CHAPTER 11

The positive contribution of a theological ethic in outline

11.1 THE AIM OF THIS CHAPTER

Since we have offered a theological critique of the basic dimensions of our problem (power structures, convictions and the relation between them), we now have to consider the positive contribution the Christian faith could make to its solution. We presuppose that where human beings have become fully human, their convictions are the most powerful motivating forces of their personal and collective lives, stronger than their desires to satisfy short-term and selfish interests at the expense of the interest of others.

In what follows we also presuppose two levels relevant to our theme: (a) collective consciousness, which is normally channelled through institutional arrangements such as churches, and (b) the academic penetration, analysis and reconstruction of this consciousness in the form of theology, in this case theological ethics. While the former has its impact directly in the sphere of social structures and processes, the place of the latter is in an interdisciplinary team of social scientists who attempt to analyse
such structures and processes, watch over their possible implications and make recommendations for a more deliberate policy to overcome the problems concerned.

In chapter 6, section 6.7, we came to the conclusion that there are three relevant levels of interaction and conflict in the context of our problem, viz. (a) the conflict between alternative convictions, (b) the conflict between the vital interests of different parties in society and the (c) conflict between a conviction and the vital interests of the party which holds such a conviction. We shall try to give a short introduction to the way in which the Christian faith deals with these three problem areas.

The core of the Christian message is that God, the Source of reality, is about to reconstruct this reality in a form which corresponds to his eternal benevolence, that this 'new age' is anticipated in the Christ-event and that believers are privileged to participate in the new life of Christ, thus in the new age, through faith. An ethic derived from this conviction will aim at the creative reconstruction of convictions on level (a), societal power relations on level (b) and human integrity on level (c).

We shall proceed in three stages. In the first we discuss the missionary dynamic of what theologians call the 'Word of God', i.e. the Christian message proclaimed in the authority of its divine Source. The Word of God penetrates the power sphere of other convictions and ideologies to overcome them from within, compromising itself in the process and leading to a number of polluted and contradictory forms. Secondly, in the ecumenical dynamic of the Word of God, its differing syncretistic and ideologised forms are led into confrontation with each other. Here the Word regains its truth and power and a common analysis and
strategy of those involved in the process become possible. The third stage indicates the criteria of structural change which could result from this common strategy.


My point of departure is the "Word of God". The Word of God is God's self-communication to humanity. Note that it is not identical with the Bible, although the Bible is its prime witness. The essential core of the message contained in the Word of God is God's creative and redemptive love in Christ. Love is a dynamic power. It always seeks its object - in this case human beings. That is why the Word of God entered human history. We call this incarnation. This also means that it becomes a dynamic historical power. This dynamic historical force is called "tradition" in theology. Human beings do not have the Word of God in any other form but in such a living tradition.

The tradition is not a fixed body of dogma which is handed from generation to generation as it is. On the contrary, the tradition develops its own historical dynamic. The driving force behind this outgoing, missionary dynamic is, again, the creative and redemptive love of God, which seeks its object. Propelled by this love the Word of God reaches ever new phases of history, ever new cultural contexts, ever new human situations and conditions. It enters them, penetrates them, makes itself relevant in them, incarnates itself in them.

This implies that the tradition branches out into ever new sub-traditions. The greater the discrepancies between the people it reaches, the further the sub-traditions of the Word move away from each other. Thus the essential cause of diversity in the
church is the missionary dynamic of God's Word itself as it encounters the vast variety of human situations and conditions. Put in different terms, the church is the world in its pluriformity as far as it has been reached by the Word.

However, diversity is not necessarily the same as disunity. On the contrary, the very concept of unity only makes sense where there is diversity. I want to go further and say that not even the tensions existing within the "Body of Christ" are a sign of disunity. On the contrary, tensions are a sign of life. A body without tensions is a corpse.

Disunity is caused by syncretism. And syncretism is unavoidable. When the Word enters a human situation it incarnates itself in the patterns of perception and interpretation prevalent in that situation. That is the only way in which it is able to become relevant to that situation. By doing so it inevitably gets mixed up with the hopes and the fears, the religious convictions and ethical rules, the vital interests and their ideological justifications in that situation. And that is just another way of saying that each of the new sub-traditions is bound to be syncretistic in one way or another.

The Word may simply be incorporated into an existing ideology and greatly reinforce it. Alternatively it may displace the ideology but take over its function of justifying the vital interests of the group in question. An underdog population group may, for instance, be eager to identify with Israel in its struggle for liberation from Egypt. When its fortunes turn and it finds itself in a dominant position it may still want to identify with Israel - but now in its conquest of Canaan, in the subjugation of the former owners of the land, in its cultic separation

290
from those unworthy of acceptance. In short, the Word itself becomes ideological.

But time leaves its mark. In these syncretistic forms the preached Word becomes dogmatised and the lived Word becomes institutionalised in a variety of ways. Sub-traditions may stagnate completely. And in these syncretistic, dogmatised, institutionalised, stagnant forms the Word continues its journey through time and space. If we remember that the Word does not only enter into syncretism with ideologies but also with religions, philosophies, world views and the like, we have all the ingredients for a church splintered into an increasing number of sections at war with each other (Figure 1). In this respect the church is nothing but a replica of the society of which it forms a part.

Figure 1
The missionary dynamic of God's word
But let me emphasise again: It is the force of the creative and redemptive love of God which leads the Word into human history, thus into historical ambiguity and human abuse. What happened with Christ - up to the extreme of the cross - repeats itself with the message concerning Christ. There should be nothing inconceivable about this fact unless one has a docetic and idolised conception of God's Word.

11.3 THE ECUMENICAL DYNAMIC OF THE WORD LEADS TO WHOLESALE CONFRONTATIONS.

But now the very power of God's creative and redemptive love can cause the Word of God to rise from the grave. That does not happen without agony and birth pains. But when it happens, people discover that the love which motivates them, leads them first and foremost to their "heretical" brothers and sisters. Divine love is unconditional. It accepts the unacceptable. And so, together with a centrifugal or missionary dynamic, the Word develops a centripetal or ecumenical dynamic. People deeply touched by God's love cannot want to be separate. Reconciled with God they are, of necessity, reconciled with each other on the basis of God's suffering acceptance. And so they congregate.

But the result is an impossible community. Each member is not just a private person. He/she is also a representative of some group and thus an element in the social structure. He/she is Black or White, rich or poor, employer or employee, security policeman or detainee. And so the tensions and agonies of society are reproduced in the Christian community. They are even heightened in this community because the contact is more immediate.
Of course, we try to cover up the sores with politeness as far as possible. And during a short conference this may even succeed. But sooner or later we shall discover each other as opponents in live social conflicts and then the sparks are going to fly. Now brothers and sisters recognise each other as structural enemies. In northern Namibia, for instance, there are Christians who fight against Russian imperialism in the name of God on this side of the border. And there are other Christians who fight against fascist oppression and exploitation in the name of the same God on the other side of the border. And both may be quite sincere in their "Christian" convictions.

It is in such situations of social conflict, in strikes, boycotts, riots or less dramatic clashes, that the real problems surface. And this implies that if we want to be sincere about the mission of the church in the world we have to develop an ecclesiology not of harmony but of confrontation. Otherwise we just cover up the cancer instead of cutting it out. Let me attempt to give a few pointers towards such an ecclesiology of confrontation.

In the first place the Word of God horizontalises vertical relationships. It reminds both the elite and the underdog that they have brought nothing into this world when they were born, and will take nothing out when they die - whether political power, economic resources, social status, technical know how or whatever. Moreover, both are miserable sinners and have lost their right of existence before God. Moreover, both are granted a share in Christ's new life as sons and daughters of God - the highest status possible for any human being. Thus on the level of consciousness (not yet on the level of social structure) they become equal. They are able to communicate from person to person on the same level without being either condescending or submissive.
And this is the prerequisite for the second step, mutual exposure of each other's specific sins. Ideology is a blinding mechanism. I do not easily discover the ideology of my own group. Nor is it very likely that members of my group, who share my vital interests and my ideological justifications, will effectively and ruthlessly reveal my shortcomings. By doing so they would cut too deeply into their own flesh. Just as much as the Word of God has to come from outside my own heart last it be corrupted by my heart's desire, it must also come from outside my own group interests and group ideology. It must be an external Word (Verbum externum) as the Reformation called it. It is my natural enemy who will perceive my sin, in this case my ideological bias, most distinctly and who will be most eager to expose it as ruthlessly as he/she can. And so it is in confrontation that the sin-exposing function of the Word (the usus elenchticus legis as the Reformation called it) becomes most effective.

But the law does not redeem. It only exposes sins. And if the community attempts to operate on the basis of demands posed by one group to be fulfilled by the other, the ecumenical fellowship may break up in tears and blood. The law can only perform its cleansing and screening function under the umbrella of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of God's unconditional acceptance of the unacceptable (which is my word for justification by grace, not by human achievement).

Acceptance of the unacceptable implies that the accepting group suffers a partner group who is not able to fulfil its norms. This is the suffering of Christ in which we are called to participate. Now structural enemies discover each other as brothers and sisters. To accept members of your own group is relatively easy. By loving them, you confirm your own right of existence.

294
Even tax collectors love their friends, said Jesus. But if one accepts the unacceptable, if one loves one's group enemy, this is no longer cheap grace because there are costs involved!

So the sin of our disunity does not lie in our differences, not even in the tensions between us, but in our refusal to expose ourselves to the highly uncomfortable, challenging and transforming encounter with our enemy brothers and sisters, refusal to suffer them as Christ has suffered us, the refusal to forgive the unforgivable, to accept the unacceptable. Put very bluntly, Christians who isolate themselves from ecumenical intercourse place themselves outside the realm of Christ's redemptive love. They get stuck on the level of the law where acceptance is conditional. There you have to satisfy certain criteria of acceptability. Setting up conditions of fellowship — whether of a dogmatic, ethical, cultural or any other nature — denies the essence of the Christian gospel, viz. the self-giving, unconditional, suffering love of God in Christ.

But while Christian fellowship has no preconditions it certainly has consequences. Christ does not suffer us to confirm us in our sin but to overcome our sin. The overall effect of an honest ecumenical confrontation is that religious and ideological syncretisms begin to be filtered out. The perception of the Word of God held by each partner group is radically challenged by that of its respective counterpart. That forces them to go back to the sources together and agonise about the true meaning of the Word. The ideological self-justifications of all partners are revealed as what they are, and abandoned in an agonising process, which takes its time but which transforms those who subject themselves to this confrontation. And this transformation is the precondition for impacting their social environment.
The result will not be a "pure" form of the Word but rather a re-vitalisation of the creative and redemptive power of God's love in Christ. And this will, in turn, not lead to a homogeneous form of the Word - that would only endanger its contextual relevance - but to new incarnations and resultant confrontations. It is an ongoing struggle heading for eschatological fulfilment. But time and again it produces tentative situations in which different forms of the Word do not exclude each other but complement, reinforce and enrich each other. These are the occasions when joy is the reward of painful struggle (Figure 2).

11.4 THE EFFECTS OF ECUMENICAL ENCOUNTER ARE SUBVERSIVE.

Confrontation does not only challenge the perceptions and interpretations of the Word but also the perceptions and interpretations of social reality of each partner. The dialectical nature of human reality is discovered underneath the conflicting evidence. A common analysis of the situation, which takes due account of other points of view in their proper relation to each other, comes in sight. Again this does not happen without the agony.
of birth pains and growth pains. But where it happens the prerequisite for a joint strategy concerning structures is being reached. A new common motivation to tackle the structural problem together is born. Structures can only be changed by collective effort. "Unity gives strength."

This presupposes, however, that what happens in the ecumenical fellowship is carried into society. Every participant is a structural element, a representative of a social group. Going back into one's own social context the painful process of confrontation begins all over again. Having discovered our brothers and sisters in our enemies we shall no longer be able to condone the blanket condemnation of the enemy group by our own group. Having discovered the shortcomings of our own group we shall no longer be able to condone the ideological self-justifications we find at home. We shall not make ourselves particularly popular. Challengers and innovators are always marginals. It may well be that massive group pressure will be exerted to make us toe the line. But in this conflict we are the "salt of the earth", the "leaven in the dough".

Seen in this light, ecumenical encounter is a profoundly subversive exercise. It may be more dangerous to a ruling ideology than communist or fascist propaganda. We should sympathise with those who become anxious when Christians begin seriously to talk to each other. If you knock down the spiritual legitimation of a social structure you let loose the devils of change and the effects may be substantial. We should not be surprised when authorities, for instance, try to shore up spiritual preparedness against an onslaught which allegedly also moves through the avenues of ecumenical encounter. To me it seems that the only valid Christian answer to this problem is to invite those concerned to be participants in this encounter - and thus
potential partners in the ensuing analysis of the problem and the reformulation of goals. Fear is cast out by love.

It should be mentioned, however, that ecumenical conscientisation will lead to frustration and subsequent hopelessness if the structural problem is not tackled with the same amount of seriousness as the ideological one. Ideology and social structure mutually reinforce each other and need to be tackled together. Again, structural change needs to begin in the church. In this relatively fool-proof area experimentation can be conducted and experience gathered which will be of utmost significance when it comes to structural changes in society.

The argument often advanced that what is possible in the church is impossible in the world - because the world lacks regeneration by faith - is invalid. The church is not a redeemed community removed from the depravity of this world. It is nothing but another part of this unredeemed world. But it is that part of the world in which the Word of God has begun its redemptive work and which it uses to reach the rest of the world. That people become willing to suffer each other and look after the vital interests of their fellow men rather than those of their own is as unlikely within the church as outside it. Yet the Word of God is quite capable of performing this miracle within the church and through the church in the world as well. We should beware of pious fatalism - particularly when it proves to be congenial to our vital interest!

The most powerful channel through which the missionary dynamic of the Word of God proceeds is evangelisation. It is usually conducted by revivalist, evangelical and pentecostal groups. Research on a vast scale is needed to find out what exactly happens during and after such evangelisations. In which ways
are existing convictions displaced, in which ways are they incorporated and do they continue to exercise their power, in which ways do they arrange themselves with the Christian faith in a series of compromises? In which ways are the typical perceptions, self-justifications and inclinations, generated by vital interests overcome, in which ways do they penetrate and determine the new allegiance to Christ, in which ways do they manage to make themselves seem acceptable, or secure for themselves a sphere of life untouched by the new conviction?

Equally desirable is research on the process and outcome of ecumenical confrontations. Where do they take place - only at interracial and ecumenical gatherings and in ecumenical institutions, or also in the secular processes of life? Do such confrontations withdraw into a sphere of spiritual harmony to avoid the pain of structure-related dissent, or do they face the structural conflict bravely and lose their spiritual depth in the process? Are ideological perceptions, justifications and inclinations challenged equally on both sides or has one party a tacit moral advantage over the other? Which type of common perception, interpretation and motivation ensues from such confrontations - is it really factual and strategically appropriate to the problem to be tackled, or is it more the outcome of the parallelogram of forces of personalities and arguments? There are many theories based on dogma or conjecture; what is needed is empirical research to see whether these theories hold water or not.

We have seen that distorted perceptions, ideological self-justifications and inclinations based on the pursuit of interests place serious obstacles in the way of any attempt to solve our problems. A factual, unbiased analysis and a sober assessment of the situation, based on the assumption that the interests of
all population groups are equally important, would be an incredible achievement. Without them, further ethical deliberations are meaningless. Most serious Christians do not err on account of their good intentions but on account of their distorted perception of social reality. At the same time such analyses and assessments are the presupposition of any policy which would go in the direction of a real solution.

If that is true, there could be no greater service the church of Christ could do to the country in the structural sphere than to deliberately and purposefully lead their members and other concerned people into confrontations under the umbrella of unconditional acceptance. We can draw on a lot of experience, for instance that of the 'Evangelical Academies' in Germany or ecumenical bodies in our own country in this regard. The main thing is, however, that such encounters should be programmatically aimed at the challenge of perceptions, self-justifications and interest-led inclinations of different groups in society in the structural sphere, not only at other concerns of a more spiritual nature.

Conversely, the church of Christ can do the country no greater disservice in the structural sphere than by allowing the present large-scale distortions of perceptions, justifications and motivations to continue unchallenged by isolating different ecclesiastical and racial groups from each other. If I were to make recommendations on the basis of this study I would certainly make this my first priority.
Once Christians are liberated and motivated to analyse a situation factually and to work for structural change, the question of theological-ethical criteria for such change emerges. The Biblical faith has its own distinct approach to that problem. However, it is based not on an eternal set of rules and regulations valid for all situations and all times, but on a personal relationship of mutual faithfulness between God and human beings, and - as a consequence - among human beings. Our prime interest at present is what constitutes the content of this relationship. And here I see three historical variations within the Biblical heritage. I call them survival, justice and concern respectively. Between these variations there seems to be a historical progression which apparently has to be repeated again and again as persons and groups become existentially involved in the transforming power of God's Word.

\textit{Survival} as a principle features very prominently in the early phases of the history of Israel. The exegesis of a single chapter, Deuteronomy 7, brings out its principle characteristics clearly, although it represents a fairly late stage in Israelite theological development, belonging to the 5th and the 4th century B.C. In the fundamental covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel, Yahweh is expected to supply and protect the basic prerequisites for the collective existence of Israel as a nation: land and livestock, health and fertility, social cohesion and legal system, political leadership and victory over enemies. Israel's part is not to allow any other religion (or social ideology) to interfere in the exclusive rule of Yahweh and to be a witness to his greatness in its national life.
All this adds up to a very powerful legitimating ideology. The highest God is unequivocally on the side of the elect - whether they deserve it or not. He liberates them from Egyptian bondage, leads them through the perils of the desert in spite of their disobedience, empowers them to conquer a country, subdue its inhabitants and appropriate their economic resources. In self-defence or aggression, liberation or domination, God is a defender of the vital interests of his people at the expense of any others who might get in the way. He is Yahweh Zebaoth, the Commander of victorious armies. It is his honour and his glory that are at stake when Israel goes into battle. Religion justifies the pursuit of the vital interests of one group at the expense of others.

This Biblical paradigm neatly fits in with the competitive Western spirit. The principle of the latter is the survival of the fittest. It should be no surprise, therefore, that capitalist liberalism, British imperialism and Afrikaner nationalism have all been able to claim Biblical legitimacy. More recently it has been picked up by Black and Liberation Theologies - to the great consternation, I might say, of those who thought they had a monopoly on it, or who restricted the Biblical message to the spiritual sphere so as to be unfettered in the political and economic realm. All this is not necessarily a misunderstanding or abuse of the Biblical heritage since you do find this dimension in the Bible (Villa-Vicencio 1981: 48ff.).

The second approach I call justice. Biblical justice is firmly based on equality of opportunity. Concerning the prerequisites of economic performance, every family within the People of God has equal dignity with all others. And that has definite economic repercussions. Nobody is allowed to pick up more manna in the desert than others (Ex. 16:15ff.). The agricultural land
in the country is allocated by lot (Nm 26:55; Jos. 14:2; Ps 16:6). If a family loses its basic means of subsistence through economic mismanagement it must be restored after a fixed time (Rosner in Nürnberger 1978a: 135ff.). The prophets lash out against the accumulation of wealth by some at the expense of others (Wittenberg in Nürnberger 1978a: 141ff.). King Ahab who took the vineyard of Naboth by committing a judicial murder has to pay with his own life: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth (I Kings 21-22). Justice is not to be played with.

It is obvious that the principle of justice, once it comes into its own, overrules the principle of survival. No group can treat another as if it were a noxious weed or an economic resource. What is claimed for oneself has to be granted to others. No discrimination against the weak for the benefit of the powerful is allowed. Even the gods (or ideologies) of the other nations are judged on whether they execute the justice of Yahweh impartially - and not according to some religious conviction or meta-physical speculation (Ps 82). Yahweh is the true God because he defends the cause of the powerless, the foreigner, the widow, the orphan. And if his people or its leaders fail in this one crucial aspect they are taken to task mercilessly - even to the extreme of annihilation.

But there is a third step as well. I call it concern (Greek agápe). Justice as a principle guarantees each group the right to its share of the economic potentials of the society. Our right is as important as the right of any other group. Concern as a principle goes beyond that. Concern is the willingness to share one's right with a group who has forfeited its rights. This principle is forcefully demonstrated by the christological formulations of the early church (Phlp. 2:6ff; II Cor. 8:9). Christ's way begins in a situation of power. Being rich, Paul
says, he became poor - not for the sake of being poor but to enrich us who are poor. To enrich us - not for the sake of being rich but to enable us to become poor with Christ and enrich others!

In II Cor. 8 Paul deliberately applies this paradigm to economic discrepancies (Nürnberger 1978a:163ff.). The economically potent are expected to move down and empower the economically impotent. The economically impotent are expected to move up so as to be able to share the way of the potent down to the impotent. A dynamic chain-reaction is set in motion, the purpose of which is to work towards a situation in which groups are able to interact on the basis of equal dignity. Equal dignity is seriously questioned by a situation where misery contrasts with superabundance.

It is clear that the principle of concern overrides the principle of justice, just as the principle of justice overrides the principle of survival. Nevertheless the goal of survival is fulfilled in justice and the goal of justice is fulfilled in concern. Where concern rules supreme neither survival nor justice are in danger. That is why concern as a principle makes more sense in terms of the human project as a whole than the principle of survival.

A person or group geared to justice will rather sacrifice survival than benefit from injustice. Only where justice breaks down do people fall back on the struggle for survival, a struggle of all against all. A group geared to concern will rather sacrifice what is its own by right than look on cheerfully while another group perishes because it has no right to resources necessary for its survival. Only where concern breaks down do people fall back on justice and claim what is theirs by right.
At this stage we need to emphasise that we are here not concerned with conversion to Christ or with a Christian sort of piety. Survival, justice and concern are collective norms which determine social behaviour and which spread through normal processes of socialisation and internalisation. Of course, there must be a mainspring which pulls the norm system of a society away from the principle of survival (which is plain selfishness) over justice to concern. And here Christians should be in the forefront. After all, they are the carriers of the Biblical heritage.

But they have no monopoly in the urge to place society on humane foundations. Often it is precisely the non-Christians who excel in this respect. Here the Declaration of Human Rights merits special attention. Although human rights aim at justice, their implementation presupposes concern. Concern has become a widely accepted principle in modern society without any reference to a particular Christian background. Examples are programs for social security, rehabilitation schemes, aid to drought-stricken or war-torn regions, the suspension of the death sentence, the support of a firm threatened by liquidation, etc.

NOTES

1. There is a theological argument saying that Christian concern cannot determine social reality because it presupposes a society in which everybody has been converted to Christ and reborn in the Spirit - while in reality Christians will always form a tiny minority. I do not believe this argument to be valid. In fact, it may very well be an excuse not to pull your weight as a Christian in this respect. Most certainly one finds self-sacrificing concern among non-Christians - Moslems, Buddhists, humanists, Marxists - and often it surpasses that of Christians by far. Moreover, the Biblical social ethic is not regarded by Biblical authors as the private domain of a particular religious group. It claims universality. It is valid for, and accessible to all human beings, regardless of their creed.
The common assumption among Christians that personal conversion to Christ automatically leads to soci-structural responsibility, is blatantly untrue as well. Christian piety can even become an obstacle to social involvement. There are various reasons for this failure. In the first place Christians do remain sinners until they die, in spite of their conversions. Their new life is 'in Christ', not in their 'flesh'. Unconsciously they continue to pursue their group interests and to share the ideological legitimations of this pursuit.

Secondly, the implications of the renewal of personal relationships for great social structures, which seem to be completely impersonal, are not immediately apparent. Thirdly, a strong spiritual commitment tends to absorb all energies and to relativise the importance of social structures. Fourthly, Christians often develop their own ecclesial group-selfishness and fail to see beyond the fences of their church yards. So they need to be led away from survival over justice to concern as well. Conversion to Christ must be followed by conversion to the world for which Christ died - and that is another big step. Put differently, sin and evil have to be tackled on the whole front simultaneously - in the hearts of human beings and in the structures of society. No breeding ground may be left untouched in either realm.

11.6 APPLICATION IN OUTLINE

Space does not permit any detailed application of our insights concerning survival, justice and concern to the problem of economic power structures in South Africa. A few indications must suffice.

The transition from survival over justice to concern can manifest itself in single measures as well as in an overall systems-approach. Single measures are open to all sections of the population at all times. They include better wages, improvement on existing laws to avoid hardships, welfare, educational and training ventures, investments in housing, eradication of discrimination and isolation, living out a respect for the dignity of a human being in ordinary life, etc.

Concerning a systems approach, the implication of concern as a principle is not necessarily a socialist society of the
Marxist-Leninist type. On the contrary. The latter attempts to equalise economic potential at the base by means of a fearful concentration of power at the top. In modern economic life it is not the possession of the factors of production (particularly capital) which counts, but control over them. Even in the West the shareholders have little say over their possession; it is the managers who are in control. In the East it is a small elite of party functionaries. The corollary of a concentration of power is always a repressive system and - possibly - a decline of motivation and efficiency amongst the masses of the population. Seen in this light there is little to choose between the concentrations of power as found in most Third World countries (including South Africa) and in Marxist-Leninist countries, as the following diagrams show (figures 3 and 4):

![Diagram of Third World pattern](image1)

![Diagram of Marxist-Leninist pattern](image2)

Figure 3
Third world pattern

Figure 4
Marxist-Leninist pattern
In contrast, social democracy and perhaps a type of democratic socialism based on autonomous enterprises can do without power concentrations and bureaucratic strangleholds while allowing for maximum of initiative and responsibility of ordinary people (figure 5):

Our task as theological ethicists is not, however, to devise and propagate a particular socio-economic system but rather to indicate the prerequisites of any satisfactory system. Our deliberations so far have led us naturally to three main emphases: measures to redirect the economic dynamic of the centre, measures to develop the economic potential of the periphery and measures to neutralise the effects of the asymmetric interaction between the two (figure 6):
11.6.1 Beginning with the latter one could reasonably expect that a society which believes in the merits of free competition should at least be honest about it and make it possible for all sections of the population to compete equally and effectively on the open market. The freedom to abuse power advantages, to entrench oneself in oligopolistic fortresses and to exploit weaker sections of the population is not worth fighting for from an ethical point of view. Moreover, freedom can only be called a positive value if it is linked with responsibility. Not arbitrariness but concern is the prime characteristic of freedom.

Concretely, there should be, on the negative side, a revision of the legal system so that it excludes any form
of discrimination against economically weaker groups, any protection of stronger groups and all forms of the abuse of power. On the positive side some very powerful countervailing processes need to be institutionalised to offset the "automatic" effects of an asymmetric interaction. The principle of justice demands, not an equality of income but the equality of opportunity to raise such an income. In contrast to the welfare principle - which has its own merits - the concept of equality of opportunity emphasises production, not consumption. In a strongly inegalitarian situation such as our own, the principle of the equality of opportunity may imply compensatory measures. Sections of the population, for instance, who have been left behind in the process of technological development, need an investment in their training which is higher than that of the more advanced, instead of the other way round, as it is at present.

Perhaps the most glaring example of discrimination in South Africa is influx control. I am personally persuaded that it is high time that a realistic assessment of the trade-offs between advantages and disadvantages of this system should be made. The disadvantages of the system include the following:

1. The system implies discrimination on the basis of colour and thus impairs the concept of equal dignity for all men. This creates enmity locally and abroad and - as a consequence - costs more than is currently realised among the defenders of the system. That a denial of equal dignity is ethically unacceptable, is self-evident.

2. The system implies a network of bureaucratic and police controls on a scale unparalleled in the Western, Southern and possibly even the Eastern world. The level of frustration, alienation and sheer anger produced by such measures is politically dangerous and economically demotivating.
3. Liberal economic theory will maintain that interference in the horizontal and vertical mobility of labour leads to an irrational allocation of the available factors of production within a given economy. In the South African case it is obvious that influx control and other discriminatory measures have led to bottle-necks in skills, a higher level of capital-intensity than warranted in a semi-industrialised country and thus to a distorted and costly factor-market.

4. To this the enormous costs of an extended bureaucracy and security apparatus without which the system could not be maintained, has to be added.

5. The high pressure on the land in Black rural areas makes a transformation of subsistence agriculture and the economic utilisation of their agricultural resources virtually impossible. In fact, these areas show all signs of rapid ecological deterioration and may be largely lost to posterity if present trends continue.

6. The periphery bears the social costs of maintaining a labour force which is utilised by the centre. In the centre its full potential is not allowed to develop, and whatever potential is developed, cannot be utilised by the periphery.

7. The extent of the damage done to family life, social cohesion, community morale, upbringing, education, cultural values and moral norms by the migrant labour system is prohibitive and may take generations to repair. In the meantime the society as a whole has to pay the bill in terms of crime, moral disorientation, cynicism and anarchical tendencies.

If influx control was lifted we would have to contend with mainly two problems:

1. Great numbers of poverty-stricken Black people would move from the overcrowded Black rural areas to the metropolitan areas. This prospect conjures up the spectre of vast slums, unemployment, crime, filth and disease. The neat, developed, Western image of our urban areas would be lost and replaced by Latin-American urban situations. A number of comments can be made:
(a) Slum conditions are undesirable. But the question is whether rural social decay is any better. Misery is as unacceptable in rural areas as it is in urban centres. If poverty cannot be avoided in the short term in a semi-industrialised Third World country such as South Africa, then urban misery has the advantage that it is highly visible. One cannot escape the sight of the favelas on the hillside in a luxury apartment in Rio de Janeiro, in Pretoria one can. The illusion that we are a prosperous Western country, artificially created by damming up poverty behind geographical race barriers, can no longer be upheld. A visible problem has more chances of being tackled by policy-makers.

(b) Urban slum-conditions are unacceptable - but for whom? Obviously the rural poor prefer them to their rural misery, otherwise they would not move to the cities. If they saw themselves fooled by wrong expectations, they would soon return to where they came from. If the drift to the city is unacceptable to Whites (and perhaps to some urban Blacks because they would meet greater competition), the question is whether it is ethically right to protect the interests of the privileged at the expense of the poor. Our ethical deliberations so far suggest that it should be the other way round. If there is a burden to be borne by society then that burden should be shared in some way by all groups in that society.

(c) Obviously such a policy would have catastrophic results if the neglect of urban housing for underdog race groups for many decades would be perpetuated. Sharing the burden would imply at least the provision of site and service schemes and the slackening of bureaucratic strangleholds on family initiatives in housing on a large scale. A social infrastructure (schools, clinics etc.) would have to be built up as well. All this is costly, but perhaps less costly than the total direct and indirect cost of the present policy as outlined above.
(d) Unemployment in the cities would increase, but total national unemployment would probably decrease in relative terms: (i) There would be a more rational factor allocation; (ii) the task of slum upgrading would create a huge market for labour and industrial goods such as building materials; (iii) an informal sector would develop in which a great number of people could make a living. An informal sector cannot develop in resettlement camps or a rural subsistence environment because it presupposes the vicinity of a strong formal sector on which it 'preys'.

2. Basic resources of the metropolitan areas will be placed under severe strain. Here the greatest problem seems to be water. A lot of research, experimentation and investment is necessary to solve this impasse. The question is whether the solution of this problem is any more difficult than the problem of providing acceptable living conditions in rural areas and resettlement camps.

It has become clear that Black urbanisation cannot be avoided (Smit 1981). If that is the case, a deliberate and rigorous urbanisation policy is called for. It is unlikely that the urbanisation program envisaged for Blacks inside the Black areas is any less costly in terms of total direct and indirect costs. The disadvantages of the latter are that there is no economic base for such an artificial urbanisation. While decentralisation policies may have their merits it is very unlikely that they will lead to industrialisation sufficient in volume to create such a base. Which means that the economically awkwardly located dormitory towns still have to be financed in some way by the metropolitan centres, while the disadvantages of influx control discussed above are perpetuated.

Pending unbiased, ideology-free research in which the interests of the poor are taken to be as important as those of the rich, I have the impression that the trade-offs of a programmatic abolition of influx control would gravitate towards the greater advantage of the country as a whole and all its people.

This is only one example and more must follow. All I plead for at this stage is that a serious look is taken at the trade-offs between present policies and their
possible alternatives on the basis of a de-ideologised, factual analysis of the situation and a sober assessment which takes the interests of all inhabitants of the country as of equal importance. The academic community should be the first to venture into serious investigations concerning the probable consequences of alternative policies on this basis so that possible initiatives coming from the policy-makers do not find the ground unprepared.

11.6.2 The economic dynamic of the centre needs to be redirected - away from capital-intensive, highly mechanised and automated industry and towards labour-intensive methods; away from inflated remuneration of expertise caused by bottlenecks in skills and towards the building up of purchasing power on the lower levels of the labour force; away from a production of luxury goods for a wealthy elite and towards a production geared to satisfying the needs of the majority of the population; away from the ideal of becoming competitive on the international market and towards establishing a moderately wealthy and contented local population; away from research for the further development of labour saving machinery and towards research into ways of raising the productivity of labour-intensive techniques to competitive levels; away from the motivation to maximise profit for the sake of profit and towards responsibility for the quality of life of living people. This is what moving down according to the principle of concern concretely means for the centre in South Africa and of the world as a whole.

The example of post-war Europe shows that the building up of the purchasing power of the lower sections of the population makes profound sense in economic terms. Instead of trying to raise profits by cutting down labour costs, productivity-oriented salary increases have led to a mass consumer market which greatly contributed to sustained economic
growth for more than two decades (Fröbel 1981: 11ff, 65ff). Why the recipe did not continue to work so well after 1970 is a story too long to be investigated here. Possible reasons include rocketing fuel costs, a certain degree of saturation of the local market, contracting external markets due to the financial plight of the Third World and the displacement of labour by technological progress. The message is, however, that sustained economic growth with a stable internal basis demands the development of a mass consumer market, which in turn implies labour intensive production and a more equitable distribution of rewards, based in turn on a greater spread of expertise. South Africa has a potential market of 30 million people, only a fraction of which is fully developed. However, economic growth can only be condoned in as far as it leads to quality of life for all, thus a greater equity, and does not undermine the ecological base of the economy (see par. 10.2 above).

11.6.3 Correspondingly, the periphery population has to move up. If that is to materialise, two closely interrelated problems have to be tackled. In the first place the exponential growth of the population needs to be arrested - otherwise any progress will continue to be neutralized by higher numbers. I know from experience how emotionally explosive this problem is. The policy-makers of the centre should, for this reason, remain very much in the background. As long as they support immigration from Europe they are not going to convince Blacks anyway. It is the peripheral population itself which has to discover the grave dangers and disadvantages that lie in large families and rising population figures. Power lies in quality, not in quantity.

But the prerequisite of an effective population policy is a rising standard of living accompanied by social securities and improved education. That brings us to the second task, viz. raising the economic potential of the periphery.
Again this is the task of the periphery itself. The centre cannot develop the periphery on behalf of its population. Such paternalism always backfires. The centre can, however, supply the infrastructural requirements for such a development and - far more important - release the stranglehold it exercises over the periphery at present, thus allowing its free evolution.

The two tasks seem to be interrelated to such an extent that it is impossible to solve the one problem without tackling the other. The population explosion is, in part, itself a consequence or symptom of socio-economic impotence, while at the same time it greatly contributes to poverty and stagnation. This also means that by strengthening the economic potential of the periphery the centre can greatly contribute to a falling growth rate of its population - without getting directly involved in population policies.

Of course, a falling growth rate of the peripheral population is in the long term interest of all inhabitants of the country. South Africa's natural endowments are such that it cannot feed exponentially growing masses of people indefinitely without an ecological breakdown. And that is true for the world as a whole.

In closing I wish to suggest that structural change, as envisaged above, is unlikely to come about as long as disadvantaged population groups do not have full representation in the actual decision-making bodies of the country. It was their access to political power which made it possible for the Afrikaners to overcome their economic plight in the first half of this century. In the
absence of economic power, disadvantaged groups can only find redress through the political process. Those who are serious about greater equity in the economic realm, therefore, will have to come to terms with the political implications of such a goal. Moving down means sharing political responsibility. Moving up means assuming political responsibility. A commitment to the democratisation of the South African society is a prerequisite for any meaningful contribution towards greater economic equity. The alternative is violence.

We may close this study on a theme with which we began: South Africa is a microcosm. This becomes apparent if one compares the country with another semi-peripheral state, viz. Yugoslavia. Both states are plagued by internal tensions due to a very heterogeneous population. Both states are authoritarian. The difference is that in Yugoslavia the leaders acknowledge responsibility for the entire population, thus creating an overarching loyalty to the country as a whole. The reduction of regional inequalities is a matter of policy. In South Africa the centre population has been separated from the peripheral population and made to believe that the periphery is essentially not part of its responsibility. Nor does it belong to the constituency of the leadership. In this sense South Africa is, once again, a replica of the international structure. The centre pursues its own interests and only bothers about the plight of the periphery in the context of those interests. It may graciously grant 'development aid' - not without strings attached - but it is under no obligation to do so. If the country is to have a reasonably peaceful and prosperous future, this whole presuppositional structure has to change. South Africa must be seen as one country with one population demanding common loyalty and solidarity.
In this chapter we discussed the possible contribution of a Christian theological ethic towards the solution of the problems analysed in this study.

We first described the process in which the Word of God develops a missionary dynamic and penetrates the power spheres of different convictions and ideologies. We saw how it branches out into a number of sub-traditions which become increasingly syncretistic and ideological.

Then we saw how the inherent character of the Word of God leads to an ecumenical dynamic. Here the bearers of different syncretistic and ideologised branches of the tradition are brought into confrontation with each other under the umbrella of God's unconditional acceptance. In such an 'impossible community' one party reveals the distortions and shortcomings of another. A common, more factual analysis and a sober assessment of the situation, on the assumption that the interests of all parties are of equal importance, becomes possible.

This may lead to the formulation of a joint strategy to overcome the problems concerned. We described three stages in the development of criteria for structural change in the Biblical heritage and suggested that groups which allow themselves to be involved in the dynamics of God's Word, will be led from one to the other. These stages are survival, justice and concern.

Finally we tried to give a few indications of a possible application of these insights. Concerning the asymmetrical interaction between centre and periphery, we suggested that all discriminatory measures and institutionalised abuses of power should be
removed and countervailing processes institutionalised to balance out structural mechanisms. We secondly suggested that the power of the centre needs to be redirected away from its orientation towards capital and profit to an orientation towards needs. Thirdly, we suggested that the impotence of the periphery should be overcome through a serious effort to develop its potential and a reduction in the birth rate, assuming that these two aspects depend on each other. Finally we argued that economic equity presupposes democratisation in the political sphere.

With this we come to the end of the present study. I wish to emphasise once more that the main aim was to develop a systems-analytical model for detailed interdisciplinary research in the area of our theme. The detail mentioned in the text is meant to illuminate the model, not to render such research superfluous.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


KRITZINGER, J J 1984. 'n Statistiese beskrywing van die godsdienstige verspreiding van die bevolking van Suid-Afrika. Pretoria: RGN Onderzoek na Tussengroepverhoudinge.


SCHLEMMER, L 1981. *Black perceptions of development: some insights from research*. Durban: University of Natal, CASS.


SCHLEMMER, L 1982e. The spatial dispensation in South Africa: an assessment and tentative principles for planning in South Africa. Durban : University of Natal, CASS.


SCHLEMMER, L 1983b. Black needs and aspirations for socio-economic development: some insights from research. Durban : University of Natal, CASS.


SCHLEMMER, L 1983d. The fence of opportunity: Black reactions and influx control in South Africa. Durban : University of Natal, CASS.

SCHLEMMER, L 1983e. Socio-economic conditions and political violence in South Africa: A brief exploratory analysis. Durban : University of Natal, CASS.


