

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Christian involvement in the public square

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PREFACE

What exactly is the role of religion in society and especially in a changing society? (We use the word *society* here in the broad sense of including politics, economics, culture, education etc.) This is a very difficult question to answer because: (1) religion is only one factor amongst many others in the case of societal change; (2) the impact of religion is dependent on a specific context, on the interaction of many other factors; (3) its influence or "weight" cannot be quantified in a scientific way, and (4) religion may help to structure society, but at the same time it is dependent on a specific socio-economic-political order. Stated differently: it could be both the cause as well as the result - or even both at the same time!

Because the relationship between religion and society is a very complex issue, there are many theories in this connection. The following four are important:

- *Religion has no influence, it does not make a difference in society*

Sigmund Freud already regarded religion as a neurotic phenomenon. Fortunately it is disintegrating and will soon disappear. The steamroller of modernisation and secularisation will finally run over it and turn all religions into dust.

This prognosis, however, was proved to be wrong. Today many age-old religions are revived and new cults appear on the scene.

- *Religion does have an impact on society, but it is a negative influence*

According to Karl Marx religion is simply an instrument of social control. It offers rewards in the hereafter to the oppressed - to keep them quiet in the here and now. The powerful uses it to maintain order, stability, the *status quo*. Religion has no formative, positive power - it is simply the product of economic relations in society.

Marx was correct that religion may sanction the *status quo*, even an unjust one. This, however, is only one side of the coin. Apart from proclaiming the present order to be sacrosanct, it can also protest against it, promote change and renewal, create a new order. Religion is not by nature socially impotent.

- *Religion only has a limited influence on personal and cultic life*

According to this viewpoint (for instance, amongst American sociologists) religion is not disappearing. Religious awareness is on the increase. Religion, however, has become something personal and individual. People limit it more and more to their private devotional life, family and church. Religion is an oasis of tranquillity in a world gone mad. It enables individuals to survive the harshness of public life. Religion is only one of many personal experiences, a facet of individual life, which cannot give direction and meaning to the whole of life anymore.

This kind of escapism is strengthened by contemporary liberal secularism which teaches that religion is something personal and should therefore be limited to the private sphere. It should not be allowed to play a role in public life which is by nature a secular, neutral domain.

Our reply in this case is, in the first place, that escapism is impossible. Even when one distances one's faith from society, it will continue to play a role in public life. An uninvolved attitude simply implies the acceptance of the *status quo!* In the second place, the idea of a neutral, secular "public square" is self-deception. Secularism is also a religion - and a very fanatic one! It does not permit any other religion on the market place.

- *Religion has an automatic beneficial influence on society*

This viewpoint is the opposite of the first one above, which believes that religion can have no real impact on society. It is also different from the second viewpoint which teaches that religion can only influence society negatively. We encounter this fourth perspective on religion amongst many Christians who naively believe that their religion will automatically benefit society.

Religion indicates the reaction of human beings to God's Word. Like all other human activities, it is consequently fallible and influenced by our sinful nature. We cannot rely on our religious activities! They may - even when sincere and adorned with Biblical texts - be an expression of disobedience to God. Also the Christian faith is not immune to distortions and, instead of a liberating Gospel, can become an oppressive ideology.

We experienced the last two viewpoints (religion limited to private life and something which has only beneficial results) during the apartheid era. On the one hand, we had exponents of the idea that religion and society should be *separated* from each other. Well-known slogans were: "Keep religion out of politics" or the reverse: "Don't mix politics and religion". Consequently churches and Christians focused their attention on "spiritual" issues - while millions of South Africans suffered physically and economically. Theologians fought against all kinds of doctrinal heresies - while the social injustices of apartheid was ignored. A good personal

moral life (no smoking, drinking, fornication etc.) was emphasised -while social ethics were neglected (political atrocities and murders were acceptable). Churches even went so far as to ostracise their members and suspend those ministers who could not believe in the separation of their Christian belief and socio-economic-political life.

On the other hand - what a tragic irony - in reality religion and politics were never separated, but thoroughly mixed. Apartheid was sanctioned with the Bible! The so-called *separation* between religion and politics in fact simply implied the tacit *acceptance* of the apartheid ideology. The Christian religion influenced South African politics and *vice versa* the Christian faith was determined - and distorted - by apartheid politics. Only today we realise how stone-blind we were not to see what was happening ...

We started with the question "What is the role of religion in society?" We now limit the question to the role of *Christian* religion. We, furthermore, ask the normative question: "What role *should* Christian religion have?" As indicated above, it is a simple fact - because religion is something central and fundamental in human life - that our religious commitment cannot be *separated* from any part of our lives. At the same time it became clear that the relationship between religion and society can be *wrongly* conceived. The urgent question is: How should they be *correctly* related?

The essays in the volume present an effort to answer this question, because we should not repeat the mistakes of the past. The solution, however, cannot be captured in a single, simple formula. Compliance with the following three requirements is needed to ensure that the Christian faith will in future be able to influence society:

- *We need God's Word.* Not our fallible, human, Christian religion, but the will of God should be our norm. How we understand the Christian faith should continuously be reformed in the light of God's infallible Word to ensure that Christianity does not deteriorate in a complacent ideology. The Christian religion should not in the first place be critical about society, but about itself! The yardstick for this introspection should be God's revelation in creation and in Scripture.
- *We need a Christian worldview.* To listen carefully to God's revelation does not imply that we quote some verses from the Bible. If, as Christians, we intend to be present in society in a prophetic way, a Christian worldview is a *sine qua non*. We need more than to be reborn Christians, faithful to the Gospel. We need the orientation, guidance, motivation and inspiration of a Biblically-founded worldview.

- *We need a Christian philosophy of society.* Most Christians still try to live in two kingdoms: the one spiritual, where the commands of Christ are supreme, and the other secular, of this world, where we have to make it on our own. Therefore many Christians believe that the Gospel provides spiritual clothing and footwear, but when it comes to socio-political "clothes" and "shoes", the Gospel cannot provide. Because we cannot go naked and barefoot, many Christians then buy socio-economic-political clothing at the secular market of ideas. They try to walk in shoes which do not really fit them as Christians!

I am convinced that the Word of God not only provides us with pyjamas for our personal, devotional life or a Sunday suit, but excellent, distinctively Christian overalls for labouring in society. What these "overalls" should look like is explained by a Christian societal philosophy.

This booklet builds upon my previous works which already elaborated on a Christian philosophy of society. They are *The Liberating Message; a Christian Worldview for Africa* (1994, reprinted in 1996 and 1998) and *Leaders with a Vision* (1995, reprints in 1997 and 1998). The different chapters were originally presented as papers on different occasions, but they are united by the one, central theme of "Christian religion and society".

sincerely hope that this small volume - like its two predecessors - will provide the necessary "clothing" to enable Christians in South Africa and elsewhere to appear on the market place with confidence, as well as the necessary "footwear" to be actively involved - in word and deed - in the public square.

Bennie van der Walt January, 1999

Chapter 1

A NEW CHRISTIANITY FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA

1. Introduction

What will happen if today all the Christian ministers, pastors and priests in South Africa 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) follow suit? Will our country come to a standstill? Or will we not even notice such a religious strike?

I ask this question to draw your attention to the small impact which Christians make on our 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.

The following metaphors were used by different authors to bring the point of our passivity and small influence - if any - clearly home:

- Do we 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 thermometer, 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 feel - and I agree - that we are far too passive. Passivity does not imply neutrality. It can be very dangerous, because it may condone a *bad* status quo. Christianity does not automatically have a beneficial influence on society, because Christianity itself can deteriorate, become an ideology.

In the past, Christianity played an important role in inspiring nations all over Africa - also in South Africa - for the liberation struggle. It activated our conscience to struggle *against* apartheid. This negative freedom *from* is an important aspect of real 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 country. 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 Christians are against abortion on demand, against pornography, homosexuality, etcetera. The reason is that to be an anti-Christian, is much easier than to be a pro-Christian, a positive Christian.

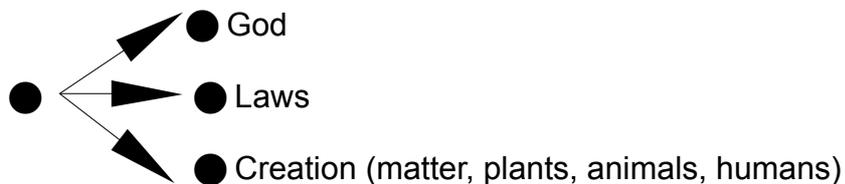
As indicated, the clock of history has moved away from the time of dismantling and destruction. It now indicates time for reconstruction. To use another metaphor: Like Israel we are already liberated from the oppression of Egypt. We have not yet reached the promised land, however. We are still wandering in the desert, learning - both as oppressors and oppressed - to be converted from slaves to a nation; learning not to accept everything passively 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 re-creation - 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 nation down at the most crucial juncture of its history!

This contribution will therefore, first, have an indepth look at ten reasons for the present sad state of Christianity in our country. Secondly, it will try to indicate what a new kind of real Biblical Christianity should look like.

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). Sh/e 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.

3. The weak points of present-day Christianity: ten isms

An ism indicates an overemphasis, an absolutisation and, therefore, distortion. I will mention ten isms which together are responsible for the meagre impact of Christianity on our 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.

3.1 *Nominalism*

Nominalism indicates that not all Christians are reborn, committed, but they only have the name of being Christians. It is 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 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 beliefs), (2) lukewarmness, (3) beautiful words without any confirming deeds and (4) no missionary zeal amongst its members. A nominal church is a dying church!

3.2 *Pietism*

This ism (from the Latin *pietas*) indicates a wrong kind of piety. In the white churches (including my own) 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 God 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 clearly indicated that our relationship to God is inseparable from creation.

When we analyse pietism from this perspective, we find the following characteristics (1) The Christian is the *individual* Christian, who should live a personal pious life. Also the church is a conglomerate of individual souls and faith is reserved for the inner chamber of the soul. (2) S/he 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 pietism. No clear guidelines are provided of how, as a Christian, one should be involved in society. (4) *Creation* plays an even more insignificant role in this type of Christianity, because of its one-sided focus **on** God - 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) with a dualistic view which looks more or less like this:

The basic 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 did 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 etcetera.

Many favourite 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 Totius’ poem *Die Wereld is ons waning 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), *et cetera*.

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 succeed. 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 be serving God!

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 our 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* for all the bad things we experience. Their attention is focused on these culprits to such an extent, that they 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 also 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 abundantly clear in the course of this essay, 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!

3.4 *Denominationalism*

We will only briefly mention some of its causes and consequences 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. 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 (we, and only we know the truth), 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.

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 or, stated differently, the church usurps the entire life of the Christian.

The basic mistake of institutionalism (or eccesiocentrism) 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 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. The ecclesiastical supervision or dominance often merely adds a thin layer of church varnish or a bit of icing on the cake!

3.6 *Secularism*

Two forms of this ism can be distinguished: (1) A radical 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”, 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 our Christian faith.

3.7 *Subjectivism*

This ism is very dangerous because its result 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 norm 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 (above) clearly distinguishes (without separating) God's laws from his creation. Everything in creation should "obey" specific laws posited 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 because no human being can live without direction. (As we have seen, a human being always has to choose between different possibilities.) Ways of doing it are, for example, the following:

- 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.
- Take recourse to an authority, like science.

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, science etcetera 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" acquires the status. In the world outside the church development, progress, competition, self-satisfaction etcetera 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!

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 during the last hundred years, 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, the mainline churches are still very Western!

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!

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 shortsightedness, 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. 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.

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 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 Biblical! 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 without a truly Christian philosophy of society based on what the Bible teaches about being *tumuli* it a (pluralist) view of society is available. If we do not make use of it we will —mu be engulfed in one or other form of totalitai i.tuism again ...

4. *En route to a new 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 social Christianity.

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). 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 (oneself plus God, 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 s/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)!

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) 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. 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 Christianity after 2 000 years during which it was paralysed by double-focus, dualistic worldviews of different kinds.

A few examples will illustrate the difference between pietistic and 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).

4.3 *An involved Christianity*

This has to be the alternative for an escapist Christianity. 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 essay 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 etcetera.
- God loved the world so much that He sent his only Son to it to become a human being and 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. 21:14) 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.

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.

4.4 *An ecumenical Christianity*

This should replace denominationalism. 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 above-mentioned vocational pyramid 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.
- 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 eliminate different churches, but will liberate us from ecclesiastical arrogance, pride and indifference.

4.5 *A kingdom Christianity*

The wide perspective of service in God's all-encompassing kingdom should replace narrow institutionalism.

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 six days.
- While the church has a limited task, the scope of the kingdom is as wide as creation itself.
- Finally: the church is something temporary (there will be no church on the new earth), while God's kingdom, his reign has no end - it is everlasting.

4.6 *A radical Christianity*

This is what we need instead of secularism. 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 radical 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, compromistic 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!

4.7 *A normative Christianity*

With a normative Christianity we want to challenge present-day subjectivism. Perhaps our greatest need in contemporary South Africa is new, positive, Christian values to guide our society into the future. With 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 *how* we should serve God and 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 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 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 to the unnatural. But a world (creation) which tries to stand on its own, in isolation from God's laws, falls victim to license 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* Christ 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 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 to guide us through the modern world, in a new South Africa.

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), the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) as the results of obedience. We 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 (Matt. 22:37-40, cf. Matt. 7:12) which should direct *all* of our activities.

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 we have to *diversify* the central love commandment 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 truth 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 (the confessional).

Our norms and values cannot be eternal or universally applicable, like God's laws. They are human, fallible responses to God's laws, which should continuously be improved and applied to new 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 norm!

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.

4.8 *An African Christianity*

Paul and other apostles struggled to liberate Christianity from its Jewish cultural captivity, only to be entangled in Western culture - for two millennia already! We have to replace this Eurocentric Christianity with an African 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, because only then can it touch us deeply in our hearts.
- 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 steamroller 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" 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 overcritical 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 1:17-24 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” (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. Exactly the same also has to happen in the case of the Western or any other culture!

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. Such a worldview could help us to get new answers to the many new problems of our new South Africa - 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 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. I will only remove two possible misunderstandings: it is not denominational and not Eurocentric.

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Firstly, “Reformational” does not indicate the Reformed churches or their confessions. It 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 worldview.

Secondly, 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). 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 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 dynamic, active.

- Finally it is not an unrealistic but a very realistic worldview, because it acknowledges the fallenness of the whole of creation.

We need this kind of worldview because it inspires us to serve Someone far greater than ourselves!

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 socialism and liberal individualism.

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 s/he 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. (3) You create societal relationships (marriage, family, church, state, business) according to your own concept of what it means to be a 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: 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. Unfortunately, I cannot elaborate even on its basic ideas. (See my *Leaders with a vision*, 1995.) Let me mention only a few salient features:

- It provides a new conception about *daily work as a* divinic 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.

5. Conclusion

We started 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 facing an uncertain future. We badly need something new to guide us into the future. If we can renew 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 Christianity should look like. What I have proposed is nothing new. It is age-old Biblical truths, overshadowed by centuries of dualistic, unbiblical “Christian” worldviews, which I have tried to recover.

The one message which, in retrospect, should not be forgotten, is the following: Otherworldly, 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 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 *et cetera* - 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 Christianity can be realised, we need no longer be confused or uncertain about the future. We may enter the new millennium with new hope, new optimism. Such a new Christianity will bring about renewal in all areas of life, result in a decisive turn in the more than 2 000 years history of Christianity and -above all - change it from passivity and increasing irrelevance into active, fully relevant Good News for South Africa!

Chapter 2

CHRISTIAN RELIGION AND SOCIETY

The heritage of Abraham Kuyper for (South) Africa

It should be kept in mind that this paper was not primarily written for the august audience, gathered at the university established by Kuyper to commemorate his famous Stone-Lectures. My paper is not at all intended to present a scholarly analysis and evaluation of a minute detail of Kuyper's heritage to be appreciated -and criticised - by Kuyper specialists. It is an elementary overview, presenting broad outlines. The reason is that it was originally written (in line with the subtheme of this conference: *The heritage of Abraham Kuyper on different continents* for ordinary (South) African Christians, battling to find direction. My modest contribution can therefore only be relevant as an example, a serious effort, to make the spiritual heritage of a great Dutchman understandable and relevant to an African audience - to inspire them with a new vision.[1] This is also the reason why we start with a brief introduction about the personality of this giant in the Reformational tradition.

1. Introduction: The man Abraham Kuyper[2]

Kuyper was not a perfect human being. His human relationships were not always of the very best. Also his spiritual heritage can easily be criticised: his love for generalisations, his speculative tendency, his preference for theoretical constructions and grand systems, sometimes misrepresenting history, his often weak exegesis of the Bible and finally, the clearly discernable influence of Biblically foreign ideas, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, on his own conception. As a fallible human being - like all of us - his ideas could even have had a detrimental influence.[3] At the moment, however, I want to emphasise five aspects which fascinate me about Kuyper.

- *He was a true reborn Christian.* Proof of this can be found in the great amount of devotional literature which he wrote.[4]⁴ He lived in an intimate relationship to his Saviour. But he also differed from most contemporary "reborn" Christians: His Saviour was also his Lord!

Therefore not only in his *heart* but also in his *mind* - in his *whole life* - he had to obey Him.

- *He was a visionary, a man of broad outlines and wide perspectives.* He knew the current secular ideas of his time and, over against them, formulated a personal, clearly distinguishable Christian worldview which enabled him to inspire his people.
- He was not only the architect of theories or interested in the history of ideas, but a *practical man, an activist in the good sense of the word.* Most of his publications were the result of his confrontation with the real, practical problems of his day - they were, so to speak, conceived from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.
- *He was a man of the people.* He did not elevate himself above the ordinary man in the street. On the contrary: he was their leader or general, who tried to understand, inspire, empower, motivate and mobilise them - to provide them with a vision worthy to live - or even to die - for.

What could the message of this great man be for contemporary (South Africa)?

In order to enable us to indicate Kuyper's relevance for today we first need to take a brief look at the present (South) African situation on the issue of Christian religion and society.

2. Christian religion and society in (South) Africa

Much has changed during the last century since Kuyper delivered his Stone-Lectures in 1898. On the one hand Europe and the US, about which Kuyper held such high expectations - in spite of a strong Evangelical influence - has become more or less secularised. On the other hand Africa, to a large extent has, as a result of the missionary endeavors of the past century, become a Christianised continent. What is the state of Christianity at the moment on the African continent? Three dominant types of Christianity can be distinguished. Briefly they can be typified as follows:

- *Ecclesiastism*

According to this viewpoint, Christianity is confined to converted individuals and the established churches. It lacks a broader kingdom vision. Society (politics, economics *etc.*) *can* only be Christian

when the church has “stamped” or “baptised” it - life is “churchified”.

- *Escapism*

This type of Christianity has, because of the current situation on the continent, a very strong appeal. Within the safe walls of one’s religion, one can escape from the harsh realities of the “outside” world. It manifests itself in different sub-types (often imported from overseas), like an apocalyptic Christianity or a gospel of prosperity. Also from this side we cannot expect either criticism of or Christian involvement in society at large.

- *Secularism*

In spite of the phenomenal growth of Christianity on the continent, African Christians today are schizophrenic. In their personal or church life they think and behave as Christians, but in politics, economics etcetera, they are lost. More and more African Christians don’t even see any relevance in the Gospel for the real and burning issues on our continent - they have capitulated to a secularist religion, living as if God does not exist or does not matter. One of the basic reasons for this is the lack of a clear, Biblically-inspired worldview and philosophy of society.

What we urgently need is a type of Christianity with both a *clear focus* (a personal relationship with the Lord through his Spirit) as well as a *wide scope* (the relevance of the Gospel for the whole of life). A socially “blind” Christianity will not survive for very long on our continent with its many and very serious social problems!

Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo (General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa) has the following to say in this regard: “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 of an over 50% Christian population on the average, but with little or no impact on the society.”^[5]

Therefore, one of the recommendations at the end of the same volume reads as follows: “We are convinced that an integrated 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 for the Christian mind, to think Christianly and to grasp the full

implications of the Lordship of Christ over all areas of life. This implies the necessity to develop a Christian anthropology and a Christian social philosophy.”[6]

An important part of Kuyper’s heritage to our continent is that he can provide in exactly this urgent need for a Christian social philosophy.

3. Kuyper’s Christian philosophy of society in brief

In the limited space at my disposal, I can only highlight the most relevant aspects of his philosophy of society. We will first provide an overview of his societal philosophy as such and conclude with its application to the problem of poverty, one of the major issues on the African Continent.

3.1 The broad perspective

In reply to the problems of African Christianity (where the state and the church are the most prominent institutions) Kuyper provides the following perspective: (1) The state should not dominate the church (as is the case in many African countries with secular constitutions); (2) the church should not dominate the state (as was the case in the old apartheid South Africa or is the case in the present Zambia); (3) each state should not have only one religion (the old *cuius regio eius religio* of Lutheran countries or the present divisions in the same African country between more or less exclusively Muslim or Christian states like Nigeria); (4) the state is not an a-religious or neutral (secular) institution (the viewpoint today in many countries all over the world); (5) but both the church and the state should be free institutions.

In summary: One should neither *identify* religion and society (including the state), nor *separate* them, but clearly *distinguish* between the two. We should furthermore remember that the Christian religion does not automatically have a beneficial influence on society - it can actively condone an unjust *status quo* or passively accept it.

To be able to understand and appreciate such a perspective on Christianity and society, we have to elaborate on Kuyper’s ideas. In the following seven “flashes” I mention a few foundation stones or building blocks of his societal philosophy.[7]

3.2 A different kind of secularisation

Especially in reaction to the secularism brought about by the French Revolution, Kuyper distinguished between two types of secularisation, the one positive and the other negative. Liberating the rest of society (marriage, family, school, business, politics) from the supervision and dominance of the church, be regarded as positive secularisation - a development which would also benefit present-day African Christianity. The second kind of secularisation, which teaches that society (the so-called “public square”) has nothing to do with religion, should, however, be rejected. This conclusion of a wrong kind of secularisation was drawn because Christianity previously narrowly confined religion to the church. Kuyper clearly held a different view about (the Christian) religion!

3.3 *A totally new view about religion*

Because it is impossible to understand Kuyper’s philosophy of society without a grasp of his view of religion, its essence will be briefly summarised[8] in the following points:

- *God is neither part of creation nor separated from creation.* According to Kuyper He is (ontologically speaking) totally different from his creation, but (religiously understood) intimately related to it. This is the exact obverse of what is believed in, for instance, traditional African religion.
- *Religion does not exist for the sake of man, but for the sake of glorifying God.* Religion also produces a blessing for the human being, but its final purpose or its essence is not anthropocentric. If this is the case, it will only thrive in times of hardship amongst the poor and oppressed (as in contemporary Africa) or die in days of prosperity and comfort with the advancement of science and technology (as is the case in the present Western world). The real essence of Christian religion is the adoration of God. It is first to seek his kingdom (Matt. 6:33).
- *Religion should not operate mediately but directly.* Kuyper never gets tired of emphasising that real Christian religion excludes every human mediatorship of so-called holier ministers, priests, ancestors etcetera. No (wo)man can appear before God on behalf of another. Every human being must appear personally, live *coram Deo*, in the presence of God. This can only happen if Christians are liberated from all kinds of human intermediaries - another urgent need in contemporary Africa!

- *Religion is not partial, but has to embrace the whole of our being and life.* Kuyper distinguishes between the (1) organ, (2) sphere and (3) circle of religion. He indicates (1) that, as the *organ* of religion, we should obey and serve God as *total* human beings - intellectually, emotionally and ethically; (2) the *sphere* of religion is not confined to the secret chamber of an individual heart and (3) the *circle* of religion cannot be limited to the church, but is all-encompassing including agriculture, commerce, politics, the arts, sciences etcetera. Life - the whole of life - is religion! One cannot shut oneself up in the church and abandon the rest of the world to its fate.
- *Religion is not normal but abnormal.* Because the whole of our (religious) life is fallen in sin, it needs redemption from God and our own continuous conversion in the light of God's revelation.

To summarise Kuyper's perspective on religion: It is not about what we *do* (e.g. cultic performances) or feel or think, but about what we *are*, that we are captivated in the grip of the true God or an idol, determining the *direction* of our whole life. Man does not control God, but our deepest commitment towards God or idols drive or determine our entire lives. Prayer, preaching, singing and confession in church is *part* of our Christian religion, but can never be identified with the *whole* of Christian religion which includes everything we think and do.

Therefore Kuyper's Christian worldview includes not only a relationship to God, but also *to* one's fellowman and -woman as well as a relationship to the rest of creation. The prominent types of Christianity on the African continent today (cf. above), should clearly be corrected according to his viewpoint: ecclesiastism, escapism and secularism does not really offer any worthwhile perspective for Christian involvement in society.

3.4 *A novel conception about vocation*

During the Middle Ages - and amongst many African Christians today - divine calling was reserved for special people (ministers, priests and prophets) with a holy office in the church. Luther and Calvin, however, did not hesitate to regard ordinary jobs as divine vocations. As the word *vocation* indicates, God calls human beings in *every area* of life to serve Him and their fellow humans. Kuyper especially followed Calvin, who added an institutional dimension to the idea of calling: God calls us to be *office bearers in a specific societal relationship*. With their authority and power they have to answer to their calling by serving God and the members of the particular relationship.

He has given the ordinances according to which our social life should be conducted!

Kuyper did not work out a complete social philosophy. But he laid the foundations to enable his followers to look for specific norms applicable to the different societal relationships. One way of doing it, is to assume that God's central commandment of love (Matt. 22:37-40) should acquire different forms in different spheres of society like truth in marriage, (loving) care in family life, brotherly/sisterly love in the church, stewardship in business and justice in the government of the state.

3.6 *A third alternative (pluralism) for both communalism (socialism) and individualism (liberalism)*

With all these preceding building blocks Kuyper erected a distinct Christian philosophy of society, which he himself indicated as the doctrine of sphere sovereignty. We may call it (structural) pluralism.

3.5 *God's ordinances apply to the whole of society*

According to Kuyper the ordinances for social life are, in the first place, *real*. He rejects the liberalistic idea that social norms or values are merely the result of a human contract or agreement which can be obeyed or not. Neither can he accept the idea that they are confined to the ecclesiastical area or that church laws should apply in other areas of life.

Secondly, these societal ordinances are *divine*, originating from God Himself. In their variety of vocations, officers do not *invent* the norms according to which their calling should be conducted. They merely *respond* to God's ordinances.

In the third place, Kuyper explains with many examples how God in creation reveals his ordinances for the different spheres of life. The Scriptures, as spectacles, assist our weakened (sinful) eyes to "see" them correctly again. This does not imply that we can, for example, use the Bible as a textbook for politics at all times and in every place. It also does not mean that we as Christians have a perfect grasp of the different norms for societal life. Our understanding of these norms should continuously be purified and reformed.

In spite of all this, Kuyper firmly believed that justice, for instance, is not made by the statesman, but that it exists before any notion of justice crossed his mind - he can only approximate it in his formulation of laws. God is the absolute Sovereign;

Its basic idea is that of the *equality* between the different societal relationships. The state, church, family, business, academy etcetera does not exist one *below the* other, but *next to each* other. Not one of them is *subordinated* to another, either holier (e.g. the church) or more powerful (e.g. the state), sphere of society.

In each of these societal structures human beings exert and fulfil their specific divine calling in the presence of God, the Absolute Sovereign. (Sphere sovereignty is, according to Kuyper, a second kind of sovereignty, delegated by God.)

Kuyper used the metaphor of the cogs of a machine to explain his pluralism: each cog turns around its own axle in its own sphere. If it leaves its place, interfering in the place of another cog, the whole machine (society) will be bogged down. On the other hand the different cogs in the machine are not isolated from each other: In order for the “machine” of society to run properly, they have to interact with each other.

I add two other metaphors of my own to explain the uniqueness of Kuyper’s contribution in comparison with two dominant secular views of society, viz. socialism and individualism. Socialism can be compared to the segments of an orange: the “peel” of the orange indicates the state as the encompassing social structure, while the different segments symbolise the family, church, school etcetera as its subordinate parts or subdivisions. Individualism can be visualised

with different atoms coming together and by mutual agreement establishing a societal relationship like the state, church or whatever.

It will be difficult to overemphasise this part of Kuyper’s heritage today. In the past first the church was absolutised. Then the state was idolised. (Compare Kwame Nkrumah’s dictum: “First seek the political kingdom ...”.) Today, amidst economic globalisation, neo-capitalist economics dictates to every other area of life - Mammon is our latest god!

3.7 *A solution for the problems posed by a mutireligious society*

The last liberating perspective through which Kuyper could bring more light to my continent today, is what I would like to call his confessional pluralism.

He believed that one's religious commitment should be allowed to express itself in the different societal relationships outside one's private life and the church. The Muslim *as well as* the Christian should, for example, have the right to establish distinctively Muslim or Christian schools. Only in this way could freedom of religion be guaranteed.

A century ago Kuyper warned that so-called secular organisations and institutions are not neutral or a-religious - they made a deliberate choice against the true God! According to his insights Kuyper therefore took the lead in establishing across the spectrum of society a great variety of Christian organisations and institutions. He, however, never regarded them as the safe, closed hiding places (bunkers or ghetto's) of a group of introverted and complacent Christians. On the contrary, he viewed separate Christian organisations more as "strongholds" or "military bases" from which the spiritual battle for the soul of his nation should be fought. Far from separating themselves from societal life, they should be serviceable, giving guidance and direction to society. Not in the sense of missionary church organisations, but emphasising how their *specific tasks in* different areas of life should be conducted according to the *specific norms* applicable.[\[9\]](#)

We cannot deal with the history of Christian organisations in The Netherlands after Kuyper's lifetime.[\[10\]](#)¹⁰ At the moment his ideas about distinct Christian institutions/organisations are more popular outside his home country, for instance in the US, than inside. Why should we not give Kuyper's idea of dealing with religious pluralism in contemporary societies in Africa at least a chance?

4. Conclusion: The application of Kuyper's philosophy of society to the problem of poverty - eight points to ponder

In conclusion I want to indicate how Kuyper applied his ideas on society to a real and concrete problem of his time, viz. that of poverty. Also in this respect there can be no doubt about its relevance to (South) Africa. Poverty is *the* problem of our continent and it will become an even

more serious issue in future. In South Africa on one side of a street we see the palaces of millionaires - behind high walls and with security guards. On the other side of the same road are the squatter shacks of dirt poor people. On the one side people die of overconsumption and on the other side of malnutrition and starvation. And the dividing line is no longer simply between black and white ... Actually poverty is a world problem today: the rich northern countries over against the poor southern parts of the globe.

Kuyper clearly indicated more than a hundred years ago (1891)[\[11\]](#) that the question of poverty cannot simply be viewed as a material, economic or even social problem. Basically it is a religious issue (dealing with our religious *focus*). It is also an issue to be dealt with from a distinctive Christian philosophy of society (our religious *scope*).

Because of lack of space I can only provide the following flashes from his book, leaving it to my readers to apply it to their own situations.

- *We can learn a great deal from Christ's own example.* Jesus flattered no one, neither rich nor poor. Among us humans, we find either flattery of the rich and scorn for the poor, or sympathy for the poor and abuse of the rich. Christ convicted *both* of their sins. But when He corrected the poor, He did it so much more gently. And when He called the rich to account, He used much harsher words.
- *Cynical pessimism will be of no avail.* In this regard Kuyper gives a new exposition of an often misinterpreted text such as John 12:8 ("You will always have the poor with you"). These words, according to him, give no *rule* but merely state a *fact*. There is no implication that it *should* be that way, that we should accept it like a *norm!* Jesus' statement also includes a reproach: In life as you are patterning it - like Judas - you will always have the poor!
- *Charity is not yet Christian love.* Simply giving away money should not be the way in which to tackle the roots of the problem. Charity may also be offensive to the poor themselves. We have to give ourselves - not something of ourselves -like our time, expertise etcetera to be able to solve this huge problem.

- *Poverty is a structural evil, needing the fundamental restructuring of all the different societal relationships in order to be solved.* Long before all kinds of liberation theologies, Kuyper realised how greed and a hunger for power can become incarnated in the structures of society. No superficial remedies (emergency aid etc.) will therefore be able to solve the problem of poverty. What we need, is a penetrating “architectonic critique” of society.

Both socialism and capitalism will not be capable of offering a deep enough diagnosis and therapy. Liberalism in its neo-capitalist garb - the present saviour following the demise of socialism - builds its ideas on the first part of the slogan of the French Revolution, (liberty), but the laws of the animal world prevail in the jungle of Mammon: the stronger devours the weaker. Socialism, emphasising the other two motives of the French Revolution (*equality* and *fraternity*) also builds society on sand. Its result is terrible inequality and, instead of the promised fraternity, a modern performance of the fable of the wolf and the lamb!

- *In spite of the fact that the state is not the same as society at large, it still has an important task in preventing or alleviating poverty.* It can promulgate just laws about property, labour, pensions etcetera. Kuyper, however, rejects both the capitalist and socialist views about property - their ideas about *absolute* private or *absolute* communal property are not founded on Scripture.

- *Even just laws by the state will not completely solve the problem* because the rich and powerful will always be able to twist or evade them to their own advantage. He clearly realised that *juridical* justice (e.g. a bill of human rights) cannot be identified with *Biblical* justice!

- *The poor cannot wait until the day we have completed the restoration of society.* They will not live long enough to see that day. In the meantime they have to eat and drink! This is the reason why Kuyper made an appeal to the deepest Christian motives and values of his audience. The rich should not be driven by fear for the loss of their possessions. They should be motivated by the higher ideal of love and compassion for their suffering brothers and sisters. Even the poorest is not merely a “creature” in wretched circumstances, but of the same human nature. If (s)he has to rely on state relief, it is a blot on the honour of our Saviour!

At the end of the previous century, amidst a “violently disturbed society”, Kuyper concluded his opening speech at the First Christian Social Conference with a prayer. At the end of the twentieth

century we in South Africa, “a violently disturbed society” because of the large gap between rich and poor, may use the same prayer only substituting *the Netherlands* with *(South) Africa*: “ ... may it never be so• Niole to say of the Christians of (South) Africa that through our fault, through the Luke-warmness of our Christian faith, whether in higher or lower classes, the rescue of our society was hindered and the blessing of the God of our fathers forfeited.”^[12]

Notes

[1] To encourage my fellow-Africans - the majority of whom will not be able to read Dutch - I have also confined my references mainly to the few available English sources (translations of his works) as well as English publications about Kuyper.

[2] For biographical details about Kuyper, the following are available in English: M.R. Langley, *The practice of political spirituality; episodes from the public career of Abraham Kuyper, 1879-1918* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1984); L Praamsma, *Let Christ be King; reflections on the life and times of Abraham Kuyper* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1985) and F. vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper; a biography* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1978).

[3] The original text of my paper also included a section on the possible negative influence of Kuyper’s ideas on South Africa, viz. its apartheid ideology. Because of limited space and the fact that other South African speakers discussed this part of his heritage in detail, it was omitted from this article.

[4] An example is his *Near unto God; daily meditations adapted for contemporary Christians*, translated and edited by J. Schaap (Grand Rapids. Michigan: C.R.C. Publications, 1997).

[5] T. Adeyemo ed. *A Christian mind in a changing Africa* (Nairobi : Association of Evangelicals in Africa, 1993), 4

[6] op cit, 227

[7] For this section the following original sources were consulted: A. Kuyper, *Calvinism; six Stone-Lectures*, introduced by H. Beets (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1931) as well as the relevant parts of his translated works from J.D. Bratt ed. *Abraham Kuyper; a centennial reader* (Grand Rapids. Michigan : Eerdmans, 1998) and J.W. Skillen and R.M. McCarthy, *Political order and the plural structure of society* (Atlanta, Georgia : Scholars, 1991). Additional, valuable information is provided by P.S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview; Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan : Eerdmans, 1998).

[8] See Kuyper’s second Stone-Lecture.

[9] For an excellent exposition on the idea of Christian organisations, see J. Klapwijk, ‘Christelijke organisaties in verlegenheid’ in: R. van Woudenberg & S. Griffioen, *Transformationele filosofie* (Kampen : Kok, 1995, 91-123).

[10] See H.E.S. Woldring, *De Christen-democratie* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1996) for a detailed history of Christian political activity in the Netherlands following Kuyper.

[11] A Kuyper, *The problem of poverty; a translation of the opening address at the First Christian Social Congress in The Netherlands, November 9, 1891*, edited and introduced by J.W. Skillen (Grand Rapids, Michigan : Baker, 1991).

[12] Op cit., p. 79

Chapter 3

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

About ten years ago - during the heat of the anti-apartheid struggle - we hotly debated the issue of human rights. Since then (in 1996) South Africans accepted a new Constitution with a Bill of Rights (chapter 2), describing our basic rights. While, about a decade ago, we still struggled to have our human rights *acknowledged*, today we have to learn to *live* according to these rights. No wonder that many of the questions surrounding the idea of fundamental rights are still alive today.

One such a question is: What is the relationship between our Christian faith and human rights? Stated differently: How will a Christian perspective on human rights look? We will try to answer this important question under the following five headings: (1) Human rights are important, but can be over-emphasised. (2) Christian reactions to human rights. (3) The Bible on human rights. (4) Human rights in a Christian philosophy of society. (5) We need more than fundamental rights for a just society.

1. Introduction: Human rights are important, but can be overemphasised

The formulation and application of human rights are without any doubt of great importance. Because the rights of all South African citizens during the time of apartheid (up to 1994) were not constitutionally guaranteed, gross human rights violations as those uncovered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission during the last three years (1996 - 1998) - about 31 000 serious cases - could occur.

At the same time one should never be so naive as to believe that the mere acceptance of a Bill of Rights will instantly bring about paradise on earth. Fifty years after the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10th Dec. 1948), we today have serious violations of human rights

in more than a hundred countries worldwide. While at the beginning there were high expectations and optimism about human rights, today disappointment and even cynicism reigns. During the past few years, we have experienced, also in our own country, that a Bill of Rights is only the *beginning* and definitely *not enough* to prevent robbery, rape and murder. To prevent any unrealistic expectations about human rights (as an introduction) a few negative results of human rights wrongly conceived or absolutised are mentioned.

The basic aim of human rights is to regulate relationships between individuals, between individuals and societal relationships and between different societal relationships. The irony of a wrong overemphasis on rights is that the opposite is achieved: instead of resulting in a strong societal bonding, society disintegrates! (Pile reason is not merely the difficulty of implementing human rights, but also some inherent weaknesses of current human rights theories.) A few of the dangers are the following:

- *Human rights may divide or atomise society.* Current human rights ideas mainly emphasise *individual* rights. In spite of this, their ultimate aim is to ensure a good, strong and stable society. Excessive emphasis on individual rights, however, may stimulate the natural (sinful) human tendency towards a kind of individualism according to which one is only concerned about one's own rights and not about those of others or one's duties towards them. Their rights are simply (mis)used to safeguard one's own interests!
- *Human rights may result in a legalistic attitude.* In this case everything is expected from the correct laws, the efficient functioning of the legal system and the enforcement of a legal code. We need laws for everything and every conflict should be solved according to the letter of the law. People sue each other for the most trivial issues! If one is right from a legal point of view, nothing more is required. Retaliation and punishment becomes much more important than restitution or reconciliation. Many Biblical values like fairness, tolerance, solidarity, compassion - love towards one's neighbour - are no longer considered to be virtues. Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) teaches something totally different than the 50-50 ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth") principle of retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42). One has to be willing not to give one's tunic but also one's cloak, not only to go one but two miles! A society without a legal code is terrible. But a society based on nothing else than legal rights is less than worthy of man!
- *Human rights may result in a situation where personal and communal responsibilities are*

neglected. Rights can become so important that mutual responsibilities and duties become of less importance. However, as we will soon see, rights and responsibilities are - like the two sides of the same coin - inseparable, they always go together. A one-sided emphasis on rights distorts this mutual dependence and cannot bring about a healthy social life.

This is unacceptable because secularism is also a religion. Why should it be the only religion which has a say in the "public square", excluding all other religions?

- *Human rights may, instead of advancing justice, undermine it.* When human rights are considered to be more fundamental than justice, their roles are reversed. Justice is the real foundation for a healthy political-social order. The enforcement of human rights is only one of the expressions of the ideal of justice (the basic norm for state and politics) and not the reverse. The development of human rights should, therefore, always be subordinated to the basic norm of justice. When human rights are overemphasised, they will not advance justice, but hamper and obstruct it.

- *Human rights (in its secular forms) offer no sure foundation.* One of the most basic problems in human rights theories is its ultimate foundation. In the secular traditions reference is made to natural law, the will, reason or conscience. The human being is therefore regarded as the ultimate ground or norm. God and his laws do not fulfil this role any more. The consequence is subjectivism. The human subject, which has to obey God's commandments, is elevated to the status of law - man becomes a law unto himself! Because of man's limited insight and his sinful nature, there will, however, be little chance that people will agree on the demands of human reason or conscience. Without the sure Ground or Anchor of justice, (God and his laws), we build our ideas about human rights on sand!

Our own Constitution grounds its Bill of Rights on the following three key concepts: dignity, equality and freedom. What exactly is meant with these concepts? *Dignity* is extremely difficult to define. As far as *equality* is concerned, the important question is: equality of what? Opportunity, access, action, results? Also *freedom* can have different meanings. Is it freedom *from* (negative), freedom *of* (positive) or both? It becomes even more difficult when one asks about the relationship between these three concepts. Which of them is the most important? Dignity? Does the one not often exclude the other? Equality may, for instance, imply the restriction of freedom or *vice versa!* (We will return to this issue.)

These six examples illustrated the fact that, no matter how important they may be, human rights should never be overestimated, because then - as in the case of everything which is absolutised - they will miss their goal.

- *Human rights may promote the process of secularisation.* The modern, secular idea is that the individual has the right of freedom of religion in his/her private (devotional and church) life. Religion should, however, be kept out of public life, because it clashes with the rights of individuals from other religions.

2. Different reactions of Christians to human rights

History testifies to an ambivalent attitude of Christianity towards human rights. On the one hand research has revealed that Christians from the beginning not only protected certain basic rights, but also has had a significant influence on modern (secular) human rights theories. On the other hand the church has also contributed towards and participated in the violation of rights. Well-known examples are: the crusades against the pagans, the inquisition, the religious wars amongst the Christians themselves and colonial imperialism and slave trade condoned by prominent Christians. We, however, skip this sad and bloody history to concentrate on the attitude of contemporary Christians. Two viewpoints can be mentioned.

2.1 Uncritical acceptance

This viewpoint simply accepts secular human rights theories without even trying to criticise or adapt them. It sees no *difference* but *continuity* between contemporary human right philosophies and the Word of God: what we have today was taught in Scripture 2 000 years ago!

Such uncritical accommodation, according to my mind, is unacceptable. As we will see, the Bible not only teaches *more*, but it also *corrects* certain aspects of present-day human rights ideas.

2.2 Overcritical rejection

According to this position, Christians cannot learn anything from the contemporary human rights discussions. To substantiate their viewpoint, arguments such as the following are advanced:

- *Human beings do not have rights but only duties.* It is true that over against God we can never have any rights, but (because of his grace) only privileges. But in relation to each other, human beings definitely have rights. Human rights could be described as a way of protecting the privileges (like life, freedom of religion etc.) which God granted us.
- *Sinful human beings (all of us) cannot have rights.* It is argued that because the human race participated in Adam and Eve's sinful nature, it has forfeited its claim to any rights. The opposite, however, is true: Precisely because human beings are sinful and by nature inclined to violate the rights of others, human rights are important and should be protected.
- *Human rights will simply be used for one's personal advantage.* Our answer to this objection is that, instead of rejecting human rights *as such*, we should rather guard against their *abuse*.
- *We do not find the concept in the Bible.* Against this fundamentalistic, Biblistic argument (which wants to prove everything from Bible texts) our reply is that thousands of modern concepts (like television, computers, pension funds, speed limits, antibiotics) will indeed not appear in the Scriptures written more than 2 000 years ago. This, however, does not imply that the Bible has nothing to say, provides no guidance on this issue (see 3. below).
- *Human beings have no rights but only duties and responsibilities.* We want to deal with this argument in more detail. Many people in South Africa still do not see their rights correctly, they underestimate their value. If something comes their way, they are grateful. If not, they are disappointed but not angry. because they think they don't deserve it. They don't realise that a right is not a gift or charity and that we should claim our rights.

This wrong viewpoint is often the result of an incorrect, hierarchical view of authority. According to this view only God has rights, but He delegates them to bearers of authority in the different societal relationships like family, church and state. Those subjected to their authority (children, members and citizens), however, do not have any rights, but only duties and responsibilities towards their "superiors". History bears witness to the detrimental consequences of this viewpoint: Many in a position of authority became authoritarian because of their supposed absolute, divine rights and suppressed, exploited and ill-treated their "subjects".

We cannot isolate rights from responsibilities. Where there is a right, there usually is a counterpart obligation, and vice versa. If there were no rights, there would not be obligations either!

Obligations not acknowledged, lead to *guilt* from my side. But we cannot stop at this point, because rights not acknowledged lead to a *wrong* done to someone else. We, therefore, cannot simply stick to our own obligations or duties, ignoring the rights of others. Then we only see our own guilt or neglect and do not realise that we may also have wronged someone else! If we do not acknowledge the existence of rights, it will furthermore not make any sense to confess that you have wronged a fellow human being and to ask for his/her forgiveness.

In the case of obligations not fulfilled, *disappointment* will be an appropriate reaction. But in the case of rights not respected, *anger* is more appropriate. In the case of obligations, *appealing* or even *begging* is appropriate - like asking for a gift or charity. But rights are not gifts. We can therefore *claim them* or *insist* that they are acknowledged.

An example from my own daily experience would be the case of a test written by two students. The one got 75% (a distinction) and the other 40% (he failed). Student A (75%) has the right to pass with distinction. I have the obligation to let him pass. He doesn't have to beg me to do so! If I don't do it, he will not be disappointed, but angry. I would be guilty, because I am not fulfilling my obligation. And I would also be wronging the student. Student B (40%), however, has no right or claim to pass the test and I have no obligation to let him pass. He may be disappointed (in himself) but not angry (with me). I would not be guilty of doing any wrong unto him.

3. The Bible on human rights

When we try to use the Bible as a textbook to solve all kinds of technical problems about human rights, we are expecting *too much*. We should, however, also not expect *too little* from the Word of God. We may look for broad perspectives to guide and direct our thinking about human rights. The real question is not *whether the Bible* has something to say in this regard, but *what* it has to tell us, *how* it approaches the issue.

3.1 *Rights are not based on human qualities.* The first perspective to be derived from the

Scriptures is that human rights are not dependent on any kind of human quality.

The above clearly indicated that human rights according to the Bible should not be grounded on the wrong foundations. We can now have a look at the positive, the real foundations for human rights from a Biblical perspective.

3.2 *The relationship towards God*

The first thing that always strikes one about the Bible, is that it does not discuss anything apart from its relationship to God. Neither does it view the human being separated from his community of fellow humans.

This is very clearly stated in the central and fundamental commandment of love given in the Old Testament and repeatedly stated in the New Testament: I have to love God with my whole being and I have to love my neighbour as myself (Matt. 22:37-39). Love of myself, my fellow humans and God are inseparably bound together. *In my* love for my neighbour - not *apart from* it - I love God!

- According to the Bible, human rights is not a matter of *charity* or *goodwill*, but because of God's command they are (viewed from my side) a duty or obligation to others, and (viewed from their perspective) they are rightful claims. The Bible, for example, clearly teaches that the poor have a *right* to be helped - they do not simply depend on the *kindness* of others!
- According to the Bible human rights should also not be made dependent on what humans *deserve*. If this was the case, we could easily argue that some people do not merit any rights! When the Bible declares that God maintains the rights of the poor, widows, orphans and many other people, He is not passing judgement upon their superior moral virtues or piety in comparison to others. Here again, their rights are based on God's will alone. We may, therefore, never argue: "Poor people have only themselves to blame. I am not responsible for their poverty. They do not deserve to be assisted." According to God they have - in spite of their failure - the right to be helped.
- Human rights, according to the Bible, can also not be viewed as a kind of *inalienable quality* which resides in mankind (so-called inherent or innate rights view), for instance his dignity or nobility. I therefore also disagree with Christian scholars who argue that the basis for human

rights is man's creation in the image of God. The deepest, only sure foundation of human rights is God's demands.

Both the idea that people should be helped because they are (inherently) good or should not be helped, because their conduct is not good, is a wrong idea. An example of the latter is Cain, the murderer of his own brother. God gave him a sign (Gen. 4:15, 16) to prevent that he would be killed in revenge!

We may call this the three-dimensional perspective of the Bible. On the one hand: (1) my responsibility to others, (2) their responsibility toward me, (3) both subsumed under our joint responsibility to God. On the other hand: (1) my rightful claims upon the other, (2) his/her rightful claims upon me and (3) both of which are subservient to God's comprehensive claim upon us all. We are under an obligation to God for all our fellow human beings!

3.3 *Human rights are realised in social relationships*

Already from the preceding it will be clear that human rights are not something individual or abstract. They are realised in concrete, human relationships. This occurs in inter-individual relationships but especially in the different societal relationships. In every societal relationship (family, school, church, factory, state) we have people in authority and those members who have to obey their authority (parents and children, teachers and pupils, church council and members, management and workers, government and citizens). Those subjected to authority do not only have *responsibilities* towards the authorities, but also *rights* - to safeguard them against the abuse of authority. The Bible provides many guidelines in this regard.

3.4 *God's laws, ordinances and decrees presuppose rights*

Apart from the core commandment of love, we also have the Ten Commandments in the Bible, which are an elaboration (into ten different commandments) of this fundamental law of love. And apart from that, we find many statutes, ordinances and decrees of the Lord in the Bible. If we read them carefully, we will realise that almost every aspect of God's law has a bearing upon one or other human rights issue. "You shall not steal" indicates the right to property. "You shall not murder" presupposes the right to life, and "You shall not commit adultery", aims at ensuring the right of a sound marriage.

And it not only applies to books such as Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The prophets (like Amos and Isaiah) can be regarded as a running commentary on almost any conceivable human rights violation. Even a book like the Psalms, usually regarded as a devotional book, is full of human rights perspectives. It, for instance, emphasises the close relationship between acknowledging the rights of especially vulnerable people and the blessings or punishments of God. If people's rights are not acknowledged, there will be no peace in the land!

In the New Testament this line is simply continued: The righteousness of man is related to the righteousness of God. Because of our righteousness in Christ, we are called to make things right in the world. Special attention is again given to vulnerable and marginalised groups like the poor, shepherds, sinners, women, Samaritans, pagans and other outsiders. What God justly lays upon one person as a command of love towards another, is simultaneously a right which the latter holds over the former! God loves us and wants us to flourish and, as human beings, to experience freely and fully what being human really means. An important way to achieve this, is good human relationships. And no such relationships can be achieved in the absence of both duties and rights.

3.5 *We are only stewards, not owners*

The Bible does not adhere to the modern individualistic idea of ownership. It clearly teaches right from the beginning (Gen. 1:26) that man is not the owner of God's creation but only his representative, trustee or steward. As a trustee, he has the *right* to enjoy everything God created. But he also has an *obligation* to use it according to God's directions. And one of God's directions is that one should share it with others who - for one or other reason - have less or are in need. Failure of the wealthy to share with the poor, is not a lack of *charity* but *theft* from the poor. They have a *right* to eat and live. We do not *possess* our own wealth, but *received* it from God and God demands from us to share it with the poor.

3.6 *Obligations and rights are inseparable*

Our *obligations* are grounded in the *will* of God. Our *rights* are grounded in the *love* of God. *Obligations* consist of some good *required* of us. *Rights* consist of some good to which we are *entitled*. The dark side of obligations (when they are not fulfilled) is *guilt*. The dark side of rights (when they are not acknowledged) is that someone is *wronged*. The Bible says over and over that the wealthy and powerful are *guilty* because they did not fulfil their *duties* and that the poor, widows, orphans etcetera are *wronged* because their *rights* were not acknowledged. We always encounter both parties: those who do wrong and those who are wronged.

Toward those who do wrong, God's response is *anger*, because to cause harm and injury to a fellow human being is to wrong Himself, to be disobedient to his law, to violate his love. But towards the wronged, God's response is sympathy, compassion. God's solution for the wrongdoers is that they should repent and confess in order to be forgiven by those they have harmed and for God to wash away their sins. His solution for those who were wounded is giving them his love, binding their wounds, consoling their hearts.

3.7 *Dignity, equality and freedom*

Let us, in conclusion, say something from a Biblical perspective, about the three central values mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 2 of our South African Constitution: dignity, equality and freedom.

- We can, in the first place, learn something about the *dignity or worth* of people from the Bible. Rights do not merely have to do with specific goods a person should be able to enjoy, like food, clothes, a shelter, job etcetera. We should also acknowledge and respect each other's worth as a person. And especially the worth of a poor person, a disabled person, a woman, a black or a white person. From the fact of the unity of the human race (Acts 17:26) we also deduce the equality between humans and their (equal) dignity. Because our human dignity is not dependent on ourselves but given by God, we should never measure the value of a human being according to his/her race, achievements, intelligence, sex, faith, social position, wealth etcetera.

One of the reasons why in the old apartheid era black people were deprived of all kinds of rights (good medical care, education, housing, jobs etc.) was exactly because of the failure from the side of the whites to fully acknowledge their worth or dignity. One of our major tasks in the new South Africa will therefore be to follow God by accepting that all of us should be valued and respected, not for what we *have*, but for what we *are* - his creatures, his image.

Let me add that the worth of a person is closely connected to what (s)he values. A few examples are his/her language, culture and religion. When our Constitution emphasises human dignity and intends to protect it in a Bill of Rights, it should be consistent and also protect these aspects of being human. To mention only one example: The worth and therefore rights of (cultural) groups should also be acknowledged. (We will return to this issue.)

- In the second place, the Bible can also teach us something about *equality*. God and Jesus Christ treated all human beings equally. Christ flattered no one, neither the rich nor the poor. Among us humans, we find either flattery of the rich and scorn for the poor, or sympathy with the poor and abuse of the rich. Christ convicted *both* of their sins. But - and here we also have to follow his example - when he corrected the poor, He did it much more gently. But when He called the rich to account, He used much harsher words.

In a similar way the state in its task of executing justice should not treat some as if they are less equal than others. But at the same time it should keep in mind that the disadvantaged and marginalised need special protection and encouragement.

- In the third place, something about *freedom*. The Bible emphasises that, as sinful human beings, we are not free at all. We are the captives of the devil, too willing to do what is wrong, not willing to fulfil our obligations or to respect others' rights. We have to be freed *from* this terrible bondage (the negative) in order to be free *towards* obeying God's commandments (the positive). Real freedom, therefore, is not to be free from all restrictions - even from God's law -but it is *responsible* freedom. It is a freedom which enables us to respond obediently to God again in caring for our fellow human beings.

* * *

The Bible has helped us on our way to understanding what fundamental rights are about. Especially that we should never isolate our discussions about human rights from God or from our Christian religion. Rights are founded in his love, duties in his will. He is the only absolute, secure Basis and not the shifting sand of the human intellect or will.

At the same time we cannot stop at this point. We have to fit what we have learned from God's Word into the total perspective of a Christian view of society, a Reformational social philosophy. Rights, we have seen, are not abstract, individual qualities, but they have to be realised in concrete societal relationships.

4. Fundamental rights in a Christian philosophy of society

A right cannot be inherent in a single *individual*, because it always implies a *relationship* between more than one person. Rights exist in social life. To understand rights, we therefore need a philosophy of society. And to understand rights as Christians, we need a Christian societal philosophy. (I therefore disagree with theologians who are of the opinion that we can construct a complete Christian theory of human rights on the idea of man as the image of God.)

But before we provide the outlines of such a societal philosophy, let us first have a look at two other dominant views of society. This will help us to see how a Christian philosophy of society differs as well as underlines its importance. They are: individualism and socialism.

They both originated in secular Western thought which believes in the autonomy of the human being. They, however, became each other's rivals because the one (individualism) overemphasises the individual, while the other (socialism or collectivism) puts too much emphasis on society. Individualism emphasises *popular* sovereignty, while socialism emphasises *state* sovereignty.

- According to individualists, free and sovereign persons are the fundamental units or building blocks of society. Associations of people are but the aggregates of self-interested and self-determining individuals who band together to secure their concerns and shared purposes. Of primary importance is the safeguarding of the inalienable rights of free human beings. The state is a constant threat to individual liberties and can only derive its power from the consent of the individual citizens (popular sovereignty).
- Collectivists, on the other hand, want to consolidate authority and power in a single institutional megastructure (usually the state), making its interests and prerogatives the ultimate standard for the rest of life. All rights are vested in an all-encompassing institution and individual persons and other associations are regarded as its sub-units, which have to support it. Human rights are absorbed into - or suppressed by - this totalitarian super-institution. Human beings and other associations do not *have* rights, but the state may *grant* them specific rights.

The interesting fact is that not only collectivism or socialism, but also individualism finally ends up with a totalitarian, bureaucratic state. While the collectivists move towards a totalitarian state quite directly, smoothly and consistently without any reservations, individualists do so more indirectly, reluctantly, hesitantly and with great reservations.

Neither individualism nor collectivism is therefore a true friend of human rights. The former is usually long on personal liberties, but short on justice and equity for all. Collectivism, on the other hand, is generally long in regimentation and order and the equal distribution of goods, but notoriously short on safeguarding human freedom and responsibility. Stated in a simplified way: individualism one-sidedly emphasises individual *rights*, while collectivism is as one-sided, because it stresses communal *duties*.

A Christian should be critical in both directions. On the one hand he should reject liberal individualism with its emphasis on individual rights and punishment or retaliation in the case of a transgression. On the other hand he also rejects the one-sided emphasis only on duties towards society and restitution in case it is violated. According to the Bible the human being is neither an individual nor a communal *being* - he only has an individual as well as a social *aspect*.

Over against both individualism (liberalism) and socialism (or collectivism) we propose a third, alternative view on society: pluralism. This societal philosophy cannot be elaborated in detail in this paper, but I will try to explain its basic characteristics. According to its name (*pluralism*), it emphasises diversity, as will become clear in the exposition below.

4.1 *God is the absolute Sovereign*

God is, according to the Bible, neither part of creation, nor separated from his creation. He is (ontologically speaking) totally different from his creation, but (religiously understood) intimately related to it. He furthermore has absolute authority over every single part - humans included - of creation. He has the *right* to rule over everything and He does so by way of his laws.

4.2 *Our whole life is religion, service unto God*

Man does not exist for himself, but for the sake of serving and glorifying God. Every human being lives directly in the presence of God. Real Christian religion excludes every human mediatorship (like ministers, priests, saints, ancestors) between man and God. No (wo)man can appear before God on behalf of another. We have only one Mediator!

Religion is also not partial, but has to embrace the whole of our being and life. We have to serve God with our emotions, intellect, our bodies, our whole being. We cannot confine religion to the secret chambers of our individual hearts or limit it to our devotional or church life. Life as such -

the whole of life - is religion, including our economical, political, cultural, social, artistic and academic activities.

To serve God in everything we think and do is our most fundamental *obligation* or *duty*. It is also our most basic *right*. Nobody - not even the state - can either grant it or take it away from us. It cannot grant it, because it is not "owned" by the state. And if it takes it away, we will be forced to obey God rather than man (cf. Acts 4:19 and 5:29).

4.3 *We should also serve God in public life*

Because the Bible teaches that every human being lives and works in the direct presence of God, we cannot accept the idea that the church supervises and dominates all Christian activities. We believe in the freedom, not only of the individual, but also of different societal relationships like marriage, family, school, church and state to be in the direct, immediate service of God.

Liberation from ecclesiastical domination, however, does not imply that the rest of (public) life should be regarded as secular, having nothing to do with our relationship to God. The unique characteristic of a real Christian philosophy of society is that we can and should serve God in business, politics, arts, science etcetera. We reject secularism, which teaches that religion is something private and personal and should not play any role in society at large. We also unmask it as a religion itself - sometimes a very intolerant religion. We claim our most fundamental *right* (see previous point), viz. to be God's servants not merely in our private lives, but also in the "public square".

4.4 *A variety of vocations*

In line with the preceding, the Bible also teaches that God calls human beings in different areas of life to serve Him and their fellow humans. It is wrong to reserve divine calling for special people like ministers, priests and prophets with so-called holy offices. Ordinary jobs are divine callings or vocations from God! *All* of us, no matter what kind of work we do, are in full-time service of the Lord. And the service we render is not less holy than that of a minister of religion. Because my job is a calling from God, it is both an *obligation* and a *right* I have.

4.5 *A variety of social relationships*

Our calling by God does not only have an individual, personal side, but also an institutional one.

God calls us to be office bearers in a specific societal relationship. Let us first say something about societal relationships before we return to the idea of office in these relationships.

Usually people only distinguish between the state and civic society. A pluralistic view of society rejects this distinction of social life into only two compartments. Social life is much richer, revealing greater diversity.

God instituted marriage (Gen. 2:24) and family life (Gen. 1:28 - the command to multiply). Later on in the history of Israel we learn about forms of worship (the church) and government (the state). Today we have schools, colleges, universities, businesses and many other institutions and organisations. One word to indicate all of them is "societal relationships".

According to a Christian philosophy of society human beings are equal in God's eyes (see above). Also the different human vocations (jobs) are equal, the one is not more important or holier than the other (see above). The same also applies to societal relationships: the state, church, family, academy etcetera does not exist, the one *below* the other, but *next to* each other. Not one of them is *subordinate* to another, either a "holier" (e.g. the church) or more powerful (e.g. the state) sphere of society. There is no super- or mega-structure like the state which encompasses all the others, reducing them to mere sub-units of the state. A Christian philosophy of society is basically an anti-totalitarian viewpoint!

The basic idea of the *equality* between the different societal relationships, also implies that the one should not *interfere* in the internal affairs of the other. Rights are not confined to individual persons. The school, church, college or sports club etcetera has the *right* to manage its own affairs. No one is permitted to prescribe to the other how its specific, unique calling should be fulfilled.

In the Old Testament already, we can see how God strictly protects the sovereignty of each sphere. Priests should not rule and kings should not usurp the role of the priests. When king Saul did not obey this divine rule and, instead of waiting on Samuel to offer to the Lord, did it himself, God punished him severely.

But apart from a *right* to manage its own affairs, every societal relationship also has a *duty* to work together with all the others. It is like the cogs in a machine: every one of them turn around its

own axle in its own sphere, but simultaneously they interact - otherwise the machine will not work. Likewise society cannot function properly if there is no co-operation between all the different societal relationships. (As will be explained later on, the state has a special role in this connection.)

4.5 *A variety of offices*

Let us now take a look at the offices to which God calls us in these different societal relationships. In every societal relationship we should distinguish between those in office or those who have authority and those who have to follow, who have to obey the authority. (The state, for example, consists of government and citizens. We should not identify the state with either government or citizens.)

In the Old Testament already we read about priests, judges, kings and prophets. Today society has diversified: One can be a parent, the other *can* be the headmistress of a school, manager of a factory, member of the local or provincial government, chairman of the board of a church etcetera.

Office is basically a mandate of God. And its aim is to be of *service* to the members of a specific societal relationship (Luke 22:24-27). Not many people in office today realise how important this is. They think an office implies status, they dominate the members of the relationship and even enrich themselves! Stated differently: they regard it as a *right* to be used for their own or their group's benefit and not as a *duty* to serve others.

How should they serve the members of the specific societal relationship? We have indicated above that God calls all of us to serve Him and our fellow humans. He, however, does not call all of us to the same task. He calls the one to be a teacher, another to be an accountant, the manager of a firm *et cetera*.

Also in the case of office bearers of societal relationships there is a great variety. Every one of them has the task to protect and promote the *specific* calling of the specific societal relationship. The headmaster of a school should, for instance, see to it that his teachers teach and his pupils are educated. He has to empower all the members of the school for their task. To enable him to do so, he should maintain the necessary order and fight against wrong tendencies.

Office, however, is not only a mandate from God. In everyday life of a democratic society the members of a specific societal relationship elect and confirm their officers. We, for instance, have to elect a government for our own country every five years.

This is a basic *right in a* democratic society. But it is also a great *responsibility*. We should not simply vote for or elect the most charismatic, most influential, most senior, most popular or powerful person, but the one who has both leadership qualities (who knows what the specific calling of the specific societal relationship is) as well as the willingness to serve the members of the specific relationship to enable them to fulfil their specific divine calling.

4.7. *A variety of norms*

How should a person in office know what the specific task is of the societal relationship in which s/he holds an office? (This requirement also pertains to the members of the societal relationship - because God is calling them to a specific task.)

The answer is to be found in God's central norm mentioned earlier in this chapter: All of us have to love God and our fellow humans. The two sides of the command are closely related. I, for example, do not love God and *in addition* I also love my wife. No, by loving my wife, I also love God!

But we love God in a variety of ways. As the rays of sunlight are broken up into all the beautiful colours of the rainbow, so love is also diversified into different forms of love in the various societal relationships: troth in marriage, care in the family, brotherly/sisterly love in the church, stewardship in business and justice in the state. These are the norms which indicate the various tasks of the different societal relationships and which also distinguish the one from the other.

A person with an office in government should know that the norm and task of the state is (public) justice, otherwise s/he will not be able to fulfil her/his office. And the citizens who select people in government, should also make sure that those they vote for, will govern justly and not misuse their positions.

Here again we see that justice - not rights - is more fundamental. Justice is not "brought about" by the statesman, but it existed (as God's norm) *before* any notion of justice crossed his mind - he can only approximate it in a Bill of Rights or in the formulation of laws.

Justice is, furthermore, not the opposite of love - as many people think - but is the specific way in which we have to love God and our fellow humans in politics. Politics is not something "dirty" or "secular", having nothing to do with our Christian religion. Also in political life we are responding, answering to God's basic love commandment!

4.8 *A variety of authorities*

Up to this point we discussed different callings, different societal relationships, different offices and different norms (forms of love). The next important perspective is that also the authority which office bearers in the various societal relationships have to execute are different in kind. We should distinguish between political authority (the government of a state), parental authority (at home), kerugmatic authority (of the preacher in the church), the pedagogical authority (of the teacher at school), vocational authority (of the manager of a factory) and the technical authority (of the research leader in a laboratory). Every one of us knows intuitively that parental authority will miss its aim when conducted in a military style. Or that the confessional authority of the church cannot be executed with powerful means as in the state - no one should be forced to believe!

Authority is a *right*, the right to render service (not to dominate - see above) in a specific societal relationship. From the preceding it will, however, be clear that such a right cannot be identical in all the societal relationships. Authority rights are different. It is therefore wrong to ask *how much* authority government should have. You should rather ask *what kind* of authority it should have. The answer to this question will also determine what kind of right it has.

The point to be emphasised is this: Because authority *differs* (according to the different spheres of life in which it is executed), it is always *limited* authority. No societal relationship (like the state) and no human being - not even the state president - has absolute or total authority, but always specific and therefore limited authority.

Authority (the right to serve the members of a specific societal relationship) should not be inherited or based on seniority or popularity. To have authority, one needs *insight* into the norm for the specific societal relationship (see above). To be a member of parliament, one has to know what justice entails. Being a good parent, requires insight into the norms for nurturing children etcetera. Apart from insight, real authority also requires *obedience* to the God-given norms for the specific relationship.

According to the same norms, those who have to obey, have the *right* to judge the authority of their "superiors". Many people may *legally* be in a position of authority, but in reality they cannot execute their task, because of a lack of insight and obedience. (You will be able to mention examples from your own experience!)

Rights take place in the mutual determination of authority and the concomitant responsibility. An important characteristic of a Christian philosophy of society is, therefore, the place it accords to accountability and responsibility. The fact that I do not only have rights, but also responsibilities or obligations as a person, also applies to different societal relationships. Those in authority do not only have the *right* to an office. They have the *obligation* to serve the members of that societal relationship. And more: they are *accountable* to the members as to how they conduct their servant leadership.

In a Christian philosophy of society we may not even stop at this point. Because we have indicated (above) that God calls us to an office and that we live directly in his presence, we have to add that, in the final instance, *every* office bearer (not only those of churches or other Christian organisations) is responsible towards God Himself. He is the final Judge of how we used or misused our right of authority! To wield authority is serious business indeed!

4.9 A variety of powers

To be able to execute your authority, you need power. Power is the *ability* to render service in a specific societal relationship. Like fire, power can be misused and therefore be dangerous. But, like fire, it can also be used correctly. (Power *as such* is not something wrong.) The powers given to people in authority should therefore not be *too great*, because it may lead to domination and tyranny. But they should also not be *too slight*, because then it will not be possible for a person in office to fulfil his/her task. Power should always be used constructively - even in the case of the use of violence by the state. It should be a means to empower the members of the societal relationship to fulfil their calling.

The nature of the power in the various societal relationships will also be different. (State power is, for instance, totally different from the power of the church.) For this reason power - like authority - should always be *limited*. Many societal relationships, therefore, have one or other kind of constitution which specifies the power and responsibilities of their office bearers.

This is especially important in the case of the state which has coercive powers. The constitution of a state is the basic law of a country. And the aim of the constitution is to describe the relationship between government and citizens. It describes, on the one hand, the authority and power of government. On the other hand, it guarantees the rights of the citizens against abuse by government. (According to a pluralist view of society both government and citizens have rights. It differs from individualism with its heavy emphasis on the rights of the citizens, as well as collectivism which teaches that only the government [identified with the state] has rights.)

Because the state is the only societal relationship which includes all the people in a country, it has a very important task to fulfil in society. As already indicated, it does not have an all-encompassing task. We cannot expect - as many people still do - almost everything from the state. Its guiding norm is public justice or justice for every citizen. It has to treat all of its subjects equally and fairly. It has to see to it that every human being has the right (freedom) to fulfil her/his divine calling. One citizen should therefore not be permitted to dominate or exploit another. The same applies to societal relationships. Both persons and societal relationships should therefore enjoy their rights and also fulfil their mutual obligations.

The state is not the proprietor of every kind of right and therefore does not create or grant them. But it has to acknowledge, protect and promote the great variety of rights. Because, in real life situations, different rights are often in competition or even in conflict with each other, the state (through its government) will have to carefully weigh and balance the different rights claims. We could call the state the fly-wheel or balancing wheel of society. It does not create all the rights, but it has to balance them. And the way in which it balances them, will determine whether justice is achieved. This is not an easy task at all, but that is what public justice entails!

4.10 *A variety of religions*

What we have described thus far may be called *structural pluralism*: how the different societal structures in society should relate to each other and how rights fit into the whole picture. Such a philosophy of society offers real liberating perspectives for a just society.

But does it also offer a solution in the case of a multireligious society such as that of South Africa? As we have seen, a secular constitution (like our own) permits private religious freedom, but it tends to limit religious expressions in public.

Against this I have already strongly argued that it is one of the most fundamental rights of a Christian to serve the Lord - not only in his/her private life but also in public. Am I then advocating a "Christian state" (sometimes called a theocracy)? No, I am in favour of confessional pluralism.

Confessional pluralism means that one's religious commitment should be allowed (or has the right) to express itself in the different societal relationships outside one's private life and one's church. But the right to do so should not be confined to Christians only, but should be granted to each and every religious group.

For example, the Muslim as well as the Christian should have the right to establish distinctively Muslim or Christian schools. Only in this way could freedom of religion be guaranteed. Such "private" schools should also qualify for state subsidy. (Muslims and Christians are also taxpayers!) I regard it as a violation of a most fundamental religious right when the state forces people to send their children to so-called secular schools. "Secular" schools are not neutral or a-religious -they are the expressions of a (religious) choice not to serve God!

4.11 *A variety of cultures*

For people adhering to an individualistic philosophy of society, individuals are all that exist. Groups are really just collections of individuals. All supposed group rights therefore ultimately boil down to individual rights. The way to protect the culture of the Tswana or Afrikaans people, will be by protecting the language rights of the individual Tswana or Afrikaner!

Not only our own, but hardly any country in the world is culturally homogeneous. And cultural groups are not just private arrangements or purely incidental matters. They are important not only for personal but also for public life. Sometimes group claims and demands are simply a cover for racist goals. However, the dangers of group identity should not drive governments to futile repressive attempts to eradicate it from human rights issues. It needs to be recognised and accommodated in political life and to be dealt with responsibly and justly. Numerous examples could be mentioned from different parts of the world where governments recognised group rights. We cannot assume that all group claims are necessarily valid. But neither can we accept the view that no group right is valid. Group rights may sometimes even override individual rights and should therefore be given priority.

5. Conclusion: more than human rights are needed

Special emphasis was given on the preceding pages to the following:

- Christians cannot simply accommodate or reject contemporary human rights theories.
- The Bible can help us to become more critical about current human rights ideas.
- A Christian view on human rights cannot be separated from our basic Christian convictions. The acknowledgment and promotion of human rights is part of our Christian calling!
- A complete perspective on human rights cannot be built upon a single Biblical concept (like man as the image of God) or a few Bible texts, but should be developed as part of a Christian philosophy of society.
- Because there are so many societal relationships in which human beings live together, there is a great variety of rights. Chapter 2 of our South African Constitution (about twenty pages!) is an example of how government and citizens should relate to each other in the state. Rights and duties should, however, not be confined to the political sphere.

Because of this variety of rights, it is not easy to define exactly what a right is. My preliminary effort is the following: In a situation of competing claims, human rights are the recognition of the freedom which must be allowed and the resources which must be protected for each person and each societal relationship to fulfil his/her/their divine calling in a responsible way.

In conclusion we return to our introduction which emphasised that human rights are not the *alpha* and *omega* to obtain a just society. They can be overemphasised with detrimental results. We now want to add that for a good society we need even more than rights.

Justice is *inter alia* a question of the codification and acknowledgment of rights. Fundamental rights, however, are only a *starting point*, merely a *minimum requirement* for a just society. The Biblical idea of justice requires more. According to the Bible justice is not simply to see to it that each of us receives his/her due. Justice is also not merely an economic, social or political concept. It includes a deep religious dimension.

The following example will explain. A bill of rights may create equal opportunities in South Africa. But it will still not be possible for everyone to utilise these opportunities because of a lack of, for instance, education or finances. It will, therefore, be wrong to argue that we today have the same

rights and if people do not make use of them, they only have themselves to blame. In this way we will be hiding behind a bill of rights to commit injustice!

Something like affirmative action is necessary to address the matter. Affirmative action cannot simply be rejected as the substitution of one injustice by another or as reverse discrimination.

Real, genuine justice often requires that one should be willing to sacrifice one's own rights and privileges on behalf of others - the many poor and weak people without a house, job or education. This requires - like God's Word - a greater emphasis on duties than on rights. Christian people living according to Christ's sermon on the mount, will also not in the first place stand up for their own rights, but for the rights of others!

When we are assured of fundamental rights, it should be applauded. But the Bible indicates an even higher, better way: that of love (1 Cor. 12:11 ff.)!

To live according to such a lofty ideal will not be easy. At the same time it is a way in which we, as Christians, can provide a unique example and can erect small signposts of God's kingdom of justice and peace. We can also be assured of God's blessing: "Whoever holds on to his life (read: rights) will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39).

* * *

Possible questions to be discussed

1. What are human rights? List some of them.
2. Do we respect the human rights mentioned in chapter 2 of our Constitution (1996)? Which of all the mentioned rights in this chapter do you regard as the most important? Why?
3. Do Christian churches respect human rights? In which ways has the Christian church been negligent in its duty to champion the cause of human rights, sided with injustice or assumed the role of the oppressor?
4. What should Christians do to promote human rights in South Africa?
5. What categories of people deserve our special attention in redressing human rights violations?
6. Do you regard women also as one of these categories? Why?
7. Why can victims of the violations of human rights not enforce their rights? Because of ignorance, lack of education, poverty, oppression by the elite, corruption in the legal system?
8. Would you regard bribery and corruption as violations of rights? Why not?
9. Why is discrimination and intimidation wrong? What should be done?
10. Do prisoners - including murderers - also have rights?
11. Where will you go for help in case your rights have been violated?
12. How is the right to life violated in South Africa? Would you include abortion on demand? And careless driving?
13. Analyse the death sentence and its consequences. What should, in your opinion, the Christian position be on this issue? Should we accept long prison terms or - in the light of the increasing violence in our country - return to the death sentence?
14. What can you as individual do to promote human rights awareness in your community?
15. How will you challenge human rights violations in your community?
16. Do you think the church should be more vocal in condemning human rights violations and injustice?
17. Review the Ten Commandments, especially commandments five to ten. What affirmative direction is indicated in the rights implied in these negatively stated commandments?
18. Read Leviticus 19 verses 1-18 and 32-35 and Deuteronomy 15 verses 11-15. What specific rights are mentioned? Whose rights are they? What obligations do these rights imply? Whose obligations are they? Why should they be honoured?
19. Comment on the following statement: "The vast majority of poor people are experiencing

poverty because of their own laziness. We who work hard and are responsible, cannot be held responsible for their failings."

20. Mention one text from the prophets (Hosea, Amos or Isaiah) dealing with the violation of the rights of the poor. Why does the Lord reject the religious activities (fasting) of Israel according to Isaiah 58:6-7?
21. Read Matthew 5 verses 43-48 or Luke 6 verses 27-29. Do you have enemies? Do you love them? What rights do our enemies have that we must acknowledge?
22. Choose one societal relationship (e.g. marriage, family, schools, business, church, soccer club etc.) and develop a list of what rights, freedoms and responsibilities are appropriate for that specific societal relationship.
23. Are obligations *always* based on specific rights? Or are they much broader?
24. Do we always have to claim our rights? Can you mention instances where we should rather forgo a right?
25. Why does a Bill of Rights not automatically guarantee justice?
26. How do you think human rights can be overemphasised or misused?
27. Are human rights in agreement with traditional African culture (its emphasis on mutual responsibilities and restitution instead of retribution)?
28. Why is socialism/collectivism not a friend of human rights?
29. Why is human dignity of paramount importance in our new Constitution?
30. Would you regard our new South African Constitution as secular? Is it possible to have anything else in a multi-religious country? What should the Christian's attitude be towards a secular constitution?
31. When electing a person for a position of office and authority, what will your criteria be?
32. Is it really possible for a leader to be a servant?
33. Do you think we need private Christian schools? How will they be different from secular state schools?
34. Can you agree that group rights should be defended?

* * *

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Chapter 4

THE TYRANNY OF THE NEO-CAPITALIST FREE MARKET ECONOMY

In the grip of the most dangerous ideology?

While we in South Africa are not yet fully liberated from the old apartheid ideology, we at the moment uncritically accept a new - perhaps even more dangerous - ideology: the neo-capitalist free market ideology! Another proof of the fact that we - because we are religious by nature - cannot live without ideological captivity?

This essay will concentrate on the following four main points in order to help us to recognise this ideology and its dangers: (1) why it is an ideology and a very dangerous one; (2) an analysis of its main characteristics (3) why it is unacceptable from a Biblical perspective, and (4) how it should be challenged.

1. A dangerous ideology

First a brief word about ideology.

1.1 The nature of an ideology

Every human being lives - consciously or unaware of the fact - according to a worldview. A worldview could briefly be described as the network of beliefs which shape the way in which we view and experience reality. (Cf. Van der Walt, 1994:39-55 for a detailed analysis.)

The danger with any worldview - also a Christian one - is that it can become absolutised, closed, dogmatic, “hardened”, because it is not prepared to listen to the voices of reality (creation) and the

Word of God. When this happens, a worldview has deteriorated into an ideology.

My own definition of an ideology - there are many attempts to describe this phenomenon (cf. Nürnberger, 1979b:6 and Goudzwaard, 1984) - reads as follows: “Ideology, which usually comes into being in a threatening situation, is a substitute for true religion, with as its highest ideal an all-encompassing purpose, to the attainment of which any (power) means may be used, norms adapted, sacrifices demanded and a specific image of the enemy propagated” (Van der Walt, 1994:357)

This definition can be analysed in detail (Van der Walt, 1994:358-367), but the most important points for our present topic are the following:

- Neo-capitalism is a substitute for true, Biblical religion, it is *a secular* religion.
- Its all-encompassing *purpose* is to restructure the whole of society according to the model of the free market economy.
- The *means* through which it wants to achieve *its* goal is global domination.
- It requires great *sacrifices* - even when they are dehumanising.
- Its *norms/values* clash with the basic Biblical directives for human life.

If something is not conceptualised according to God’s will (revealed in creation and in the Bible), it cannot be beneficial. But let me mention specific reasons why I regard neo-capitalism as a most dangerous ideology.

1.2 *The dangers of the free market ideology*

- Like every ideology it is *deceiving*, because the impression is created that, after the ideological cold war (between the two superpowers, viz. the capitalist US and the socialist USSR), political and economic agendas are no longer ideologically motivated.
- This new ideology is - especially after the collapse of socialism -*unchallenged*, it is “the ideology of no alternatives”.
- It enjoys *global domination*. It is perhaps the most powerful ideology of all times, which reigns supreme. The impression is created that, after decolonisation, imperialism is gone. In fact the old colonial imperialism was only replaced by post- or neo-colonial imperialism - which is no less

powerful and oppressive. The only differences between the two are the following: the old colonial imperialism was (1) formal, (2) political domination from (3) mainly Europe as the centre of power, while contemporary neo-imperialism is (1) informal (2) economic domination from (3) the US as the new centre of power. (For more details, see Fowler, 1995 - different sections of his book.)

- Like any kind of ideology, neo-capitalism *presents itself with a good face*. It is regarded as the only, self-evident solution for the world's problems. This explains why the "underdeveloped" countries so easily accepted the capitalist-inspired idea of development. While for the West it was a legitimising concept, which gave them the right to continue their economic involvement - exploitation -of the South, for the non-Western world it seemed to be an open concept (it did not refer to political programmes) as well as an optimistic idea (with the promise of a better future than the colonial past).
- Neo-capitalism is also a *seductive* ideology, because (as a secular religion) it does not present itself as competitor or the open enemy of other religions. It permits, even encourages, the practice of religion (e.g. Christianity) in *private* life and the church, but it itself determines what happens in *public* life. This dualism between "private" and public" is unacceptable in an integral Christian perspective.
- Neo-capitalism *gradually infiltrates* our hearts and minds because it seems to make good sense. Without noticing, its virus paralyses our hearts and blurs our perspective on life. When we ultimately realise that we ourselves and our institutions have been secularised, it is already too late ...
- Lastly, this ideology - like all ideologies - *can never fulfil its promises*. It presented itself as a lighthouse, which could guide the newly independent nations out of the "dark world of underdevelopment" towards the "light of development". But today the light is still flashing just as far away as ever, receding into the dark! B. Goudzwaard and H. de Lange (1994:1-5) convincingly indicate the failure of this economic ideology when they draw the attention to the following six paradoxes, inherent in the system:

(1)*The scarcity paradox*: unprecedented abundance with unprecedented scarcity;

- (2) *the poverty paradox*: increasing wealth with increasing poverty;
- (3) *the care paradox*: greater resources with declining care for people and environment;
- (4) *the labour paradox*: rising need for labour with widespread unemployment or underemployment;
- (5) *the health paradox*: improved medical technology with increasing disease, and
- (6) *the time paradox*: more labour saving devices with less time to choose what to do.

These dangers clearly indicate why it is of the utmost importance to recognise, to know this ideology - our second main point.

2. The main characteristics of the neo-capitalist free market ideology

In describing its features we will distinguish between (1) its governing belief (or “mother idea”), (2) a number of justifying or supporting beliefs and (3) the slogans by way of which the ideology is propagated. (Especially with respect to the first two points I have learned a lot from Fowler, 1998.)

2.1 The basic idea

The basic belief of this ideology is that the (idealised) free market is the saviour of the world. The fact that it is *a belief, a secular religious belief*, can clearly be seen from the following: (1) One has to trust the free market. (2) It is above human critique or control. (3) Anything is permissible in the name of this ideology. (4) In spite of its name (*free market*) it is not free at all. There is no freedom *within the market*, e.g. equality between buyers and sellers or even between sellers. What is actually meant, is the freedom *of* the market to dominate all areas of life in every country! There is no freedom of choice! (5) Its merits may not be questioned. (6) It has its own gospel of sin (underdevelopment), conversion (to its beliefs), redemption (through Western developmentalism) and gratitude (living according to the laws of the free market).

An example *par excellence*, the incarnation of this ideology, is the powerful World Bank. An excellent study of its religious-ideological presuppositions and its influence on our own continent is provided by Mihevc (1995).

2.2 The four supporting beliefs

They are the following:

- *The beneficence of the impersonal market forces.* Long ago, the father of modern economy, Adam Smith, believed in the “invisible hand” (of God) which will see to it that the market will not only benefit the already rich. This belief has today become secularised, but it did not disappear. Therefore the development of the market has to be maximised. The market *as such* is something good. It is not necessary to measure it against values or norms - it has itself become the norm, a hyper-norm!
- *The compatibility of economic interests with other social interests.* The free market is not only good by nature, it is regarded as the saviour in every area of life. It, therefore, has the right to extend the scope of its operations into every sector of society. Only fix the economy, then all other areas will flourish! Commercial operations, it is believed, are the most efficient ways to advance *any* social good. Therefore, all non-economic societal relationships should be subordinated to commercial interests, because it will not *compromise*, but *advance* their goals.

This is a totally new phenomenon, because in previous world history the commercial (economic) aspect was regarded as only *one* facet of life. One example (relevant for the theme of this conference) is that, according to this ideology, it is believed that (higher) education will be more effective if it is commercialised, when commercial management practices (“efficiency”) is employed.

- *Abundant and ever expanding consumption of the goods and services of the market output is regarded as “the good” life.* Everyone should have as much as possible of the good things which the market provides, because it makes life easy and enjoyable. When satisfaction of desires - not needs - becomes the measure of life in its fullness, it is believed that life can continuously be improved simply by having more. The question is never asked whether man can live by bread alone, or whether welfare is the same as *well-being*. In spite of this, the media daily propagate this ideological, egoistic belief about human fulfilment: I must feel good, my sense of well-being is the most important!
- *Quantitative criteria are accepted as indicators of human “development” or well-being.* In accordance with “the more, the better”, mathematically measurable data are considered to be reliable indications of the level of consumption and therefore fulfilment. “What cannot be counted, does not count!”

There is no awareness that numerical norms (to count correctly) cannot only provide us with the correct numbers, but they never indicate what is ethically, religiously, juridically etc. - or even economically - good or bad for us as human beings. They cannot measure quality in *other* areas of life than the numerical. Life expectancy, for instance, cannot simply be measured by the number of years a person lives (the time between his/her birth and death) because it reveals nothing about the *quality* of life enjoyed during that period. Education (the theme of our conference) cannot be measured by simply counting the enrolment ratio's and not taking into account the *quality* of the education, e.g. lack of equipment, poorly trained teachers/lecturers etcetera in South Africa.

2.3 *The slogans*

With a variety of slogans this ideology is propagated daily on different levels: in the media, in development planning, in scholarly articles, in academic textbooks etcetera.

A few examples of these slogans are: "progress", "achievement", "excellence", "efficiency" and "competition". They are elevated to the status of values or norms that should guide our behaviour in accordance with the belief in the free market. In actual fact they cannot be norms, but should be normatively judged!

The idea of "progress" is thoroughly discussed (also from a distinctly Christian perspective) by, for example, the following writers: Bury (1955), Goudzwaard (1979), Griffioen (1987) and Nisbet (1980). I will briefly criticise another slogan, viz. competition, because it is regarded today as the "gospel", supposed to cure all economic ills.

It is true that, on the one hand, *good* competition can eliminate waste, laxity, inefficiency and raise the standard of performance. On the other hand, *bad* competition (competition subjected to no norms) can be a frightening, brutal taskmaster. Consider the following obvious points: According to this value (1) there are only two categories of human beings, viz. winners and losers; (2) there is no guarantee of quality because the winner is not necessarily the best - there are ways to win! (3) people become each other's opponents - to be beaten or even eliminated; (4) it is therefore destructive of good human relationships; (5) the weaker competitor is simply forgotten, rejected or eliminated - justice is not a consideration; (6) competition causes a terrible ratrace, even anxiety; (7) it never ends; (8) it encourages the conviction that, because one has failed economically, you are a total failure as a human being; (9) it not only prohibits the realisation of other important

values, but it clashes with the basic message of the Gospel (cf. Phil. 2:3-4); (10) it is not even economically efficient - as its adherents believe - but inefficient, because it eliminates diversity in the market place - only a few winners overcome the struggle for survival!

2.4 *Summary from a worldviewish perspective*

Every worldview (and its distortion in the form of an ideology) contains the following six basic elements: a conception about (1) God, (2) norms, (3) mankind, (4) society, (5) nature and (6) time or history. A brief summary of these six components in the case of the free market ideology will be in the form of the following diagram:

The six basic ideological components in the case of the neo-liberal market ideology

1. *Conception of god (what is regarded as absolute):* live as if God does not exist or matter (in public life), secular self-redemption through belief in benevolent free market.
2. *Norms/values:* development, competition, achievement, excellence, efficiency, consumption, selfishness, greediness = subjectivism because subjects (things) are *elevated* to the status of norms instead of being *subjected* to norms. (Result: relativism, utilism, hedonism, egoism.)
3. *Mankind:* a one-dimensional being (“nothing more than an economic being”) instead of multi-dimensional.
4. *Society:* the great diversity of societal relationships commercialised (= totalitarianism).
5. *Nature (environment):* exploited (not cared for) to the utmost.
6. *Time and history:* time a scarce commodity to be used (not enjoyed) and history a process of linear progress - the future better than the present and the past.

2.5 *The outcome*

Not only in the “underdeveloped” and “developing” world, but also in the so-called developed world, we can today clearly see the results of this powerful, but destructive, ideology. It may promote human well-being in *one* aspect, but it diminishes and threatens it in *most* other respects.

The southern parts of the world (which the West is trying to develop according to the capitalist

model) is experiencing terrible suffering because of illness, poverty, starvation, malnutrition, loss of dignity etcetera. Also in the northern countries there is growing dissatisfaction, because of the increasing inequality between rich and poor, the chronic physical diseases associated with an affluent lifestyle, increase in mental diseases like depression, drug abuse, the escalation of violence (in different forms) and the crisis in care, because the “caring” professions are not regarded as “productive”, without “market value” - you have to buy it, if you can afford it! The neo-capitalist free market ideology has created a sick, a very sick society!

In summary: it leads to (1) distorted values and (2) a distorted society built on these values. Norms or values are the response of the human being to what he regards as the highest authority in life. The capitalist ideology serves another power in the place of our highest Authority, the real God, viz. Mammon. Its norms, therefore, reflect obedience to this substitute god.

2.6 *The challenge*

How should we challenge such a powerful, global, unchallenged, but questionable, misleading ideology? It will not be enough to indicate its failures, as we have briefly tried to do. Because it is an ideology, people not only *believe* in it, but will *keep on* believing in it in spite of the overwhelming evidence of its failure. They will *rationalise* their belief by calling its detrimental results “unfortunate side effects”, “growing pains” or “short-term problems”, necessary to reach the - ever vanishing - utopian goal. As indicated in our definition of an ideology, it requires unbearable sacrifices - in this instance on the altar of Mammon. In challenging this powerful ideology, we will therefore have to concentrate, not on its *merits or results*, but on the ideology *itself*.

Because all human beings are deeply religious by nature - an ideology is a religion - one faith can only be efficiently rejected if it is replaced by another faith. We therefore need an *alternative faith* to challenge this ideology, as well as *alternative values*, founded in this new faith. I am proposing the Christian, Biblical faith in the place of contemporary neo-capitalism - our next point.

3. The Biblical alternative

We have to break out of the passive acceptance of this secular faith, refuse it as a framework for discussion and develop our own values, founded in the Gospel. (The secular religious - ideological - presuppositions of contemporary Western developmentalism is clearly revealed in the studies by Van Ufford & Schoffeleers, 1988 and Zeylstra, 1975.)

It is an urgent task because (South) Africa will move backwards if it follows the free market ideology. It is also of vital importance because of many Christians' uncritical endorsement of the free market economy - which they even try to prove to be the correct Biblical economy! (Cf. Boer, 1984.) Many of them (like Sherman, 1992) also embark on a one-sided vendetta against socialism, without realising that capitalism is also a secular ideology, the estranged twin brother of socialism, in no way better than the socialist ideology. The first overemphasises the individual (his well-being and prosperity), while the other absolutises the community. We should be critical of *both* of them! (Cf. Leatt, Kneifel and Niirnberger, 1986 and Nurnberger, 1979b.)

What I personally regard as of the utmost importance are the following: (1) We have to get our priorities straight and (2) we again need real norms to guide our conduct.

3.1 *The correct priorities*

Years ago K. Nkrumah, at the time of the independence of Ghana, proclaimed: "Seek first the political kingdom and you will receive everything else." Today this *political* ideology is replaced by an *economic* one. The free market ideology says: "Seek first the abundance of food, drink, clothing and the other consumer benefits of the free market and all the other social goods will follow." In fact it says: "You may also worship and thank God for the consumer goods, but you will only enjoy these if you agree to make the market your absolute priority."

This ideology clearly turns God's priority for human life on its head. The Bible urges: "Do not worry, saying: 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ... But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:31, 33).

Christ is not denying a place for the market, but He clearly says that we will never achieve well-being if we make the pursuit of market commodities our *prime* objective. We have to subordinate

the market - like everything else - to his kingdom, his laws. Only then can we receive these things - as his free gift!

When looking from this basic norm of God's kingdom at the abovementioned supporting or justifying beliefs of the neo-capitalist ideology, we realise how distorted they are and how necessary it is to emphasise totally different norms.

3.2 *The real norms*

As already stated, norms are our responses to whom/what we regard as our highest authority. Norms provide direction, they set limits, they tell us what ought to be done and therefore teach us real wisdom about good or bad.

- *The beneficence of the market*

The basic religious choice here is between the so-called goodness of the impersonal, free market and the gracious goodness of a personal God: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon" (Matt. 6:24). Christ here clearly rejects the dualism of private-public according to which we try to serve Him in private, devotional life, but follow Mammon in our public conduct.

The market is not something impersonal on which we should simply rely. *We* create the market! It can be an instrument for our good. But if we develop it in defiance of God's norm for economic life (e.g. stewardship) as well as all his other norms for life in its diversity, it becomes oppressive and destructive - as is abundantly clear today. As already indicated, the "free" market, is not free at all. It can also be a very wasteful market.

We should especially be critical about the idea of a continuously growing and expanding market, producing more and more. Firstly, continuous growth is an impossibility in a finite world with limited resources. The productivity of workers cannot be increased and the natural environment exploited indefinitely!

Secondly, growth as such is not beneficial (growth is not a norm but should be subjected to norms). It can be healthy, good or destructive, bad. Anti-normative growth is growth beyond the limits

posted by God's norms. It resembles pathological, cancerous growth - which gradually destroys itself! Normative growth, on the other hand, is like a tree: at a certain stage it stops growing - to bear fruit!

“No growth” is not a solution. Economic growth - within normative limits - is necessary to supply in our own basic human needs in order to fulfil our callings. Research has, however, clearly indicated (cf. the “threshold theory” of Max-Neef, 1991 and 1992) that economic growth can only improve human well-being to a point. Passing that point, it becomes destructive.

Welfare can therefore only be a *means* towards human *well-being*. If it is viewed as an *end* in itself (as in the free market ideology), it becomes an idol - with all the disastrous consequences of idolatry.

- *The compatibility of economic interests with other social interests*

As already indicated, the belief of the free market ideology is that *all* social relationships will be served best if they adopt the organisational model of the “efficient” commercial organisation. Everything has to be commercialised!

The human person, for instance, is only valued in so far as, as a “market unit” (sic!), (s)he can provide an input (production) and/or act as consumer on the output side. This is a complete inversion of what the correct order should be: man now has to serve (because it became an idol) economic goals, instead of an economy in the service of mankind!

In the case of a business/commercial enterprise, it is necessary that the market output should be maximised, while the input costs should be kept as low as possible in order to reach the goal of a financial profit. Efficiency, in this case, is the effective use of certain means towards an end.

Other societal relationships, however, are designed or ordained by God for quite different purposes or ends. We advocate (Van der Walt, 1994:259-336 and Van der Walt, 1995), over against both socialism and liberalistic, individualistic neocapitalism, pluralism as the correct philosophy of society. Every societal relationship (marriage, family, school, church, state, business etc.) has its own unique God-given task which should be executed according to its own norm (e.g. truth in

marriage, care in family life, justice in the state and stewardship in business).

This variety of societal relationships has an economic *aspect* (a marriage, family, school, church, state also needs money to survive!), but it is not (like the market) economically *qualified*. (If you, for instance, view and structure your marriage or family as an “economic unit”, it will soon be ruined!)

For this very reason efficiency in the case of all these non-economic societal relationships will also imply something different than in the case of the market. We need other models of efficiency designed to serve their distinctive tasks or goals. Efficiency in their case does not necessarily mean reducing costs, because it may be achieved at the cost of achieving their own, unique callings. Our conclusion is that we should not strive for the commercialisation, but rather the decommercialisation of contemporary society!

- *Abundant, ever expanding consumption of the goods and services of the market and gratification through the pursuit of our own desires*

The supporting belief of the free market ideology in this case is that egoistic, self-gratifying consumption will bring happiness, well-being. And that the satisfaction of our desires or greed - viewed as needs - is the measure of the good life.

Of course we cannot live without consuming food and drink, without shelter and clothes, but it should never be the one and all of our life and it will never provide real meaning and fulfilment. Christ clearly teaches: “Man does not live on bread alone” (Matt. 4:4).

We also do not need - because it is not good for us - abundant, ever expanding consumption. (Read Phil. 4:11 and 1 Tim. 6:8.) Christ warned us: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

The Bible is very critical about our (sinful) desires. The desire of the flesh (meaning *sinful* desire and not simply *sexual* desire!), of the eyes (everything we see advertised today) and for riches are not from God (1 John 2:16). It clearly rejects envy, greediness and selfishness - all “virtues” promoted by the ideology under consideration.

Don't misunderstand the Gospel. It is not propagating a grim life of no enjoyment or satisfaction: " ... God ... richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17b).

God provides us with a new direction for the whole of life in his commandment of love (Matt. 22:37-40). Following this basic, central but also encompassing direction, guarantees life in its fullness (John 10:10b). It is not something sentimental (Hollywood style), but a love that gladly *serves* one another (cf. Gal. 5:13b en Phil. 2:4).

Our basic choice is the following: Either pursue the gratification of desire for more and more as a goal - and your desires will never be satisfied - or pursue service in love as your goal in life - and you will enjoy fulfilled desire and a satisfying, meaningful life. The last option is exactly Paul's advice to the rich of his time "so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life" (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

- *Quantitative criteria as indicators of "the good life" or human well-being*

Because of the great diversity in creation, there are also a great variety of norms: numerical (mathematical), physical, psychic, economic, legal/political, ethical/moral and confessional. Numerical norms are not the only norms. They can also only give direction and *set limits* in *one area* of life: that of quantity. Simply by way of counting, one cannot decide on good or bad. *More* is not necessarily *better*. (I may have more apples than John but they may be worthless because they are rotten, while John's few apples are fresh!) Mere numbers cannot judge (by comparing what cannot be compared, e.g. money and art) the value of the many non-quantitative life aspects. I repeat: *more* should not automatically be regarded as *good* and *less* as *bad*.

3.3 *A new social order*

Personal values/norms lead to communal or social values. Distorted personal values inevitably yield a distorted society. (A house depends on its foundations.)

The same idea could also be explained in a different way: (1) One serves an idol (god), (2) one begins to look more and more like the idol one serves, one portrays its image, and (3) one creates a society (e.g. marriage, family, business etc.) according to one's own image, which reflects the image

of one's god/God. The same applies in the case of the ideology under discussion: (1) The commercial interests of the market (Mammon) are *in control and are served*, (2) the individual is *re-shaped* in accordance with commercial principles, and (3) society at large is *redefined* to serve the priority of commercial interests. Money *remakes* society in its own image.

Commercial power shapes the social agenda in ways that subordinate all other social interests to its own view of society. It devaluates *everything* else apart from commercial interests! (It is just as dangerous as when political power is allowed to expand its control over society beyond the legitimate boundaries of state authority). This new global social tyranny of an economically driven society, is dehumanising, because it fails to provide a social environment in which human life in its rich diversity can flourish. (For how diverse, multifaceted, rich human life really is, see Van der Walt, 1997.)

A few examples may make this point clearer. As far as the theme of this conference is concerned, the following. *Education*, which once existed to nurture breadth and depth in understanding the whole of life, is now redefined as preparation for and participation in the commercial world; it becomes vocational or professional training. The result is one-eyed students, "educated" and equipped to maintain and advance the market kingdom, but more or less totally ignorant about life outside that kingdom. The *media* serves the same goals, reinforces the beliefs and values of the ideology and supports its interests. *Sport* deteriorated from relaxing social interaction into commercial entertainment, producing its millions

for the professional players and the media covering the events. In the *state* administering justice is no longer a priority, but the regulation and administration of finances, co-operating or struggling against powerful multinational cooperations (cf. Antonides, 1978). Even *churches* tend to merely become the successful marketers of spiritual services!

Man today is distracted (by living from bread alone) from asking the really important questions of life, like what is good, true, meaningful. Many already believe that such questions are unanswerable anyhow or that they are insignificant, do not matter at all! Consequently we today live in a culture characterised by the superficial and trivial.

We urgently need a new society built on real values, in which (1) there will be food, shelter etcetera

but not *ever-increasing* consumption, because the word “enough” plays a positive role and (2) in which market growth is not rejected (“no growth” is not an option), but in which not *any* or *excessive* growth is considered beneficial. *Good* market growth is when it serves *broad* human social interests -not merely *narrow* market interests!

4. A few practical steps

In order to establish a new kind of society in the place of the presently capitalistic-driven one, will require, apart from a consensus on different social values, also structural change. How can this be achieved?

The change will definitely not come from the centres of capitalistic, economic power from “above”. It will have to come from the *people* and the *institutions* of society *outside* the state and the market. We urgently need a strong “civil society”, a diversity of strong, well-organised social interests - the best safeguard against the use of political and/or economic power.

To finally achieve structural changes, may be a long and difficult process. It may, however, develop according to the following steps: (1) Begin in the small-scale context of communities which are in our power to control. “Small is not only beautiful: (Schumacher, 1973) but also powerful! (2) Reassess the values by which we live. (3) Reject the dehumanising values of the free market economy in favour of Biblically-inspired values. (4) Adopt practices in everyday life which reflect these values. (5) A groundswell of change can develop which can, in time, sweep through the whole of society, creating an irresistible momentum for change.

(6) Ultimately, large-scale structural change of society can become a reality.

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Chapter 5

WESTERN DEVELOPMENTALISM

A critical assessment

Development is a buzzword in the new South Africa. Simply mentioning the word arouses high expectations. Merely to be involved in one or other kind of development work, automatically ensures credibility and acceptance. Development has become the norm!

There can be no doubt that South Africa needs to be developed. Western development also had beneficial results in the past, which should be acknowledged. This essay, however, is intended to help its readers to acquire a more critical stance. To enable them not to uncritically accept *any kind* of development - as if development *as such* is good, instead of evaluating it from a normative perspective. I will do so by concentrating on the following three main points: (1) its character (as a Western invention), (2) its motives and results and (3) the need for an alternative model.

1. Development as a Western invention

It is not an easy task at all to define what exactly should be understood under the term “development”. Someone said it is as difficult as to fit a shirt (with only two sleeves) on to an octopus (with its many “arms”)! It is a kind of chameleon concept, meaning different things to different people. Development models sometimes change as fast as ladies’ fashions. A few examples of different emphases are: (economic) aid, supplying in basic needs, sustainable development, rural development, development of women, checking population growth, elevating poverty, job creation, redistribution of wealth and human resource development.

The focus in this essay will be mainly on the Western kind of development which is strongly inspired by the capitalist free market economy. (For details on this type of economy, see my other essay entitled: *The tyranny of the neo-capitalist free market economy.*) Let us have a look at its origin and character.

Development was initiated fifty years ago (on 20th January, 1949) with the inaugural speech of Harry S. Truman (president of the US). He said: “We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of the underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism - exploitation for foreign profit - has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing”.

With the arrogant stroke of a pen two thirds of the world was declared “undeveloped”. Up to 19th January, 1949 there was a great diversity of nations. A day later, only two types: the developed and underdeveloped! In an instant it was decided - not by themselves - that the countries of the south have the same “problem” (underdevelopment) and also the same “solution” for their problem (development, which means becoming like the West).

Development and underdevelopment are very relative terms, however; any country has precisely the level of productivity that it ought to be expected to have in view of its total cultural-historical circumstances. The so-called Third World *was*, therefore, not underdeveloped, it was first *declared* and afterwards *made* underdeveloped. Underdevelopment was not the *starting point* but the *result* of development! The West overdeveloped itself and underdeveloped the rest of the world - a process of “developing underdevelopment”!

This is the case because development is a (Western) *cultural* activity (of “modernisation” and therefore Westernisation), it is the *transfer* of (Western) culture and the *interference* with and *changing* of (non-Western) cultures. Every development planner and worker is the bearer of a specific culture.

Development is always perceived, defined and carried out from a specific worldview (= the soul of a culture). It is a vision (from a specific cultural perspective) about the ideal society - according to which other cultures also have to be changed. It contains specific ideas about (1) God/god, (2) norms or values, (3) man, (4) society, (5) nature, (6) time and history.

The cultural intervention of development usually leads to disintegration, impoverishment and decline of the indigenous culture. (It can be compared to the destructive role of a foreign imported

invader plant or animal.) Even when improvement in levels of income and consumption occurs, it would be misleading to call less self-esteem, self-respect, dignity and freedom “development”!

Every kind of Western development has vital consequences for the target culture. The following examples explain what happens.

- In the case of *charity* (e.g. relief and humanitarian assistance), change is “*given*” and the results are a loss or destruction of indigenous adaptation strategies and an increasing reliance on external coping mechanisms.
- In the case of the *modernisation* model, (mega projects, basic needs development etc.), change is *planned for* others for their supposed benefit and the implications are that, because progress, material well-being and individualism are considered of primary importance, other vital aspects of the indigenous culture is relegated to a secondary status.
- With *imperialism* (e.g. colonialism, conditional aid etc.) change is *imposed* or *forced* with the result of the loss of indigenous values and social organisation, coerced acculturation and cultural homogeneity.
- Even with the *institutional model* (local organisational development, partnership strategies) whose cultural change is *controlled by local participants*, it is still *guided* by Western ideologies and values so that the local institutions are transformed.

From this brief exposition it is clear that “development” is a Western invention. Most Western countries did not even know the concept!

2. The motives and results

The world of development is not a world of charity. It is a harsh world. To believe in benevolent nations or a just international economic order, is not cynicism but realism! Of course there were and still are individuals genuinely concerned about the “underdeveloped” world. We will, however, concentrate on the unstated - the real - motives behind the Western development mania of the past half century.

2.1 *Unstated motives*

They are the following:

- *A guilty conscience* of the Western countries about their past treatment of the non-Western nations. In some cases it started centuries ago with the slave trade -especially from our own continent. Africa in this way was robbed of millions of its best citizens. After the ban on slavery, the exploitation was simply continued in the form of colonialism!
- *Self-interest played the main role.* From about the sixties, when the decolonisation process started, the emerging independent countries briefly threatened to upset the existing international order established by the West. Development was a way to ensure the continued loyalty (submission!) to especially the US, which dominated the world order. The primary aim of development was, therefore, political and not - as it was portrayed - economic by nature! It also served as a handy tool in the competition or cold war between the US and USSR.

The US simply wanted an open international market! It forced the UK and Europe out of their colonies. But because it was regarded as the champion in dismantling colonialism, it was regarded as a friend of Africa and other previously Western colonies!

In actual fact the old colonialism was simply replaced by a new form of colonialism - as powerful and oppressive! The old colonial imperialism was (1) a formal, (2) political domination from (3) Europe as the centre of power. Neocolonial imperialism was (1) informal, (2) economic domination (3) from the US as the new centre of power.

Development for the West was a legitimising concept - it approved the continued role of the West in designing the “development” of the rest of the world according to the West’s own agenda! The reason why the non-Western world accepted the idea was mainly because it sounded like an open concept (it did not refer to specific political programmes) as well as an optimistic concept (it promised a better future than the colonial past).

- *Self-justifying beliefs* are religious beliefs or convictions which sanctioned the motive of self-interest. The US believed - a typically Eurocentric, paternalistic attitude - that the “underdeveloped” nations needed (Western) democracy, freedom and civilization. The rest of the world - especially a continent like Africa - had to be civilized (= Westernised), because it was regarded as childish, backward, inferior, in one word: “uncivilised”!

All the above motives are incarnated in an institution like the World Bank, which was established to “run” this international development programme. It is a concrete embodiment of the ideology of developmentalism. From the “Vatican” (centre) of development its “pope and cardinals” (chairman and board) speak *ex cathedra* (the final word), while its priests (scientists and planners) execute their authoritative decisions in the different “underdeveloped” countries!

2.2 *The results of developmentalism*

Overwhelming evidence today testifies to the dismal failure of the West to develop the rest of the world. The West itself became (economically) overdeveloped and the rest of the world remained “underdeveloped”! It is suffering in poverty, hunger, marginalisation, loss of dignity, etcetera. At the same time the rich, northern countries put all the blame for the whole catastrophe on the shoulders of the poor, southern countries: it is their fault that, in spite of all the help from the West, they could not develop.

Because of its impressive scientific, technological and commercial/industrial achievements the West regarded itself as qualifying as a model for the rest of the world. It assumed the right to teach other countries what it means to be human, what “the good life” entails, what a “developed society” is about. Because development is an intercultural transaction (see above) the West one-sidedly transferred its own culture and interfered in the non-Western cultures.

Different cultures, however, have different views about what it really means to be human and what a developed society entails. We should not be uncritical about Western development ideas. They provide a one-sided, limited - even distorted -view of human, social well-being. It may promote well-being in *one* respect (e.g. economically through scientific-technological control), but diminishes it in *most* other respects!

What a contemporary neo-capitalist inspired “developed” society looks like, can be summarised in the following diagram (also see the previous chapter on the neocapitalist free market ideology):

**A DEVELOPED SOCIETY ACCORDING
TO CAPITALIST FREE MARKET IDEOLOGY**

6. *The outcome*

Scarcity, poverty, inequality, declining care, increasing diseases, less time, violence, dissatisfaction, boredom etc. - dehumanising instead of human well-being.



5. *The needs required*

Never enough (because needs replaced by greed, desire), never satisfied, cannot start bearing fruit by fulfilling real callings.



4. *Social structure*

Structural poverty. All other societal relationships shaped according to (economic) market model. No freedom to fulfil diverse human callings -not even in “free” market. An oppressive society, spiritually poor in spite of material affluence.



3. *Social values*

Trust the market, strive for economic prosperity, material abundance, privatise, commercialise every institution in society, compete as hard as you can no matter what the consequences.



2. *Personal life values*

Collect and consume as much as possible, as quickly as possible to satisfy individual desires - follow the Western way of life.



1. *Basic motive power*

Obey Mammon: love money and yourself.

2.3 *Conclusions*

Our first conclusion is that not the failure, but the success of developmentalism should be feared. Imagine how terribly boring a “completely developed” world would be. It will be the worst case of human impoverishment in world history when the massive oil slick of American culture has finally covered the entire globe, eliminating all cultural differences!

Our second conclusion is that development as such cannot be the norm. Like everything else in the world, it should be subjected to normative evaluation.

Norms or values provide *clear direction*, while the present development agenda is clearly without direction. (This lack explains why the one development fad is soon replaced by another. In South Africa the Reconstruction and Development Programme [RDP] was, after only two years, replaced by the Growth Employment and Redistribution Programme [GEAR]. And at the moment - after another two years - GEAR is questioned!) Secondly, norms *sets limits*, while this is clearly not the case in the Western idea of unlimited, continuous development. Thirdly, real norms finally teach us *wisdom*, because they discriminate between good and bad, right and wrong, beneficial and harmful. As already indicated, this is not the case in developmentalism which uncritically regards development as such as beneficial - always and everywhere.

3. Towards an alternative view of development

Because the present development agenda is flawed in its foundations, it cannot merely be modified or improved. It has to be replaced by something better.

This does not imply that we reject development. God, in his cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28 and 2:15), instructed us to rule over and take care of the earth, to develop our own and its inherent potential. Our basic human calling and responsibility is a developed society!

3.1 *A new definition*

An alternative definition of a really developed society may be the following: “A developed society is a society which provides the freedom and opportunity for every person to unfold all his/her human potentials in order to fulfil his/her calling.” The three basic components in this definition are (1) being human, (2) calling and (3) society.

3.2 *Being human*

To be human, implies richness, diversity. Humans are not one-dimensional (e.g. economic) beings, but they have a multidimensional, multi-faceted nature. As humans we have a physical, logical, social, lingual, economic, juridical, aesthetic, ethical and confessional aspect. And we have to develop *all* of them *simultaneously* in a *balanced way*.

We, therefore, cannot merely look at our physical needs (live from bread alone, Matt. 4:4) or our own economic welfare, because it will result in *distorted* instead of *full* human well-being. It is simply not true that if we develop economically, our other potentials will also follow suit. The only moment of truth is that the different facets of our life are interrelated. We also need economic development, but it can only enhance the development of other aspects of being human to a certain point. If it is overemphasised, its beneficial influence on the rest of life is lost.

Closely connected with this first facet of being truly human, is the fact that we need a diversity of norms to guide life. As in the case of the different aspects/facets of human life *all* these norms should be obeyed *simultaneously*. It is wrong to argue that you first have to obey economic norms and only *afterwards* see what can be done about psychological, social, ethical or religious values.

A few examples of these different norms are the responsible use of numbers/statistics (the mathematical), wellness (the physical), sensitivity and selfcontrol (the emotional), beauty (the aesthetic), validity (the analytical), meaningfulness, clarity (in language or communication), respect, kindness, humility (the social), stewardship and compassion (the economic), justice, lawfulness (the legal/political), integrity, fidelity, trustworthiness (the ethical/moral) and godliness, commitment, devotion (the confessional).

The Bible provides many more norms like caring, sharing, serving, giving and enriching in the way we treat the whole of creation and live with others. They have to replace the present-day norms of, for instance, ruthless competition, limitless progress, consuming as much as possible, self-centred gratification of desires and productivity understood as how much we can get *out of* the earth and our fellow human beings - instead of how much we can put *into it*, how we can leave it richer, more fruitful. The norms of capitalist development is a grotesque distortion of the human person. Only the Biblically founded norms guarantee a worthwhile life to be enjoyed *in its fullness*.

I also believe that these Biblical values are not culturally confined. They have universal validity and can therefore be developed in any culture. I am furthermore convinced that to apply such norms in

the African context will not be difficult or detrimental, because traditional African cultural values are in my mind much closer to Gospel values than Western capitalist development values which clash head-on with almost every Biblical norm.

3.3 *Human calling*

Human calling according to the Bible is not confined to special offices in the church, like minister, pastor, priest, prophet, elder or deacon, which are considered to be the intermediaries between God and “ordinary” humans. Every human being lives in the direct, immediate presence of God. And He calls everyone of us to his service. We, however, serve Him in diverse ways - not everyone of us has the same vocation. But, in spite of this diversity, every “job” is a divine calling.

According to the great diversity of societal relationships, one may, apart from one’s specific calling, also be a husband/wife in marriage, a mother/father/child in a family, a teacher/pupil at school, a worker/manager in a factory, a church member, citizen of the state etcetera. To be able to fulfil one’s calling in life leads to real fulfilment, genuine well-being. Simply having and consuming more and more can never satisfy human beings.

A developed society will be a society which allows the necessary opportunity and freedom for its people to fulfil these diverse callings. To be able to do so, one needs basic things like food, clothing, shelter, income etcetera. These, however, should not be striven after for their own sake.

Development should not be one-sidedly viewed as material-economic development. It should not be an “introverted” kind of development - development for the sake of (economic) development. It should serve much broader social interests, assisting people to fulfil their God-given, diverse callings. When our economic calling is absolutised, there can be no freedom to develop social life in its richness and diversity, but it becomes a commercialised society which devaluates all other callings.

3.4 *Society*

The kind of society which will enhance the necessary freedom and opportunity for a balanced development of the human potential and real fulfilment of diverse human callings, cannot be a totalitarian society.

A socialist society is more or less by nature a totalitarian and therefore distorted society, because it

regards one societal relationship as all-encompassing, all-inclusive. Usually the state is viewed as the mega-structure of which the other societal relationships are only “subdivisions”. A liberal-individualist view of society correctly rejects this kind of totalitarianism. It propagates (in economy) a market free from state control. Unfortunately it does not always realise that capitalism simply replaces one form of totalitarianism (political) with another (viz. economical). It also becomes a distorted society!

We therefore need a third, alternative society of philosophy. We may call it pluralism. According to this perspective *all* kinds of totalitarianism should be rejected - whether it be that of religion, politics, economics or whatever.

According to this philosophy of society each societal relationship, however small and insignificant, should be free in its own sphere of operation (its area of divine calling) to fulfil its specific task, without interference from larger, more powerful societal structures. At the same time the different societal relationships should not become each other’s competitors, but should co-operate and support each other for the mutual benefit of all as well as individual human beings living in them.

3.5 *Summary*

The preceding exposition of an alternative development paradigm can be summarised in the following diagram (compare it with the previous diagram under section 2.2):

A DEVELOPED SOCIETY ACCORDING TO BIBLICAL VALUES

6. *The outcome*

Full human well-being and peace (*sjaloom*).



5. *The needs required*

Enough to sustain multi-faceted human life and achieve freedom.



4. *Social structures*

Structural plurality of family, school, university, business etcetera. Freedom and opportunity to fulfil in a balanced way, without coercion, our human callings in all of them.



3. *Social values*

Shared by society as a whole. Prosperity = abundance of different social values like truth (marriage), care (family), stewardship (business), justice (state), respect (creation) etcetera.



2. *Personal life values*

Responding (thus responsible) in relationship to nature and neighbour, to basic will of God (love) in diverse ways: serving, sharing, giving, caring, producing, enriching etcetera.



1. *Basic motive power*

To obey God's will: love of God with all we are and our fellow humans as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40).

4. Conclusion: a few lessons

I do hope that this brief essay helped its readers to start viewing development more critically and realistically.

- We should realise that development cannot primarily be about goods or things. It should be about people, their values, about human society as a whole.
- Development also cannot be given, bought, ordered, imposed, forced or comprehensively planned from above for others. It has to start from *inside*, from peoples' worldview, their cultural beliefs. It has to begin from *below*, from the grass roots.
- Genuine development can never be instant, quick development. Real development, which leads to the unfolding of all human potentials in order to fulfil their callings, takes time - often more than one generation - to achieve.
- Furthermore, when for the sake of genuine development, it is necessary to transfer Western culture - even when it is a wholesome, good aspect - to another culture, it should be done with the utmost care to prevent more harm than good. A gift of material goods will, for instance, usually make people more dependent, while a gift of sound knowledge will help them to remain or become independent -it will help them to help themselves.

The well-known example of how to help the poor is applicable to many development issues. If you give a hungry man a fish, you have merely helped him with one meal, for one day. When you show him how to catch a fish himself and provide the equipment to do so, you have also assisted him for a limited period until there are no fish left in the dam or stream. But when you teach him how to breed fish, you have really fully developed his possibilities to survive for an indefinite period.

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Post script: This article merely provides a few flashes and fragments from a comprehensive study on *Development, culture and worldview* which the author is at present preparing for publication later in 1999.