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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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Two copies should be submitted, one with double spacing and the other single spaced. All paragraphs should have a 5mm indent on the first line, with no line space between paragraphs. Headings should be used sparingly with no more than three levels, distinguished by different font sizes. Headings should be flush left with no space before or after.

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The Significance of Names to Christians In Africa:

A Preliminary Investigation

Mary Nyambura Muchiri

Introduction

In their book, *Issues in Christian Theology*, Ndegwa et al. (1998) aptly describe the three worlds that African Christians have to contend with, as follows:

There is, first of all, *the world of Christian faith* represented by the bible he studies, the church where he worships and a special religious vocabulary filled with words with personal meaning, words like “*born again*,” “*justified*,” “*spirit filled*” and, above all, “*saved*.” But there is a second world. It is the world of African culture represented by the name he bears, the ancestry to which he belongs, and the headlines of the daily newspaper, alive with political, economic, intellectual, and social pulsations.... Mumo’s third world is *the world of modern culture*. His Levi jeans, his Sony cassette player and his Michael Jordan poster pasted to the wall of his dimly lit room....

This paper attempts to describe an aspect of the first two worlds, represented by the names of the African Christians. My interest in this subject started as early as when I was baptized into the Church of England, now known in Kenya as Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK). It was during the “Emergency”, a period during which movement was restricted, due to the fight for independence in Kenya, in 1952.

Since my parents had not been married in church, I was required to go for baptismal classes. Members of the Mau Mau movement, called “terrorists” by the British Colonial government but “Freedom Fighters” by the local people, threatened to kill those who attended the classes. These were seen as betrayers of the national cause by following the religion of the enemy. All the others stopped attending and so I was baptized with small children who did not have to attend the classes. Although the threat was not carried out on me, I wondered why both the Christians and the members of the Mau Mau movement considered baptism so important.

Moreover, the missionaries insisted that one chose a Western name for baptism, “in order to radically cut oneself from traditional values and identify oneself with the new community of Christians.” It was rumoured that the white missionaries thought that African names were associated with evil spirits, something that no Christian would like to be holding on to.

There was no place for questions, one had to do what was required. So I chose the name “Mary” (the mother of Jesus) because I had always been fascinated by her story, especially her faith in God. Many of my friends discouraged me saying the name was too common, (*gacanga bijiriri, in my Gĩkĩjyĩj language*), but I stuck to it. After all, she was the Mother of God and a very special person in the history of the church. Later, I met a girl who had kept her African name after baptism and I learnt that people were now able to use African names for baptism, but this was after Kenya got her political independence.

When I joined the Alliance Girls High School in 1960, my name was given from the previous school as “Mary Nyambura Jimnah”. Nyambura was my personal name, given to me after my maternal grand mother, and Jimnah was my father’s baptismal name. Soon after arriving at Alliance, I was informed that I had to use my “family’ name. None of us were used to that concept, so I decided to use my father’s African name “Kimori”. Later I discovered that that was not his real name, it was a nick name given to him when he was young because of his big body, which was like a big banana tree *mori*, with the added prefix “*kij*” to indicate a big one, the opposite of “ka” meaning small. His real family name was *Mijthjita* and he also had an age set name *Macharia*. This refers to the age of those who search for wealth.

When I changed my name on the exercise books, I forgot to change in one. It had been taken by a teacher for grading, and when it came back I had already changed the others. The next time I handed it in for grading, the teacher called me to find out why I had two different names. I tried to explain, but she said that only thieves use different names. The comment made me very angry, but also made me interested in finding out more about the meaning of names.

The main objective of this paper, therefore, was to find out from as many African ethnic groups as possible, but within a very limited time of three weeks, what their naming systems are, and what significance each of the names has for the individual and to the community. I was especially interested in finding out what changes are taking place with regard to the choice of baptismal names, now that African countries have become independent of the colonial powers, and the missionaries are no longer in control of the African Church to the same degree as they were during the colonial period.

The exploratory research reported in this paper was done as part of a course on “The Gospel and Culture”, at Tangaza College in Nairobi, Kenya. Since there was very little time for the fieldwork, a properly structured interview was difficult to administer, so the informants supplemented information from the works cited with answers to the following basic questions.

What are all your names?

How and when did you acquire each of those names?

What value does each of the names have for you:

As an African

As a Christian

As a young/older person

As a member of your denomination

As a man/woman

As a member of your ethnic group

As a member of your profession

What other comment do you have on the issue of names?

A further limitation was that within the available time it was not possible to interview representatives of most of the African ethnic groups. Yet, though it may not be appropriate to generalize my findings, this is a significant first step in trying to understand the cultural significance of names among the African people. The analysis also points to the underlying African philosophy. The method of analysis was mainly an attempt to categorize African names according to meanings attached to them. Seven categories were arrived at, as described in the following section of the paper.

A Description of the Results of the Field Work

A total of seventeen (17) people from different linguistic groups were interviewed as per the summary found at the end of this paper. Nine of these were women and seven were men. They were all confessing Christians from different walks of life. Most of them, except four, had some university education. Two were young, one elderly and the rest were middle aged. The following denominations were represented: Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, African Independent Church, Legio Maria, and a number of mainstream Protestant Churches. Following is a summary of the main findings.

Seven types of names were identified as follows:

Personal

Family

Baptismal

Age group

Wedding

Euphemisms

Nick names

Personal Names

Everyone interviewed said she or he had a personal name. These normally differed according to the sex of the person and the different linguistic groups had various ways of generating the names. The main ways were:

Using family or national events

For example among one group in Tanzania, it is common to give a child a name related to the events that took place in the family during the mother's pregnancy. An example is the name *Kokuhumbya*. It was given to one of my informants because her father was attacked by thugs and stayed in hospital for three months. The day after he was discharged from the hospital, their daughter was born. She was given the name, which means, "to rescue." It was believed that her innocence, and his desire to see his child were what rescued him from death. Another example is *Kokugonza*, which means to love, and is given to the child of a couple that had a good relationship.

Among the *Dinka* of Southern Sudan, a name such as *Agot* which means "to quarrel" is used. The name is given to a child if the parents had a quarrel before the child was born. Also among the *Amhara* of Ethiopia, a name like *Semeret*, which means "success", is given to a girl if her parents succeed in business or in other ways during pregnancy. *Belete* or *Hivet* means "greater" or "great life" and is given to boys to denote a national event such as the Communist occupation of Ethiopia.

Names that denote the child's position in the family

Among the *Basaar* of Togo, the first boy in the family is called *Kpapu* and the girl is *Walim*. The second boy is *Tchandikou* and the second girl *Agbassi*. The *Nandi* of the Congo also uses the same system. *Kanyere* means the first-born girl and *Paluku/Zanzu/Mumbere* the first-born boy. *Kavila* is the second born girl and *Kabale* the second born boy. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria the first-born boy is usually named *Majisola*, meaning, "wake to honour."

Names that denote one's Clan

This is a system used among the *Agjkyjy* of Kenya. The personal names among the girls are those of the ten clans. These, according to a creation myth, were given by the mother and father of the clan, *Gikjy* and *Mjmbi*, to their ten daughters, referred to as "nine full" because mentioning the real number may bring a bad omen. Since they did not have any sons, they prayed and *Ngai* (God) brought to them ten handsome young men who married their daughters.

So the name *Wambiji* gives the *Ambiji Clan* its name and so do the others; (Wachera, Wairimÿ, Wanjikÿ, Wangarÿ, Wanjirÿ, Wangÿi, Warigia and Waithÿra).

Names after a relative who has recently died or a good friend.

Among the Kisii of Kenya, most of these names are given to children at birth, however, among some groups in Tanzania, the child is called *Mwana* until the first tooth appears and then the grand father gives the name. Among the Yoruba, the naming ceremony takes place on the eighth day, after consultation among family members.

A new trend

A girl from the *Luhya* language group of Kenya told me she was given the name *Violet*. She came from a mixed marriage and because her mother liked the colour by that name, she gave it to her daughter as her personal name. This is a new trend, which was exemplified in other types of names as will be seen in the ensuing discussion.

Family Names

Every one of those interviewed said that in addition to a personal name she/he had a family name. Most groups use mother, father, grandmother, or grandfather's name as a family name. In some cases they use great or great grand parents' names. Among some of the groups, for example the *Kisii* of Kenya, the relative has to be dead. However, the trend is changing and some people may be named after living relatives. My informant said he named a child after his mother who is still alive to make sure her name continues, since he was not likely to have any more children.

Among the *Agikjyij* of Kenya, children are named after both dead and living relatives. The first girl is named after the father's mother, while the first boy is named after the father's father. The second girl is named after the mother's mother and the boy after the mother's father. After that the names of mother's and father's brothers and sisters are used alternately. It is considered a great insult not to name one's children after one's parents. However, this tradition is also changing and a few people choose other names for their children.

Groups that do not use parents' or grand parents' names include the *Nandi* of the Congo, who may use the name of a loved relative. My *Yoruba* informant also said this often happens among her people, for example, her name *Olajumoke* was given to her after her great auntie, who is still alive, because she is very highly respected.

The name means, "Together we shall look after/spoil her". The Amharic-speaking people may also give names according to what the parents wish for their children. For example, *Tiyale* means "my shadow" or "you will be my future." The *Nandi* may also use "meaningful" names such as *Matabisi*, which means, "A gift from God."

Baptismal names

As mentioned earlier, most of those who were colonized had to take a Western name at baptism. Those not colonized, as in Ethiopia, were not forced but some chose to do so. For example, those converting from Islam, in order to distinguish themselves as Christians chose new names after baptism. Most of these do not belong to the Orthodox Church, for example the *Dinka*, but they normally use their Western names only on official occasions, rather than on a daily basis.

An exceptional case is that of the Congo where, according to my informant, when Mobutu Seseseko became president, he banned Western names for everybody, whether they were Christians or not. This was in line with his philosophy of "Authenticity." So, although the churches gave their converts Western names, these were never used officially. Other Africans have also questioned the use of Western names and some churches now even encourage the use of African names for baptism. However, a few such as the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church still insist on Western names. One of my informants said he had to leave an SDA to join a Catholic church because he did not want to use Western names for his children.

I have used the term "Western" deliberately because I do not think there is anything inherently Christian in a Western name. A useful distinction that might be made is between Western and "Biblical" names. It would make more sense to me if Africans had been asked to take on Biblical names. It is not that those are inherently Christian, but people would at least know something about the people who had used those names. It would make sense if one chose the name of a character she/he admired and gave it to his or her daughter. Such a system, I was informed, has been used in the Catholic Church where one is given a list of names of Saints to choose from.

Age Group Names

Some groups have additional names for all those who are initiated into adulthood at the same time. Among the *Agikjyij*, most men's names are for those who get circumcised at the same time.

A common name is *Mwangi*, which, according to tradition, means “those who are scattered” because they went to different parts of the country to look for wealth. Other such names include *Maina* and *Irungu*.

Wedding Names

I was only able to get one example of such names. My *Dinka* informant explained that the family of the bridegroom gives such names to a prospective bride. If they like her they give a beautiful name like “different gold” and if they do not like her, they give her an ugly name such as, “he is greater than you.” It is clear that the name is likely to cause a lasting enmity between the two families, if the man decides to go ahead and marry a bride that his family does not approve of.

Euphemistic Names

Euphemism is a characteristic of most cultures. Such names among Africans are meant to “cheat death.” They are used when one child dies and another is born. The family feels that by using a different, and often an ugly name, death will not be interested in the second child and it will therefore survive. Among the *Agikjyij*, a girl child is named *Njoki*, “The one who has come back” and a boy is called *Kariuki*, “The one who has risen from death.” If yet another child dies, animal names are used such as *Ngarij* (Leopard) or *Ngatia* (Lion). A similar system is found among the *Nandi* of Congo, where the name *Yalala* means “rubbish” and *Kaburi Kamangoya* means, “The grave is waiting.” The same system is found among the *Luhya* and *Embu* groups in Kenya.

Nicknames

Africans, like many other people in the world, use nicknames for their children. For example, my father had a nickname for each of his four children, such as *Wamijoto* and *Nyaitjirij*. The *Dinka* people use mainly animal names for those thought to have similar characteristics. *Agok* means monkey, *Majok* means black and white bull, *Akol* means the sun and *Koor* means a lion. The *Gikjyij* name *Mijcai* also started as a nickname to mean “the one who sighs.”

Such names are then integrated into the language and sometimes people do not even remember how they started.

Other Origins of African Names

In addition to those already mentioned above, there were other origins:

Time of birth

Among the Luo of Kenya, a boy born at midday is called *Ochieng* and a girl *Achieng*. Also among the *Akamba*, a boy born at night is *Mutukij* and a girl *Ndukij*. Another group with a similar system are the *Embu*, who name one born at night *Nduku* or *Nduma* and one born during the day *Muthenya*.

Dreams

In some groups, dreams are used to decide names. These are supposed to indicate the wishes of the ancestors, some of who dictate the specific names to be used. According to my informant, this happens when there are problems, for example when a child is deformed and the ancestor rejects the name, or a child cries all the time after birth. In such circumstances, the diviner revokes the name already given to the child.

Famous people

Among the *Luo*, children are named after famous people like Kenyatta, the first Kenyan president or Mandela, the first black president of South Africa.

Meanings Attached to African Names

Although there were slight differences among the informants, the following interpretations were common.

Personal names

Personal names are for individual identity. Each person is unique and must be recognized and respected. There is, therefore, the tendency to identify him or her with specific characteristics, events, position in the family and so on.

Family names

Family names, on the other hand, link the individual with the community, clan, or linguistic group. An individual does not exist alone; he is part and parcel of her or his forefathers, through the family name.

Baptismal names

These names signify the initiation to a new community of faith. However, the requirement to choose a foreign name has now come to be seen as unnecessary, even cruel. It forced people to “cut off their roots” without offering a valid alternative, since an African will always be one and never become an American or a European. However, a few informants, especially Roman Catholics, said they were grateful for their “Saintly” names because they give them the motivation to be holy. One informant even believes that whenever she prays through her “namesake” saint she gets answers to those prayers.

A few people felt that choosing an African name for baptism does not clearly distinguish a person as a Christian. One informant said that the Western name strengthens his personal identity in that there are very many people in his area with the same African name but very few with his baptismal name.

In some groups women do not have to change their names after marriage. In such cases the baptismal name does not affect the woman’s status. In other groups, however, the situation is very complex, in that if she wants to keep her father’s name, she may have to drop her baptismal name legally in order to have three legal names. A case in point is of one of my informants whose name was Janet Wambÿi Mÿchiri. After marriage she became Wambÿi Mÿchiri Mwangÿru, the last name being that of her husband. Some felt that dropping a name is like losing a part of yourself. One informant said she kept her baptismal name because her husband liked it and another because it had become part of her identity.

An interesting case is that of one who disliked her name *Rebecca* when she read the Bible story of the mother with that name, who showed favouritism to her children. Rather than drop it, she prayed that she would become a better mother to her children. This was mainly because she did not want to show disrespect to her par-

ents who had chosen it for her. All the women interviewed said it was unfair to expect women to change their names after marriage because they lose part of their identity.

Age group names

These names were a way of forging unity among members. The name also gives a general description of their characteristics. The names are valued because they mark an important stage in life, that of becoming an adult.

Wedding names

Wedding names are an expression of the attitude of the new family towards a prospective bride, to let her know whether she is liked or not. Interesting enough, bridegrooms are not given any names. Depending on whether the name is good or bad, a bride is expected to change her behaviour accordingly and live up to expectations.

Euphemistic names

Euphemistic names are used to protect the new born from death. According to my *Nandi* informant, for example, when a child is called *Yalala*, meaning, “rubbish,” one is telling Death that she is not worth coming for. Among the *Agijkijyij*, names like *Ngarij* may mean the child has the power of a lion to fight death or that he is not a human being, so not worth Death’s efforts.

Nicknames

Nicknames may be used to tease, for example, *Agok* in *Dinka* means, “monkey.” They may be used to express love and endearment, for example *Kanini Kega*, which in *Gijkijyij* means “small but good.” Other nicknames express the observed characteristics of the individual, for example, *Nyachae*, which among the *Kisii* of Kenya means the “one who drinks a lot of tea.”

A Discussion of Findings

In this section, my aim is to integrate the findings from the field research with the theoretical aspects encountered both in class and in the literature on the Gospel and African culture. It is therefore an

attempt to compare the concepts learnt with the specific experience in the field.

Gyekye (187-194) summarizes African cultural values through the use of "maxims" or proverbs. I have chosen ten of his maxims to illustrate some of the values. It would be easy to find equivalent proverbs in other language groups, but I have only given examples from my own group, the *Agjkkjyvj*.

1. Nothing is as painful as when one dies without leaving a child behind.
2. When a person descends from heaven, she/he descends into a human society or human habitation.
3. Because God does not like evil, he gave each person a name.
4. All human beings are the children of God; no one is a child of the earth.
5. When a person dies he or she is not really dead.
6. The fingers of the hand are not equal in length.
7. The lizard does not eat pepper for the frog to sweat.
8. In the extremes of need, a human being will live in the forest (like an animal).
9. The judge has no preferences.
10. Wisdom creates well-being.

The first five maxims are very relevant to the topic of names, while the other five illustrate general values of African societies. *The first is the great love of children.* As described in the foregoing sections, parents in the African communities go through a lot of trouble to get appropriate names for their children.

The reason, according to one of my informants, is that the name is believed "*to bear the spirit of the person after whom the child is named.*" This is what is generally known as "*nominal reincarnation.*" In fact among many groups, the expression used to refer to the person whose name is given to the child is "*so and so has been born by her or his son or daughter.*"

Moreover, the relationship between the child and the wife or husband is described in adult terms, for example, "*Your daughter or son has given you a wife or husband.*" Consequently, many African societies have naming ceremonies, some very simple and others very elaborate. Through these ceremonies, the spirit of the ancestor is expected to inhabit the newborn baby. To illustrate the impor-

tance of children, are the many taboos that are put on pregnant women or those who have just given birth. It must be remembered, however, that a boy is always more important than a girl in many African societies, as will become evident in the ensuing discussion. For example, according to my *Luo* informant, these are some taboos that surround pregnancy and birth:

- If the first wife does not give birth to a boy, the second wife of the same man has to deliver in a neighbour's house.
- No man should be present during birth.
- The mother of a newborn baby does not cook. The co-wives cook for her.
- Midwives have to be given a chicken. They bury the placenta where it can be found if it is needed, for example, if no baby boy is born, the placenta is buried in another place.

Among the *Embu* people, on the other hand:

- The payment of the bride price has to be completed
- All curses have to be neutralized by slaughtering the necessary number of goats.
- The pregnant woman must not eat eggs.
- She must not carry fire at night.
- She must not get into contact with a barren woman.
- She must not eat meat of an animal caught in a snare.
- She must not touch a corpse.
- The husband must not go hunting.
- The couple may not have sex.
- She must go through purification rights.

There are many other taboos among other African people. A modern person may dismiss these taboos as simply superstition.

But a closer look will reveal an underlying theme, the protection of the child from harmful influence. There is almost a parallel with the Jewish Nazarine laws recorded in the bible. At baptism, therefore, when one is given another name that is supposed to replace the one given by the community, "*Giving that name up was social death*", according to Oduyoye (1995). She goes on to explain that at baptism,

The African Christian did literally receive a new name. Not only was it new, it was also strange, but pronounced to be the “best.” But the same name also brought the “stigma” of being a renegade from one’s primal groups.

According to the *second maxim*, each person belongs to a human society. One enters the society through birth and leaves it at death. The naming ceremony ushers the child into his or her society. Baptism also ushers the individual into the family of God. A difficulty arises in that there is no such a thing as a Christian society but Christians belong to many and varied social groups. How are they to reconcile the two societies? According to Oduyoye, some African Christians have sought to reconcile the two naming ceremonies by asking a Christian priest to baptize the child in the context of the traditional naming ceremony. But are the two covenants coterminous? Theologizing our baptism as African Christians means examining the implications of our two names, African and Christian, and the two covenants involved in the ceremonies that incorporate us into the two communities.

The *Yoruba* people of Nigeria have tried to solve the problem described above by recognizing that some of the African names are dedicated to African divinities and so should not be used for Christian baptism. For example, *Oguntade*, which means the God of iron. These so called “fetish” names have been changed for Christians to *Olutade* in which *Olu* means Lord as in “the Lord Jesus.”

Another way of dealing with the problem has been to recognize that the so called “Christian names” are not all good or meaningful. So Christians try to make up names that have meaning for them, hence the saying among the *Yoruba*, “You look at a house before you name the child’. An example of this is the *Shambala* name *Elia-penda*, which means “God loves”, and the Kenyan *Kiswahili* names *Imani* and *Pendo*, which mean “peace” and “love” respectively.

The *third maxim* points to the individuality of each person, though still a member of the community. Each person has an individual identity and responsibility, although all are the children of God, according to the *fourth maxim*, this arises from the belief that each person has a personal spirit, “Chi” or “Kra”, and so can, to a large extent, map his or her destiny.

This was clearly demonstrated by my informants by distinguishing the role of the personal name as that of individual identity while that of the family name was to make them belong to their specific communities, the two, therefore, complementing each other.

The *fifth maxim* shows that Africans believe in life after death. That life is not divorced from the current life, because before one is born, she/he belongs to the unborn members of that community and returns to it when she/he dies. Immediately after death they are the “living dead” and later they become the “ancestors.” The family name maintains that relationship by perpetuating the values and characteristics of the ancestors. Christians, especially the Roman Catholics seem to have a similar system through the concept of “The Saints.” Many informants said they were named after saints so that they can emulate their character. Others also said that their names were chosen based on the character of the person, whether a member of the family or not.

According to the *sixth maxim*, all people are not equal; some are richer or poorer than others. This was used in some societies to conclude that people should be content with what they have and not aspire to a different social status. The Church has been accused of exploiting a similar concept, for example by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1982):

The white man had arranged it all
To completely soften our hearts.
To completely cripple our minds with religion!
And they had the audacity to tell us
That earthly things were useless.

However, the same maxim could be interpreted as pointing to the diversity of the human race, in which everyone has a unique role. This would compare well with the Christian idea of a God who deals individually and differently with different people and gives them unique gifts for the building of the Body of Christ, the Church. Though with many parts, it is still one.

The *seventh maxim* follows logically, in that individuals should be responsible for their actions. This, however, did not happen all the time in the African society where some people, especially women, suffered for other peoples’ sins. A case was narrated to me where, among the *Kisa* of Kenya, a woman is blamed for giving birth to

twins, as if she alone was responsible for it. She is abused by the community and given *Manyasi*, that is a herbal drink to cleanse her and she is shaved by a hired person because she has brought a bad omen to the community.

There are many instances, even in the Bible, of female oppression, for example the woman caught in adultery was to be stoned, but not the man she committed it with. Jesus clearly showed which side he was on when he asked anyone who had not sinned to cast the first stone. Unfortunately, the African societies continue to oppress women in the name of culture and the church has not done any better whenever it has failed to speak out against such injustices.

Moreover, the attitude that women are inferior to men seems to be supported by some interpretations of the creation story. Eve sinned by eating the fruit of knowledge between good and evil and by giving it to her husband, Adam. The issue that such an interpretation seems to avoid is that Adam was the one given the command not to eat and so should have explained it to Eve, rather than eating without question. Moreover, he was not forced to eat it but did it voluntarily. Also in the New Testament, wives are supposed to submit to their husbands, which is interpreted as a sign of inferiority, rather than the two being complementary, as I believe it is meant to be. The issue of women being as fully human as men are is yet to be faced by both traditional and current religious and civil authorities.

One example of the discrimination against women narrated to me was the requirement that African women should renounce their maiden names and adopt those of their husbands. It was, however, heartening to learn that some women are defying this demand and keeping their father's names and either adding those of their husbands or leaving them out completely. Unfortunately, some of us did not have that choice.

The *eighth maxim* refers to what happens when people face problems like exploitation, violence, or extreme poverty. This is the theme of Ngugi's play referred to earlier. It hints at the potential evil found in every human being. This may manifest itself through witchcraft, according to African Traditional Religion. On the other

hand, it is attributed to the original sin committed by our first parents, Adam and Eve, or the devil, among Christians.

The *ninth* and *tenth maxims* point us to issues of justice, and the need to live a good happy life here and now. Injustice and prejudice are main themes in the encounter between the Gospel and African culture. For example, Pobee (1996) discusses the issue of syncretism, which reveals much prejudice against Africans. He says, "An obsession with rooting out *superstition* and *syncretism* is in fact typical of many discussions of the relation of Christian faith to African cultures."

There seems to be a conflict between Christianity and African Traditional religion on the matter of "well being." Christians are urged to persevere in life until they get to heaven, which is in opposition to the "abundant life" promised by Jesus. The Africans, on the other hand, believe in making the best of life here and now. This was manifested through the love of feasts and the significance of sharing meals as a way of promoting unity and reconciliation. Goats, chickens, and even cows are slaughtered at various ceremonies, including those of naming. Any attempts of enculturation of the Gospel must, therefore address issues of justice and not mere charity as well as ensure a good life.

A major problem that many African Christians have not yet understood is the discrepancy between the message of the missionaries and their lifestyles. For example, they preached that Christians should not be concerned about material wealth while they lived comfortably among the poor. They also preached that drinking alcohol was sinful but those who worked for them found alcoholic drinks in their fridges. This had a very negative effect, especially for those who were educated in Britain. When they came back they renounced their "Christian names" and said they did not want to have any association with "hypocrites."

My personal reaction when I went to the United Kingdom was that the missionaries had not made much distinction between Western culture and Christianity. Many times what they passed on to the African was not "Christian" but Western. Of course the African had no way of distinguishing the two. On the other hand, because

they did not understand African culture, they damned everything as “pagan.” This has made many Africans want to go back to “their roots” and find out what they can still salvage from their culture and integrate it with “Biblical Christianity.”

Oduyoye (1995) has coined what I think is a very appropriate metaphor for the situation just described. She says that Christianity in Africa is “a potted plant.” The African may continue watering it but it will never grow to the full potential until the Western cultural pot is broken and Christianity is planted in the African cultural soil. This will take many years, but I believe it is a task worth doing. A study such as this is a tentative step in that direction. Understanding that a problem exists is the first step towards finding a solution.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to describe, analyse, and synthesize information obtained from fieldwork with what was learnt in class and through reading.

The whole confusion about names was a major effect of the evangelism among Africans by Western Missionaries as part of colonialism. As Fredland (2001) reminds us,

Contact with Europeans transformed Africa and Africans, in ways that are at once profound, complex, obvious, and difficult to comprehend, ...The African was in many ways made a stranger in his own land.

The issue of names is one that continues to confuse African Christians even today. As we have seen, some have tried to resolve it personally, but it seems to me that this is one issue that the church could help to clarify for its members. Unfortunately, as in many other issues, the church is still divided. The individual Christian cannot divorce himself or herself from the society, and I do not think that the teaching of the Bible expects it. All Biblical characters, including our Saviour Jesus Christ, participated in their culture, as long as it was not in opposition to their faith.

My main conclusion, therefore, is that there is nothing wrong with African names. Though the African Christian continues to be “a child of two or three worlds,” he is still an African. Faced with all these forms of globalisation of cultures, the African is there-

fore being drawn back to his original culture, about which he does not always understand. This is evident from the many independent churches that are coming up in a bid to leave the mainstream churches that are normally associated with the missionaries. The way forward seems to me to be one of honest soul searching and trying to root the gospel in the African soil. The time when African cultural values were either rejected indiscriminately or ignored is over.

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Appendix: Field Research Summary

Tangaza College, Karen, Kenya. May 31, 2000. Interviewed a man about the naming system of the Kisii people of Kenya. Being young, he was not able to share much and suggested that I should speak to an older person.

Near Holy Basilica, Nairobi, Kenya. June 3, 2000. Interviewed a Gikuyu woman. As a lawyer, she pointed to the cultural as well as the legal significance of names. As a woman, she said names affect one’s self-image and identity in a very significant way.

Karen, Nairobi, Kenya. June 4, 2000. Interviewed a Meru man. As a gardener, he had not thought much about the topic but when probed had interesting insights. According to him Western names help in establishing individual as opposed to community identity.

Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya. June 5, 2000. Interviewed a Yoruba lady. She was willing to share about her complex but interesting system that has been changing with time. Christians, while abandoning Western names, are creating new ones by translating Christian concepts into Yoruba.

University of Nairobi, Kenya. June 5, 2000. Interviewed a lecturer on the naming system among the Kisii. As a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA), he said that Africans should not be required to use Western names, which are culturally foreign to them. African names are very important for group identity and continuity.

Tangaza College, Karen, Kenya. June 6, 2000. Interviewed a Togolese man. Being a pastor in a Roman Catholic Church, he showed keen interest in the Topic and shared with much insight what he thinks the Church should do to encourage African Christians to respect their traditions that do not conflict with the teaching of the Bible.

Tangaza College, Karen, Kenya. June 6, 2000. Interviewed a Tanzanian woman. Her name that means "the rescuer" has great significance to the whole family, especially her father, who believes she has powers to protect him and others.

Nairobi Evangelical School of Theology, (NEGST), Kenya. June 6, 2000. Interviewed a Dinka man. As a former Moslem, he contrasted the significance of names between Christians and Moslems. He stressed the fact that names are individual and women should not be required to change names after marriage.

NEGST, June 8, 2000. Interviewed an Ethiopian Woman and an Eritrean man. Though their two systems are similar, there is a difference depending on whether one belongs to the Orthodox Church or to one of the newer ones. Both were eager to share their ideas on the topic of names.

NEGST, June 8, 2000. Interviewed a Congolese woman. There are very striking similarities between her group and the Agikuyu

of Kenya, Both being of Bantu origin. For example, there are a number of names used to "cheat" death after a number of children die in a family.

NEGST, June 8, 2000. Interviewed a Gikuyu woman. She was happy to share about the names of her three girls, one of whom bears a Zimbabwean name. She was also eager to share her views on the use of Western names, especially by Christian women.

Tangaza College, June 15, 2000. Interviewed a man on the Embu naming system. As a student of Anthropology, he was eager to share extensively and with great insight. Particularly interesting was the information about children born with deformities and how they were thrown into the forest to be picked up by neighbours because they were a bad omen.

Daystar University, June 15, 2000. Interviewed a lady from the Luo community. As a researcher, she was well informed, not just about her group but also her neighbours, the Kisa, a sub group of the Luhya of Kenya. Of special interest to me were the various taboos related to childbirth and the role of the co-wife in a generally polygamous society.

A hotel in Nairobi, June 16, 2000. Interviewed two girls, one from the Idakho people and the other a Gikuyu. One was given the name Violet because her mother likes the colour, while the other is proud to be called Mumbi, after the mythical mother of the Gikuyu tribe. She also likes the way her baptismal name "Gladwell" is pronounced, as opposed to Gladys.

Karia Village, Kiambu, Kenya. June 18, 2000. Interviewed an elderly Gikuyu woman. As a staunch Roman Catholic, she has investigated the meaning of her baptismal name, Teresia. She told me that it refers to "Saint Teresia of Jesus the child." She believes that praying through her makes her prayers to be answered by God. She has devoted herself to prayer and was even healed of asthma through prayer. She had a statue of the saint as well as that of "Jesus the King" and many other artifacts of religious material culture.

Religious Diversity, Equality, Freedom And Tolerance

BJ van der Walt

Most people today have to live, if possible, peacefully in a multireligious society. They are asking questions like the following: Are all religions equal? How should religious freedom be viewed? Is it really possible to tolerate other religions and how should it be achieved?

Questions like these are not of an abstract, academic nature. They are asked because of everyday experience.

Growing religious diversity

The interesting fact is that secularism—thinking and living as if God does not matter—did not leave us with a post-religious or areligious world.

On the one hand it would seem as if we are living in a post-religious world, but on the other hand there is a large scale resurgence of religious awareness. On the one hand there is less or no god (he has been declared dead) and on the other hand more god, or everything is god: god in nature, in oneself, in one's fellow man, in other religions—everywhere!

After Western Christianity had, in alliance with Western culture, dominated the world for centuries, it began to fall into decadence. The "mature", non-religious European emerged onto the scene since the Enlightenment. The centres of gravity of Christendom shifted to other parts of the world, the so-called Third World. Europe's dominant direction-giving position as model for the whole world has waned.

The process of secularisation of the West, however, only resulted in a religious vacuum for a short while. The empty space of Christendom is at present rapidly being filled by a variety of religions. Europe and the USA who used to be exporters of (the Christian) religion, are at present the importers of a variety of religions! The reason for this phenomenon is that, while Secularism is a religion,

it is an "empty" religion, and this vacuum calls out to be filled by all sorts of old and new religions.

In the Western world one would be able to distinguish the following six types of religions—many of them also present in Africa:

1. World religions, in their more or less pure form, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity.
2. Adjusted Eastern religions and cults, such as Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, etc.
3. New Age movements.
4. Neo-Paganist religions which were driven out by Christianity in the past, but which are now reviving again, such as the old Celtic and Germanic paganisms and occultist cults.
5. Implicit religions, meaning that specific facets of reality (for example, success or wealth) or certain values (for example, individuality) are absolutised. They are called "implicit" because their adherents will normally deny that they are religions.
6. Vague superstitions indicate "religions" which have not been defined properly, such as, for example, people who believe that there will be life after death, but who have no certainty about what this would entail.

What Christ said in Matthew 12:43-45 has become true in the history of the West: When an evil spirit is exorcised from somebody, it seeks another abode. When the "house" that it has deserted remains empty, it will, however, return to it and bring with it seven others—worse than itself. At the end such a person is therefore worse off than before.

Western man has thought that he could live without any god, including the God of the Bible. This would seem to have been a misconception, however. The West is also no better off today than it has ever been. This emerges clearly from the strongly pantheist trend already mentioned above. Pantheism means that everything is god/divine (or that god is all). Now that something of the large diversity in religions has been described, the subsequent issue can be addressed, viz. that of the equality of religions.

All religions are not equal

There are many statements in the Bible which indicate Christ's uniqueness, such as, for example, his "I am" statements: "I am the

truth and the way and the life" (John 14:6); "I am the true vine" (John 15:1); "I am the bread of life"; "I am the light of the world". In Acts 4:12 we read that "Salvation is in no one else, for there is no other Name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." In 1 Timothy 2:5 it is said: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus"

W.A. Visser 't Hooft wrote a book called *No other name* nearly forty years ago (1963). Fifteen years ago (1986) Paul Knitter, however, put a question mark when writing a book with a similar title: *No other name?* The questions which will be addressed here are: (1) Is only Christianity true and all other religions false? or (2) are all religions at least partly (or wholly) true? or (3) are they all possibly untrue?

Four possible views

If we say that the Christian faith is the only true one, we have to remember that it is not other faiths which say this of Christianity, but Christians themselves—and the testimony which one gives about oneself is normally not impartial.

The simplistic view that all other religions are the work of Satan is definitely not biblical. Scripture clearly teaches that God, through his creational revelation, also talks to the pagans. On the other hand, it is also unbiblical to deny the work of Satan in non-Christian religions—Satan even works within the Christian religion.

What is really the difference between Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and traditional African religion? What is the difference between the Bible, the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita and African religious myths? Is it not so that if you were to be born in India, the chances really are that you would be a Hindu; in Egypt you would probably be a Muslim; in Sri Lanka there would be quite a probability of you being a Buddhist, and in Africa you would probably be a Christian, a Muslim or a supporter of Traditional African Religion?

Are all forms of religious worship not probably true in the sense that they travel by different routes, but in the end they reach the same destination—various routes to the same mountain peak? Are they not simply different expressions, in terms of different cultures, human types, temperaments and intellectual predilections? Do the

different religious trends not represent the different experiences and perceptions of and responses to the same unlimited "transcendent, divine reality"? (The differences are then merely superficial as a result of the differences in mentality and cultural background.) Or does such a viewpoint bring us perilously close to the quicksands of relativism and even scepticism?

The third possibility: If all religions could not be true—even if everybody thought that his were true—it is of course also possible that none of them is true.

Or are we on a wrong track by trying to make the question of truth applicable to religions? We do not, after all, ask this question when it comes to cultures, and do not, for example, ask the question as to whether American culture is less true or more true than, for example, Japanese culture. We do not say, either, that Japanese culture is totally untrue.

A survey of the different viewpoints

M.S. Heim, in his book *Christ the only way?* (1985) divides the different viewpoints into two main groups (pluralism and particularism), which are then sub-divided into three groups each.

Pluralism

Parallel pluralism

Christ is the only mediator for Christians. Other faiths, however, can yield much the same results as Christianity. (For example, Ernst Troeltsch: *The absoluteness of Christianity and the history of religions.*)

Jigsaw puzzle pluralism

Each religion contains a fragment of the full and final truth. It is our task to link up the pieces. There is no communal core in all religions, but they should all flow together ultimately. The strong point(s) of each religion should be brought together in a mansion of faith for all nations. (E.g. John Hick: *God and the universe of faith and God has many faces.*)

Gradual pluralism

Some religions bring the final truth to stronger expression than others. The Christian faith is true in the sense that it is the best, because Christ towers above other religious leaders. He is, in a sense then, the highest peak in the mountain range! (For example, Schubert M. Agden: *The reality of God.*)

Particularism

As opposed to pluralism, the particularists teach that God works in a determining way for the whole world through the person of Christ. They therefore reject—to a greater or lesser extent—the relativism to which pluralism gives rise.

Magnetic particularism

This movement views Christ as a magnet which attracts all other religions and fills them with his magnetic power. Nobody is saved without Christ, but they can be saved as Muslims, Buddhists or Hindus. Salvational knowledge of God is therefore possible without the revelation of the Bible. The grace which flows from Christ orients man—even unknowingly—towards God. His power flows through all religions and turns them into instruments of salvation when their adherents respond in a believing manner. (For example, Karl Rahner: *Foundations of Christian faith.*)

Healing particularism

The image here is of a life-saving vaccine which could heal anybody—even those who have died. (It is often asked what happens to people who never had the chance to hear about Christ, or those who died very young.) This view is almost the same as the old “second-chance-theory” after death. It differs from the preceding vision (which teaches that the meaning of Christ can be channelled through other faiths) in the sense that its full effect is dependent on direct and personal knowledge of God. (For example, Karl Barth: *Church Dogmatics.*)

Imperial particularism

Christ is the only source of our salvation, and conscious confession of Christ in this life is the only way along which we can hope for salvation. (For example, Leslie Newbigin: *The finality of Christ.*)

Heim’s overview is of course a simplification and cannot possibly do justice to the many and growing visions on the issue of Christ’s relationship with other “saviours”. He also does not treat clearly enough the question as to what will happen to those who never heard the Name Jesus Christ. Personally, I do not think that this is a question that can be answered. Can we give a biblical answer to this when it is a question that did not interest the writers of the Bible? Shall we let it suffice that God is a just and impartial Judge and will therefore judge everyone in accordance with the light that he/she had? Might we say that for children who die young God’s love in Christ is full and completely applicable? Or are we going too far in saying even this?

Imperialist arrogance?

The particularists regard the pluralists as relativists, and finally as sceptics. (It is a small step from “All religions are true” to “No religion is true”). The pluralists in their turn regard the particularists as exclusivists. They are seen as arrogant, intolerant, imperialist and even fanatic.

I do not, however, regard a person who believes that his faith is the true one as necessity arrogant. He can, without relinquishing his convictions, acknowledge his own fallibility, as well as appreciate the perspectives of others. Especially if he is a Christian, he should not be arrogant at all, because he should acknowledge that the knowledge which he has of God and Christ is not the result of his own cleverness or piety, but has come about precisely because of his own weakness. It is a result of the grace of God. And if a Christian feels impelled to share his faith with others, this need not be a sign of arrogance or religious imperialism, but it can also be viewed as a sign of a humble desire that others should also share in the saving Truth.

This brings us back to the big question:

Are all religions equal?

My answer is quite simple: All religions are *not* equal. The reason is obvious: I *believe* in the Christian religion as the truth. The word "believe" is in italics, because one's religion is one's ultimate and total commitment to someone or something which you regard as the divine, absolute authority. It is humanly impossible to prove in a rational or any other way either that your own religion is true or that other religions are false.

Let me nevertheless, try to say a few words about this very difficult problem. I will approach it from only one perspective, viz. religion as our human reaction to God's revelation.

That God has revealed and is still revealing himself to people of other faiths cannot be denied, because the continuously reveals himself to everyone - even the so-called irreligious person. This is usually called God's "general" revelation. Because God daily speaks concretely, clearly and personally, I do not like the term "general", but prefer "creational" revelation to indicate God's voice in the ordered structure of reality. (The term "creational revelation" is not really satisfactory, because all forms of God's revelation occur in and through creation. The Bible as book is part of creation and Christ was a human being.) Because of our sinful nature we tend to suppress this revelation of God and to replace it with our own beliefs. Religion (= our response to revelation) is therefore always a mixture of truth and falsehood. On the one hand Christianity is not immune to what is wrong, and on the other hand Christians can admire beautiful elements in non-Christian religions.

As Christians we are privileged above other religious people because we know a second form of God's revelation, namely in a written form in the Bible. In a certain sense God "republished" his creational revelation in the Scriptures. Or to use another metaphor: He provided our weakened eyes with the glasses of Scripture to be able to read his creational revelation.

Through the Scriptures, guided by the Holy Spirit, as Christians we also know and believe in God's third revelation, his "incarnated" revelation in the Person of Jesus Christ. As a human being He lived on earth as we should do - in full obedience to God's will. He was, however, different from all other religious leaders and prophets like Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, etc., because He

died as priest. No other religion knows about a God who loved this world so much that He sent his own Son to die and rise again to renew everything. He is, furthermore, the King of the entire universe.

To my mind the difficult question about the equality of religions can best be approached from the perspective of the norm of God's threefold revelation and not from the subjective human religious experience. Religion (our life-encompassing response to God's revelation) should always be guided by and obedient to God's will as given in his threefold revelation. This emphasis is of vital importance as the opposite is often the case: our religious aspirations and needs determine the contents of what we believe to be "revelation". Such a reversal of course not only applies to non-Christian religions. History bears abundant testimony to the fact how Christians did bad things in the name of their religion.

Our standard for judging whether religions are equal should therefore not be what/how the Christian religion was or is, but what it ought to be in the light of God's revelation in creation, in Scripture and in Christ. Even though it may be difficult - even impossible? - to distinguish between divine revelation on the one hand and the human religious response on the other, we should at least try to do so. By comparing the revelation of the God of the Bible with the revelations in which other religions believe, we will, I presume, be in a better position to see the uniqueness of the revelation which is the foundation of our Christian faith. However, as stated already above, it should be kept in mind that the fact that God's revelation has no equal, cannot be proved rationally or scientifically in a comparison with other faiths - ultimately it can only be believed in gratitude and humility.

Religious freedom

The fact that I do not wish to put Christianity on a level with other religions (other religions also regard themselves as unique) does not mean that I reject freedom of religion and that I support the idea of Christian imperialism. The argument is often stated that one can only support religious freedom if one accepts the idea of the equality of all religions. It has already been stated, however,

that there is a big difference between religious equality and religious freedom.

Religious intolerance—a general phenomenon but unacceptable

The need of religious freedom is clear from the fact that lack of religious freedom and religious intolerance have in the course of history drenched the earth in suffering and blood. Every religion has the tendency to regard its own form of worship as the only true one, or at least as the best. All too often this can lead to intolerance of other religions to the point even of persecuting their adherents.

One could mention the religious wars between *Christians* themselves, and the Crusades, during which Christians wanted to overpower Muslims by the power of the sword.

The obverse would also be true. Where *Islam* obtains the power of state the zeal for the faith at times leads to a degrading of Jews and Christians to the level of second-hand citizens and only barely tolerating their religions.

Although *Hinduism* reveals a striking religious tolerance, intolerance can be manifested when a Hindu converts to another religion, because in this way he/she affects the social unity of the community.

Buddhism also reveals a special willingness to listen to other convictions, but when Buddhism and nationalism are linked, a break with Buddhism is regarded as treachery against the nation.

The erstwhile intolerance of *Communism*—also a form of religion—towards Christianity in Eastern Europe, Russia and other places where it had become the official state ideology is well known.

From all these examples it clearly emerges that the danger of religious intolerance appears again and again when no clear distinction is made between religion and the state or politics.

Today the constitutions of most countries guarantee the freedom of religion, belief and opinion. Religious freedom can be motivated or founded in different ways, for example:

1. on the basis of religious *relativism*, already discussed above;
2. *indifference* with regard to the demand for truth;
3. even simply as the result of a *need for peace* among different religions.

Biblical grounds for religious freedom

Christians will want to know, however, whether the Bible supplies grounds for religious freedom, and what exactly these grounds are. They will be considered briefly.

The Bible reveals that each person has been created in the image of God (cf. Genesis 1:27; 9:6 and James 3:9), and that God imparts to each individual certain rights and responsibilities (Genesis 1:28). God leaves room for people to seek Him—and to serve Him—He even allows people and nations to go their own way (Acts 14:16). He gives to each person freedom of conscience (Romans 2). We cannot therefore discriminate against anybody on the basis of his/her religious convictions.

The God of the Bible is a good, long-suffering God. He lets his sun rise and set on good and evil alike; He lets his rain fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He is also patient and long-suffering and gives people an opportunity for conversion (John 4:2; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9 and Acts 14:17). God's patience does not mean that He will approve of evil and inhumanity, but that He offers people the opportunity to be converted. The final judgement about what is true and what is false does not lie with man, the church or a government, but with God alone (Romans 12:19).

The most important ground or foundation for religious freedom, therefore is not man's tolerance but God's tolerance or long-suffering. In the same way that God deals with man, people also have to act towards each other (cf. Luke 9:52-56).

The Gospel is not disseminated through violence or force but through persuasion and conviction (1 Corinthians 1:17 ff; cf. Zechariah 4:6). The battle is fought, not with weapons of the flesh, but of the Spirit (Matthew 26:52; 2 Corinthians 10:4). The Gospel comes in peace, not in force (John 18:36).

Although the church is represented as a militant church (Ephesians 6:12), and also as a persecuted church (John 15:20; 2 Timothy 3:12) and a pilgrim church (Hebrews 11:13) which has no special privileges, it is an institution which wages a spiritual struggle (Ephesians 6:12) and which does this with the weapons of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 10:4). It therefore cannot use political favouritism or even force to promote the kingdom of God.

Questions of Christians

Some of the questions which have been raised are the following:

Does religious freedom not imply religious equality?

This has already been denied. It should also be kept in mind that religious freedom is primarily a juridical concept, which indicates that the government in a religiously plural society should protect all religions and treat them equally. The right to free religious practice should be protected against possible contraventions by government.

Does this not imply that the faithful (Christians) have to pull in the same yoke with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)?

The concern in this text is with the church, and not with the state. The prohibition applies to the church, but not to the domain of the state.

It is important to remember that church and state each has its own God-given terrain and task. The church is a community of believers, and the state a public juridical community. Therefore the task of the state is not to promote one or the other form of religion, but to see to it that justice is done to all citizens in the country. In this sense the state is not “neutral”—it has received a specific task from God which should be executed.

This brings us to the next question, which is:

Does religious freedom not imply state neutrality?

For several centuries before the Sixteenth Century Reformation Christians believed that the state should be “Christian”. This meant inter alia that the state had to promote the Christian religion actively and even had the power to punish and to persecute those who were not Christians.

The following four factors served as motivations for relinquishing this view after the Reformation. (1) It led to violence and the persecution of non-Christians, because there was no freedom of conscience or of religion. (2) The realisation dawned that human ideas and the convictions of the heart could not be changed through force of government. (3) It also became clear that large-scale degeneration and superficiality occurred when (as during the reign of

Constantine and thereafter) Christianity became a state religion. (4) Christianity abused the power of the state (politics) and, obversely, Christianity could easily be used by the state for its own purposes—even to justify repression (the phenomenon of “civil religion”).

The answer to the question above is, therefore, yes, the state in the case of a multi-religious society has to be “neutral” in order fulfil its God-given role of guaranteeing public justice.

The correct interpretation

Religious freedom does not imply an endorsement by the state of neutralism; relativism; indifferentism or tolerance of simply everything. It does not therefore imply that all values of society can simply be thrown overboard so that injustice, lies and evil can triumph.

Properly formulated religious freedom means that all members of the society, including Christians, can practise their religion unhindered, publicly and privately—provided, of course, that this is not regarded as a licence for injustice, oppression, slander or other public evils. As such it is in harmony with the Word of God.

Religious tolerance

Religious pluralism has its beneficial side. It impels one, for instance, to self-criticism; a reassessment of one’s own viewpoint on the one hand and respect for other viewpoints and tolerance of other lifestyles on the other hand. The correct kind of pluralism will not lead to relativism either. There is, however, an unhealthy pluralism.

In this new pluralistic attitude norms, values and traditions are at stake. Morality has become a purely private affair. Parents and teachers no longer know if and how they should transmit values to the younger generation. People have difficulty to stand up for their convictions. Institutions and organisations founded on a specific worldview, for example, Christian schools, colleges, universities and political parties are experiencing problems in holding to their identity. Pluralism has created a cultural and moral vacuum and even collapse as well as religious scepticism and cynicism.

Because this article may, if not read carefully, give the impression that I am against dialogue with other religions, it should be stated

clearly at the beginning that this is definitely not the case. I am of the opinion that inter-religious discussions are necessary to understand each other. On the one hand, dialogue should not simply be a disguised way for the Christian to force others to accept his/her religion. On the other hand, if a Christian feels compelled to share his/her faith with others, this need not be a sign of arrogance or religious imperialism.

Reasons for religious pluralism and tolerance in Western history

By religious pluralism I do not mean merely the existence of a plurality of religions side by side and the protection of such diversity by the state (religious freedom). Religious pluralism is understood here as religious equality, e.g. that many or all religions are equally valid.

A Christian understanding

Let us start our historical review at the end of the seventeenth century. After many years of violent conflict between the different Christian churches, Europe eventually adopted a policy of toleration (for instance in Britain the Act of Toleration—1689). People realised that authoritarian tyranny could not serve the cause of Christ. Tolerance was born of confidence in the ability of the truth of the Gospel to vindicate itself without state coercion. We could call this the Christian understanding of tolerance.

The rationalistic viewpoint

Very soon, however, other secular viewpoints emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It was argued (e.g. by J.S. Mill) that it is not possible to evaluate religions on rational grounds and decide which one is true and which ones are false. Everyone, therefore, had the freedom to choose the religion she/he wanted.

In the mid-eighteenth century, G.E. Lessing illustrated this viewpoint with the following parable. A father had a magic ring which only one of his three sons could inherit. Since he loved them all and did not want to be accused of favouritism, he made two extra imitation rings. The result was that each son thought his own ring was the magic one and the other two were not. They disputed their claims in the presence of a wise man who offered the following

judgement: "Let each think his own ring is true and in the meantime show forth gentleness and tolerance".

The parable clearly indicates that religious truth is not verifiable—in spite of the fact that, in theory at least, it still accepts the existence of an absolute truth (there is only one real magic ring). One could "think" one's religion is true, but not prove it. Religion was henceforth limited to the private domain. Tolerance was the only reasonable attitude since one can't prove one's religion to be right and one's opponent can't prove it to be wrong. This idea of tolerance and religion being a private matter became typical of the liberal humanist tradition. Accordingly it was held that any influence of religion should be barred from the public sphere.

An irrationalistic turn

In the late twentieth century we witness a major shift: I can no longer be certain that my ring is the only magic one. Perhaps all "rings" are equally magical!

A good example of this viewpoint is the New Age Movements with their pantheistic monism which denies the distinction between truth and error. All religions are the same. Tolerance, according to this view, is demanded not because the right path is indistinguishable from the wrong ones, but because all paths are right—all religions finally lead to "God"!

To summarise: Tolerance, which began in the seventeenth century as an expression of Christian confidence in the self-evidence and self-authenticating power of the absolute truth of the Gospel, has at the end of the twentieth century become an expression of profound uncertainty, even agnosticism, regarding an absolute truth. Many deny its accessibility and many even its objective existence.

The two phases described in more detail

The developments subsequent to the viewpoint of the Puritans of the seventeenth century could also be divided as follows: (1) from exclusivism to inclusive relativism and (2) from inclusive relativism to pluralism. Viewpoint (1) only implies mild relativism, while viewpoint (2) advocates radical relativism. The tendency towards relativism already started in rationalistic philosophy, while its full development became very clear in irrationalistic thought.

The first development can be illustrated with the image that other different religions are simply different footpaths climbing a mountain—finally they reach the same mountain top. Or the image of a wheel: the religions of the world are like the radial spokes of a wheel which all find their common focus in the same central hub, viz. “God”. Another image is that today we live in a supermarket of religions and worldviews—just as we can choose from a range of painkillers for a headache. Faced with such a dazzling range of products one can easily argue: “They are all just the same under different labels—everyone is as good as the other”! Accordingly, all religions are complementary paths to God. It is not so much that the doctrines of Christianity are false; rather the other faiths are equally true.

The second movement (from inclusive relativism to radical pluralistic relativism) is of the opinion that the universalist inclusivism did not go far enough. Ultimate truth cannot be defined in rationalistic either-or distinctions. Religion is a universal experience which transcends rational analysis. The cognitive content of faith is irrelevant; it is the authenticity of our religious feelings that is important. It does not matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere! Inclusivism has given way to relativistic pluralism.

The two grounds for religious tolerance advocated in Western history were, therefore, the following: (1) Rationalistic agnosticism (of the 18th and 19th century): it is not possible to know which path to God—if any—is the correct one; therefore every individual must be free to select his own path. (2) Irrationalistic pantheism and mysticism (of the late 20th century): all paths lead to God. Therefore it does not matter which road the individual selects for his/her spiritual journey. The final consequence of radical relativism is indifference.

The third step—our next main point—is the development from pluralism to intolerance. Not only old style mild relativism, but also new style radical relativism is basically intolerant.

From pluralism to intolerance

Contemporary religious pluralism (as described above) has the following consequences:

1. It places religious belief above any criticism. It is possible, however, that one can be very sincere (like the worshippers of Moloch who burned their own children), but still be totally wrong!
2. Pluralism is guilty of disguised dogmatism in spite of the fact that it fights against all other kinds of “dogmatism”. If, for instance, it insists that God did not reveal Himself clearly as the only true God, this categorical denial is also an absolute truth. Is this not intellectual hypocrisy?
3. The most dangerous consequence of relativistic pluralism, however, is its implicit threat to liberty of conscience or religious freedom. A religious variety of political correctness is emerging today. School teachers and Christian academics who wish to express a commitment to Christianity are viewed as fanatics who try to brainwash their pupils and students and may find it hard to achieve promotion. It becomes a sin when you feel a calling to convince people from other religions to accept the biblical faith. Not only Christians but also Muslims and Jews, who refuse to abandon the absolute truth claims of their holy scriptures, find themselves labelled as particularistic, exclusivist, fundamentalist, divisive, intolerant, imperialist and militant! It seems as if pluralism will eventually destroy the very freedom which its so-called tolerance was intended to defend!

This ironic consequence cannot be denied. Humanistic agnosticism and New Age monism both are inherently inimical to religions like Christianity. The reason is that pluralism is not simply an example of democracy in a multi-faith society. It is not humble about its claims at all—it is an arrogant, absolutist religion itself.

Modern pluralism in fact therefore does not prevent religious persecution, but it may well foster it. And this will not happen for the first time in history. The Roman Empire was a pluralistic society which tolerated all religions or “superstitions”—except Christianity, because the Christians were not prepared to add Christ—their exclusive Lord—to the Roman pantheon. Pluralism will not generate a neutral, secular society at all, but a neo-pagan and therefore anti-Christian one. Pluralists will only tolerate fellow-pluralists and will be intolerant towards those who refuse to subscribe to their “creed”.

The biblical alternative

If our conclusion is that secular Western thought has failed to offer solid grounds for religious tolerance, what about the Bible? We know that Christianity does not have a good track record in this regard. (Cf. the previously mentioned religious persecutions in the name of Christianity in the 16th century). If, however, we listen carefully to the Bible again, is it possible for the Christian to defend an attitude of tolerance towards other faiths and at the same time to affirm the truth claims of Christianity? My answer to this question is affirmative. It is not only possible to do so, but it is also of vital importance for the preservation of religious liberty. And—what is important—it is not motivated on the basis of either religious relativism or indifference with regard to truth, or simply the practical need for peace amongst different religions.

On what biblical grounds can the Christian on the one hand practise tolerance towards other contradictory faiths, and on the other hand have confidence in the non-negotiable nature of the Gospel? Summarised: how is tolerance with conviction possible? Let us have a brief look at each one of them.

Tolerance

From the Bible we receive the following guidelines:

God respects the freedom of human beings.

As already mentioned, God leaves room for people to seek Him and to serve Him—He allows people and nations to go their own way. He gives to each person freedom of conscience.

We cannot therefore discriminate against anybody on the basis of his/her religious convictions. The freedom of choice of every human being must be respected, because God respects it. As responsible beings, created in the image of God, people may refuse the Gospel. And if they do, the Word of God does not allow Christians to circumvent that refusal by strategies of manipulation or intimidation. To pray for the fire of judgement is to fail completely to understand the purpose of the Gospel (Luke 9). Jesus commands his disciples only to shake off the sand from their feet in protest against unbelieving people. In the same way Paul never conducted

his proclamation of the Gospel by any other method except candid proclamation (2 Cor. 4:2). The opposition may be silenced by courageous argument and/or testimony (Acts 4:14) and admonished by public protest (Acts 18:6), but intolerant techniques are prohibited—the human dignity of the unbeliever must never be held in contempt.

The God of the Bible is a good, long-suffering God.

As already mentioned, he lets his sun rise and set on good and evil alike; He lets his rain fall on the just and the unjust. He is also patient and long-suffering and gives people an opportunity to be converted. God's patience does not mean that He will approve of any evil and inhumanity, but that He offers people the opportunity to be converted. The final judgment about what is true and what is false does not lie with man, the church or a government, but with God alone.

The most important ground or foundation for religious freedom, therefore, is not man's tolerance but the long-suffering, patience, grace and love of God—His "tolerance". (I am putting the word tolerance in inverted commas, because I am not quite sure whether we should use this modern word in describing God.) In the same way that God deals with man, people have to act towards each other.

As mentioned above (in the case of religious freedom) the Gospel is not disseminated through violence or force but through persuasion and conviction.

It was the folly of the crusades and the inquisition as well as the conquistadors and the persecutors of the Anabaptists (16th century) to think that coercion could serve the Gospel.

Tolerance (patience towards those whose opinions and practices differ from one's own) is approved in dealing with disputes among fellow-Christians (cf. Mark 9: 38-48; Rom. 14: 1-13 and 2 Cor. 2:4-11), but it is clearly condemned in dealing with sin, evil and error (cf. 1 Cor. 5: 1-13; 2 Cor. 6: 14-18; Mark 9: 43-48 and 2 John 10,11). It should be kept in mind that the Christian cannot simply tolerate anything!

Confidence

The viewpoint that the different religions are equal (and therefore have to be tolerated) is problematic. The dogmatist pluralistic viewpoint about their equality simply sweeps the deeper problems under the carpet without really answering them. This becomes clear when one dares to ask a few simple critical questions like the following:

According to what or who's criteria should the different religions be compared?

Are we not, also in the case of religions, permitted to make judgements and characterise them as good or bad?

How should it be determined whether something is genuine religion? Should we simply accept anything? Does this include the different cults which were, in the last few years (cf. what happened recently in Switzerland, the U.S. and Japan) responsible for religious mass murders and suicides?

The wheel theory of religion (see above) cannot in any way be accommodated to the basic teaching of the Bible. The Old Testament repeatedly warns against the possibility of false witnesses. Idolatry was prohibited. A very clear example is the confrontation between Elijah and the worshippers of Baal (1 Kings 18). Elijah refuses the wheel theory propagated by King Ahab. Ahab had been permitting an increasing pluralistic religious attitude which confused the people of Israel to such an extent that they worshipped Yahweh and Baal alternately. Elijah, however, refused to accept that the two religions could be complementary routes to the same "God" and insisted upon a choice: "If Yahweh is God, follow him; if Baal is, then follow him".

It is true that the New Testament church is not permitted to slaughter pagan priests like Elijah did. But this does not imply that the New Testament has a less exclusivist stance.

Take, as an example Paul at Athens (Acts 17). Is he more tolerant of pagan idolatry than Elijah was? No, his spirit is provoked and in his subsequent address on the Areopagus he makes no concessions to the pluralism of the Greek pantheon. He insists that there is only one God. This God may perhaps have been worshipped in ignorance by those not knowing biblical revelation. But now he is

urging them to abandon their idols and turn in repentance towards Christ.

Paul makes no attempt to purge Athens from idolatry with the sword. But this is not done because he believed in our contemporary secular theories about tolerance. The task he sets for himself is very clear from a text like 2 Corinthians 10:4,5: "to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (the negative side) and "to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (the positive). Because he was absolutely convinced about the universal and exclusive truth of the Gospel, dialogue for Paul was aimed at persuasion. It was not a Socratic dialectical quest for a still to be discovered truth. Dialogue for him was a means to proclaim the Good News.

As Christians we cannot prove by way of logical argumentation that the Bible is God's Word. At the same time it cannot be disproved. It has to be accepted—or rejected—in faith. Belief definitely has a rational side or facet, but it also surpasses our rational faculties (more correctly: it underlies our rationalisations).

Of course our understanding of Scripture is never perfect but limited and sometimes even incorrect. We may therefore never absolutise our personal understanding of the Scriptures. We should, furthermore, always keep in mind the radical difference between, on the one hand, our subjective understanding of Scripture (our religion) and, on the other hand, his Word and God Himself. Religion—also the Christian religion—is always a fallible, human response to God and his Word which is infallible.

It should also be added that the Bible is not the only way in which God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself in a non-lingual way in nature, culture and history (his so-called general revelation), in a lingual way in Scripture and in a personal way in Christ. This explains why other religions, like African Traditional Religion (through God's revelation in nature and culture), knew about God long before the missionaries arrived with the Gospel. Because of sin, however, our understanding of God's creational revelation is incomplete and distorted. We also need the Bible. (It is like spectacles assisting our affected eyesight or hearing aids which help us to hear his voice clearly again.) Non-Christians can therefore learn much from God's creational revelation—often more than Chris-

tians—but without the Bible and Christ their knowledge cannot be complete.

Conclusion

Tolerance in the biblical sense therefore, is not the same as relativistic indifference. It is always accompanied by confidence.

Authentic Christianity is in favour of religious freedom and welcomes dialogue with those who disagree with it. This one should do with self-control, setting an impeccable example in this regard. But we should be tolerant without being mealy-mouthed about our faith. We should be aware of the peril that under the subtle pressure of the spirit of our times, we present the Gospel as mere subjective experience rather than the revelation of God. Pre-scientific religious truths are different from scientific and other truths, but basic logic cannot simply be thrown overboard. We can speak falsely or truly about the Truth, Jesus Christ.

As Christians we are emphatically in favour of a free-market of ideas. But when tolerance is defended with relativistic, pluralistic arguments which deny the accessibility or even the very existence of ultimate truth, it becomes an enemy of the Gospel—and we must not be afraid to say so. If we capitulate to contemporary secularistic pluralism we will in the end also have to surrender to the intolerant tyranny that goes with it.

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Rationality, Certainty and Education

in a Postmodern World

Stuart Fowler

This article is based on a keynote paper presented to the 1998 Conference of Christian Teacher Educators in Australia. The issues are, however, equally relevant in a global context and in this revised version special attention is given to implications for the contemporary African situation.

The Contemporary Context

Rodney Clapp (1998:7,8) accurately identifies modernity with a social order in which public life is dominated by two institutions—the state and the market. It is important to add to this, however, that this social order was undergirded by a belief in the power of human rationality to provide a universal structure of certainty for human life.

One of the features of the postmodern society is a shift in the balance of power between state and market, with the commercial market becoming the dominant partner in shaping society. This has had profound cultural implications, including educational goals and priorities. It is important that we develop an understanding of the dynamics involved in this change.

This is no less important for Africa than it is for the Western world. As postcolonial societies, desiring to shed the negative label

of “developing” countries, have struggled to “catch up” with the developed societies they have all too often uncritically adopted the cultural values of those societies. This has been given additional impetus by their vulnerability to the pressures of economically powerful Western interests.

It may be said, indeed it is said, that this new focus on “market needs” is necessitated by the realities of the contemporary world. The 1991 report of the Australian Education Council (1991:4-7), for example, argues that schools need to change “to become more concerned with issues of employability” in order to serve their clients’ needs. With regard to Africa, the additional argument is used that the eradication of African poverty depends on a strengthening of the power of the commercial market in African societies.

There is, of course, some substance to those claims. However, they beg two important questions that responsible educators, as well as others, need to consider carefully. Firstly, what are the forces that have brought about this change in the social reality? The second and crucial question is the normative question: What value should we give to this change in the social reality? Is it a change for the better or for the worse, or a mixed blessing?

Responsible educational practice can never be an uncritical conformity to every social reality. The social reality of Nazi Germany was one in which schools were expected to serve the interests and goals of the Third Reich. It would be hard to sustain an argument that uncritical conformity to this social reality was responsible educational practice.

For none is this more true than for the Christian educator. For the Christian, social reality is always the result of an interplay between the forces of the kingdom of God and those of the kingdoms of this world (Matthew 13:36-43). The Christian educator is called to exercise a critical discernment that distinguishes between those features of the current social reality that reflect the impact of the kingdom of God and those that reflect the impact of the powers of the kingdoms of this world.

Educational Change at the Two Ends of the 20th Century

A comparison of educational change in Australia during the last two decades of the twentieth century with definitive educational

change that took place in the first two decades of that century serves to illustrate the issues involved.

Change at the beginning of the twentieth century

In their study of the educational contribution of Peter Board, Crane and Walker (1957) provide a careful discussion of the educational changes that occurred in the state of New South Wales in the first two decades of this century. They argue (297–310,319) that the scope of these changes was without parallel in the state's history, setting a pattern for education that spread throughout the whole nation and endured for decades.

One reason for this change was that the "successful operation of the economy required the mastery of an imposing volume of new knowledge and an array of new skills" (96). Textbooks and "chalk and talk" were not to be abandoned but they were to be subordinated to the activity of the student as the focus of learning. The new syllabus was expressly designed "to make the self-activity of the pupil the basis of school instruction" (38).

For our present purpose, however, both the impetus for this change and the priorities that govern it were of primary importance. It was educators who both provided the social stimulus for change and directed the design and implementation of changes. University educators such as Francis Anderson and J.W. Turner (13-16) played the leading role in creating social awareness of the need for change. The design and implementation of the change was directed by Peter Board, an educator with 28 years experience as a teacher and inspector in schools, who served as Director of Education throughout the decisive period—1905-22.

The changes were made possible only because of a political leadership with the vision and will to provide the support needed to make the educational vision a reality. Yet it was clearly the educators, not politicians, bureaucrats or leaders of business, who generated the vision and made it an educational reality. More importantly, the design and implementation of the change was governed wholly by educational considerations. The need to recognise the realities of the social situation, including the changing labour requirements of industry and commerce, was recognised, but was not the decisive factor shaping educational change.

Board, undoubtedly the chief architect of the change, saw the educator as a leader of change, sensitive to the social context, yet guided in the shaping of education by a clear educational vision in which three principles were fundamental.

The first of these was the priority of the interests, or well-being, of the child as a human person (50,51). He spelt this out at the very outset: "Education gathers around the child, his capacities and attitudes, his interests and his future needs" (47). In a revealing statement to a 1920 enquiry into apprenticeship training, Board said: "After all, the boy does not exist for the good of the state. The state does exist, among other things for the good of the boy." From this he drew the conclusion that apprenticeship training was a problem for the educator, rather than political or commercial decision makers, since it could only serve the interests of the child if its aims are broader than the training of intelligent workers (229,230).

While the interests of the market were recognised, priority was not given to these interests. For Board, only the interests of the child, as a complete person and never merely as a unit in the market, could have the priority in education.

The second defining principle was the conviction that the central goal of education was the preparation of the child for service in and for society (48,50). While the interests of the child had priority, these were not individualistic or self-centred interests; they were the interests of a person whose life was only fulfilled in service.

Board was significantly influenced by the American educator, F.W. Parker, but rejected Parker's individualistic conception of the person. In this, as in other important respects, his Scots Presbyterian heritage seems to have been the most powerful influence in his educational thinking. For Board, the interests of the child required the development of moral character with a strong sense of social responsibility and obligation (38,48,51).

Speaking about the usefulness of education he said: "The word 'useful' is equally applicable to the knowledge that enables a man to stand in the right relation to his fellows and to take his part in the organization of society, as well as to the knowledge that enables him to earn his board. The word 'useful', therefore, is applied to knowledge and articles that must be at the root of all wholesome living" (39). The nurture of the values of service, social responsibil-

ity and moral character was not merely one educational objective among others. It was the first educational priority.

The third guiding principle in Board's agenda of change was the recognition that human needs are not satisfied by bread alone. He "deplored the tendency towards purely materialistic aims in education" (54). A profile in the Sydney Sun on 1 June 1937 described him as one who "taught to have minds broad and generous, not forged as instruments of the Materialist Age, which he now recognises in the world around him".

Hence, while he recognised the role of the commercial market, and the importance of ensuring that students are adequately prepared to be effective participants in that market, he refused to give the needs of the market priority over other broader educational goals. The priority was the preparation of youth, from all sections of society, for "the complete life" (104). It was taken for granted that an education that aimed at the development of the student as a full, well-rounded person would inevitably serve the legitimate interests of the market but without sacrificing, or compromising, other human interests.

Change at the end of the century

The final decades of the twentieth century again saw a powerful movement for educational change. While there are some clear parallels the differences are far more important for our present purpose.

Firstly, much of the impetus for change, as well as input into the aims of the change, has come from political decision makers under pressures from commercial market interests rather than from educators. Educators have been involved in important ways in the implementation of the change, of course. However, the main driving force has been the interest of the market in a workforce educated to serve the interests of the market.

Secondly, and following directly from this, the primary goal of the change has been to ensure that the education system more effectively serves the present and emerging needs of the market. There has been no suggestion that schools should serve the interests of the market exclusively. However, these other interests are subordinated to the interests of the market. Thus the priorities of the

changes of the first two decades of the century have been reversed in an interesting, and significant, way.

The influential Finn Committee argued that the need to maintain and enhance productivity in the workplace means that schools need to change "to become more concerned with issues of employability" (AEC, 1991:ix). It did make it clear that it did not regard the employability-based key competencies, which it took as the basis for change, as a comprehensive set of educational goals. It argued, however, that it "found that once it had identified what it regarded as essential competencies for the world of work, it had also incorporated many of the attributes required for individual well-being and for citizenship." (AEC, 1991:54,55).

Similarly, the more recent Schools Council report argued that, while the key competencies are work-related, they "incorporate attributes which are needed by those who are continuing their studies beyond school, as well as by all active and effective citizens" (Schools Council, 1994:23).

While educational goals that serve the interests of the market undoubtedly will also serve other human interests, there are other important human interests that they will not serve. An educational agenda that gives priority to goals that serve market interests will inevitably subordinate these other human interests to the priority market interests.

It is at this point that we see a complete reversal of the educational priorities that governed change at the beginning of the century. Those changes were driven by the priority of the development of the whole human person for a life of service. Meeting market needs was recognised as one component of such a human development. Change at the end of the century was driven by the priority of ensuring that market interests are served, with other human objectives given a place in education that is subordinate to this overriding priority.

The dominant influence of the market in education is not limited to issues of curriculum design. The school is increasingly expected to function along the lines of a commercial organisation, and to form alliances with commercial organisations in order to fulfil its mission. Speaking of the American situation, Herbert Schiller observes (1996:32,33): "More and more public schools...

have become marketing-saturated image and message environments. Public space, free of corporate imagery, is an increasingly rare feature of the American social and physical landscape. ...The privatization and commercialization of United States' public education proceeds swiftly...".

The contrast with the educational vision that drove the changes over which Board presided could scarcely be greater. The priority in Board's strategy for change was the interest of the human person in achieving a complete life. It was assumed that, by meeting this priority interest, the legitimate interests of the market would be met. The present changes have reversed these priorities. Priority is now given to the impersonal interests of the market, with the assumption that, if these are met, the interests of the person will be met.

This reversal of educational values reflects wider changes in social and cultural values. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the full complex of factors involved in this change. For the present purpose we focus on just one factor, yet one that is fundamental to the whole change—the collapse of the universal rational certainties that provided the foundations for the modern world.

The Rational Foundations of Modern Society

In order to understand both the foundations of the modern world, and the collapse of those foundations, we need to return to the world of the ancient Greek philosophers. The foundations of modern society were not those of the ancient Greeks but they were developed from the legacy of the Greeks. These philosophers claimed that rational human thought is able to provide knowledge that has the quality of universal certainty. This certain knowledge gives us a reliable map of the world including knowledge of the conditions for a sound human society.

For the philosophers of ancient Greece human rationality achieved this universal certainty by its ability to access universally valid, abstract concepts that provide the normative foundation for human society. These concepts were not the product of human rationality but were universal laws of reality that exist independently of the human person. For Plato they exist in a transcendent realm of Ideas; for Aristotle they are Forms embedded in the world

of the senses needing to be abstracted by rational thought; others had yet other ideas about their identity.

Yet, there was agreement that human rationality has the unique ability to access with certainty the abstract concepts that provide the conditions for human life and a sound human society. This was one of the grounds on which Plato argued (1955:325) that the state should be ruled by philosophers since they are "those who know most about the principles of good government".

With the Christianisation of Europe the abstract concepts that reason accesses as universal social norms became divinely given laws articulated in the dogmas of Christian faith. The modern world that emerged from the social, religious and intellectual upheaval of the Reformation and Renaissance brought two more changes in the way human rationality was conceived as functioning.

Firstly, human rationality is no longer held to access laws external to itself; it is itself the source of these laws. The existence of a reality external to human thought is not denied but the laws and principles by which human rationality orders this reality are now regarded as internal to human rationality itself.

The influential French philosopher, René Descartes, who has been described as the first of the modern philosophers (Copleston, 1985:1), led the way in this development. In his quest for rational certainty, Descartes concluded (1637, 1824 edition: 158–160; 1960 translation: 62–64) that the only ultimate certainty is the existence of the thinking person. "I think, hence I am" (*je pense, donc je suis*) is the one indubitable truth on which everything else must rest. Rationality does not access certainties outside itself. Human thought is the ultimate certainty on which all other certainties rest.

Descartes retained a firm belief in the existence of God, holding that this also is a rational certainty (1641, 1960 translation: 128–143). However, the foundation for this certainty is the prior, and ultimate, certainty of the existence of the autonomous person.

One of the most influential thinkers in laying the social foundations of the modern world, John Locke, illustrates very clearly in his social theory, the new understanding of rational certainty. Locke argued that human life, including the social order, is governed by the "law of Nature". He insisted (1690:1-12) that the exist-

ence of this law is certain and its provisions are “intelligible and plain to a rational creature”.

When we ask what is this “law of Nature”, Locke answers (1690: II:6) that it is nothing other than “reason, which is that law” binding on all persons everywhere. The obligations of this law of reason residing in all rational persons, are “an eternal rule to all men” (Locke, 1690: II:89,135).

The second change that characterised the modern world was the radical individualising of rationality and the human person. In pre-Reformation Europe, the institutional authority of the church provided a communal framework for the individual’s exercise of rationality. This communal framework collapsed with the fragmentation of ecclesiastical authority resulting from the Reformation together with the secularising influence of the Renaissance.

The response of Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Locke was to accredit the individual person with the full authority of universal rationality. The rationality that is the universal law for human life—Locke’s law of Nature—is now the autonomous rationality of the individual person. Descartes’ autonomous “I” has displaced all communal authority to become the ultimate authority and source of rational certainty.

It did not take long for the first crack to appear in these rational foundations of modern society. Barely fifty years after Locke published his work, David Hume (1739) raised serious questions about the ability of this new, autonomous individuality to deliver the desired certainty. Hume’s views were not shared by everyone but they did signal a crisis in the understanding of rationality that was basic to modern society.

It was the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who provided the most influential answer to this crisis. He proposed that scientific, or theoretical, knowledge should be limited to knowledge of what is experienced by the senses. Anything that is not experienced by the senses, including God, was excluded from scientific knowledge. He then argued, in an extremely complex work (1787), that the rationality of the human individual is universally equipped with an inbuilt structure for ordering human experience in order to construct a systematic knowledge with universal validity.

Thus, by the twin strategies of limiting the scope of scientific knowledge and attributing to human rationality an inbuilt structure for organising this knowledge, Kant aimed to maintain the rational certainty of scientific knowledge as the basis for the modern world.

Kant argued that there are other rational certainties beyond the certainties of scientific knowledge, notably the moral law and the idea of God. However, as certainties of practical reason these have no place in a system of scientific knowledge, which is the province of pure reason.

This represented a major new departure. Previously human knowledge had been regarded as one, indivisible, seamless fabric in which the knowledge of God and moral principles were interwoven with the knowledge of the world of the senses. Kant’s rescue of a universal rational certainty involved tearing this fabric in two. In doing so, the process of the secularisation of modern society, that had begun with the Renaissance, was given definitive form. In the process science received a new, and narrower, definition that limited scientific knowledge to the world of the senses.

While this limitation of scientific knowledge was to remain without serious challenge, it was not long before Kant’s ideas of an inbuilt structure of rationality and of a practical reason validating a moral law and belief in God were decisively challenged. Within fifty years of the first issue of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, the French philosopher, Auguste Comte, was publishing his monumental *Course of Positive Philosophy* that introduced a new, positivist view of human rationality.

Comte (1830-35:20-29) discarded, as an outworn metaphysics, Kant’s idea of a form of rationality that can give rational certainty about matters other than the world of the senses. The only proper objects of rational cognition are the phenomena of the sensory world. While people may continue to believe in God if they will, God, not being an object of sensory perception, cannot legitimately be an object of rational thought.

At the same time, Comte discarded Kant’s idea of an inbuilt structure of reason as the basis for the systematic ordering of sensory objects. Instead, he proposed a rational method that formulates laws on the basis of observed patterns of relationships between the objects of our senses. Thus, he introduced the idea of the positive

facts produced by the rigorous application of scientific method to the observations of our senses. It is to these positive facts, and these alone, that rational certainty can be applied. And it is a system of knowledge based on these facts that alone can justifiably claim the status of universal rational certainty.

While Comte's detailed exposition did not endure, the basic features of his positivism became the dominant view of rationality for something like a hundred years till the mid-twentieth century. During that period science, redefined as the systematic ordering of indubitable sensory observations by a universally valid rational method, was seen as the basis for a universal certainty.

From Modernity to Postmodernity

The belief in the universal authority of scientific reason continued to provide a foundation of certainty for modern society until around the middle of the twentieth century. By that time, after repeated failure of attempts, especially by the logical positivists, to demonstrate the existence of a universal rational foundation for this belief, the consensus crumbled into dust. While there remain some who persisted in believing that scientific reason provides universal certainty, significant number of well respected scholars rejected this belief as one having no rational foundation.

This development is often attributed to the work of Thomas Kuhn. However, while his work first brought the issue to popular attention, he was neither the leader, nor the most influential figure in bringing to an end the consensus about scientific reason as the basis for rational certainty. A wide range of scholars, though differing on details, were united in the judgment that the basis on which that consensus rested was now decisively discredited—Suppe (1977) provides some idea of the breadth of this consensus.

There remained those who continued to hold their belief that scientific reason provides rational certainties, but they could no longer claim to represent the generally accepted view. They were now simply one faction among others. This did not mean that there was any general rejection of scientific knowledge or its value for human endeavour. It meant simply that this knowledge came to be seen as fallible with no rational basis for regarding it as having unique authority over and above all other sources of knowledge.

With the collapse of this consensus about scientific reason, the rational foundations of modern society collapsed. There was no longer any clearly recognised authority to which appeal could be made to settle disputes about the way humans relate together in the one society.

This crisis in the rational foundations of society soon brought the winds of change sweeping across the educational scene. Responding to the discrediting of the rationalist certainties, Postman and Weingartner (1969:82) argued that educational practices that impose a fixed structure on learning are a hindrance to learning. They argued "...whatever structure there is to anything is a product of the cognitive processes of the structurer, i.e. the perceiver, the learner...the structure that is perceived in a subject is solely some perceiver's way of viewing things." All frameworks that give structure to learning are open to question since they are nothing but individual points of view.

There were those, of course, who mounted a vigorous defence of traditional educational practice based on rational certainties. Bestor (1955), for example, called for the restoration of learning while Dyson (1971) warned of the perils in condoning the sleep of reason. These were, however, rearguard actions in a lost battle.

While, in many ways, there is a strong continuity between the modern and postmodern worlds, the change in social foundations has been so fundamental in nature as to justify calling today's world a postmodern world. While modern society had an agreed foundation in a common belief in the rational certainties of scientific reason, postmodern society has no agreed foundation for human life and activity. Many different bases are offered with each person free to choose among them at will.

The Character of the Postmodern World

Brian Walsh's graphic portrayal of postmodern culture (1997) characterised by boredom, aimlessness, numbness, lack of meaning, purpose and direction is certainly an accurate portrayal of one segment of that culture. However, it is a long way from the whole story. Nothing is more characteristic of the postmodern world than cultural diversity and contrast. The negativity of one segment depicted by Walsh, exists side by side with others who see

today's world as full of promise and possibilities. It is a world of new freedom for the human spirit; a freedom to venture out in the exploration of new frontiers of possibility giving life new direction, purpose and meaning.

In the academic world we see this hopeful face of postmodernism in those who have taken the collapse of a universal rational certainty as the cue for the systematic development of fresh rational accounts of human experience that will provide new frameworks of meaning and purpose for human life. We might think in this connection of such names as Gadamer, Rorty, Habermas, Derrida.

A superficial reading of these works, especially those of deconstructionists like Derrida, can leave the impression that they provide academic foundation for the culture of hopelessness described by Walsh. A more careful reading, however, makes it clear that what they are aiming to do is to destroy the last vestiges of hope in the rational certainties of the modern world as a basis for a meaningful, purposeful life, so that they may replace it with a radically new basis for giving hope and meaning to human life. As Derrida clearly puts it (1992:88,89) his deconstruction has the entirely constructive purpose of demolishing the artificial structures of structuralism so that the authentic structures of human life may be uncovered—"... on démontre une édification, un artefact, pour en faire apparaître les structures...".

We may or may not agree with these new frameworks that are offered or the new directions that are being set but it would be foolish to dismiss them as visions of despair and hopelessness, without power to give a sense of meaning and purpose to human life. The challenge for Christian scholars, where we find these alternatives lacking, is to offer a coherent alternative of our own that is not based on a return to the discredited certainties of modernity but meets the challenges of today's postmodern world.

The second area in which postmodern society is characterised by strong conviction and clear direction is that encompassed by the centres of social power. In the postmodern world the centres of power are decisively the state and the market, with the balance of power favouring the market. Here we find a clear vision full of hope and promise of a purposeful and meaningful world in which

human life can achieve unprecedented levels of satisfaction and fulfilment.

The engine that will achieve this fulfilment is the commercial market, freed of the irksome restraints of government regulation that impede its growth. The vision is that this self-regulating market will be able to harness the power of scientific technology in ways that will bring new heights of human fulfilment by an unprecedented level of satisfaction of human desires and new standards of comfort and convenience.

Unlike the modern society, such a vision cannot be promoted in the postmodern society by appeal to a universal rational authority. It can be sustained as the basis for public life only by the exercise of power, including the persuasive power of the instruments that modern technology has made available. In this context, the relentless pressure for commercial control of the mass media ought to be no surprise. It is a prime instrument of persuasive power for promoting the vision of a brave new world driven by the powers of the market.

Schiller (1996) provides substantial arguments to refute the notion that commercial control of communications media means free communications. It is free only so far as there is no serious challenge to the dominant vision of society that is promoted by the market.

The lingering authority of rationalism in the popular imagination leads to the use of the language of rationalism in the promotion of this vision. Hence, in recent times, we have seen the basic policies used to further the vision described as "economic rationalism"; a term suggesting that the policies rest on a base of compelling rationality. It is a deceptive suggestion.

A more appropriate term for the policies in question would be "determinist realism". The basis of the argument is that, in order for a society and its people to flourish the social order must be conformed to the existing social realities. In the present situation, these realities are characterised by the dominant power of the commercial market. Therefore, if we do not pay due homage to that power, we cannot expect to achieve the good life.

The argument is that we must either conform or perish. This lack of choice can be sustained only on one of two grounds. Either

social reality is a kind of metaphysical absolute beyond the power of humans to affect, or the powers that control the present social reality are too powerful to be resisted.

The first of these alternatives can only be the case if we embrace a metaphysical determinism in which humans are powerless pawns in a vast cosmic design wholly beyond our control—a view wholly inconsistent with the postmodern world. The second has a measure of truth in that the powers that control the present social reality exercise awesome power. However, it is not at all clear that resistance is either impossible or pointless.

In spite of the use of the language of rationality, this faith in the commercial market to bring the good life has no rational basis. It is founded in an ideological faith that is an idolatrous faith in the creature rather than the Creator. Such a faith can and, indeed, must be stoutly resisted, in the power of the Spirit, if we are to be faithful to the Gospel in today's world.

It is the dominant power of the market in public decision making that is the driving force behind the radical change in educational goals and values during the last century—which was the century of transition from the modern to the postmodern worlds. The postmodern society does include the alienated so well described by Walsh, and we should be concerned for these our neighbours. But the fundamental threat to the effectiveness of Christian witness does not come from that direction. It comes from the dominant power of the market ideology with its promise of a bright new world of new meaning, freedom and hope.

Critical Participation as Response to Postmodern Culture

My proposal is that we should mount this necessary resistance to the idolatrous forces governing today's postmodern world by taking the path of critical participation. On the one hand, we should recognise and embrace the realities of the postmodern world as full *participants* in that world. It is the world into which our Lord has sent us and which we are to embrace in love as he embraced the world into which he came.

On the other hand, we should be critical participants offering constructive alternatives for remedying the fundamental flaws in

our world. Pointing out the weaknesses is not enough; we must offer realistic ways of strengthening these weaknesses.

Returning to the present educational scene, there is much in the recent changes that we can, and should, embrace with enthusiasm—See Fowler, 1996,1997. If adopted with critical discernment, they provide possibilities for the development of creative educational strategies that will serve students well in the postmodern world.

At the same time, there are two fundamental respects in which they are open to criticism. The first is the priority that is given to market interests in the setting of educational goals. The second, closely related to it, is the one-dimensional view of reality on which it is based.

In this latter connection, Michael Leunig (1998:48) offers some penetrating comment in a discussion of the importance of nurturing the human soul, which he defines as the place within the human person "...where there is a sense of the eternal, that we are more than this body and this gathering of perceptions...". Commenting, in this context, on contemporary society he observes:

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.

It might be added that being a Christian does not in itself exempt us from this sickness of the soul, if we allow the values of the market to dominate and determine the priorities of our daily life. And Christian educators will exhibit this soul sickness if those decisions are based on an implicit acceptance of the prevailing educational goals and priorities. We do not challenge idolatry by adding a strong Christian component to fundamentally idolatrous practice. We only become spiritual adulterers. Christian faithfulness requires a critical examination and overhaul of the foundations underlying all our practice.

It is only possible at this time to provide a brief sketch of the fundamental contours of a critical participation in today's postmodern world.

Recognising a fiducial constant as the rational anchorage for life
Michael Polanyi suggests (1962:297) that all rationality is characterised by “fiduciary rootedness”. I prefer the term “fiducial”, which means “based on trust”. A fiducial constant refers to a reliable object worthy of our trust. All human life, in the end, operates on the basis of such trust in what we regard as a worthy object of trust.

The modern world, especially in its later development, was anchored in a trust in scientific reason as its ground of certainty. As we have seen, human rationality was unable to provide validation for such trust. Yet, there remain people whose lives are anchored in this trust because they believe in science.

Similarly, the market ideology that drives those at the centres of social power today is grounded in a profound trust in the powers of the self-regulating market to produce a secure and prosperous social environment. The idealised market has become the new fiducial constant serving as an anchor and guiding star for human life. Again that trust cannot be validated by rational arguments; it is simply based on belief in the idealised market. This does not mean that the people holding these beliefs can give no reason for their trust. It simply means that there is no compelling rational basis that requires all rational persons to share this belief.

The Christian is called to live the whole of life guided by a belief in God in Christ as the fiducial constant, the one worthy of all our trust. We also have a sound reason for this trust. It is founded in the experience of God’s revelation of himself, in all creation, in Scripture and, above all, in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the alternative that we must offer to our world, not merely as an added dimension of life, but as the secure foundation on which all human endeavour must be built if we are to achieve the fullness of human life that everyone desires.

Redrawing the lines between rationality and religious faith

The secularising of modernity created the illusion of a separation of rationality and religious faith. Rationality became the province of science that operates in isolation from religious faith. Yet, as has become clear since the collapse of modernity’s rational certainties, this merely disguised under secular language the religious roots of secularised science. The trust in autonomous rationality as the

fiducial constant of secularised science was itself a commitment of faith of the same kind as a religious commitment.

In the present postmodern world, therefore, we do not need to argue the case for recognising that human rationality cannot provide a secure foundation for human life since it can only function on the basis of trust in a fiducial constant. A wide range of secular thinkers has already made this case very clearly. In declaring that all our endeavours are founded in trust in the God who reveals himself as the fiducial foundation for our rationality we are in tune with the prevailing intellectual culture. What we do need to do is to challenge others to similarly recognise and articulate the fiducial constant on which their rational endeavours are founded.

Recognising multimodal rationality in multidimensional reality

Abandoning the faith in autonomous rationality and its supposed rational certainties does not mean abandoning rationality itself. However, there are two requirements for an effective exercise of rationality in the present situation.

A multidimensional reality

Firstly, we must reinstate the acknowledgment of an interrelated, multidimensional reality as the object of rational attention. The one-dimensional world of modernity focused on one dimension, but only one dimension, of the reality into which rationality provides insight. There are other, important dimensions of life, without which the dimension accredited by modernity cannot be adequately understood.

Even within the world that we experience with our senses, there are important qualities that cannot be weighed, measured and analysed by scientific procedures or valued by their market value. How do we measure or reflect in an appropriate market value the delight in the sound of a bird or the disturbance of the noise of a neighbouring party that keeps me awake? Then there are the rich qualities of human relationships that are so often ignored in the market passion for productive output. And there is the spiritual world that we experience in and through the world of our senses and yet is distinct from it.

Of course, the remaining believers in scientific reason will argue that these other dimensions of human experience are entirely subjective, having no basis in any objective reality outside the individual human persons who experience them. However, such a claim is nothing but a dogmatic assertion with no foundation except faith in scientific reason as the sole source of universal truth. So far as its advocates claim for it a universal validity they are guilty of the irrationality of circular reasoning.

As the respected philosopher of science, Paul Feyerabend, has said (1978:306,307) while science does provide us with authentic knowledge of the world in which we live, there are no rational reasons for regarding it as either the only source of such knowledge or a source that is more authoritative than others.

A multimodal rationality

In order to do justice to the complex, multidimensional reality of the experienced world, we need to recognise the multimodal character of rationality in giving an account of this reality. As a working definition, I suggest that rationality is to be understood as the human faculty of ordered, meaningful insight into the world of human experience.

Science and other academic disciplines, when properly conducted, are certainly activities providing us with rational accounts of our world that provide insight into the order and meaning of that world. There are, however, other ways in which rationality is exercised to provide insight into our world. Wherever we find humans ordering their experience in ways that have a consistency of meaning and answer questions of how and why, we encounter the exercise of rationality.

As an example, we might think of the accomplished master chef who regularly and consistently takes a variety of raw ingredients and transforms them into a gourmet delight. This accomplishment is only possible because of the chef's insight into the qualities of the various ingredients and the possibilities for their transformation through combination and various kinds of manipulation. That it is ordered, meaningful insight is demonstrated by the ordered patterns of action that, by transforming the raw ingredients, invest them with new meaning as a gourmet meal.

Or we might think of the successful gardener, the person with "green fingers". Such a person relies on a range of insights into the world of plants and the conditions that are required for nurturing these so that their life is not only sustained but enhanced. In doing so there is a transformation of meaning as a piece of wasteland is transformed into the order of a garden in order to serve human purposes.

We might go on to consider other examples, such as the artist, or the artisan shaping and fashioning wood or stone or metals, or the motor mechanic, or the farmer, or the experienced mountain climber. To these we could add a range of situations where rational insight into human relations is demonstrated, such as teaching, counselling, parenting, selling. While those engaging in these activities commonly receive training modelled on theoretical modes of rationality—training courses of this kind in parenting are also now available—a close examination will show that success in these areas depends to a significant extent on insights that are neither derived from nor reducible to those of theoretical rationality.

There is no doubt that theoretical rationality, and particularly the kind exemplified in the physical sciences, has immensely increased our ability to manipulate our environment for achieving desired ends. However, if we are to build a world for tomorrow that will provide an environment that nurtures full human development, it is imperative that we develop an understanding of our world that makes use of the full range of insights that come from the multimodal diversity of human rationality.

Educational Implications

In the realm of educational practice, this means that, while recognising the valid place of both scientific and commercial interests, the present domination of these interests needs to be resisted. We need to develop educational programs with goals and priorities that take account of both the multi-dimensional nature of reality and the multi-modal nature of human rationality.

We need to develop education systems that nurture the rich fullness of the meaning of this world and of the human person as steward of that world. Students need to be led to develop insights into all the rich diversity of life in the context of a clearly articu-

lated fiducial constant capable of bringing this diversity into unified focus. For the Christian that focus can only be God in Christ, the Creator and Redeemer in whom all things hold together—Colossians 1:16–20.

In the African context, the words of B. Wanjala Kerre (1992:376) provide an apt conclusion to our argument:

...modern cultural values that have 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 the self in his moral, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of life.

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