

***African Journal  
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**Contents**

Publication Information.....	i
Culture, World View and Religion.....	1
<i>B.J. van der Walt</i>	
Freedom, Person and Community.....	28
<i>Stuart Fowler</i>	
Building Bridges withing the Community of Faith.....	53
<i>Isaac Mutua</i>	
Transforming the Development Agenda.....	78
<i>Stuart Fowler</i>	



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# *African Journal for Transformational Scholarship*

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## **Editorial Policy**

The *African Journal for Transformational Scholarship* is a peer reviewed journal that aims to encourage high quality academic research focused on issues relevant to the contemporary African situation. While it especially aims to encourage African academic endeavour, it welcomes contributions from anywhere in the world. All contributions are expected to meet the following criteria:

1. *An acceptable academic standard.* As well as providing a forum for experienced academics, the journal also wishes to encourage novices to publish their work and will assist, if necessary, in ensuring an acceptable academic standard for contributions that show promise.
2. *Relevance to contemporary issues.* While the primary focus is on issues in the African situation, the globalisation of human life means that these are commonly linked to global issues. For this reason, the acceptance of a contribution does not necessarily depend on its showing a close knowledge of the African situation.
3. *Insights that are grounded in the Gospel.* This does not mean that they must be theological in nature—though theological contributions are welcome. What is expected is evidence of an engagement with the issue that maintains the integrity of the relevant discipline within a world view perspective that is grounded in the Gospel.

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## **Notes for Contributors**

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## **Culture, World view and Religion**

*Towards a biblical-reformational perspective on development*

*B.J. van der Walt*

This article contains the substance of a presentation to the “Transforming Directions for Africa” conference of the Heidelberg Institute for Christian Higher Education, South Africa in January 2000. It is an edited version of a much longer paper written for the International Symposium of The Society for Reformational Philosophy on Cultures and Christianity AD 2000 held at Hoeven, the Netherlands 21-25 August 2000.

Why is a biblical-reformational philosophy needed in Africa? Most Western missionaries taught Africans a “broken” or dualistic world view. Because reformational philosophy advocates the biblical, holistic approach it is welcomed on our continent. It is a healing and liberating message.

What Africans, however, neither want nor can afford, is an ivory tower philosophy, playing intellectual games; a philosophy which does not *do* or *change* anything. The crucial question is how to approach our topic so that it can become more alive, concrete, with direct practical value.

### **Approach and aims**

I start, therefore, with the more visible, viz. culture, and then move to the more invisible phenomena of world view and religion.

In the second place, I discuss these three concepts in their relation to development. We could regard development as both one of the greatest obsessions and one of the greatest failures of the latter half of the 20th century. Seldom has so much effort produced so little! Most of the world remains “underdeveloped”.

The way in which I would like to illustrate the practical value of a reformational (i.e. biblically inspired) philosophy can be explained with the image of a tree.

In its *fruits* we see the results of Western developmental efforts all over the world. As already stated, these fruits are not impressive nor do they serve the well-being of mankind. With the “tools” of a Christian philosophy I intend to query that which lies “beneath” these fruits: (1) the *branches* (culture) of the tree, (2) its *trunk* (world view) and (3) its *roots* (religion).

I believe that in this way we can achieve two objectives: We can arrive at a penetrating criticism and unmasking of existing models of development, exposing the deepest reasons for their failure. We can also move closer to the alternative of a really biblically inspired idea of what wholesome development should be, instead of simply modifying existing models.

### **Idea of development: origins, motives, and models**

#### *The origin of the idea*

The concept “development” is of Western origin—most non-Western languages do not even have such a word. The word is first mentioned in 1944 in one of the sub-committees, which drew up a constitution for the United Nations. The concept acquired official status in the inaugural address of President Harry Truman on 20 January 1949. In the late fifties and early sixties, when decolonisation reached its climax, the word “development” became part of the popular and academic vocabulary.

While up to 19 January 1949 a great variety of countries existed, the very next day all of them were divided into only two types: “developed” and “underdeveloped”. From that day onwards there was only one solution for the “underdeveloped” world: it had to be “developed” according to the Western model.

In spite of the difference between Western capitalism and Eastern Europe’s socialism, their ideas about development were basically the same: the repetition of the European success story of large scale industrialisation. The whole idea was built on Western cultural values. Development, therefore, was not something purely economic or neutral. Those who opted for development, had to

accept “superior” Western culture as an inherent part of such a programme.

Furthermore, “development” may mean a lot of different things to different people. “Underdeveloped”, “developing” and “over developed” are relative concepts. One should ask in what respect a people or country is developed or underdeveloped. It may, for example, be economically highly developed, but at the same time poorly developed in terms of human relationships.

In the light of this many authors today emphasise the fact that the West did not develop the rest of the world, but rather retarded its development—the underdeveloped state of the non-Western world today is not the beginning, but the end result!

When we discuss the motives for the West to develop the rest of the world, it will become clear that they cannot be separated from Western imperialism. Development provided a reason for the West to continue involvement in the rest of the world (economically, politically and militarily)—even after decolonisation. However, because it sounded like an open and more promising concept, it was accepted by the non-Western world.

Two reasons explain why the concept of development was socially and culturally more disastrous in Africa than in the far East: (1) Colonialism was applied more harshly and effectively (compare the slave trade); it had a much deeper impact on the African continent than in the East. (2) The East, like Japan, never regarded Western civilisation as morally superior to theirs. They only desired to master Western science and technique in order to rectify their comparative backwardness in these specific fields.

#### *Motives behind the Western developmental mania*

We should not deny that different humanitarian motives played a role in the development of the underdeveloped world. But we should also keep in mind that altruism very seldom has a place in international affairs. Usually so-called “justifying beliefs” validate the real motives, for instance that African countries needed freedom and democratic government.

I mention only a few of the most important motives:

- The belief in the so-called superiority of Western civilisation and the supposed inferiority of Africa, regarded as uncivilised, backward, childish and even barbarian.
- A guilty conscience because of centuries of slave trade and nearly a century of severe colonialism, especially in Africa.

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- After decolonisation the existing world order, controlled by the West, was threatened. Development (aid) was chosen as a means for carrying out a strategy to preserve that order.
- While the USA portrayed itself as the champion of liberty and decolonisation, it in actual fact also intended to eliminate the European colonisers in order to obtain the valuable raw materials and markets of the “Third World” for its own benefit.
- During the Cold War between the USSR and the USA, both superpowers tried to win the poorer, Southern countries for their respective ideologies.
- As will become clearer in the course of this paper, all these motives combined are still not sufficient to explain the élan with which the West, not only outside but also in Western countries, has pursued development as a sacred duty. We can only fully understand this zeal when we realise that development acquired a quasi or completely religious character. It has become a secular form of salvation!

### Culture, world view and religion

The purpose of this section is to briefly describe these three concepts. I will not try to *define* them precisely.

#### Culture

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

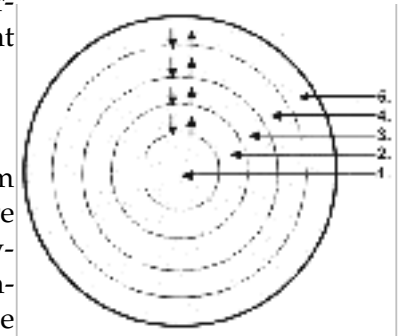
The *segmental* includes in the term culture only “spiritual” achievements like intellectual and artistic products (orchestras, performing and other arts, museums etc.). Culture is regarded as something that bestows lustre upon life. It can therefore only be acquired by the wealthier and more leisured members of society.

The *comprehensive* view of culture regards human life in its totality as culture. It includes our ordinary attitudes, customs, behaviour, values, beliefs, institutions, etc. It is not necessarily acquired by (formal) education and reserved for a section of the population. Every human being is a cultural being—prisoners and the poor included! Culture is our “frame of reference” for thought and conduct. We are hardly aware of it. It is like the air we breathe.

#### Important distinctions

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

It is important to realise that development is an aspect of culture. We should not speak of development and culture as if they are totally separate. Development is the “product” of a specific culture. We can gain more clarity when every time that we use the word “development”, we ask ourselves: What kind of development (religious, political, economic, etc.)?



#### A layered view of culture

I am aware that, while a diagram oversimplifies and should therefore always be used with great care. However, to reduce the complex phenomenon of culture to comprehensible proportions, I use the following diagram, consisting of five concentric circles:

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

1. The *religious dimension*. We may also call it the directional dimension, because religion is the central directedness of all of human

life towards the real or presumed ultimate source of meaning and authority. In the case of the Christian religion this directedness is our response to the true God who reveals himself in creation, in scripture and in Christ. The response should be according to his will summarised in the central commandment of love.

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

I see the distinction between religion and world view and their interrelatedness as follows: The difference between the two is that religion is our relationship towards God, while world view describes our relationship towards the world. But because we believe that this world belongs to God, we can never separate the two. Our service to God manifests itself in this world!

If religion is the direction towards God (or a god) and world view indicates our place in creation, the remainder of culture indicates our task or calling. Culture is the historical manifestation of our religiously directed response to all God's mandates for life, indicated by our understanding of creation and of our place in it.

My diagram does not solve two important problems. The first is the distinction between our *central* religious commitment and the *dimension* of faith. This is a very important distinction because it prohibits the identification of *all-encompassing* religion with only *one aspect* of life—the faith aspect.

The second is whether we regard religion and world view as part of culture. The whole of human life is religion, that is service of God or of a substitute. Religion and world view are influenced by culture; they have a cultural *side*. But is it correct to regard them *as such* as cultural phenomena?

1. The *“social” dimension*. Because I could not find a more appropriate term, I put “social” in quotation marks. It includes inter alia morals, arts, politics, economics, language, styles of thinking, the way our emotions are expressed as well as the different societal relationships, like marriage, family, the state, business.
2. The *material or technical dimension* includes food, clothes, tools, machines, buildings etc.

3. The *behavioural dimension* includes our habits, customs, and behaviour—our lifestyle.

### *The value of the model*

- *It is integrated, holistic*. I deliberately put light, dotted lines between the five different layers to indicate that we may distinguish them from each other, but can never clearly separate them. The two-way arrows between the different layers emphasise that they are mutually interrelated.
- *Visibility and describability*. The diagram indicates that not only the more visible aspects of a culture are important, but also its deeper, invisible core facets, like world view and religion.
- *Cultural change*. The outer, “softer” layers of a culture usually change more easily. The “harder” core is more resistant to change.
- *The determining role of the core*. The heart or soul of a culture is its religion and world view. This directs the outer, more visible cultural layers. Only in the light of a specific religion and world view can we properly understand the outer cultural manifestations. Real, deep change in culture is stimulated from the core.

### *Limitations of the model*

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

- I would like to keep religion and world view in the centre. As far as layers 3 to 5 are concerned, I have no order of priority in mind—in the sense that 3 is built on 2, 4 on 3 and 5 on 4.
- My model should not encourage the idea that religion, world view and other aspects of culture are static entities. All cultures change, some slowly, others more rapidly.
- My model should also not create the impression of a homogeneous or pure culture. Culture is usually a hybrid or mixture—especially in our contemporary, multi-cultural world.

- We cannot (physically) see a religion or world view. Therefore we will have to derive their features from their more visible, concrete manifestations in the other aspects of a culture.
- Not only does religion and world view influence culture, but the rest of culture influences religion and world view too.
- Such a change caused by the influence of the outer layers of a culture on the centre may result in a complete “power shift” in the core. Thus, the original religious commitment may be destroyed and replaced. More often—at least initially—the result is a dual, split religious and world view loyalty.

We should therefore reckon with the fact that while older, “closed” cultures had a single religious core, cultures may have more than one religious centre in the contemporary, “open”, multicultural-world. It seems however, that one of them gradually becomes dominant. This is noticeable in secularism, which marginalises other religions so that they start functioning “outside” the core.

### *Cultural diversity*

Today, more than in any previous time in history, we are confronted with cultural diversity. How is this great variety to be explained? How should we evaluate different cultures?

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

I can therefore not accept ethnocentrism—neither Eurocentrism nor Afrocentrism—which believes that its own culture is the only true and wholesome culture. Neither can I accept present-day relativism that is of the opinion that, because cultures and their cultural traits or features are equally true or good, they should not be judged, criticised or changed.

### *Cultural interaction*

Evaluating different cultures becomes even more tricky when they interact with each other. Western development is a clear example of this encounter and interaction of cultures.

The older theories in this regard could be described as theories about “development and culture”. In the oldest ones, non-Western cultures were regarded as a stumbling block in the path of development. In more recent ones, traditional, indigenous cultures are viewed as something positive, which may aid Western development projects. Nevertheless, the basic viewpoint has not changed. Culture and development are still viewed as separate entities. In the first theory they have to be separated and in the second you have to stir them together to get effective development.

Followers of more recent theories have realised that culture is not a facet of development, but rather that development is a facet of culture. I call this the theory of “development as culture”. This realisation that development is a part of culture enables us to be much more critical about different development paradigms. It assists us *inter alia* to view development as an encounter and interaction between the competing interests of different cultures; as the cultural intervention of one culture in another. It brings home the truth that “development” is a relative concept. It has diverse meanings in different cultures.

### *World view and ideology*

As mentioned already, a world view is our perspective on created reality. It is an indication of our place in the world in which we have to fulfil our cultural task. A world view functions like a map, providing *orientation*; like a compass, giving *direction* from a deep religious commitment.

The danger of a world view—even a Christian one—is that it can degenerate into an ideology. And ideology is an absolutised, hardened, closed, dogmatic orientation about the world, our place and cultural calling. It forces reality into its own preconceived mould and wants to change it accordingly. Basically therefore, a world view and an ideology have the same structure, but different directions. A world view is something normal and healthy; an ideology can be very dangerous.

## World view components of the development ideal

Six, interrelated and interdependent elements of a world view have a decisive influence on the kind of development a culture will achieve: (1) a concept of God/a god (religious orientation); (2) specific norms or values; (3) a view on being human; (4) a notion of community life; (5) a view of nature and (6) a concept of time and history. These six elements in the Western world view that underlies the development ideal may be briefly described as follows:

### 1. The concept of a god

Different scholars have already revealed the religious character of Western development ideals. Some of these traits are: (1) The promise of a not yet visible, but better future (idea of salvation), (2) towards which the world is guided by the development experts (the “priests”), (3) providing precise prescriptions (norms), (4) which should not be questioned (because it is the only truth, the only way towards life). (5) In order to attain this all-important goal, it is considered a sacred duty to eliminate all “sinful” obstacles. Two additional characteristics of this “religion” is that it is (6) a *secular* religion—the real God of the Bible has no place in it—and (7) a *materialistic* religion. (like traditional cultures and religions). Unconditional obedience is required: To question the Western way of development, is to be automatically regarded as a modern-day “atheist”!

### 2. Normative concepts

Words that occur regularly in Western development language are *competition*, *progress*, *growth*, *achievement*, *production* and *consumption*. Viewed from a reformational perspective, all these words indicate *things*. They should, therefore, be subjected to *norms*. This does not only apply to these development slogans, but also to development itself. Development can never be a norm, but has to be subjected to, or evaluated from a normative perspective.

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

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

### 3. View on being human

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

### 4. View on community or society

The West’s individualistic view of human nature leads to an individualistic view of community life. All human activities (education, politics, commerce, etc.) are geared towards the enhancement of the individual. It highly favours the rights of the individual. Individualism, sees a kind of mechanistic, atomistic relationship between individuals and between different societal relationships.

### 5. View of nature

In the modern Western world view, nature is viewed more or less as an object, separate from humans, their opponent. Nature should be conquered, used and even exploited for human benefit.

### 6. View of time and history

The essence of the contemporary Western concept of time can be summarised as follows (for more details, see Van der Walt, 1997. pp. 51-71, as well as 1999, pp. 182-184): Time is a commodity “outside” the human persons “through” which they move. They have to use

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

and fill it. This is evident from expressions like *time lost, saved, made up, passed* and *time wasted*. Time is furthermore something abstract, independent of ordinary life, measured and determined by a clock on the wall or a watch on one's arm.

This view of time is impoverishing because it reduces humans to slaves of time. It results in the well-known rat race, tense human relationships and alienation from one another. On the other hand, it leads to punctuality, thorough planning and tight schedules.

### The development outcomes of this world view

The general conclusion today—after 50 years of development efforts all over the world—is that the expected results have not materialised. Failure is not only a fact in the non-Western world, but even in the West itself. Because the capitalist economy believed in the fairness of the “free” market, it could not alleviate poverty. Because it emphasised production, it could not value human labour. Because it viewed nature as a commodity to be exploited, it contributed towards ecological damage.

Goudzwaard and De Lange in their book (1994) list six paradoxes we face today: (1) the scarcity paradox: unprecedented abundance, but at the same time greater scarcity; (2) the health paradox: improved medical care, but the simultaneous increase in all diseases; (3) the time paradox: more and more time-saving devices, but less time to get through schedules; (4) the poverty paradox: increasing wealth alongside dire poverty; (5) the labour paradox: a greater need for jobs, but at the same time growing unemployment, and (6) the care paradox: increased possibilities for the care for humans and their environment, but practical decrease and deterioration.

### The traditional African world view

Although traditional African culture and worldview has been suppressed and modified, it has survived. And, in spite of great local variety sub-Saharan Africa has a remarkable number of common cultural characteristics. We may, therefore, speak of a traditional African culture and worldview that remains influential in Africa. Limitations of space prevent a detailed presentation of this, but the

table on page 12 summarises its main features in comparison with the Western and biblical-reformational views.

### **A Christian-reformational world view**

Only a reformational, biblically based world view is capable of providing a framework for development that will liberate us from the distortions of the dominant Western world view leading to the life in abundance that Jesus Christ came to the world to give us— John 10:10.

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

We may call creation the time of formation, the fall the moment of deformation and redemption the period of reformation. At the moment we are living in the age “between the times”, the time of “already” and “not yet”. Christ’s redemption of the world, started during his first coming to this world, will be completed at his final, second coming when he will completely renew everything. The human direction, place and task were different in each of these three divisions of history.

#### **Creation**

- The *direction* of human life was towards the true God.
- The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created in the image of God, indicating that they obeyed his *commandments*.
- The essence of their *humanity* was that they were God’s stewards. Their place was that of trustees—not masters—who had to see to it that creation in its immense richness and diversity should develop, evolve, unfold and reveal its potential.
- Adam and Eve not only served God and acted according to the will of the God they served, they also created a *community* life (marriage, family etc.) which reflected their concept of being human and also revealed the God they served.

- They were permitted to use *nature* as part of God’s creation entrusted to them. They did not misuse nor exploit it, but used it carefully and respectfully.
- Finally, they knew how to both use and enjoy the *time* God granted them.

The *direction* of their lives was correct. They knew their place in God’s creation. They could, therefore, also fulfil their *calling*, the cultural mandate entrusted to them by God. They could perform their task in a balanced way, enjoying life in its fullness.

#### **Fall**

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

- Their hearts were now directed away from God towards themselves. They rejected being the image of God and wanted to be like God!
- They consequently did not want to obey God’s *commandments*. They preferred to be a law unto themselves (autonomous)—not realising that it was a contradiction in terms. By doing so, they lost their *place* in creation, namely that of *stewards*. Instead of *taking care* of God’s creation, they were *hiding* behind trees! (Genesis 3:8).
- They also lost the real meaning of *being human*.
- They began creating a *community* (see the rest of the Genesis story) not directed by love, but by hatred, a reflection of their own corrupted nature.
- While it was not clear directly after the fall, how reckless and harsh humans would treat nature, it is evident today. The simple fact that God banned them from the Garden of Eden was an indication that they were not regarded fit, capable, responsible caretakers any longer.
- Finally fallen humans had forgotten how to correctly use and enjoy the time God had given them. Because they misused it, their life span was decreased (Genesis 6:3).

Insight into what happened at the fall, enables us to interpret present-day development programmes. They are secular, without any *directedness* towards God. They are executed by human

beings who have forgotten their proper *place* in creation: stewards entrusted with the task to serve God and their fellow human beings according to his laws. Instead, through development, humans now try to serve and save themselves according to their own norms.

### **Reformation as a return to the correct norms**

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

The real biblical world view does not want to return to an idealised past. Neither does it try, like the Western world view, to create a future utopia. In spite of the fact that it emphasises our human responsibility in the present to reform the world, it believes that only God will finally bring about a new heaven and a new earth.

Each of the six components of a biblical-reformational world view is important for reformation. If, however, we have to select the most important for our topic, it will be the normative component. Reformation in essence can be described as a return to the correct norms applicable to the different aspects of our lives.

The Western world view believes in individual human autonomy and the African world view in communal autonomy. Both imply a subjectivistic view of God's will. Instead of obeying God's laws, humans elevate themselves to the status of law.

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

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

We have to (1) obey God's will which is (2) expressed in different laws, e.g. the Ten Commandments but also revealed in the history of God's dealing with Israel and in the life of Christ. Because these laws were given to a specific nation in specific historical circumstances, we have to (3) "translate" them as norms relevant to ourselves, living today under quite different circumstances.

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

Although our norms are time-bound and fallible—they have to be reformed continuously—they play a very important role, providing: (1) direction to our lives, (2) indicating limits to what may be done, as well as (3) what ought to be done. In other words, they teach us how to distinguish between what is bad as a result of the fall, as well as how we should reform life to attain the goodness possible through Christ's redemption.

Because development is multifaceted, it is not sufficient to apply only one kind of norm. Even when we concentrate on one kind of development, for instance economic development, the rest of life cannot be excluded. Economic development has consequences for the rest of our lives. Therefore, the simultaneous application of all norms is necessary! This multidimensional character of development requires an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach when studied by scholars.

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

Since the norms of our Christian world view are fallible responses, influenced by our own culture, how then can we know that they are the correct norms to guide us in our task of reformation?

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

The second answer to this important question is that God also reveals his will in our everyday lives. We have to watch creation carefully for "green lights" and "red lights". The green lights are signs that the norms prescribed by our world view are the correct ones. This happens when people experience joy, physical and spiritual health, peace—in brief: the fullness of life.

The red lights serve as warning signals. They flash in the case of disorientation, a lack of vision, pain (physical, psychological and spiritual), suffering (of different kinds), the death of humans and animals and damage done to the rest of creation. These signs are an indication that the norms provided by our world view are wrong—in spite of the fact that they may be called "Christian".

Western inspired development in Africa should be subjected to this kind of normative evaluation from the perspective of the true experience of the African people. A clear direction, hope and genu-

ine, full human well-being are green lights. Disorientation, hopelessness, damage to the environment, suffering, pain and death committed to the animal and human world, are however flashing red signals, warning that development is directed by the wrong norms.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The same applies to development: it should be both structurally and directionally good to be really beneficial. We may encounter development projects which may be acceptable structurally, but when its direction is considered its wrong religious direction is revealed—it is not motivated by real love. The reverse situation is also possible. The direction may be correct, e.g. it could be inspired by real love towards God and our fellow creatures, but the people involved do not have the slightest idea of the structural requirements for effective development!

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

### **A biblical-reformational development perspective**

This concluding section unites the lines already drawn, providing the final result of the previous pages. It starts with a preliminary new definition of development from a Christian perspective:

*Development is the (1) balanced unfolding of (2) all the abilities of the human being and (3) the potential of material things, plants and animals (4) according to God’s purpose and (5) his will, to enable the human being (6) within his/her own culture, (7) to fulfil his/her calling (8) as a responsible steward of creation (9) in a free society (10) to the honour and glory of God.*

Because the quality of development is dependent on all six components of a reformational world view (as will become evident in the following exposition) I have included them in this definition.

### ***Balanced unfolding***

Development may be compared (but cannot be identified) with the *physical* development of a crystal or the *biological* development of a plant, animal or human being. The reason why we should also

distinguish it from these kinds of development, is the awesome historical power God granted humans when he gave them the cultural mandate. Such power implies not only physical-biological development. Humans have also the task to develop the emotional, logical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical and religious aspects of reality to reveal its diverse richness.

All these aspects should, however, be developed harmoniously. Not only one aspect, like the economic, should be developed, but all of them simultaneously—even when the emphasis is on economic development. Otherwise the result is a one-sided, distorted development. Development does not mean more (quantity) of one facet, but better (quality) for the whole. Also, development in any one aspect cannot be continued limitlessly in a creation that itself is limited.

Harmonious, balanced development has another implication. Development does not only mean, “to take out of”, but also “to put back into” creation. Development should not exploit and impoverish creation, but rather enrich it. Against the Western idea of restless progress, we should also emphasise that development does not only entail “evovement” but also “involvement”; not only a “turning out” (of many products), but also a “turning in”—in other words to keep, maintain, protect, save and preserve.

#### *Of all the abilities of the human being*

The human person is multi-dimensional and not only one- or two-dimensional. Humans are not merely individual or communal beings nor even a combination of them. Human existence reveals a faith, ethical/moral, juridical, aesthetic, economic, lingual, logical, emotional, biological and physical aspect, ability or capacity—all of which have to be developed in a balanced way. To be involved in development from, for example, the perspective of humans as “nothing but economic beings” will result in dangerous, one-sided development. Such development will lead to the treating of the human person as an economic “commodity” that has to produce and consume.

#### *The potential of material things, plants and animals*

This section of the definition of development includes the next element of our world view, namely our view of nature. We continue to discover the vast potential and immense richness of the material, plant and animal worlds and their value for human life.

A Christian perspective on nature and its development can, however, not be divorced from our view of God. All creation belongs to him—Psalm 24:1. Every creature has an intrinsic value to him. They are not only valuable because they are useful to humanity. We are therefore not allowed to treat them simply as “objects” or “raw material”. They should not in the first place serve us. We, as stewards of God, should serve them, respecting and protecting them. Using nature is not prohibited, but misusing it is a sin against its Owner and nature itself. Apart from religious sins (against God) and moral sins (against humanity), our ecological sins should also be acknowledged!

#### *According to God's purpose*

With this section of my definition I include the *time component* of our biblical world view. As in the case of the other elements of a world view, this one too, cannot be separated from our notion of God: our goal for development should be determined by his design for or aim with creation.

As indicated already, this world was created, fell into sin, was redeemed and is moving towards its consummation in a new earth. Then God's kingdom will be visible in its full glory: (1) he will be acknowledged as the only King (2) of the entire new creation, (3) where we will fully enjoy the blessings of his kingdom.

This new creation will not be *another* creation, but a *renewed* creation (see different sections of Isaiah and Revelation). Because God is not rejecting the present, but will be renewing it in future, the positive results of our cultural task will be welcomed on the new earth—Revelation 21:24,26.

#### *According to his will*

The fact that the normative is the key element for a reformation of present day developmental ideas, clearly indicates that we will have to think anew about the dominant ideas about development,

not merely adapting or modifying them. We will again have to start asking some basic questions: Why is development necessary in the first place? For whom is it intended? What kind of development is planned? With what goal in mind? What will the results be? Who will benefit? And above all: According to what norms?

#### *To enable human beings within their own culture*

God gave us a cultural mandate. He even looks forward to the purified results of this task on the new earth. He does not expect us to serve him isolated from our own culture. We should do it through and within our own culture because we cannot do otherwise. As indicated above, the fact that God's Word associates itself with different cultures (relative continuity), implies that he simultaneously liberates and transforms them (radical discontinuity).

What should be emphasised, however, is that every community has the right to develop according to its own cultural criteria, provided that people are not uncritical about their own culture. There is no reason why there should only be one ideal of development, e.g. a Western, African or Japanese.

#### *To fulfil the human calling*

With his cultural mandate God calls all human beings to fulfil a task. Development, as part of our cultural task, is also a divine calling. We cannot divorce any aspect of development from our relationship to God. We may, therefore, not call it a "secular" duty, next to or separated from our "religious" duties of praying, reading the Bible and attending church on Sundays.

God not only calls ministers and priests or church officers. All of us are called to a calling in which we fulfil our task of developing different aspects of life: the social, political, economic, etc.

#### *As a responsible steward*

God's cultural mandate, that is the basis of our development task, does not imply that humans are the owners, proprietors or rulers of creation: they are only God's deputies, managers, trustees or servants. The word *steward* summarises all of them.

To be a steward does not indicate less responsibility than an owner. God placed a huge responsibility on our shoulders when,

at the beginning, he created our ancestors, Eve and Adam, as stewards. Stewards have a double responsibility: towards the Owner of creation as well as towards creation! And as far as creation is concerned, we have the difficult task of both using and protecting it. As stewards we have to use it for our real needs, but protect it against our own sinful, selfish desires.

#### *In a free society*

This section of my definition brings into focus another element of our world view: the communal or societal. We have a calling to serve God in different offices in a great variety of societal relationships. In each one of them we encounter officers and members. The officers need authority and power to fulfil their task. Authority and power as such are not wrong, but their misuse is. When misused, it robs the members of specific societal relationships of the necessary freedom to fulfil their calling of developing themselves and the rest of creation.

Real authority from a biblical perspective does not mean domination for own benefit, but service to others for their benefit, empowering them to be able to fulfil their diverse divine callings. Real authority, therefore, requires (1) insight into God's will for the specific societal relationship; (2) a willingness to obey this norm; (3) the protection and promotion of the interests of those subjected to one's authority and (4) combating evil as it is manifested in the specific societal relationship.

Development, therefore, cannot simply be planned and executed in an authoritarian way from the top down. Leadership has to empower people at grass roots, from where real development has to germinate.

#### *To the honour and glory of God*

This last section of our definition is not a pious attachment. The six elements of a Christian world view may be distinguishable, but are inseparable. In the explanation of the previous parts of my definition, it was already clear that not one of them could be detached from our idea of God. We should live before the face or in the presence of God. Life—our entire life—is religion.

At the same time, God did not only call us to live in his presence in everything we do, but that he himself should also be the final goal of everything we do. The highest norm according to which we should measure our development projects is to ask the question: Is it done to the honour and glory of God? If it is merely done for the benefit of the individual or the community, it cannot qualify as genuine development according to biblical standards. It may structurally speaking be fine, but its final direction is wrong.

## Review

This paper dealt with the influence of culture, world view and religion on development ideals. At the beginning I explained why I have focused on development. It was not merely because of a theoretical interest, but because of an existential urgency.

The African continent has become more or less irrelevant in the world economy. It is not even any longer considered a cheap source of raw materials. Two thirds of the less developed countries of the world are in Africa. Investment in education has in the last ten years dropped by 25% and health care services by no less than 50%! About 10,000 children die daily because of malnutrition and/or being underfed. Africa's foreign debt has increased faster than any other region in the "Third World": from 6 billion US dollars in 1970 to 300 billion US dollar in 1993. In my own country, South Africa—one of the "rich" countries on the continent—more than 40% of the people live below the poverty line.

This is the reason why as a philosopher I could not but get involved in the issue of this paper. I am no development expert, having but little practical experience in this field. Yet, I wanted to make a contribution from my field of study, however small.

"Rather than shouting against the darkness on our continent, we should light a candle. Because with only one small candle, our continent will not be absolutely dark any more." A Christian brother in one of our African countries gave this advice to me long ago when I felt very pessimistic about the future of this vast continent with its huge potential for development. I have tried to follow his advice.

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## Freedom, Person and Community

### *Towards an Authentic Freedom*

Stuart Fowler

The second half of the twentieth century was characterised by an unprecedented global preoccupation with freedom as a fundamental human right. The peoples of the old colonial empires, including Africa, gained political freedom as their right. Categories representing freedom as a norm of the social order, such as “the free market”, “free speech”, “free elections”, “freedom of religion”, have become commonplace in international discourse. Everyone is talking about freedom and everyone agrees that it is a good thing.

There is, however, surprisingly little discussion about just what this good thing, called freedom, really is. It is generally taken for granted that freedom is something that anyone will recognise when they see it. Yet, in practice, it is clear that everyone does not agree on what constitutes freedom.

For example, we commonly see large numbers of people exercising what they see as their civic freedom to protest against an international gathering in their city. The city authorities, however, often deny that this constitutes a legitimate exercise of freedom, taking vigorous action to restrain the protesters.

While there does exist a general consensus about the boundaries of freedom that holds good most of the time, conflicts such as this founded in differences over the practical meaning of freedom are occurring with increasing frequency around the world. Clearly, everyone does not recognise freedom when they see it.

When it comes to the broad contours of a free society, Western societies are widely regarded as providing the model of freedom, with other societies being judged to be free so far as they match the norms of these societies. These norms are promoted as universal values that are readily recognisable by all right minded persons. On this basis, the political leadership of these societies put pressure on the leaders of other societies to institute reforms that remodel the society in the image of the free, Western societies. While those

pursuing an agenda of social change in these other societies confidently look to the Western societies, and particularly the most powerful of the Western societies, as the models of the freedom they seek.

This image of contemporary Western society as the model of freedom is so influential in today’s world that it can seem absurd to question it. Yet, if we look closely behind the image, we find that the reality does not always match the image.

The image is one of political freedom in which political power belongs to the people. The reality is an increasing political disillusionment because the people feel politically powerless. Effective political power belongs to the few who control the powerful political organisations that dominate political life. The right to vote, the great symbol of democratic freedom, gives the people little real choice other than a choice between the look-alike alternatives prepared for them by these powerful organisations. Anyone else can talk about an alternative political agenda but the dominating power of the existing political interests ensures that, in political practice, they are marginalised and demonised as right or left wing extremists.

The image is one of economic freedom in which the market is a competitive environment open to the participation of all. The reality is that the market is increasingly dominated by a few immensely powerful commercial interests, the power of which is being exponentially expanded by the current drive for globalisation. The economic power of the five most powerful commercial interests already exceeds that of any African country (UNDP, 1999, 31,32). Economic freedom has become primarily the freedom of consumers to choose between products offered by these interests, or, at best, to function on the fringes of economic life.

The image is one of freedom of speech and information in which ideas and information are able to flow freely throughout the society. The reality, as documented well by Schiller (1996), is one in which the mainstream of communications media through which ideas and information flow is tightly regulated by the private commercial interests that control these media. Anything else is pushed aside into a shadow zone with minimal influence in the mainstream of society.

There are many good things about modern Western society. It is a comfortable place, on the whole, for most of those who live in it, not least because of the significant degree of freedom it provides. However, the reality of this freedom not only falls short of the rhetoric but, more significantly, offers a basis for social relationships that hinders rather than promotes human wellbeing.

There is no doubt that freedom is a good thing. God created us to be free and has redeemed us for freedom—Galatians 5:1. It is too important for us to risk accepting everything that is presented to us in the name of freedom as the genuine thing. We need to test every claim to freedom to ensure that it is an authentic freedom. As Neuhaus puts it (1991, p. vii) there is a need “to discipline our culture’s frequently loose talk about freedom”.

### Defining freedom

This discipline must begin by developing a working definition of freedom. The freedom of which we speak in the present context is human freedom. For this purpose, I propose that we should understand freedom as *the state of existence in which humans are able to act in ways that fulfil the meaning of human life*.

A mere absence of restraint on our actions is, at best, a meaningless freedom. To let an elephant loose on the Antarctic ice is not setting it free in any meaningful sense. It is consigning it to a painful death. The same would apply to an Antarctic penguin let loose on the inland plains of tropical Africa. To have any meaning, freedom for any living creature must have the possibility of fulfilling the life of that creature. Human freedom, then, must be defined in relation to the fulfilment of the meaning of human life.

Neither can freedom be satisfactorily understood as a total absence of restraint on action. Freedom can exist only within a framework of appropriate restraints. The legal restraint that confines the flow of traffic to one side of a road depending on the direction of travel is not an impediment to freedom but an important factor in facilitating freedom of movement on public roads.

A state of freedom, therefore, is one in which there is an absence of those kinds of restraints that prevent the fulfilment of human life. However, it is meaningless to say that I am free to do something because there is no active restraint that prevents me if I lack

the power necessary to do it. I am not free to go to the moon, even though nothing is acting to hold me back, if I lack the necessary power to get there. A state of freedom, then, is one in which we are appropriately enabled to do whatever is needed to fulfil the meaning of human life.

It is common to speak of a diversity of freedoms (Neuhaus, 1991). On this view, freedom is defined as a series of rights each of which is, in principle, absolute. This leads to the problem of a conflict of freedoms when the interests of one right conflict with those of another (Gastil, 1991). We avoid this if we think of freedom as one, the unity of which is given in the unity of meaning of human life which freedom serves. We may then helpfully distinguish different facets of this one freedom but the question of conflict does not arise. In an authentic freedom, each facet functions in harmony with all the others to fulfil the one meaning of human life.

In order to fill out this understanding of freedom we need to explore three issues in more detail:

1. The nature of the human person;
2. The meaning of human life;
3. The relation between power and freedom.

### The nature of the human person

The dominant view of freedom in modern Western societies assumes an individualist view of the human person (Neuhaus, 1991, p. vii). The basic principles of this individualism are clearly articulated in the influential work of the seventeenth century English social theorist, John Locke, and again, in slightly different form, by the eighteenth century Genevan, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Locke (1924) and Rousseau (1992) both argued that the primary state of humans—the state of nature—is one in which each individual orders his<sup>1</sup> own life. Locke argued that the individual is governed in this by reason, which he calls the law of Nature (1924, p. 119). Rousseau is somewhat more vague on this point, but it is clear enough that for him also there is a law built into the nature of the human individual by which he is able to order his life in appropriate ways.

A human society comes into existence as a group of these autonomous individuals enter into an agreement, or contract, by which

they each individually surrender their natural right of self-government in order to gain the mutual benefits of collective action. This agreement creates a state with a government as the primary social organisation.

On this view, the human person by nature is an autonomous individual. Communal life is not part of human nature. It is created only as and when individuals agree to unite together for common ends. The only exception is the family, but this is a special case that exists only for the purpose of the nurture of individuals until, having reached maturity, they can assume the individual autonomy that is their most basic right as humans (Rousseau, 1992, pp. 29,30).

There is another strand in the Western tradition that takes a very different view of the human person and society. It is represented in the work of the German Reformed political theorist, Johannes Althusius, which appeared nearly a hundred years before Locke. Like Locke and Rousseau, Althusius regarded communal life as an integral feature of human life, something that belongs to human nature itself. Hence, while, like them, he regarded democracy as the political norm, he saw human communities, rather than individuals, as the primary constituents of the democratic state.

The individualist views of Locke and Rousseau became the dominant Western view. However, as Carl J. Friedrich points out (Althusius, 1964, p. xii), the view of Althusius has been influential in shaping the political and social order of the Netherlands and Switzerland and has strong echoes in Sweden. In today's debates about democracy it offers a significant alternative to the individualist models of democracy commonly regarded as the norm-represented by the United States, France and Britain. It is an alternative, furthermore, that has provided the foundations for some of the world's most enduring and stable democracies.

The individualist views of person and society that dominate modern Western thought are also challenged by the African tradition. Menkiti (1979, p. 157) argues that the dominant view of the human person in the African tradition is that the person is defined, not by some quality of the individual but "by reference to the enveloping community". He quotes Mbiti's summary of this view: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am." He concludes

that "as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories".

It should be noted that Menkiti is not saying that there is no place for the individual in the African tradition but that the human community is primary. We may debate the details, but there seems no doubt that the dominant view of the human person in the African tradition is a communalist one, in contrast to the individualist view that dominates modern Western thought.

A communalist view does not require the obliteration of the individual. It says that the community is primary and definitive of the human person with the individual deriving meaning from the community. Similarly, an individualist view does not wipe out all forms of communal life. It says that the individual is primary and definitive of the human person with communal life deriving its meaning from the collective will of individuals.

These distinctions are not always appreciated in discussions of Western individualism. For example, in a discussion about individualism in America, Gastil argued (Stallsworth, 1991, p. 117) that the reality of American society is strongly communalist. In support of this he offers the evidence that it is "a society of joiners, of people who belong to a wide variety of organizations." He was supported in this by Neuhaus with the observation that the American reality "is more attuned to a communal form of life" than to individualism. Similarly Novak (1989) argues for a communal interpretation of American culture on the basis of the important place that social organisations have in American life.

Arguments of this sort reveal the fundamentally individualist thinking of those concerned. Their view of communities as social organisations to which individuals belong because they choose to join is a decidedly individualist one. The individual is primary and definitive, with the community deriving from the free actions of these autonomous individuals. On a genuinely communalist view, such as is described by Menkiti, a community is not an organisation that we join because we choose to do so. It is a relationship to which we belong because of who we are.

Individualism blurs the distinction between community and organisation by seeing communities as collectives organised by individuals. No community can function without some kind of

organisation, formal or informal, to order communal affairs. But the organisation is not the community; it is an organising of a communal life that is founded in the nature of the human person.

The American, Vincent Donovan, records how he only came to understand the possibilities of genuine human community when he immersed himself in the communal life of the Masai of East Africa. Of his earlier experiences he observes (1978, p. 141) that “the strange, changing, mobile, temporary, disappearing communities of America can leave one without any experience of what community is.”

Unfortunately, the experience and understanding of community is being lost in Africa. The drive for modernisation, the adoption of Western patterns of education and the dominant role of Western ideas in the communications media is conditioning the peoples of Africa to see Western individualism as the norm of human life. All too often the label “African communalism” is being used to justify patterns of social relations that serve the interest and convenience of the individual without any of the responsibilities that a genuine communal life involves. If Africans allow this erosion of practical communal values to continue, they will lose one of the richest insights that their tradition has to offer the modern world.

While Scripture undoubtedly affirms human individuality it just as clearly affirms communality as a fundamental constituent of the human person. Each of us belongs to others so that our own humanity cannot be fulfilled unless we live in ways that acknowledge that belonging—Romans 12:4.

This does not mean that we should embrace communalism as an alternative to individualism. Neither communalism nor individualism does justice to the biblical revelation. The human person is defined neither as an autonomous individual nor as a member of a community. The human person is defined by the creative word of God that constitutes us as God’s creaturely image. This image of God is not some quality that we have. It is who we are. The human person is an individual, but is also more than an individual. The human person is a member of community, but is also more than a member of community.

Individuality and communality are aspects of our humanness that must be recognised equally if there is to be a full human devel-

opment. Neither is primary or definitive. A healthy individuality will express itself in a vigorous communal life. A healthy communal life will nurture and affirm the individuality of each person. To break this connection by making either individual or community primary and definitive distorts human life. However, the dominant influence of individualism in today’s global society requires us to focus sharply on this particular form of distortion if we are to achieve an authentic freedom.

A freedom based on an individualist view of the person, that subordinates communal life to individual interest, is inevitably destructive in its tendencies. It is notorious that a lion, or an elephant, if cut off from the communal life of the pride or herd, tends to become a destructive rogue. Lions and elephants are created to live in communities of their own kind. Their character becomes distorted when they are cut off from that communal life. In a similar way, when the communal bonds of the human person are weakened in the name of the freedom of the individual, the human person is distorted with destructive effects on both the individual person and communal life.

It should be noted that, in the modern society, communal life is differentiated. There is no single community that embraces the whole of human life. Any one person will belong to several communities, each of which covers a different area of life. Among the different kinds of communities we may think, for example, of familial community, political community, educational community, worshipping community, recreational community, commercial community, artistic community.

Menkiti (1979, p. 167) draws attention to an important aspect of this issue when he points out that, whereas Western individualism leads to a focus on the rights of the individual in social relationships, the African view of the person leads to a focus on the duties that the individual owes to the community.

There is no doubt that individuals do have rights, or entitlements. As a law-abiding citizen of Australia I have the right to a passport and to use this to travel where I choose. I also have a right to vote in the elections of governments in my home country. More broadly, as a human person I have a right to expect respect for my life from the communities within which I function.

However, a rights-based approach to freedom, deeply rooted as it is in an individualist view of the human person, leads to a distorted freedom that undermines rather than advances human wellbeing. Firstly, defining freedom as a right tends to detach the exercise of freedom from the discipline of communal responsibilities that is essential to a responsible exercise of freedom, and, for that matter, of right.

Secondly, the definition of freedom in terms of a series of discrete, and, in principle, absolute, rights leads to inevitable conflicts between the claims of different freedoms, in which, in the end, the claim of one must lose to the other—note Stallsworth (1991, p. 130). Much of the social conflict in today's societies is rooted in this conflict over the competing rights of competing freedoms.

While the responsible exercise of freedom requires the discipline of communal responsibilities, it is no more satisfactory to base freedom on responsibilities than on rights. An authentic freedom will be "a freedom with purpose" (Stallsworth, 1991, p. 139). Such a freedom must be linked to the meaning of human life.

### **The meaning of human life**

Freedom is not a good thing in itself. Its good is in the purpose that it serves. Rural Africans with little education will usually show more interest in freedom to grow and sell their own crops without interference than in the political freedom that is so eagerly sought by their educated urban fellow citizens. One freedom serves a clear and important purpose in their lives, while they fail to see what purpose the other will serve.

Possession of a set of keys and an access code will give free access to a bank vault. This is a good thing while it serves legitimate purposes. However, when this freedom serves the purposes of a bank robber it is no longer a good thing.

This does not mean that freedom is only good if those concerned see the good. It may serve a good purpose even though this is not recognised by those concerned. The point, however, remains that we can only judge the good of freedom by the purpose that it serves.

Unlike other creatures, humans choose the purposes that they will pursue. A zebra or giraffe fulfils its creaturely purpose by following its in-built instincts. Humans must choose from a wide

range of possibilities and accept responsibility for these choices. The biologist Charles Birch observes (1990, p. 2) that the choice of purposes is the most powerful of all influences in human lives. When life seems to have cheated us, the fault, in the end, is that "we have failed to choose purposes that could fulfil life."

People desire freedom for a variety of purposes. Sometimes the desired purpose is being able to do what I want to do. In other cases the purpose is access to the centres of social power. Or, sometimes freedom is regarded as a desirable end in itself.

An authentic freedom can only be one that serves the purpose of fulfilling the meaning of human life. A freedom serving any other purpose is an empty, meaningless freedom that, in the end, can only be destructive in its effects. It is a dehumanising freedom. This leaves the question: What is the meaning of human life?

For the Christian the only answer to this question can be the service in love of God and neighbour. We are not created for self-gratification or the exercise of power for its own sake but in order that, in love, we may be the creaturely image of the God who is love. As those redeemed in Christ we have been given a freedom that is not to be seen as an opportunity for self-indulgence but that we may "through love become slaves to one another"—Galatians 5:13. If we depart from this all-encompassing purpose of love, our freedom will become a destructive force for ourselves and for others—Galatians 5:14,15.

This leads us to a view of freedom that is in direct contrast to the dominant view of our age. As a rights-based freedom the dominant view focuses on what the society owes me; it is directed towards obtaining my entitlements. It leads to conflict and alienation as the right claimed by one party conflicts with the right of another. It divides society into factions each fighting for its perceived rights.

A redemptive view of freedom, directed towards the service of love, focuses not on what others owe me, or us, but on what I, and we, can do for others. It takes our Lord's words seriously when he said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."—Acts 20:35. It acts in accordance with the mind of Christ that looks not to our own interests "but to the interests of others"—Philippians 2:4<sup>2</sup>.

It will require some courage to adopt this view of freedom in today's world. It is a world that believes passionately in the fulfil-

ment of human life through a freedom for each individual to pursue his or her goals and interests. Concern for others has a place but only so far as it does not interfere with the pursuit of our own goals and interests. It is a world in which quality of life is not measured by how much we give but by how much we get. Giving to others has a place, but only so far as it has no more than a marginal impact on what we get for ourselves.

Yet, if we are to achieve the transformational living of which Paul speaks in Romans 12:1,2 we must be ready to resist, by word and deed, conformity to this dominant view of freedom. We must pay more than lip service to the redemptive message of the God who took the form of a slave in his love for his rebellious creatures—Philippians 2:5–8. We must show that his mind is in us by living in a way that shows freedom as a calling to become slaves to one another through love. Note that this is not the slavery of external coercion that is the ultimate denial of freedom. It is a freely chosen slavery governed by love that is the ultimate affirmation of human freedom.

### **The relation between power and freedom**

It is clear that power can be used to deprive us of freedom. A person armed with a gun can hold others hostage. Yet power can also be used to secure freedom. Other persons with sufficient power can free us by using the power to disarm the person holding us hostage. The failure to use power can also affect our freedom. If I have the power to free the hostages, but fail to do so, I contribute to their deprivation of freedom.

It follows from this that the freedom people enjoy in a society is directly related to the way power is used, or not used, in society. The relation between social power and freedom is often seen in terms of the amount of power that different parties have. The oppressive nature of a totalitarian state, for example, is seen as the result of its having excessive power. Yet the reality is that power is never evenly distributed. Some always have more power than others. In spite of Rousseau's ideal (1992, p. 39), a democratic society is no exception.

The real issue is not one of the relative amount of power but the way in which power is exercised. A totalitarian state is not oppres-

sive because it has too much power but because it uses its power to restrict the ability of its citizens to act in fulfilment of their human calling. Colonial regimes in Africa were not oppressive because of the amount of power they had but because they used that power to exclude Africans from the political and commercial life of the society, thus denying them the opportunity to act in fulfilment of their human calling in these areas.

This is not to say that the amount of power is unimportant. Clearly, the greater the power the greater the potential for using that power to restrict freedom or, on the other hand, for advancing freedom. However, the decisive issue is the way power is used.

Power that is used to prevent people from acting in ways that will fulfil the meaning of being human is always oppressive. Power that is used to enable such action is always liberating.

### *The contemporary reality of power*

It is often supposed that the decisive issue in ensuring a free society is the limitation of the power of the state. Berger (1991, p. 12), for example, argues that the freeing of economic life from the control of the state is "the necessary presupposition for democracy", with the freedom this entails. There are two flaws in this view. Firstly, it supposes that the important question is the amount of power rather than the way it is used. Secondly, it overlooks the other forms of social power that can play as important a role as the state restricting or facilitating freedom.

In today's global society, the power of commercial interests rivals, and in many cases exceeds, the power of the state. The annual sales of General Motors alone are greater than the GDP (total output of goods and services for final use) of Norway, Finland or Greece, four times that of Nigeria, 16 times that of Kenya, 18 times that of Zimbabwe and 42 times that of Zambia (UNDP, 1999, pp. 32,184–187). And globalisation, through mergers and global expansion of markets, is rapidly increasing the concentration of power in these commercial corporations (UNDP, 1999, p. 32).

Already, more than 60% of world trade involves multinational corporations. Somewhere around one third of all trade involves transactions between components of multinational corporations which are effectively shielded from any genuine competition. In

the case of Africa, and other developing countries, multinational corporations, whose home bases are in the developed world, dominate the production, distribution and sale of many goods vital to the economies of those countries (UNDP, 1999, p. 114).

Adam Smith (1961, p. 147) argued that, despite the self-interested intentions of the operator of a commercial enterprise, he is "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention". While Smith's "invisible hand" may be regarded as too mystical for today's secular thinking, the idea persists of a benevolent power operating in the field of commercial endeavour under the name of "market forces". If allowed to function freely without state intervention, these "market forces", it is argued, will override the self-interests of individuals to ensure that the effect of commercial activity is overwhelmingly beneficial.

Yet, when we examine it closely, this faith in "market forces" to regulate commercial activity for good is founded in ideology and myth rather than any empirical reality. There is no empirical reason to believe that the intentions of the humans in control of commercial power have any less impact on the outcomes of that activity than of any other human activity.

As Christians, we believe that the "invisible hand" of God does ensure that, even where the intentions are unrighteous, desirable outcomes are not altogether lost. But this is as true for the state as for commercial activity. Furthermore, this divine grace moderates but does not negate the effect of the unrighteous intention in the state, in commercial activity or any other sphere of human life.

Given the power of commercial interests in today's world, we cannot afford to ignore the impact of commercial power when considering the question of freedom. In Africa, the issue of the inappropriate use of state power limiting freedom remains a significant issue, to a greater or lesser extent, in many countries. In Western society, however, commercial power must be the prime concern. Neither should it be ignored in the African context where its influence is already significant and likely to become increasingly so.

### *The role of commercial enterprise*

The difficulty in attempting any kind of critique of commercial power in today's context is that any criticism of the use of

commercial power is too easily labelled as left wing radicalism advocating a discredited socialism. It is then automatically dismissed as irrelevant.

Let me, then, try to get some things straight before we proceed further. Contrary to all socialist views, I believe firmly that, on the whole, the means of production, distribution, and exchange in human society should be owned and operated by private commercial interests in accordance with commercial principles. As commercial enterprises, these constitute a sphere of activity distinct from the state and, so far as their internal operations are concerned, should be free of state control. In this most fundamental sense my convictions are decidedly capitalist.

On the other hand, there are ideas that are commonly associated with capitalism to which I do not subscribe. I do not subscribe to the now common view that all services are necessarily best delivered by commercial enterprise, nor do I subscribe to the user-pays principle in the provision of all services. There are services essential to human freedom that clearly cannot be provided on this basis. To attempt it is to deprive significant numbers of persons of the opportunity to fulfil the meaning of human life.

Also, as will already be apparent, I do not subscribe to the view that "market forces" will ensure that commercial activity has a positive, liberating impact on human life. Like any other area of human life, commercial activity is a normative activity that can be either beneficial or harmful in its impact, depending on what norms govern its practice. Critical scrutiny of commercial practice, therefore, is not to be seen as an attack on commercial endeavour as such but a necessary process for ensuring that its potential for good is realised.

For this reason, the argument that all social policy must conform to the existing commercial reality is dangerously flawed. To the extent that the existing commercial reality is governed by faulty norms, such an argument is a guarantee of social policies that undermine human wellbeing. For the Christian, it is an argument that will frustrate all our endeavours to achieve transformational thinking about the issue of our age.

Finally, I do not subscribe to the idea that the relation between the state and commercial enterprise should be one of minimal inter-

vention. The issue is not the extent to which the state should regulate commercial activity but the nature of that regulation. In particular, I consider it to be important, and entirely appropriate to its God-given calling, for the state to regulate commercial activity in two respects: to ensure genuine freedom in the commercial market and to ensure that commercial power is not used to advance commercial interest at the expense of other human interests.

### *The exercise of commercial power in today's world*

There are three ways in which the exercise of commercial power shapes social reality in today's world. Firstly, that power is used within the commercial market to secure and maintain an ever increasing market dominance for an increasingly smaller group of giant corporations. Others are left with no choice but to operate on the market fringes, providing fringe products and services—"niche markets". Nowhere is the dogma of Social Darwinism more entrenched than in the commercial world, where it is the norm for the strong to devour the weak and might is right. There is no greater myth than the idea that the strong triumph because they provide superior products and services. They triumph because they are more effective in the ruthless exercise of power.

Secondly, commercial power is used to put pressure on governments to adopt social policies that create the most favourable environment for commercial interests. The power of commercial interests is such that even the strongest states cannot afford to ignore this pressure. For smaller states, whose power is minute compared to that of the commercial interests, the pressure is overwhelming.

Orwa (1992, pp. 392, 393) documents how the government of Kenya has progressively amended its foreign investment legislation in response to pressure from multinational commercial interests to secure an environment that favours those interests. This contrasts sharply with King's report (1996, pp. 32–34, 200) of an extended and careful study of Kenya's indigenous, micro-enterprises. The study shows a vibrant, innovative micro-enterprise sector that has developed in spite of, at best, "benign neglect by government" and, at worst, petty bureaucratic regulation hindering its development. This continuing failure to provide it with a suitably favourable operating environment hinders the further development of its

potential for a more formal role in the national economy, including a contribution to the much needed expansion of exports.

In the case of South Africa, Marais (1998, pp. 146–172) traces the way in which the power of commercial interests was used in the early 1990s to influence a fundamental reshaping of ANC policies in ways that sometimes involved a total reversal of earlier "liberation" policies. The outcome was government policy that was congenial to the dominant commercial interests.

It is, of course, as appropriate for commercial interests, as much as any others, to contribute to debate about appropriate official policies. The reality of today's world, however, is that the contribution they make is not just one among any number of others. Their power means that they have an access to, and influence in, the centres of political power that others do not have. Again, this is not, of necessity, a bad thing. In any society, including a democratic society, some have more power than others. The important issue is how the power is used.

Thirdly, the dominant commercial control of the mass media gives commercial interests the power to shape the values and norms of society. That this is a persuasive, rather than coercive, power makes it even more significant. Coercive power can be used only to control external actions. Persuasive power has a more profound impact in shaping society by capturing the hearts and minds of people.

The nature of today's communications technology that allows powerful images to be transmitted instantaneously around the world makes this arguably the most powerful of all instruments for shaping public opinion.

News reports with graphic, on the spot images create the illusion that we know what is actually happening on the other side of the world, just as though we were there. It is an illusion because we are not there and what we actually see are carefully selected and edited images that do not represent the full reality of what happened. They represent the viewpoint of those controlling the transmission of the images we see.

Glossy, easy to watch dramas entertain us and, in the process, subtly, yet powerfully, shape social norms and values by presenting powerful images of "normal" human life and relationships. We

listen to debates on social issues that lead us to believe that there is free and open discussion of the issues, when the reality is that we are exposed to a careful selection of views (see Schiller, 1996, pp. 14–18).

The reality is that there is no such thing as neutral communications. All communication represents a point of view, a world view. It would be extremely naïve to suppose that, where commercial interests control the means of communication, the communications received through these means will not represent the world view of these interests. If we have any doubt of this, Schiller (1996) provides extensive and compelling evidence of the way in which commercial interest controls the flow of communications in today's mass media.

#### *Evaluating the role of commercial interests*

In making a critical evaluation of the role of commercial interests, it is important to note that there are many individuals of personal integrity and faith in the executive ranks of commercial corporations. Whatever may be said that is critical of the role of commercial interests in today's world should not be taken as a reflection on the integrity of these persons.

At the same time, it needs to be recognised that there prevails within corporate entities a corporate culture that reinforces the fundamental rightness of the way these entities function. This is as true for academic and church entities as it is for commercial corporations. Especially for those who hold positions of authority within these entities, and who are therefore immersed in this corporate culture, it is difficult to stand back and evaluate corporate activity other than in terms of the corporate culture.

It is therefore an important function of an effective Christian community that its more widely dispersed members are able to stimulate their brothers and sisters in the commercial world, as in every other area of life, in a constructively critical evaluation of commercial life by the norms of the Gospel.

We have noted already that the mere possession of power is not, in itself, a bad thing. However, the power of today's commercial interests, that enables those interests to dominate social life and political decision making, is, at the very least, dangerous. In

practice, there are three reasons for concluding that the use of this power is having a negative impact on freedom in today's world.

#### *The role of profit*

The primary, and overriding, purpose of today's commercial corporation is the making of profit. Chief executives are paid salaries of millions of dollars a year on the understanding that they will justify their remuneration by maximising profits. Corporate structures are rationalised and operating procedures reformed with the same end in view. The United Nations Development Programme annual report (UNDP, 1999, p. 114) summarises this situation in the context of the current globalisation:

*The world is rushing headlong into greater integration—driven mostly by a philosophy of market profitability and economic efficiency.*

It is often said that private commercial operations are more efficient than publicly owned organisations. While there is some truth in this, it is a broad generalisation requiring careful qualification. An important qualification, in the present global context, is that the overriding goal of commercial efficiency is the maximising of profit. Quality of product and service figure in the equation only so far as they affect the profit bottom line.

It is entirely legitimate for any commercial operation to make a profit. In the nature of the case, it must cease to exist as a commercial operation if it does not. However, when profit is the overriding goal of the operation, the result is an inevitable distortion, rather than a fulfilment, of the meaning of human life. The consequence is a social environment that inhibits authentic freedom.

Firstly, when maximum profit is the operational bottom line, the biblical norm that the ox that treads out the grain must not be muzzled is overridden by the requirement that labour costs must be minimised—1 Corinthians 9:8-10; 1 Timothy 5:18. The biblical norm does not require that all should receive the same reward, regardless of the role they play. It does require a rejection of today's practice that determines rewards by the dynamics of labour market supply and demand. Instead, it specifies that, all, including the lowliest labourer, should be rewarded on the basis of a right to share in the general bounty of the operation.

Secondly, it restricts the supply of goods and services. In view of the array of goods and services on offer in today's market place, this may seem to be a ridiculous claim. However, the dazzling array that undoubtedly is on offer tends to disguise an underlying restriction in supply. Because mass sales maximise profits, the emphasis is on products and services for which a mass market can be created. Other products and services are pushed to the fringes of the market where they can be found only with considerable effort and, in some cases, high cost.

Even more alarming than the restriction in the supply of consumer goods is the well documented restriction in the provision of care (UNDP, 1999, pp. 77–83). Those rich enough to pay can still gain access to high quality care. For the majority, however, the relentless pursuit of profitability is resulting in a steadily declining quality of care. Only the caring of a few dedicated people who defy the trend is preventing an even greater crisis.

Thirdly, and perhaps more profoundly, the overriding profit goal creates a distorted set of social values as all other values are subordinated to that of profit. People, including those in control of commercial operations, still hold other values to be important, including values of caring. However, in practice these values are diminished by their subordination to the overriding value of profitability. This shift in the balance of values is not confined to the commercial world but spills over to the whole society. It turns on its head our Lord's call to give priority to the righteousness of his kingdom—Matthew 6:25–33.

#### *Desires, wants and needs*

It is often said that the commercial market merely gives people what they want. One of the disciplines of the market is said to be that, if people do not want it, they will not buy it. The reality is that modern marketing strategies, facilitated by the persuasive power of modern communications technology, shape tastes and create wants in the interests of ever expanding sales.

I long wondered why Americans are so passionate about having pancakes and syrup for breakfast. I was even more mystified that they seem to prefer artificial maple syrup rather than the real thing! All was made plain when I learned that, in 1919, the makers of

Domino Gold Syrup launched a highly successful promotional campaign to persuade the American public that their syrup was not just for cold winter evenings but was to be enjoyed all the year round. The sales manager of the company said: "Our belief is that the entire year is syrup season and the people must be educated to believe this is a fact." (Clapp, 1998, p. 185). Clearly the public were so educated!

To similar effect, Crowell of Quaker Oats is on record as saying that his aim was "...to awaken an interest in and create a demand for cereals where none existed." (Clapp, 1998, p. 185). These are but two of many examples of this kind that could be given. The modern commercial enterprise does not set out merely to satisfy existing wants. It sets out quite deliberately to create new wants and new needs by stimulating human desire.

Successful sales strategies are designed to use the power of modern technology to project an image of a product or service as something desirable that will enhance the quality of life. The aim is to persuade as many people as possible to say: "I must have this". In this way, desire becomes need, and yesterday's unheard of luxury becomes today's necessity.

This generates and reinforces the value that whatever has a desirable image is good. Desire becomes the criterion of good. This, of course, is precisely the basis for the original temptation. The image of the fruit made it appear as "good for food...a delight to the eyes, and...to be desired to make one wise"—Genesis 3: 6. There is nothing wrong with good food, or pleasant sights, or wisdom. The temptation was the use of an image of these things as a lure to allow human desire, rather than the word of the Lord, to be the criterion of good.

Today's commercial culture reflects in an unmistakable way the characteristics of the world as described by John: the identification of the good with the desirable and pride in riches—1 John 2:15,16. Involving, as it does, a fundamental denial of the love revealed in Christ, it is a culture that, in spite of its often appealing appearance, can only lead to a serious diminishing rather than a fulfilling of the meaning of human life.

### *The human person as consumer*

Finally, the values of today's commercial world lead to the definition of the human person as primarily a consumer. The quality of human life, the standard of living, are measured by the amount of consumption.

The processes of production are not valued for their own sake but only as a means to consumption. We produce only so that we can consume. It is regarded as desirable to obtain what we want to consume, where possible, without involving ourselves in the process of production. Goods that we can obtain ready for instant consumption are the ideal.

The retailing analyst, Victor Lebow, writing over forty years ago, put it well (Clapp, 1998, p. 189):

*Our enormously productive economy...demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and using of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption...We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.*

The result is a fundamental undermining of the meaning of the human person. We are created to be producers and carers, not consumers. We are called to be God's image by cultivating and caring for the earth—Genesis 2:15. The proper purpose of our cultivation is not so that we may consume more and more but a caring, loving nurturing that makes the earth a richer place in every way—not merely in terms of market value.

We do need to consume, and ought to enjoy what we consume, but consumption does not give authentic meaning to our life. That comes through productive and caring activity. The subordination of productive activity to consumption goals and of caring activity to market constraints subverts our most fundamental humanity and, with it, our authentic freedom.

If we have the will to do it, we can find ways of freeing ourselves from the prevailing consumerist mould to find the joyful freedom for which we are redeemed. Bill McKibben (1998, pp. 40–50) tells how a family Christmas was transformed into a time of relaxed, joyful celebration by breaking with the consumerist pattern that has now become a social norm throughout the Western world, and,

increasingly in urban centres of the developing world. Instead of viewing Christmas as a time for big spending and lavish consumption, the McKibben family adopted a pattern of relaxed family sharing, focused on God's redemption in Christ and including the sharing of simple gifts made by the family members. He speaks of it as the experience of a "deep bubbling joy" that comes only as we pass up the temptation of easy but "momentary pleasure".

### *Swimming against the tide*

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to achieving the kind of authentic freedom that McKibben describes is that it requires us to adopt values that contradict the prevailing values of freedom. In the prevailing values, the unfettered consumption of the glittering array of goods and services offered in the global marketplace is a fundamental mark of personal freedom. A market of ever increasing consumption is seen as an essential ingredient of a free society.

This was dramatically illustrated in the days when the Berlin wall was crumbling with a flood of people pouring through from the East. It was clear that the focus of the celebration was not political freedom but access to the consumerist market of the West.

To adopt a lifestyle that refuses to be drawn by the allure of ever increasing consumption means going against the prevailing cultural tide. Yet, is this not what is clearly required if we are to experience the freedom that Christ has given us? Is it not what we must do if we are to avoid being conformed to the world and be transformed by the renewing of our minds in wholehearted service to our Redeemer?—Romans 12:1,2.

This does not mean that we should withdraw from participation in the marketplace. Christ has not called us to withdraw from the world but has sent us into the world to live in the world by the law of love that is the law of his kingdom. What we are called to is a discerning participation that selects not on the basis of our own desires but on the basis of what will enable us to most effectively serve God and neighbour in love in today's world.

### **Towards an authentic freedom**

When critically viewed in the light of the Gospel, it is clear that the freedom that is being pursued so passionately around the world

today is a flawed freedom, founded in a flawed understanding of the meaning of human life. It blocks the way to the experience of authentic freedom. To the extent that Christians adopt a way of life based on the values of this flawed freedom we are unable to live in the freedom for which Christ has redeemed us and the witness of our lives before the world is dimmed.

There is, therefore, no more urgent issue about which we need a practical understanding of transformed living that, bringing discernment of the will of God, alone leads to the genuinely good life. This calls for critical reflection on our calling in Christ that involves the whole Christian community. The fruit of academic analysis and discussion on the authentic meaning of freedom in today's world is one of the inputs needed if this reflection is to be effective.

Let us again remember that the success of our endeavours in this, as in any other area, is not to be measured by the extent to which we are able to change the direction of society. It is to be measured by the faithfulness of our witness to the society in deed and word.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The masculine is used deliberately in this context because, at the time that both Locke and Rousseau wrote, the social role of women was, to say the least, ambiguous. When they spoke of the individual it was decidedly the male individual that they had in mind. Women's role in society was tied to that of the man.
- <sup>2</sup> The translation of NIV at this point is doubtful when it says: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests

of others." While this meaning is not entirely impossible, it weakens the force of the command in a way that is not consistent with the context.

## **Building Bridges within the Community of Faith**

*Isaac Njaramba Mutua*

Christ is the mystery of God and in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and understanding. The challenge of the gospel is to make this mystery known (Colossians 2:2–3). It makes sense then to propose that most of Africa's problems can be located in the lack of the knowledge of Christ. The solution to those problems lies in the knowledge of Christ. Knowledge of Christ, however, means different things to different people.

Most people pre-occupied with the burden of the unreached people confuse the knowledge of Christ with the churchification of an area. Others confuse the knowledge of Christ with the numerical growth in their churches. The Bible advocates something more than either of these views. The great commission stipulates this clearly. Jesus Christ commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything that he had commanded (Matthew 28:19–20). The commission is to make disciples and not converts, to Christianise and not to churchify. Tite Tienou (1990, p. 51) observes this clearly:

*For the great commission cannot be considered fulfilled unless and until there is teaching and discipleship .*

When people become Christ's disciples, their deeds, thoughts and speech are renewed as God in Christ leads them in the scripture through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this state, Christians become the salt and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16).

It is to this end of making disciples that scholarship in Africa should be geared. This means that a great task lies ahead for African evangelicals. In order to see clearly the nature of this task, we need to have a look at the current problem in Africa.

### **The Current Problem in Africa**

Though Africa is afflicted by the problem of illiteracy (as far as reading and writing is concerned), it is afflicted even more by the

problem of Christian illiteracy—that is, an ignorance of the fullness of meaning of the Gospel. More and more Christians are entering institutions of Christian higher learning, such as theological colleges and Christian universities, yet this Christian illiteracy is on the increase.

The reason is the gap that exists between those who obtain these academic qualifications and the people of God who do not have them. It is unfortunate that this gap is widening at an alarming rate thus opening room for more gaps.

Tite Tienou, a well known African evangelical theologian struggles with this alarming gap and suggests possible measures to curb it. This paper is to a certain degree a response to his call. I propose that the challenge of African evangelicals is to address themselves on how this gap must be bridged.

In the current development of theology in Africa, there is, in fact, a gap between academic and popular theology (Tienou, 1990, p. 40). He distinguishes between academic and popular theology suggesting that academic theology is theology written for international readership. Popular theology, he notes, is well expressed in hymns, preaching, ordinary counsel given by pastors and other spiritual leaders on a day to day basis (Tienou, 1990, pp. 49-50).

What is saddening to us is that much is taking place at the popular level while at the academic level little is happening that has significant practical impact at the popular level. Partly as a result of this, popular theology is not always grounded in and governed by the Scripture (Tienou, 1990, p. 50).

It has to be acknowledged, of course, that academic theology is not automatically grounded in and governed by the scripture. Yet the lack of effective communication between believing academic theologians and the rest of the people of God, deprives popular conceptions of the faith of important input.

We observed earlier that the knowledge of Christ is the key to most of Africa's problems. The great commission must be fulfilled in Africa if the prophetic mission of the church to be the salt and the light of the world is to be fulfilled. But what shall we accomplish when the avenue is blocked by the gap we just explained?

This gap is not something that we can comfortably stay with. It is not something we can just assume and pretend that we can

continue with our scholarly endeavours without taking note of it. It demands our urgent attention. Secularism is finding fertile ground in this gap. Shorter and Onyancha (1997) warn us in the following terms:

*So, far from the African being inherently, if not "notoriously" religious, secularism is rapidly becoming a more generalised phenomenon in the African continent, spreading from a small circle of privileged individuals to a whole society that is undergoing a spectacular evolution.*

More than this, other religions, such as Islam and African Traditional Religion, are taking advantage of a secularised Christianity to extend their hold in Africa. This means then, that the bridging of this gap is imperative.

### **Causes of the Problem**

The causes of this problem may be many and varied but we limit ourselves to four major causes: the academic circle, lack of contextualised Christianity, lack of interest in reading and lack of adequate recognition by the Christian academic community that God speaks equally to non-academic members of the body of Christ.

#### *The academic circle*

As noted earlier, we would expect that with more and more trained personnel in the Christian field, the gap should be narrowed. With more going into the churches from academic institutions we would expect the fruits of academic reflection to be penetrating more effectively. Yet the reality is that the gap is widening.

A major factor in this is what we may call the academic circle. The academic circle is just this; a person trained in an academic institution proceeds immediately to further studies, and then proceeds to train others with little, if any, experience of actualising what is being learned in the world of everyday life—see figure 1.

To be effective in the field, what is learned in academic institutions needs to be tested in the field. The trend we are observing in the current field of Christian scholarship does not respect this principle. People with academic training in pastoring are becoming trainers of pastors without adequate experience of what the actual-

ity of pastoral ministry entails. Theologians are teaching “contextualised” theology without a feel for or understanding of the context which this theology is to address because their own understanding is shaped by an academic learning without adequate experience of the actualities of the context.

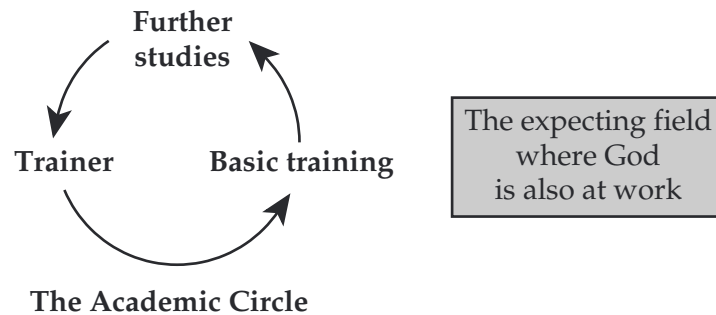


Figure 1

In our Christian training institutions, students are busy looking for scholarships in the final years of their undergraduate training to enable them to proceed to postgraduate training for a field of ministry without knowing what that field looks like. Some of these students entered undergraduate training directly from high school. When such persons complete their postgraduate training, they become lecturers to train others for ministries of which they have little knowledge except what they got from books. This process is dangerous, but seems to be the favoured path for many of those pursuing scholarly callings within African Christianity.

Admittedly, it is not always easy for the Christian scholar in Africa who wants to pursue scholarly endeavours within the context of the daily life of the churches. Sometimes, withdrawal into the seclusion of an academic institution can be a welcome relief from the pressures of the field. While addressing a seminar organised by Nairobi Fellowship of Theological Colleges (NFTC), Tite Tienou was asked why he was addressing the subject of the theological task in Africa while he himself was working as a lecturer in an institution outside Africa. He answered that he was taking a break or leave from frustration.

For whatever reason further study is sought, as long as it is detached from the field, it helps to deepen or increase the problem

of the academic circle. “If the mouth is not wide enough to swallow a pill can it swallow a mango?” If the first level of study has never been communicated effectively to the people it was intended for, there seems little chance that increasing the amount of learning with a second or third level will lead to greater effectiveness.

Under such circumstances, what is called further studies is not actually furthering of studies but just accumulation of studies. This type of exercise will not have a practical impact in our continent. This I take as one of the reasons contributing to the existing gap between the community of scholars and the non-academic community.

Since the non-academic community cannot stay in a spiritual vacuum, they are forced to develop their own ways of doing things. Tite Tienou calls this a popular approach. Once the popular way of dealing with issues establishes roots, it becomes more and more difficult to penetrate with the fruits of Christian scholarship. The result is an increasing widening of the gap. The type of scholarship provided in the environment of the academic circle has no power to penetrate the community at the popular level and to help bridge the gap. Our challenge in the new millennium is to address ourselves to what we must do in our scholarship in order to have a practical impact at the popular level.

Does this mean that we are to belittle the continuation of study? By no means. Rather we must know what continuation of study calls for. The best way to continue study, I suggest, is to merge what is acquired in training and what confronts us in the field and establish a practical way of standing our ground and effecting changes in the world. In doing this, we must strain to be biblically accurate and culturally sensitive.

In this respect, we should note that the continuation of study can be either through the formal curriculum of an institutional agenda or by following a private agenda of study. It can also be done either on campus or off campus, with the latter preferable where possible.

### *Lack of contextualised Christianity*

Due to the existing academic circle, it is becoming exceedingly difficult to achieve contextualised Christianity in our continent. This is sad when we consider the words of Victor Cole in his effort to

define contextualisation. He notes: "I see contextualization as a task that all churches around the world must engage in themselves as they allow the Bible to speak to their particular contemporary issues. The message of the Bible is a constant; our particular situations are variables." (Ngewa et al., 1998, p.13).

The contextualisation of Christianity is nothing more than the process of interpreting Christian truth in terms of and applying it "to the real life issues arising from the social cultural context within which the interpreters live" (Imasogie, 1993, p. 7). With only a superficial view of Africa's social-cultural structures it is impossible to develop a sound biblical hermeneutic relevant to the African context. The situation is made worse when scholarship is divorced from the field and particularly when it is done abroad.

Firstly, when study is done abroad, it is pursued in a context, and within a world view, that is not that of Africa or appropriate to the African situation.

Secondly, such study is done under those who have a limited view of Africa's social and cultural structures and whose perspective of African culture is, in many cases, not positive. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for such scholars to develop a hermeneutical approach that is biblically sound as well as culturally sensitive and suitable for Africa.

A word of caution is needed here. It does not mean that it is wrong, in itself, to study abroad. However, in doing so we need to be sensitive to the fact that the context is different from that of Africa. This difference in context inevitably shapes the study in ways that are not always appropriate to Africa.

When the people of God wait patiently for a contextualised Christianity to come from the academic community and fail to see it, they will look for their own alternative. They will turn a deaf ear to the voice of the academic community because its lack of authentic contextualisation makes it irrelevant to the realities of their situation. Thus the gap widens.

### *Lack of reading interest*

An important way in which the academic community can communicate to the people of God at large is through appropriately written literature. However, to be effective this literature must be read.

The reality of the present time is that many have no interest in reading except for reasons of securing jobs. Or when they read, they do not read the works that stimulate and challenge to serious thought but read newspapers, news magazines and, in the case of youth, romance and fictional literature.

KBC (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) television presented a panel discussion from the University of Nairobi on 18 October 1999. In this panel, Professor Chacha Nyaigoti Chacha (Secretary of the Higher Education Loans Board of Kenya) was asked to comment on Kenya's reading status. He noted that reading was equated to getting jobs. Once the job is acquired, in most cases, the reading stops. He appealed to the University community and Kenyans at large, to make reading part of their living experience.

To most Africans, reading is not a priority. They have other pressing things to think about such as, medical care, shelter, food, cost of educating their children and so on. This is done in most cases in a state of extreme poverty, that leaves little time, resources and interest are left for reading.

This lack of interest in reading is another reason why, even when the academic community makes the effort to communicate in an appropriate way, its message is not reaching the non-academic community. In simpler terms they actually do not know what the academic community is doing. All they know, is how to do things in their own way. This helps to widen the gap between the two communities.

### *Failure to recognise that God speaks directly to all*

So far, it may appear as though the stage is being set for a one way communication from the academic community to the rest of God's people; that the insights that the church in Africa needs must come to the people of God from the academic community.

The Bible does not support this line of thinking. It supports a two-way communication. Academic training does not give special access to God, denied to others, giving those with academic training special authority to speak on God's behalf. It is God's anointing that gives one authority to speak as his servant and not academic training. God has poured out his Spirit on *all* and by his Spirit he leads *all* in the way of righteousness (Romans 8:9-17). What needs

to be emphasised is that the leading of the Holy Spirit comes to us in the community of faith where all contribute according to the gifts and insights God has given to each one (Ephesians 4:11–16).

This is supported in several ways in scripture. Firstly, God pours out his Holy Spirit on all believers and teaches all by his word through the Holy Spirit. What the Holy Spirit illumines to the believer, must be shared and this sharing is only possible when all in the community of faith are willing to learn (Romans 8:9-17).

Secondly, the Holy Spirit gifts every believer with gifts to enable them to minister to one another. The teaching on spiritual gifts discourages independency and encourages interdependence (I Corinthians 12:1-14:1-4).

Thirdly, the body of Jesus Christ is joined and held together by every supporting member and it grows and builds itself up in love as each member does his or her work (Ephesians 4:16). This is not possible when some members assume special access to God that others do not have. While more is expected from some, this does not mean special access. If one who is not a scholar has wisdom, the scholar must be willing to learn, and on the basis of such wisdom to change his or her views that do not measure up to God's word.

Fourthly, we find in the Bible examples of God using people who were not scholars. For instance, the understanding that led to the defeat of Goliath in the days of Saul came through David, an insignificant shepherd youth (I Sam. 17.1-58). It was not to the High Priest Eli that God revealed the wrath on his family but to the boy Samuel who was Eli's trainee.

Fifthly, there is clear indication in scripture that those who filled the role of the modern scholar, frequently led people astray. In the Old Testament those recognized as prophets sometimes brought wrong messages to the people. In the New Testament, the scholarly Scribes and Pharisees had a wrong view of the Messiah and they led people astray, opposing Christ himself and causing the persecution of Christians. They even appealed to scripture as their authority for doing so.

All this leads us to two conclusions. Firstly, that God uses all believers whom he has anointed with his Spirit and secondly, that the scholarly community is as likely as any other to get the message wrong. Clearly, in matters of faith scholars are not the only ones, or

even the primary ones, to be listened to. God speaks through the whole community of faith. The recognition of this makes two way communication between the academic community and the rest of the body of Christ a biblical imperative.

When one community within the body of Christ assumes special access to God and authority to speak authoritatively on God's behalf, others within the body are liable to react negatively because they are also certain that God is speaking to them, since they too have access to him.

Schisms in the church that result in African independent churches are largely the result of reaction to mission churches. At least some of this reaction is due to the tendency of the academic community to elevate its authority as interpreter of God's word over that of other Christians.

In other cases, however, the gap is not so readily evident. The formulations of the academic community are accepted superficially but, in the daily practice of the people of God, people follow what they believe God is communicating to them without paying much attention to the academic formulas.

As scholars, we need to recognise that, like any other person, we may embrace faulty assumptions and world view beliefs that condition our formulations. In addition to the compelling evidence of scripture, this is also supported by recent secular scholarship. This has made it clear that the formulations of scientists and scholars do not have the status of objective purity they were once thought to have. The prior beliefs, assumptions and prejudices of the scientist or scholar inevitably play a part in shaping these formulations.

In the world of the natural sciences, we may think of the work of Kuhn (1962) in identifying the role of sets of concepts or beliefs, which he called paradigms, in that they provide a framework of scientific endeavour. In the human sciences, we can think of Gadamer's (1976, p. 9) argument that what he calls our "prejudices" are not groundless biases but the necessary rational framework of "our openness to the world".

Theology is no exception. Theologians, like any other scholar, use systematic procedures, but there is no theological method that guarantees the true interpretation of scripture. The formulations of

theologians are human formulations, with all the limitations that implies.

Imasogie (1993, pp. 25-45) presents a case for a relevant Christian theology in Africa. In doing so, he underscores the fact that theology is always contextually conditioned, so that theology developed in one context should not be regarded as the authority for another context, as has often been the case with Western theology in Africa.

On this ground of presuppositions in scholarly formulations, it is valid to argue that the work of the scholarly community, including that of theology, must be seen as human work that, like any other human work, is always limited and subject to error. This provides a case for a two-way communication.

Scholars can, and should, speak to the rest of the body of Christ but they should also listen just as carefully to what the members of that body outside the academic community are saying to them. They ought to teach and also wait to be taught by others.

The Lord speaks to the body of Christ as one community by his word through the Holy Spirit, according to the gifts given to each. As a result, the scholar can contribute insights not given to others but, equally, others can contribute insights not given to the scholar. A faithful hearing of the word of the Lord requires each one to listen to each of the others.

### **Factors to Consider in Bridging the Gaps**

One may ask, is the situation now hopeless? Before we despair, let us listen to what Tite Tienou says concerning this (1990, p. 56):

*It may yet prove, however, to be providential that there is a gap between academic and popular theology within African Christianity, for the solution to that situation, I suggest, lies uniquely within the reach of African evangelicals. They are, in fact, strategically positioned to assume the theological initiative in Africa by implementing a third way in African theology. A way which remains restricted neither to mere scholastic discussions nor to poorly rooted popular theology.*

In developing a third way, which gives us hope for bridging the gap, we need to examine three factors that need to be taken into account: the nature of the gaps, the social-cultural factor and the hermeneutical factor.

### ***Different kinds of gaps***

When we talk of gaps, we are dealing with a very broad subject. The gap between the academic community and the rest of the body of Christ is not the only gap to overcome. We can talk of tribal gaps, a generation gap, a denominational gap, an economic gap, and gaps created by our political affiliations.

These many gaps that are present in the body of Christ make it difficult for Christians to realize the fellowship and unity that are the key to the church's ministry in the world. Each gap is complex and requires a comprehensive analysis.

This paper attempts to deal only with the gap between the academic community and the rest of God's people. It is not by coincidence that this gap is dealt with. It is hoped that a solution to the problem of this gap will work to some extent to provide solutions for the other gaps.

### ***The social-cultural factor***

Victor Cole in his development of "Africanizing the faith" sees culture as the total way of life of a people; it embraces thought patterns, and world and life views (Ngewa, Shaw and Tienou, 1998, p. 20). Complementing this, Albert M. Wolters offers this brief but pregnant definition of a world view. He defines world view (1985, p. 2) as:

### ***The comprehensive framework of one's basic beliefs about things.***

"Things", in this definition, covers whatever it is possible to have a belief about, including God and human persons. Beliefs are considered not as feelings or opinions but as making cognitive claims. Framework implies a pattern of beliefs that are not adopted arbitrarily but as providing a coherent framework (Wolters 1985, pp. 2-3).

Following from what Wolters brings to our notice, we come to appreciate the fact that each person has a world view. Culture seems to knit world view beliefs together and give us identity in the social sense. Though we speak correctly of cultures in Africa, there is a sense in which we can speak of an African culture.

Byang H. Kato (1985, p. 40) makes the following observations:

*It is estimated that between eight hundred and a thousand ethnic groups exist in Africa. Admittedly, certain characteristics may distinguish Africans from non-Africans, such as the formers practical approach to problems, solving problems more often by compromise than by conflict, and the emphasis on communal life as a family or tribe. But in addition, major differences exist between Africans themselves, such as in language, taboos, marriage pattern, and religions. It is, therefore, difficult to speak of 'African Culture' as such. Nevertheless, there are enough similarities to warrant this homogeneous description.*

Just as there is this African culture, so there is a European culture, an American culture, and so on. To attempt an understanding of any people using the framework of a world view or culture other than their own is a futile attempt. To understand an African, an understanding of his or her world view and culture must be made a priority just as it must be for understanding Europeans or Americans.

An authentic Christian ministry in Africa, therefore, cannot be one designed within the framework of some other world view or culture considered to be superior because of historical links with Christianity, or for any other reason. It must be one that ministers to Africans within the framework of their own culture and world view.

The situation of many Africans may be likened to the prodigal son, who went on feeding on pig's food when at home there was more than enough. It is assumed that an African must disregard her own culture and world view and adopt another world view and another supposedly superior culture. This assumption is not only made in the academic field, but it is also made in political, social and economic agendas.

The call to Africans, especially those in the field of African Christian scholarship, is 'to come back home'. There is plenty at home, in our own cultural traditions, and there is no point in straying to feed on pig's food—garbage from secularised Western culture. Problems in Africa such as HIV/Aids and the political dilemmas that plague us cannot be solved by borrowing solutions developed in a different cultural context. We may learn from others, of course, but cannot look to others to provide solutions to our problems.

Having said this, it should be emphasized that we are not talking of a return to a world view or culture founded in African traditional religion. It is not a backwards looking recovery of an ideal African past that we need. We need a world view that is governed and grounded in scripture but developed within the unique context of the African tradition and experience.

Imasogie (1993, p. 47) contrasts what he calls the quasi-scientific world view, which influenced the missionaries who came to Africa in the 19th century, with the African world view. He sees traditional Christian theology as being ineffective in Africa because it was conditioned by a quasi-scientific world view which blinds it to, and thereby makes it unresponsive to, the reality of the African's self-understanding within his own world view.

He explores the African world view by considering four areas namely, the earth, man, man's place and his utilization of what he considers to be divinely ordained provisions for coping with the uncertainties of life.

It is clear that we cannot accept, without qualification, as valid the African world view that he describes. On the other hand, we cannot ignore it if the Gospel is to penetrate deeply into the life of the African people.

We must do what Christians are called to do with any cultural tradition. We must critically transform it in submission to the biblical revelation of creation, fall and redemption in order to establish a Christian world view suited to the African context. It must be a transformation of the African culture and world view and not its replacement with a foreign product.

### *The hermeneutical factor*

Then there is the need for an appropriate hermeneutic. We cannot afford to take it for granted that the hermeneutic that we have inherited is necessarily the most appropriate one for ensuring that we hear the word of God clearly. We must take a careful look at what we are doing in this area.

Modern philosophical thought has produced a wide range of views in this area. Palmer's survey of the modern development of hermeneutics (1969, pp. 33-45) traces its beginnings to the practice of a relatively uncritical biblical exegesis. From these beginnings it

has broadened into a general theory of interpretation. This had led to successively different approaches.

To name just some of these, hermeneutics has been developed as a general classical philology, as a science of linguistic understanding, as the methodological foundation for the humanities in general, as the historically embedded understanding of our being as humans, and as systems of interpretation, both recollective and iconoclastic, used to reach the meaning behind myths and symbols.

Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch (1977, p. 136) summarise this development in three paradigms. The first paradigm is shaped by positivism and views the text as a linguistic document. In this paradigm the interpreter plays no part except to apply the relevant method of interpretation.

The second paradigm views the text as a monument where the linguistic document is only the outer part of the text, and the inner aspect is the culturally defined meaning that is embodied in the text. By applying the appropriate academic method, the interpreter in a different cultural context in a different historical community is able to recapture this inner meaning. The method thought of here is one appropriate to humanities only. In the third paradigm, the text is seen as a sign that signifies, or represents, meaning.

In the first two paradigms, the interpreter plays no role in interpretation other than applying the relevant method to get one universal meaning for all times. In the third paradigm, both the subject and the object are seen as historically defined: That is, they are defined by the historical/cultural context. Here, the interpreter shapes the meaning of the text. The interpreter does not reproduce meaning but produces meaning from the text. The interpreter is actively constructing meaning.

We see from this very limited survey that the hermeneutical factor is a complex one. Even evangelical scholars are divided about the appropriate hermeneutic for interpreting scripture. Some continue to hold the view that a proper hermeneutic method enables us to extract one universal meaning from the text of scripture. Others, with equal respect for the authority of scripture, maintain that the interpreter has a necessary role in shaping meaning from the text in ways that are appropriate to particular historical and cultural situations.

What is certain is that we should make every effort to ensure that we have a proper hermeneutical approach if we are to bridge the gap that this paper is addressing. An authentic Christian ministry in Africa calls for a hermeneutical approach that is sensitive to the African context.

We can only give some brief indications here of the kind of hermeneutic we need. While it needs to be one that is sensitive to the African context, it must not be one whose religious roots are grounded in any part of the created order. As a hermeneutic grounded in the revelation of God in creation, it must assign a significant role to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process.

The current HIV/Aids epidemic, that is decimating the African population, illustrates the urgent need for such a hermeneutic. Most of our African Christian training institutions remain insensitive to the epidemic in their teaching programmes.

In Kenya, the Medical Assistance Programme (MAP International), has been developing curriculum material on this issue. It is trying to convince theological and pastoral institutions to adopt this curriculum on the ground that it is absurd for pastors to get into the field unprepared to address this most relevant issue. So far it has had little success. The reason, I believe, is not lack of interest but the lack of an appropriate hermeneutic that would enable these institutions to respond effectively.

### **The Way Forward in Bridging the Gap(s)**

It is now important that we focus our attention on how to bridge the existing gap between the academic community and the rest of the body of Christ. As noted earlier, this gap is an important factor in the other gaps that divide the community of faith. The five point proposal that follows is not intended to be exhaustive, but as a stimulus towards what can be done.

#### *A joint effort by all of God's people*

As it was noted earlier, scholarly training does not give scholars special access to God that others do not have. As important as this training is, it is still a human endeavour with limitations. It does give scholars insights that others do not have but others also have

insights gained from their own experiences that scholars do not have. We all need each other.

For this reason, scholars cannot build the bridge alone. The rest of God's people cannot trust such a bridge. They will fear that it will break and cause them to drown in the river. If the scholars come together with the rest of the Christian community to look together for the materials to construct the bridge, and labour together in the construction, they will all trust the bridge and agree to use it. In this joint effort of constructing the bridge, no one should assume the superior role.

For this to happen, scholars must act with genuine humility. They must come in the spirit of learning more about God's message through the rest of God's people. These people may not express their insights in the sophisticated language of academic life, but in the language of everyday life. Yet they will have a wisdom that does not, and cannot, come from academic endeavour.

Because they have to put aside their academic language, scholars should not think they are coming down to a lower level. They should see themselves as participants in the communion of saints in which all share in accordance with the gifts that God has given to each. In that communion, scholars will help others to recognize unbiblical ideas that shape their world view while others help scholars to recognize unbiblical ideas in the scholarly world view.

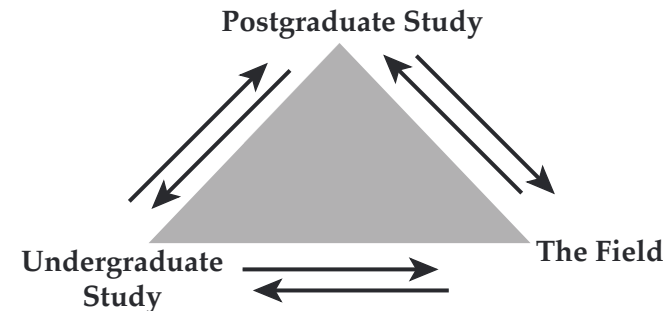
This working together should lead all to a humility that, with fear and trembling, acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit in interpreting scripture. The bridge that we have in mind is not one achieved by human effort alone. This will not work. The bridge that is in view here is one which God by his Spirit enables a weak humanity, with scholars working side by side with others, to build, as guided by his Word in submission to the authority of Christ.

### ***Christian scholars must break the current academic circle***

It was observed earlier that scholarship developed within the environment of the academic circle has little practical impact at the popular level. In order to overcome this problem, I propose an interaction view of scholarship. This is illustrated in figure 2. On one side we have the training institutions at the undergraduate level, on the

other side is the field, and at the top of the triangle, we have training at postgraduate level.

In this interaction model of scholarship, the field interacts with both levels of training. The field as it were, updates the different levels of training with the field actualities. The different levels of training respond to the questions which the field asks. A person training at any level interacts with the field.



**An Interaction Model of Scholarship**

Figure 2

In this view, no study is done for its own sake. It always responds to particular needs of the field. For instance, institutions of Christian training, especially theological and pastoral institutions, would have been highly sensitive to the HIV/Aids epidemic, if this view of scholarship had been followed.

In the interaction view of scholarship, Christian institutions of training may even facilitate study outside their formal curriculum as long as the study is responding to particular needs in the field. It overcomes the danger that academic study will deal with pseudo-problems developed within the environment of the academic circle while leaving the real problems of human life in the world unattended. Absurd though this is it does, unfortunately, happen.

The interaction view gives us great hope of bridging the gap between the academic community and the rest of God's people. As scholars we are always in consultation with the rest of God's people in our pursuit of our scholarship.

### Community training programmes

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) convened a symposium at Mombasa in November 1991 to tackle the subject of “problems and promises of Africa towards and beyond the year 2001”. Here it was observed that education for all was needed:

*What then should be expected of ‘education for all’? The present classical training in theology is based on an hierarchical pyramid in which pastors are trained first with the expectation that they may in turn train lay members of the church. Community education for all, however, focuses on all God’s people in the church and is carried out by the trainer team comprising both lay members and pastors. The training should be held in parishes, lay training centres, in seminars and through Bible studies at all levels (Karamaga 1993, p. 19).*

This is exactly the kind of educational programme that we need in Africa. We may call them “community training programmes”, meaning educational programmes that train people in the context of the communities where they live and work. Such programmes have been carried out for some time under such names as Theological Education by Extension, Biblical Education by Extension, Vocational Bible Study and so on.



Figure 3

What we need to do, however, is to stop making the community training programme a department of other institutional structures. Instead we should regard other forms of training as servants of community training programmes.

When community training programmes function as departments of other institutions, they tend to be choked up by other concerns of these institutions to the extent that little or no support goes to the community programme. In my interaction with the national coordinators of community training in two key denominations, I have found them concerned



Figure 4

that such important programmes are not a priority in the agendas of their churches.

It is for this reason that I propose that community training programmes should be the primary responsibility of autonomous organisations dedicated to this task. The educational priority for the Christian community should be community training with other programmes serving this endeavour. We can illustrate this in the three diagrams in figures 3 and 4.

This does not mean that academic institutions no longer have a valuable place. Our continent may be proud of the network of Christian academic institutions. All these are still needed and deserve the continuing support of the churches.

However, the time has come to direct our resources, manpower, and effort to the establishment of effective community training programmes as necessary partners of the existing training facilities. This will help us in three ways:

Firstly, it will encourage scholars to appreciate the many opportunities for service that exist in the body of Jesus Christ outside the framework of academic institutions.

Secondly, it will enable training at all levels to develop the needed practical relevance. In doing so it will enable penetration of the wider community and contribute to bridging the gap between the academic community and the rest of God's people.

Thirdly, it will ease the scramble for teaching positions in the existing Christian training institutions, which now seems to be the trend, by opening other opportunities for teaching ministry.

Community training programmes fit very well in the environment of the interaction view of scholarship. They provide a context of interaction in which the academic community can come together with the rest of the body of Christ in the recognition that God deals with all and God uses all.

### *We should get books out of the shelves*

We noted that most of our African brothers and sisters have a low interest in reading, especially works that stimulate thinking. If literature is to have any real impact on the church at large, we must get it out of the library and book store shelves.

While publishing more books suitable to a popular audience is important, double effort is needed to ensure that the published materials reach the people. Materials with depth of insight should be written in a manner accessible to all. Where technical terms are essential, they need to be defined in accessible ways.

To encourage more reading, firstly, we can encourage reading clubs. This means we look for a community of people, create an interest in them, assist them to prepare a list of literature, then commit them to read from the list and finally to meet together for evaluation and discussion.

Secondly, our people should be kept informed of the useful available resources, their contents, price and how they can easily get these materials. These resources should be presented in a way that will appeal to people.

Thirdly, we should encourage the equipping of libraries in our local churches for the sake of those who may have interest in reading but cannot afford to buy such books.

Fourthly, we can transfer the content of some of the materials to radio and videotapes. This is important because many of our people may be better listeners and viewers than readers.

Fifthly, we need to encourage mobile Christian book stores and libraries. Creating a reading interest in our people and getting books out of the shelves is a very difficult thing to do, but if this can be a way of bridging the gap, it must not be left untried.

### *Different academic callings are equally callings for service*

The idea of sphere sovereignty and sphere universality as developed by the Dutch Christian philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd can assist us in recognizing the importance of different callings of academic life.

The principle of sphere sovereignty in social relations, developed originally by Abraham Kuyper, is that each kind of societal structure—family, church, state, school, etc.—is a unique sphere of relationship with a unique structure and unity and with an authority to govern affairs within its sphere. Dooyeweerd developed this idea further with his modal theory that analyses the structure of reality in terms of fifteen modal aspects, or spheres.

Applying this modal theory to social structures leads to the recognition of a modal founding function and a modal qualifying, or leading, function for each of the sovereign spheres of society. For example, the family is founded in the biotic modality—the modality of organic life—and qualified or led by the ethical modality.

The complementary principle of sphere universality, specifies that each of the modal spheres has an internal structure that reflects the whole of created reality in all spheres. Applied to societal structures, this means that, while each societal type is qualified or led by a specific modality, each kind of structure also functions in all possible modalities. For example, the family though qualified by the ethical function, or modality, also functions in all other modal aspects such as juridical, historical, economic, social, faith aspect and so on (Kalsbeek, 1975, pp. 91-109).

However, Dooyeweerd's modal theory is not merely a tool for analysing societal structures. It is an analysis of the fundamental structure of created reality. The different modal aspects, or spheres, are aspects of created reality. As such they are significant for understanding the academic disciplines. As theoretical disciplines, each academic discipline is qualified by one or another of the modal spheres on which it focuses its attention. However, the principle of

sphere universality means that the internal structure of a discipline reflects the whole of created reality in all spheres.

Although each discipline reflects the whole of reality, the coherence of reality is not given in the formulations of any discipline. It is a religious coherence that is expressed in every discipline but is given by the Word of God, the Creator and Redeemer, to whose authority every discipline alike is subject.

Unfortunately, Christian thought has too often embraced a dualism that denies in practice both the religious coherence of reality and the subjection of all academic thought to the authority of the Word of God. On this dualist view, theology, together with any disciplines closely allied with it, is the academic discipline that deals with sacred reality where the authority of the Word of God is paramount. Other disciplines are regarded as dealing with secular reality governed by secular human authority.

We may think of a Christian professor of history in a university. As a secular calling, the study of history, while a valid activity, is not one through which we can expect to meet God. For this, the professor of history must go to church to be led to the knowledge of God through the professional work of a theologian. The history professor is therefore supposed to leave his or her history uniform at the university and put on in the church the uniform of theology, designed by the theologian, in order to meet God.

One of the consequences of this is that the theologian does not meet the history professor as an academic peer with whom there can be interaction that mutually advances the understanding of their common faith. In church, the history professor is just another one of the people to be instructed in the faith by the theologian.

A second consequence is that the instruction in the faith that the history professor received in the church has little relevance for his or her calling in history. As an instruction tailored by a theologian in the categories of a theological discipline, it is not suited to the quite different academic discipline of history.

What we experience here is a gap between two members of the body of Christ who both follow an academic calling. Because they are not suited to the quite different needs of the historian, the products of academic theology will have, at best, a limited impact on his or her academic life. Because of this gap the professor of history is

likely to take up and use, without critical examination, tools that are currently being used in the secular academic environment.

Among other dangers, this leaves the professor of history open to the adoption of an historicism that absolutises history, sees it as the source of the coherence of meaning for secular reality. The principle of sphere universality explains how such a view of history is possible when history is cut off from subjection to the authority of the Word of God. Since its internal structure reflects the whole of reality, it can be thought that the unity of history is the unity of reality.

A helpful contribution to our better understanding of this issue is that of Al Wolters (1985). Jerram Barrs of L'Abri Fellowship, says of this work:

*A most powerful book. An excellent introduction to a biblical world view. Al Wolters develops the biblical themes of Creation, Fall and Redemption and shows us the need to subject all our thinking to them so that we may be those who truly live under Christ's Lordship (from the back cover).*

Wolters' reformational view recognizes different academic callings with theology as one of these callings. God is at work in all disciplines and is reconciling all to himself. As these disciplines are directed to God, they become holy, when they are directed away from God, they, including theology, become worldly.

The recognition of different callings helps to bridge the gap created by the dualistic view of reality, enabling Christians to effectively penetrate the wider community with the salt and light of the gospel.

Taking our example of the Christian history professor, then, he or she does not need to put on the outfit of a theologian in order to meet God. Like the theologian, God encounters the historian in the practice of the academic discipline of history as the historian's heart is directed towards God in submission to the authority of Christ in this practice. In doing so, God sanctifies the historical study, so that it is as much a holy study as theology.

When the history professor who pursues his or her calling in this way as a holy calling meets the theologian in the body of Christ, the historian is able to help the theologian as a fellow academic to

recognise false views of history that are shaping the theologian's world view. At the same time the theologian is able to help the historian as a fellow academic to recognise idols that shape his or her historical study.

The relationship here within the body of Christ is not that of master/servant but of servant/servant under the mastery of Christ. Both parties recognize their limitation and the need for each other in their different callings in the service of one Lord. The gap is bridged when each recognizes the need for the other.

### **A Practical Attempt at Bridging the Gap**

At this point it is appropriate to briefly introduce the Community Penetration Christian Ministry (CPCM) as one attempt to deal with this problem. CPCM is a newly founded Christian organisation, based in Kenya, that aims to help Christians fully appreciate God in Christ by establishing ministries focussed on bridging the gap between Christian scholarship and the community of believers. The goal is that the community of believers will be equipped to penetrate contemporary society with the salt of the gospel.

Those who wish to know more about this ministry can do so by visiting the website at: <http://amani.org.au/cpcm> or by sending an email to: [isabecpcm@africaonline.co.ke](mailto:isabecpcm@africaonline.co.ke)

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### **Endnote**

- \* I acknowledge the contribution of my friend and colleague, Stuart Fowler, in assisting with my understanding of these concepts. He is not responsible, however, for any deficiencies there may be in my use of them.

## Transforming the Development Agenda

Stuart Fowler

The classification of countries on the basis of their level of development is a fundamental feature of today's global thinking. In its simplest terms, countries are classified as "developed" or "developing". This is further refined by instruments like the Human Development Report (UNDP, 1999) that classifies countries in terms of "high", "medium" and "low" development.

Whatever refinements are made in the classification, it is the industrialised nations, that are predominantly, though not exclusively, from the Western world,<sup>1</sup> that are classified as the developed nations. As such, they are seen as the most advanced societies that provide the best environment for the nurturing of human life and wellbeing. They provide the model of the good society for others to emulate.

Although it does not rate as the most highly developed country on the official indicators, the economic and cultural power of the United States means that it is most often seen in developing countries as the preeminent model of a developed society. The cultural dominance of the United States in today's global communications network (UNDP, 1999, pp. 33,34), in particular, means that perceptions of the developed society in the developing world are dominated by images of US culture.

An important question is: Do the developed societies of today's world provide a satisfactory model of development?

### The dark side of today's developed societies

There is no doubt that there are some very good features of today's developed societies that contribute to human wellbeing. However, when we look behind the glittering images that are the public face of these societies we find a disturbing dark side that raises doubts about their suitability as models of development.

### Growing inequality

Sustained economic growth has been making the developed countries richer. However, the impact on the individual members of these societies is very uneven. While some are becoming very much richer, others are becoming significantly poorer. Richard Freeman (1996) observes:

*Over the past two decades, income inequality in the United States has massively increased. This jump owes to the unprecedentedly abysmal earnings experience of low-paid Americans, income stagnation covering about 80 percent of all families, and an increase in upper-end incomes....*

*These facts are not in dispute. From the Milliken Institute on the right to the Economic Policy Institute on the left, virtually all analysts agree that something has gone seriously awry with our income distribution.*

Statistics provided by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in the United States—published in *The Economist* for December 20 1997—showed that over the previous twenty years the income of the poorest 20% of people in the United States had declined by 21% while the income of the richest 20% had increased by 30%.

The picture is even more alarming when we note that there was also a decrease in income, to a lesser extent, for the 40% above the bottom 20%. In other words, there was a significant shift of income from the bottom 60% to the top 40%, with most going to further enrich the richest 20%.

Myers (1998, pp. 62-65) cites a slightly different set of statistics that leads to the same conclusion of an alarming increase in economic inequality. In short, while the country has grown richer, the majority of the people have become poorer. It is not just that the poorer 60% have not benefited from the growth in national wealth; there has been a shift of wealth from the poorest to the richest. This situation is not unique to the United States. To a greater or lesser extent, the same shift of wealth, and consequent growing inequality, is being repeated elsewhere in the developed world.

### *Negative impacts on health*

The dramatic advances that have been made in the treatment and eradication of diseases in the developed world makes it easy to assume that development means healthier people. This is reinforced when comparisons are made with the high levels of infectious diseases that prevail in the developing world.

Yet, in both its 1997 and 1998 World Health Reports the World Health Organization warns of serious, and growing, health problems that are directly associated with development. It points out (1997) that, while infectious diseases are well under control in developed countries, other chronic diseases, directly associated with the lifestyle of developed countries, are a major threat to human wellbeing in these countries. As other countries pursue the same model of development the same health problems are appearing in urban centres of the developing world.

The World Health Organization warns (1997) of the danger of "global epidemics of cancer and other chronic diseases in the next two decades. The main result will be a huge increase in human suffering and disability." In the 1998 report (1998, p. 202), it points out that the changing patterns of living associated with development "are resulting in an increase in crippling chronic diseases such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and low back pain."

Clearly, while on the one hand the technological advances associated with modern development provide more effective means for dealing with diseases, on the other hand the human impact of this development generates its own range of health problems that diminish human wellbeing.

### **Increase in mental disorders**

The World Health Organization (1998, p. 57) reports significant increases in the incidence of certain kinds of mental disorders, particularly depression, schizophrenia and dementia in developed countries. While it attributes this in part to an aging population this is not the whole story. The changes associated with socioeconomic development are also an important factor.

The increase in depressive disorders, for example, clearly has little to do with an aging population since they "appear to be more common in younger age groups" than among older people. Indeed,

there is concern that these are "now being seen at younger ages" than in the past (WHO, 1998, pp. 57,92).

While childhood infections are coming under control, there is now concern that "the healthy growth and development of many children is threatened by very rapid, often disruptive social, cultural and economic changes. The emerging new morbidity is mainly of a psychosocial nature..." (WHO, 1998, p. 71). This new morbidity that threatens children's wellbeing is directly associated with the social conditions of developed societies.

Some idea of the magnitude of the mental health problem as a whole may be gained from the fact that, in developed societies, "more working days are lost as a result of mental disorders than physical conditions" (WHO, 1998, p. 92). It also shows itself in what the World Health Organization describes (1998, p. 18) as "worrying trends in mortality from...suicides in young adults, particularly in the developed countries."

### **Escalating violence**

"In all its forms, violence has increased dramatically worldwide in recent decades" (WHO, 1997). Media attention on sensational episodes of violence in developing countries can create an impression that these societies are more violent than those of the developed countries. Yet the statistics provided by the World Health Organization show that it is no less a problem for developed societies. Indeed, while in developing countries it tends to be concentrated selectively in hot spots, in developed countries violence is increasingly pervading the whole society.

### *Drug abuse*

The worldwide problem of drug abuse in today's world is notorious. It is a problem that is especially associated with adolescence and young adulthood when drug abuse most often begins (WHO, 1998, p. 79). A European study has shown that by the age of eighteen more than 20% had tried cannabis. The use of other, harder drugs tends to begin a little later, in the early twenties.

Legislators often try to deal with the drug problem by tougher legislation. While this may have a place, it deals only with the symptom, and not the cause—always an ineffective way to deal

with a problem. The basic causes for drug abuse, as identified by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1998, pp. 79,80) are to a significant extent due to social conditions associated with the modern developed society. Drug abuse occurs also in developing countries, of course, but the problem there is largely concentrated in the larger urban centres where the basic features of the social environment are very similar to that of developed societies.

### *The crisis of care*

In a penetrating critique of orthodox economic theory, the economists Goudzwaard and de Lange (1995, p. 4) point to what they call the “paradox of care”. Under the heading of care, they include the care of people in hospitals and schools, care of the elderly and emotionally distressed, conservation of soil and water and the development of art and culture.

The paradox is that, while the increasing wealth of developed countries should mean that activities of care can be given a higher priority than ever, they are, in fact, being given an increasingly lower priority.

This is closely related to their later point (1995: 56-59) that human labour is valued by its market value. Labour directed towards care, what they call “transductive labour”, does not have market value because it does not produce goods or services to be sold at profit in the marketplace.

Consequently, we are witnessing a global trend towards the commercialisation of care with a minimising of public support for activities of care. This is leading to the situation where high technical standards of care are available to those with the money to buy it while increasing numbers without the means to buy such care must make do with lowering standards of care. Similarly, the quality of care for the material and cultural environment depends on the ability to give market value to such activities

Goudzwaard and de Lange (1995, pp. 57,58) argue that, even in terms of market economics, this is a very short-sighted policy since activities of care sustain the stock of material and social resources on which the market depends for its long-term prosperity.

This is supported by the United Nations Development Programme which, in its most recent report (UNDP, 1999, pp. 77-83)

devotes a whole chapter to this problem, relating it directly to globalisation. It observes that: “Globalization is putting a squeeze on care and caring labour.” It concludes its comments in much the same way as Goudzwaard and de Lange (UNDP, 1999, p. 83):

*Policies to foster more caring labour appear unproductive or costly only to those who define them as narrowly contributing to GDP or short-term profit. The erosion of family and community solidarity imposes enormous costs reflected in inefficient and unsuccessful education efforts, high crime rates and a social atmosphere of anxiety and resentment.*

Yet, throughout the developed world governments are using their economic power to pressure developing countries to follow similar policies, with even more devastating effect.

### *Employment, unemployment and underemployment*

Closely related to their care paradox Goudzwaard and de Lange (1995, pp. 4,5) speak of the paradox of labour. On the one hand, throughout the world, including the developed societies, there is significant unemployment while, on the other hand, there is urgent, and increasing need for labour for such tasks as the “rebuilding of cities, exercising care for people in need, and rehabilitating impaired ecosystems”.

The World Health Organization points out (WHO, 1998, p. 136) that unemployment in developed countries “is...much higher now than it was in 1950-1970. It is 50% higher in the United States and about seven times higher in Germany than in the 1960s.” It goes on to point out that the present trend towards economic globalisation severely limits the ability of individual nations to deal with this problem.

Apart from unemployment, there is also significant underemployment—people who are available for full time work but can only find part time employment. Underemployment tends to be ignored by employment statistics yet, by failing to satisfy basic human needs, the impact on human wellbeing can be similar to that of unemployment. The combined effect of unemployment and underemployment is “massive personal suffering, increased poverty, marginalization, exclusions, inequalities, reduced well-

being, loss of dignity, widespread social disintegration and huge economic waste." (WHO, 1998, p. 134).

Advocates of the current development agenda will argue that, given time, that agenda will dramatically increase employment. Yet the evidence of the past thirty years is evidence of a substantial escalation of the problem.

### *A flawed development*

There are certain respects in which Western societies are clearly more developed than those of the developing world. They have long been the centres for the development of scientific knowledge together with a sophisticated technology based on this knowledge. They have developed an unparalleled infrastructure for the development and marketing of products for human use based on this science and technology. In these respects, there can be little doubt that they are the most developed societies in today's world and probably in the whole of human history.

However, these impressive achievements in themselves do not constitute a fully developed society. A complete development must provide a social environment that promotes human wellbeing in all its dimensions. A careful examination of the dark side of today's Western societies provides compelling evidence that, with all their achievements, these societies fall well short of this goal.

The deficiencies are not merely blemishes on an otherwise sound social structure; they are not like a little peeling paint on a fundamentally sound building. They are indicative of fundamental flaws in the basic social structure of today's developed societies. Their development is a flawed development.

A disturbing feature of the situation is the way in which the depth of the problem is disguised. Glowing pictures of economic prosperity, with everyone having access to the glittering array of consumer products, are presented as typical. The problems of deprivation appear, at best, as footnotes, commonly with the implication they are due primarily to flaws in the individuals concerned.

Chris Wheat (*Gods from the ghettos*, Melbourne Age, 16 December 1999) draws attention to the way in which romanticised images of poor black Americans become models for bored and alienated youth in all levels of society throughout the Western world. He

notes how commercial interests are quick to exploit this situation in marketing that targets affluent youth. He concludes that this glamorising of the life of the poor has a tendency, for young and old alike, to prevent us from seeing "what is really there—the awful lives of the poor."

### **Myths and reality**

The structure of today's developed society is fundamentally flawed because of the flawed belief system that supports it. This belief system rests on two fundamental premises:

1. Economic prosperity, evidenced in ever increasing market consumption, is the basis for human wellbeing.
2. Economic prosperity is secured by social policies that give priority to the interests of a self-regulating market.

These are the premises of an ideological capitalism. In its most fundamental sense capitalism describes an economic structure in which the means of production, distribution, and exchange are substantially owned by private commercial interests. It simply defines the basic structure of economic relations in a society and is a view that I personally support.

Ideological capitalism identifies the source of all human wellbeing in economic activity, defined in terms of a *self-regulating* market characterised by ever increasing *growth in consumption*. It is no longer simply a way of organising economic relations; it is a religious faith defining the meaning of life in secular language.

The difficulty is that those who hold this faith commonly fail to recognise either its ideological or its religious character. Peter Berger (1991, p. 13), after roundly denouncing the delusive myth of socialism, declares without qualification: "Capitalism, on the other hand, has been singularly devoid of mythogenic capacity. It is a sober, practical, 'uninspiring' thing."

The problem is that myth is not myth for those who believe in it. It is simply the way things are. Others have their myths reflecting an unreal view of the world. We see the world as it really is. A myth, in this sense, is a unifying framework of belief that gives coherent meaning to the diversity of human experiences. It sets normative directions that define the route to human fulfilment.

Most often in human history, the heart of a myth has been a story of the activity of divine beings. In modern secularist societies myth is expressed in secular terms. In either case, a myth has a religious character in the fundamental sense that it is grounded in a belief in some reality that transcends the everyday particularities of our experience. A sober analysis leads to the inescapable conclusion that today's faith in market-driven development depends on just such a myth. Some of the elements of this myth are:

#### *The beneficence of market forces*

While the language of Adam Smith's (1776) mystical "invisible hand" is no longer current, the argument that "market forces" will ensure that good will come to all from a self-regulating market has similar mystical overtones.

Market forces are real enough, but there is no empirical reason to suppose that they are a beneficent power ensuring that the market serves the good of all. They are human powers employed by humans primarily to advance the self-interest of those concerned. As economists Goudzwaard and de Lange observe (1995, p. 77) "without some form of guidance we cannot expect the market mechanisms to deliver a good outcome." Any belief in mysterious market forces that override for good this interplay of human powers can only belong in the category of myth.

#### *The "trickle down" effect*

When social policies are adopted in the interests of increased prosperity for commercial interests, the argument is often advanced that this will ultimately increase prosperity for everyone. This is sometimes described in terms of a trickle down effect as increased wealth at the top trickles down to the poorest in the society.

The hard evidence shows a reverse flow. Where social policies over recent years have given priority to market interests, there has been a steady flow of wealth to the top. There is no evidence of any "trickle down"—(Freeman, 1996; Myers, 1998, pp. 62-65).

#### **Consumer benefits from market deregulation**

It is commonly claimed that the removal of state regulation in favour of market self-regulation—deregulation—ensures maxi-

imum benefits for consumers by maximising competition and consumer choice.

The reality is that, in the absence of appropriate state regulation, the primary effect of market self-regulation is to concentrate commercial power in an increasingly smaller number of increasingly more powerful multinational corporations (UNDP, 1999, pp. 31, 32). Much is made of the increased efficiency that is said to result but the primary goal of this efficiency is the maximisation of profit rather than consumer benefit.

This concentration of power allows large multinational corporations to dominate the market in their chosen field of operations in three ways. Firstly, they are able to dominate the mass media with persuasive images designed to convince consumers that their products and services are the most desirable. Secondly, they are able to use their power to ensure that their products and services dominate displays in consumer outlets. Thirdly, if faced with a serious challenge, their power enables them to engage in a ruthless price cutting war to force smaller competitors out of the market.

The result is a market dominance that severely limits effective competition and consumer choice. Where the state fails to take effective action, it is likely to result in market monopoly.

The large array of products and services on display in the market tends to disguise the limitation of consumer choice. How can choice be limited with such a bewildering range to choose from?

Go into a Nairobi supermarket and you will be faced with the choice of many different brands of hair shampoo. Look more closely and you will find that all the many brands on prominent display are imported products produced by a few powerful multinational interests. It requires a persistent search to find, tucked away in an obscure corner, a locally produced product of good quality at a fraction of the price of the imported products. The multinational products dominate the market, not because they are either better or cheaper, but because of the power of media promotion and display dominance.

Recently we needed a product for a particular purpose in our home. The only products available for this purpose in the many readily accessible outlets in the large city where we live were the products of multinational corporations that did not meet our

requirements. We did find what we needed, a product that was better suited to our purpose and half the price of the multinational product. However, the outlet from which we bought it was the only one in the whole country from which it could be obtained.

This is not an attack on multinational corporations or the many good people who work for them. The point is simply that, whatever the merits of market deregulation, the belief that, in and of itself, it benefits consumers through greater competition and choice is part of the myth generated by ideological capitalism.

### *Market growth and human wellbeing*

Policies designed to ensure continued market growth are commonly supported with the argument that there is a direct link between market growth and human wellbeing. The argument is that human wellbeing depends on a healthy market and a healthy market depends on continuing market growth. There are three reasons for questioning this.

Firstly, in a finite world of finite resources, it is clearly impossible to sustain continuous market growth over an indefinite period. The point must come when we reach the limit of resources.

Secondly, history provides many examples of healthy markets that effectively met human needs without growth. Even to this day, such markets flourish in Kenya, and other African countries, in the form of village and town markets that play an important role in supplying consumer need and providing rewards to producers. Undoubtedly, today's mainstream markets of the developed world do depend on growth for sustained market wellbeing. However, this is due to the way these markets are structured and not something inherent in the market as such.

Thirdly, there is no evidence at all that market growth generates human wellbeing. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that the pursuit of increasing consumption subjects humans to stresses that diminish the quality of life (Myers, 1998, pp. 58–61), destroying authentic human relationships that are essential to our wellbeing (Gay, 1998, pp. 32–37). And, as McKibben observes (1998, p. 46), we can achieve an authentic joy only if we are willing to pass up the momentary pleasures that a consumerist market offers.

The idea of human wellbeing through market growth is clearly another component of the myth of today's ideological capitalism.

### *The power of the myth*

Contrary to Berger's claim, ideological capitalism has generated a myth as powerful and seductive as any generated by socialism. It is a myth that has a powerful hold on today's world. Its vision of life is guiding development policies around the world, reshaping human societies according to the beliefs of the myth.

Kwame Nkrumah, the first leader of independent Ghana, urged his followers to pursue political power with the words (Kaniki, 1992, p. 309): "Seek first the political kingdom, and all other things will be added unto you." Today this faith is replaced by a faith that all good will come from the economic kingdom.

The power of this myth is increased by the fact that it is commonly seen as inescapable economic realism rather than myth. The economists Goudzwaard and de Lange (1995) provide compelling reasons for questioning this claim to realism.

Nothing but the power of myth to capture the human heart can explain the passionate tenacity with which social policies based on its belief system are being applied by people of good will in spite of the evidence that these policies are not producing the promised social good. Every myth is founded in a religious trust that can sustain a faith in its ultimate triumph that perseveres even though it is not supported by the immediate evidence.

The central question for the Christian is: Is this myth guiding today's global development consistent with the faith that we profess?

Unless we are blinded by the power of the myth, it is clear that it is not. Our Lord plainly tells us that "life does not consist in the abundance of possessions"—Luke 12:15. Seeking fulfilment in the pursuit of riches and the satisfaction of sensory desire characterises the love of the world that is a fundamental denial of the love of God—1 John 2:15,16. If "...we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich...are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction."—1 Timothy 6:6–9.

The cartoonist, Michael Leunig (1998, p. 48), puts his finger on one of the most devastating effects that this myth is having in today's societies. Having defined the human soul as that part of the human person "where meanings are made, where there is a sense of the eternal, that we are more than this body and this gathering of perceptions", he goes on to say:

*The success of our political and corporate life has been at the expense and neglect of the soul. As a result very sick souls are making important decisions.*

Yet, so effectively is the myth being promoted as the cultural norm that even Christian churches and organisations are accepting its basic principles as the basis for their operations. They are adopting organisational structures and modes of operating taken from the practices of the commercial world. They are using the marketing strategies of the commercial world in order to market their message to a market-driven society.

The faith of the Gospel tells us that God "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment"—1 Timothy 6:17. Yet it also tells us that authentic joy is fulfilled, not in the pursuit of joy, but in following the word of the Lord so that, by abiding in his love, we may love as he loves us—John 15:13; 17:13,14. Human life is not fulfilled through the abundance of possessions or of consumption—Luke 12:15.

Nothing could be further removed from this than the dominant culture of today's developed societies with their passionate pursuit of consumption, their restless search for instant self-gratification, and their faith in economic prosperity as the source of human good. That many of these societies give token homage to Christian faith does nothing to lessen the contradiction.

If the countries of Africa persist in pursuing this culture as their ideal, it can only result in all the deprivation and distortion of the human person that characterises today's developed societies. B. Wanjala Kerre, points in the right general direction when he says;

*...modern cultural values which have been borrowed from the West can no longer promise humanity a balanced and humane lifestyle.... The good life in the African context will therefore, be one where beside access to food, shelter, clothing and medical care, the individual will*

*have cultivated a balanced view of self in his moral, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of life.*

For us, as Christians, to adopt the prevailing culture of the developed world in our pattern of daily living will destroy the effectiveness of our witness to our world, however zealous that witness may be in other ways. In the African context, it will make it impossible for us to serve our neighbours effectively in the common task of building a new and better Africa for tomorrow's global context.

### **A normative realism**

In today's world, alternative social agendas are commonly dismissed as impractical and unrealistic on two, closely related, grounds. The collapse of socialist systems is said to have established ideological capitalism as the only credible basis for an effective social order. Related to this, any agenda that challenges the dominant ideology is said to ignore economic reality.

Neither of these is a sound argument. The first embodies a dangerous ideological dogmatism that discourages the fundamental structural critique that every society needs. It assumes that the failure of one alternative means that no other is possible.

The second argument fails to recognise the normative character of economic life as an aspect of social reality. As normative reality, what is is not what must be. It is only one possibility that must be judged by the normative standard of what ought to be.

In today's global society, people are encouraged to challenge existing political reality because it falls short of democratic norms. There is no logical reason why the existing economic reality should not likewise be challenged if it falls short of appropriate norms. The refusal to countenance such a challenge can rest on nothing but a dogmatic faith in the myth supporting the existing reality.

In spite of the weakness of the arguments, however, ideological capitalism has such a strong hold on the centres of power in today's world that an alternative development agenda will not readily gain wide acceptance. This should not be a deterrent to the Christian community. Faithfulness to the Gospel will always put us at odds with the world, whether that world be socialist or capitalist, democratic or authoritarian—John 15:18–25; 17:14–19; 1 John 2:15–17.

In developing an alternative agenda we need to be guided by a normative vision of what society ought to be. This vision can be nothing less than the fulfilled kingdom of God. All our strategies should be directed towards a development of human society that moves in the direction of that fulfilment.

At the same time, an appropriate realism is needed. Utopianism that ignores the realities of the present situation is no more effective as Christian witness than is conformity. We need to be realistic in assessing the nature of the problems, the limitation of resources, and the nature and power of the opposing forces. We also need to be realistic in recognising the interim nature of the present age and our calling in it. Our calling is not to fulfil the kingdom. It is to bear witness, in deed and word, to the fullness that is to come in the final revelation of Christ as the all-conquering Lord of lords and King of kings.

### **A normative vision**

The focus of our normative vision must be a society that, in all its relationships, is governed by unequivocal love for God and neighbour. This love will not be the tawdry substitute for love endorsed by the world that is, in reality, nothing but self-centred desire. It can be nothing less than the love that images the God who is love. A love that freely and gladly gives for the sake of the other—1 John 4:7–12; John 3:16.

It is the love that, in humility, regards others as better than ourselves, looking not to our own interests but to the interests of others—Philippians 2:1–8. It is the love that does not draw the boundaries of giving around those of our own kind but extends also to our enemies—Matthew 5:44–48; Romans 5:10.

While the source of this love is in our relation with God, the evidence of it is in our relations with our fellow humans and with the creation of which God has made us trustees—1 John 4:20–5:5.

Within this focus there will be a place for appropriate economic development. However, this can only be one element in a broadly based development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1999, p. 99) has called for the incorporation of “human development priorities for people in all parts of the world” in the existing market-focused development agenda. While welcome,

this does not go nearly far enough. No amount of modification to a market-focused development agenda can lead to authentic development. There must be a radical shift in focus in which market development itself serves the priorities of love.

In order to give substance to the focus on love for God and neighbour, we need to establish four development priorities.

### *The priority of service*

A developed society, governed by the norm of love, will be one that gives priority to service. In today’s world the concept of service is debased by its subordination to market interest. People are trained to provide good service as a marketing strategy for increasing corporate profit. Service is treated as a commercial commodity with market value that is sold to those who can afford it.

All this turns things upside down. In a genuinely developed society focused on love, market interests will be subordinated to the priority of service. Service in the market place will not be a means to an end but the primary goal of commercial life. Profit will have its place as the just reward to which all who labour are entitled but not as the primary goal of commercial life.

The priority of service means that those who have power will use that power to advance the interests of the weak and not to advance their own power, wealth and privilege.

### *The priority of human care*

This calls for a reversal of the current priorities that subordinate care to economic interest. Even in economic terms we cannot afford not to care since a failure to care leads to the progressive degradation of the human resource on which economic prosperity itself, in the end, depends.

Viewed within the focus of love the priority of care is even more compelling since without it love is a hollow mockery. Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan makes this very clear. The priest and the Levite allowed other priorities to turn them aside from the care of their neighbour and, in doing so, showed themselves bankrupt in terms of love—Luke 10:29–37.

It should be noted that authentic care is not a commodity to be bought and sold. It depends on people giving freely to one another.

However, there is a financial cost involved and, in complex modern societies, the state has an essential role in ensuring that the available wealth is distributed in a way that ensures that these costs can be met. The wealth is there. Whether or not we can afford to make it available depends entirely on the priorities we have as a society.

### *The priority of loving care of creation*

There is considerable talk today about the need for “sustainable development” in response to concerns that market-driven development is rapidly depleting the earth’s resource. The “sustainable development” argument does not challenge the basic premise of market-driven development. It aims only to modify this by calling for market strategies that recognise the need to sustain limited resources in the process of achieving market growth.

The weakness of this approach is that it fails to address the fundamental issue of the nature of the relationship between humans and the rest of creation. It continues to assume that the world around us is a world of resources under our control to be used for the satisfying of our desires.

Oruka and Juma (1994, p. 116) argue that this is the way the relationship is presented in Scripture, and draw on the African religious tradition for an alternative. Paul Collins, himself a Christian, in a stimulating work reads the Genesis account in a similar way (1995, p. 91).

Reading the Genesis command to humans to subdue the earth and have dominion to justify human domination of creation for our own ends fails to take sufficient account of the whole story. Humans are given the command to subdue and have dominion *as God’s image*. Contrary to Collins’ argument (1995, p. 92), this does not justify the view that God “is almost exclusively a person like us”. Rather, it calls for us, in our lives, to reflect in creaturely terms the character of God as revealed in his relations with his creation.

God is not modelled on what we are. He is the model by which we are to be judged in all our creaturely relations. A proper understanding of the appropriate relation between humans and the rest of creation must be based on God’s relationship to creation.

There is no doubt that this relationship involves the exercise of power. However, it is not a power that is used to advance God’s

own interest. It is used always in the interest of the creatures. At its heart, God’s relation to creation is not one of power but of loving care. He is “good to all, and his compassion is over all he has made.”—Psalm 145:9. He “gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry.”—Psalm 147:9. His loving care extends to the most insignificant of his creatures—Matthew 10:29.

If we are to be faithful as God’s image the exercise of the power we are given over creation must be governed by loving care for every creature. It must be exercised in the interests of the creature and not in our own self-interest.

We are called to develop creation and not to try to preserve it in some pristine purity. But it is to be a development of loving care that aims at the enriching of the whole creation and not one that exploits creation for our own ends.

In the mutually supportive relationships that belong to God’s good creation order, it is proper that we look to other creatures for our needs of food, shelter and clothing, as well as for the needs associated with the fulfilment of our callings as trustees of creation. Yet this is not an absolute entitlement. These creatures are not mere possessions to be disposed of at our will. They are creatures to be cared for in love. A failure to do so is a failure in love for the Creator.

The present reality is that there is an alienation in creation that places us in conflict with other creatures. At times this conflict can only be resolved by the use of our power to destroy. Yet, this should never be done without profound grief and repentance for our sin that has made such destruction necessary. The overriding priority is always that of loving care.

### *The priority of justice*

Justice is a central theme of the redemptive kingdom of Christ. He comes to “execute justice and righteousness” bringing “justice to the nations” —Jeremiah 23:5, Isaiah 42:1. The pursuit of justice is a fundamental characteristic of all who belong to that kingdom; “... what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”—Micah 6:8. Those who fail to pursue justice, however diligent they may be in their

worship, place themselves outside the kingdom in the company of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah—Isaiah 1:10–17.

Justice is the administration of what is due. In Scripture it is not a legal concept nor is it primarily concerned with the punishment of those who offend (von Rad, 1962, pp. 370,371). It is a religious concept focusing on faithfulness to neighbour as those who live before the face of God in the varied relationships of human life. A just society is one in which the demands of love are met in all relationships.

Biblical justice demands that all who labour, whatever their role, should share in the prosperity that comes from the communal enterprise—Malachi 3:5; James 5:1–6; 1 Corinthians 9:8–10. It does not require that all receive the same amount nor does it support the utopian Marxist principle of “from each according to his ability and to each according to his need”. Each is to receive a share as appropriate to the role of each in the enterprise. But neither does it support the current principle that treats labour as a market commodity to be valued by supply and demand in the labour market. The only just principle for fixing wages is on the basis of sharing the prosperity of the enterprise.

Justice also calls for those who, for one reason or another, are unable to participate in the economic life of the society to be given access to a share in the common prosperity, not as charity or welfare but as a fundamental right—Leviticus 19:9,10.

Biblical justice calls for all to have access to the productive resources of the society, renouncing the use of power to concentrate the ownership of these resources in the hands of a few—Leviticus 25:13–17. Justice means that those with power do not use that power to benefit from the dependency of the weak but use it rather to strengthen the weak without benefit to themselves—Leviticus 25:35–38.

A major concern of biblical justice is support for the weak and disadvantaged against the powerful who use their power to increase and perpetuate the disadvantage of the weak—Isaiah 1:16,17. The use of legal right, social approval and acts of piety to justify the use of power in ways that disadvantage the weak is a denial of the righteousness of God’s kingdom—Mark 12:38–40.

Scripture provides no support for a utopian expectation of a society of perfect equality in which all poverty and disadvantage is wiped out. It does call us, in the clearest possible terms, to stand against all forms of abuse of power in violation of the law of love. We do not need to act unjustly in order to be counted among the apostates of Isaiah 1. We only need to fail to act against injustice in the society around us. There can be no authentic development without this priority of justice.

### **A practical agenda**

To have a clear normative vision is not enough. We need a practical agenda for action that will proclaim to the world, by deeds and words, the nature of the society that ought to be, and that will be in the coming revelation of the triumphant Redeemer.

The way in which the Apostle approached the issue of slavery is an example of the normative realism that is needed. The launching of a campaign for the abolition of slavery in the social circumstances of the first century would have been a futile exercise. Instead, he chose to overturn the system of social beliefs on which slavery depended with the call for masters to treat their slaves justly and to welcome back a runaway slave as a “beloved brother”—Colossians 4:1; Philemon 15–17. In the society of the day, justice was for fellow citizens and brotherhood for those of the same social class.

The need for a realistic approach means that there cannot be a single agenda of action for all circumstances. An effective agenda will be one that is designed to suit the prevailing circumstances in any given situation. There are, however, some common characteristics to be expected of any effective agenda.

### ***A Gospel imperative***

During a visit to Cape Town in 1975 I had a very brief discussion with an evangelical pastor about issues of justice under the political regime in South Africa at that time. It was very brief because, after a brief and unsuccessful defence of that regime, he closed the discussion by saying: “I really don’t know much about these things. My calling is to preach the Gospel. I don’t get involved in politics”.

His words reflected a view that has been all too common among evangelicals. So far as agendas of social concern and justice are

seen as legitimate at all, they are seen as secondary to the primary calling of evangelism and Gospel proclamation. It is supported by a deeply sincere, and proper, desire to maintain the integrity of the Gospel against the undermining of that integrity by views that reduce the Gospel to a programme of social reform.

Nevertheless, it is a view that itself involves a serious undermining of the integrity of the Gospel. It is founded in an acceptance of the secularist separation of the spiritual and the secular, with the spiritual reduced to the private, inner experience of the individual. The biblical Gospel is certainly the news of personal renewal by grace through faith but this is not an individualistic experience detached from the various social relationships of life.

To treat the public life of society, with its political and economic relations, as an autonomous, secular realm outside the scope of the spiritual kingdom of Christ is a fundamental denial of Christ's universal lordship. The Gospel, in its biblical fullness, is the message of God's reconciliation of all things in Christ in which acts of prayer, devotional life, and worship come together with the fulfilment of our calling as trustees of creation in the single, seamless fabric of a life lived in love. The greatest diligence in the nurture of devotional life means nothing if we fail to act against injustice in the society around us—Isaiah 1:10–17.

The Great Commission is not reducible to evangelism in the narrow sense of leading individuals to an acceptance of Christ as Saviour followed only by the nurture of devotional life in the new believers. It is a call to disciple the nations, "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"—Matthew 28:18–20. It is not fulfilled unless the whole purpose of God is declared, including his purpose that we should witness to his kingdom by a pattern of living in the world that gives priority to service, to care, of our fellow humans and all creation, and to justice.

To ask whether we should give priority to evangelism or to the pursuit of justice in society, then, asks the wrong question. It asks a question that is shaped by the wisdom of modern secularism, not by the word of God. They belong inescapably together in the one, life encompassing Gospel imperative.

### *Popular initiatives*

"Popular" in this connection means "belonging to the people". Most approaches to development think in terms of national strategies, centrally planned and directed by experts—even strategies with the stated aim of empowering the people.

Firstly, it is based on an elitist view of society alien to the biblical view of the human person. It assumes that the mass of people are incapable of effective initiatives, requiring the leadership and direction of an elite leadership group if they are to contribute effectively to society. In contrast, God largely bypasses the elite of society, choosing the foolish, the weak, and the despised as the primary agents of his kingdom—1 Corinthians 1:26–31; James 2:1–7.

Secondly, it deprives society of one of its most valuable development resources—the creative initiative of its people. King's extensive study of Kenya's "Jua Kali" economy (1996) provides convincing evidence of both the development potential of popular initiatives by the people of Africa, and the limitations on development that result when such initiatives are not effectively incorporated in national strategies.

Thirdly, as a means of Christian witness it is an impractical approach. The powerful grip of the ideals of ideological capitalism in the centres of power in today's societies makes it unrealistic that we can have more than marginal impact on the thinking driving national strategies. We should by all means do what we can in this area, but a realistic strategy will give the major emphasis to the fostering of small scale popular initiatives. Here the Christian church, as a widely spread network of local worshipping communities, is particularly well placed to make a major impact.

This does not mean that the church, as an institution, should take these development initiatives. It should, however, through its teaching ministry encourage people to take appropriate initiatives as part of their calling as disciples of Christ.

### *An integral strategy*

An effective strategy will include economic initiatives but it will not focus narrowly on these in isolation from the other priorities that are integral to effective human development. It will treat economic initiatives as components of a single, comprehensive strat-

egy incorporating the priorities of service, care and justice directed by love of God and neighbour as its central motivating principle.

### Go in peace

N.T. Wright (1994, pp. 78–80) points out that, when we proceed with firm resolve to avoid all world conformity, seeking a transformed pattern of living in all things, we will inevitably find that, despite all our best efforts, we remain entangled in what seems to be inescapable conformity.

Wright draws our attention to the response of Elisha to Naaman when, having pledged that he will serve only the Lord, went on to confess that he did not see how he could avoid bowing down before the pagan deity, Rimmon, when his official duties required it. Recognising it as a wrong that he could not see how to avoid, he said: "...may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count." Elisha's response was: "Go in peace."

So when we too find ourselves entangled in what seems to be unavoidable conformity we should join in Naaman's confession: May the Lord pardon your servant on this one count. Wright then observes:

*The good news is that he does. Did Elisha say to Naaman: 'You're a half-hearted compromiser, you want your bread buttered on both sides at once, you're talking out of both corners of your mouth'? No. He said: 'Go in peace'. That is the word of God to those who are starting to bring their thinking about God and the world into the straight line that flows from the revelation of the saving love of God in Christ. It is the word of God to those who are starting to follow Jesus, and want to do so more and more.*

May we, then, go out into the world with single-minded determination to pursue the righteousness of God's kingdom in every area of life knowing that, although we fall short of that desired righteousness in our practice, while we continue to pursue this goal we go in the peace of God.

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## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> “Western world”, throughout this paper, is a cultural rather than a geographical classification. It refers to those societies, wherever they are located, whose culture is historically derived from that of Western Europe and exhibits a clear affinity with Western European culture.