creation) (cf. again the diagram under 15.2 above). It clearly indicates how we should serve *God* according to his *laws* in *creation*. For example: *In my love for my wife/husband I love God.* (Not: I love God and, *in addition*, I also love my wife).
- This brings me to the third reason for recommending a Reformational - transformational worldview. It is not dualistic, but an *integral, radical, holistic worldview*. It is the only worldview which enables the Christian to be *fully* involved in the world.
- In the fourth place it is a *positive worldview*: pro-God, pro-obedience (to his laws) and pro-creation. Therefore it can also be a dynamic worldview.
- It is, fifthly, not an unrealistic but a *very realistic worldview*, because it acknowledges the fallenness of the whole of creation and its need for redemption by God.
- Finally, this worldview *offers real hope* - for this world as well as a totally new creation when Christ returns.

We need this kind of worldview, because it inspires us to serve Someone far greater than ourselves.

15.4.10 A socially involved Christianity

This last characteristic of a new Christianity replaces syncretistic Christianity which - in its need for a philosophy of society - borrows uncritically from non-Biblical sources like utopian socialism (marxism) and liberal individualism (capitalism).

It is impossible to divorce the Christian religion - any religion - from social life as modern secularism wants us to believe. This is clear from the following three interrelated steps: (1) Every human being is religious by nature - even if he/she denies it -

and, therefore, serves either the true God or substitute idols. (2) You reflect in your own being and conduct the image of the God/god(s) you serve. (If you serve an idol, you can lose the image of the real God.) (3) You create societal relationships (marriage, family, church, state, business) according to your own concept of what it means to be human which, in turn, reflects the God/god(s) you serve. If we reverse the steps and start with (3), a specific society, it will therefore be possible to know more about (1), the idols served in a specific society. Which god(s) does our present (South) African society serve? I can only answer the question negatively: often not the God of the Bible.

This answer provides enough reason to look for an integral Christian perspective on how society should be structured. Such a philosophy of society is available in the Reformational tradition. It is called pluralism and is worth considering. Let me mention only a few salient features again:

- It provides a new conception about *daily work* as a divine calling or vocation. "Ordinary" work is a religious answer to God and we are accountable not only to man but also to God for the way in which we execute it.
- It provides a new perspective on *office, authority, power and responsibility*. These four concepts are always *limited* in nature and should be in the *service* of others and not for those in authority.
- It encourages *real democracy* and counteracts every form of totalitarianism, because each societal relationship has a unique task and is free in its own sphere.
- Also in societal life it encourages a *normative approach*.
- It offers a solution for *religious diversity* because, apart from structural pluralism, it also advocates confessional pluralism in the "public square". Apart from the rights of Muslims, Jews and Christians to have their own mosques, synagogues and churches, they may also establish their own confessional institutions, like Muslim, Jewish and Christian schools, political parties, etcetera.

15.5. Conclusion: hope for the future

We started this concluding chapter by stating the fact that we are living "between the times": an old and a new (South) Africa, modernism and postmodernism, the twentieth and twenty-first century. Such transitional times are characterised by confusion: the old certainties of the past are gone, we are often facing an uncertain future. We badly need something new to guide us into the future. If we can transform Christianity - so

that it is not part of the problem but part of the solution - it can provide the energy and inspiration to face the future.

I have tried to describe what such a new, transformed Christianity should look like. What I have proposed is actually nothing new. It is age-old Biblical truths which I have tried to recover.

The one message which, in retrospect, should not be forgotten, is the following: Other-worldly, world-flight Christianity cannot provide the correct focus and scope for Christianity. It is also self-deception, a hallucination.

Over against all kinds of escapism, our basic message of a transformational Christianity was the following:

- We are earthly beings.
- This world is our home.
- We can only serve God in his creation.
- Life is religion.
- Religion is natural like eating, drinking, making love etcetera - it is not "supernatural".
- To be religiously involved in society as Christians, should not be the exception, but the rule. Not to be involved in the world, is not love but worldliness; to be involved is not worldliness but love!

If this type of transformed Christianity can be realised, we need no longer be confused or uncertain about the future. We may live in this new millenium with new hope, new optimism. Such a new Christianity will bring about renewal in all areas of life. It may result in a decisive turn in the more than 2000 years history of Christianity. Christianity *can* be changed from passivity and increasing irrelevance into an active, fully relevant Good News for South Africa, Africa at large and elsewhere in the world.

Let us remember our Lord's summons: "... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, *and to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

And also Acts 14:47: "... this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles – this also applies to contemporary secularists (BJvdW) – that you may bring salvation *to the ends of the earth*'".

This is not an easy task. But if you try to obey His command, your life can really be meaningful: You have lived – and, if necessary, also died – for something (an eternal kingdom) and Someone (our heavenly Lord) much greater and important than yourself!

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Order directly from the author:

Prof. B.J. van der Walt
7 Bezuidenhout Street
Potchefstroom 2531
South Africa
E-mail: hannah@intekom.co.za
Telephone + Fax: 27-(0)18-2947691



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THE AUTHOR

Bennie van der Walt (born 1939, Th.B, D.Phil.) is a Christian philosopher-theologian. Until 1999 he was professor of philosophy and director of the Institute for Reformational Studies at the Potchefstroom University. Presently he is research fellow in the School of Philosophy of the North-West University in South Africa. He has written many articles and books and lectured all over the world.