

# THE CHURCH AS GOLDEN CALF IN HISTORY AND THE MEANDERING PROCESSES OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF GOD

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## *Abstract*

The idea of the church as a golden calf in history is discussed in terms of three approaches to society: the *church-centred* (= *secularisation*) approach which operates on the basis of the dichotomy of divine/semidivine church and ordinary human/natural world, the *ghetto* approach premised on an array of Christian versus non-Christian institutions and organisations, and the *diaspora* approach which embraces the diasporical scattering of Spirit-directed God-life-and-world experiences of different institutions, organisations and communities in society. The salvific sense and meaning of the three approaches to society is discussed against the background of First, Second and Third Testament perspectives and the meandering processes of the Commonwealth (Kingdom) of God encapsulated and manifested in the grand acts of God's creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

There is a primeval ideology that consciously and unconsciously makes complete sense to many Christians, but it has no name. This sense making ideology is so widespread and has such a secure place in the minds of theologians and run-of-the-mill traditional, modern and postmodern people of various church traditions that no one bothers to ask any questions about it, let alone attach a name to it.

What is the nameless ideology that has such a powerful hold on the sense making experience of traditional, modern and postmodern Christians? This ideology can be called a church- or ecclesio-centred approach to salvation, sense and meaning in people's lives. The sense making God-life-and-world approach which lurks in the terms is of greater importance than the designations church- and ecclesio-centredness. These could easily be replaced by others. Generally speaking, church-centredness is the sense making approach (= religion, ideology or God-life-and-world view) which imbues *the*, or *a* church in society with a divine character and image that it cannot sustain or justify, considering the mysterious meanderings of God's Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood and Prophetdom, etc.) which are intertwined with the events and processes of "the creation and creatureliness

of the many universes”, “the reconciliation events of the cross, the tearing of the veil of the temple and the resurrection of Jesus”, “the renewal through God’s life-giving Spirit of the whole of reality”, and the “processes of pulling, drawing and fulfilling of everything towards the future consummation”.

The church-centred ideology of people’s experience of human life and eternity is driven and directed by a divine construct of the Church – with a capital “C” – spread like a divine metaphysical blanket all over the world, which is covered by a patchwork of the many churches of the world as the small letter “c” derivatives of the gigantic Church. Church-centredness embodies in its extreme form a divine socialist caring and carrying ideology of salvation, sense and meaning in this life, the afterlife and for all eternity through the Church and the churches. In this extreme form the Church and the churches are being idolised and revered as the only centres, instruments and signs of the Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood, Prophetdom, etc.) of God.

Israel did something similar when it worshipped the golden calf, betraying and making a mockery of something good and beautiful from their life world. There was nothing wrong with the gold from which the calf was made, nor with the fact that an image of a golden calf was formed from it, but it lost its natural goodness, economic worth and aesthetic beauty the moment Israel mistook it for the god who had led and liberated them from Egypt and provided them with salvific sense and meaning as a nation (Exodus 32:4). The story of Israel’s golden calf bears a striking resemblance to the ideology of church-centredness in which the church, a church or any other societal institution, organisation or community is idolised, revered and presented as the giver of salvific sense and meaning for this life and, in many instances, for the afterlife.

In this essay the margins of salvific sense and meaning of what I call the church-centred, ghetto and diaspora approaches to society are discussed within the broad outlines of the first, second and third testaments of the Bible and the all-embracing ambience of the Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood, Prophetdom, etc.) of God which oscillates in narrowing and widening histories, percolates in deepening and heightening dimensions, fusing, moving and meandering in, through and with God’s grand acts of creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation.

The phrase “sense making approach” or “sense making God-life-and-world view” is used as an alternative for familiar terms such as “religion”, “religious faith”, “common sense”, “ideology”, “value/belief system” or “worldview”. In this way a sense making approach captures various ideas, pointers and assumptions while portraying the basic pattern and configuration of a person or a group of how God, humanity and the physical-organic universes fit together and make sense in all walks of life. Second, the main object of this essay is to portray the “sense making outlines” of the three approaches to salvific sense and meaning against the background of First, Second and Third Testament perspectives and their connection to the grand acts of God’s creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation as milestones of the meandering processes of the Commonwealth of God.

## 2 CHURCH-CENTRED (= SECULARISATION) APPROACH

*Jesus announced the Kingdom of God – what came then was the Church - Alfred Loisy*

### The church: A divine/semi-divine institution in the world?

The ideology or sense making approach of church-centredness operates with the idea that the Church, a church or an ecclesio-centric section of society is, firstly, a divine or semi-divine body and institution of salvific sense and meaning which guides, cares for and even carries people salvifically from this life into the next, and secondly that the Church or a church is the sole instrument, sign and vehicle of God's Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood and Prophetdom, etc.) meandering through history and the many universes.

The ideology of church-centredness is never mentioned, discussed or even heard of amongst the many ideologies and sense making systems of our day, generally because the church-centred approach is carried by a special divine grounding and endorsement of its whole sense making logic of how the church as a divine institution fits into human societies of this world. Some of the factors which sustain the ideology of church-centredness are: First, God has directly assigned to and given the church and the churches their operational missionary task of being the salvific sense and meaning provider(s) in this life and beyond. Second, the Church and the churches experience themselves as guided, cared for and carried without fail by God in the present and the next world while they carry out their operational missionary task in a two-pronged way: internally to guide, care and carry their members in this life and the next, and externally to guide, care for and carry their members in this life world into the fold of being the real people of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ, God's sacrament, God's building and servant in this world through proselytising, evangelising and conversion. Thirdly, the divine operational missionary task of the Church and the churches includes the obligation (self-imposed) to authorise and endorse salvific-spiritual values and beliefs, as well as to criticise and expose "secular" ideologies such as racism, sexism, tribalism-ethnocentrism (nationalism), capitalism, communism-socialism, fascism, liberalism and materialism, all aspects of worldly society – by means of the Gospel, the Word of God, Spirit-filled experience or Magisterial structures.

The main problem with the ideology of church-centredness derives from the church/world scheme, and the blind spot of nearly all churches is evident in their erroneous assumption that the *Church* or a *church* should be treated as an eternal and divine construct which has to be respected, revered and even worshipped, while the *world* is seen as the playground and operational domain of human beings in society which is for all practical purposes secularly cleansed of God. The basic conclusion, drawn from a view in which the Church or churches are divine constructions amongst the merely human constructions, institutions, organisations and communities in society, is that the Church or a church is exempted by virtue of its divine aspect from being

an ordinary human organisation, and is elevated instead to being the sole centre, vanguard, sign and instrument of the Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood and Prophetdom, etc.) of God. In this sense church-centredness is in no way better or less pernicious than the racism, nationalism, sexism, capitalism, communism, fascism, or religionism doing the rounds in our world. Each of these ideologies elevates, and thereby reduces a facet, mode or dimension of the created world to the role of exclusive meaning-giver and sense making agency of people's lives. One has to note that nearly all these so-called secular ideologies in history have been given, unwittingly, a turn to be divinely authorised and endorsed, and to be hauled into the bosom of a divinely conceived church.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic theologian Alfred Loisy (d.1940), who was excommunicated by his church, formulated a powerful subversive and anti-church-centred statement:

Jesus announced the Kingdom of God – what came then was the Church (Loisy 1929:153).

In a forceful way this statement of Loisy not only subverts the church-centred sense making approach but is an explicit rejection of the age-old perception that the Church and the churches are the only signs and instruments of God's Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood and Prophetdom). According to this view the Church and the churches perceive themselves as interim caretakers which have replaced ancient Israel as the original caretaker of the Commonwealth of God until the Commonwealth of God fully arrives with the future consummation of all things.

Two neo-orthodox Reformed theologians of Dutch origin, O Noordmans (d.1956) and A A van Ruler (d.1970) were among the very few whose lifework presented a promise of moving beyond the traditional church-centred, faith-centred (*fideist*) and theologistic incarceration of God's Commonwealth. In Noordmans' work *Herscheping* (1934) the Kingdom of Heaven (God) is viewed as a critical realisation, embodiment and reconstitution of the Spirit of God as agent and actor of God's mysterious trinitarian and mainly cross-centred way of doing in Jesus Christ. For Noordmans the suffering and humiliation of Christ happens on a level below the natural creatureliness of human beings and the world. Noordmans' theology has not fulfilled the initial promise of going beyond the church-centred ideology because his dialectical and paradoxical relationship of church/world is carried by a corresponding dialectical-paradoxical supernatural (above creatureliness), and below-natural (below creatureliness) process of trinitarian making which is theo-gnostically centred on the cross of Jesus. Noordmans consistently seems to miss the creaturely level of the natural world with his positioning of the cross of Jesus as a critical concept set in the heart of God's creation. In terms of his theo-gnostic cross-centred logic he even asserts that God cannot help the fallen world without taking part in its suffering (Noordmans 1934:116).

In a very broad way Van Ruler presented the "service and offices" of the apostles of the emerging Third Testament period as "service and offices of the Kingdom of God". He unfortunately fell back into the lap of a Reformed

church-centred ideology with his follow-up statement, that the apostles simultaneously produced the groundwork for what is called the Church (Van Ruler 1952:28). Instead of expanding the “services and offices” of the New Testament apostles as offices, functions and processes of the Kingdom (= Commonwealth) of God to all societal organisations and institutions, including churches as organisations of faith, in a real prismatic and multiverse sense, Van Ruler’s second statement amounts to a church-centred failure of nerve. In addition he gave his promising first statement a further church-centred spin with his adoption of the traditional neo-orthodox view that the Church as a semi-divine institution espouses the divine-human existence of Christ (Van Ruler 1952:34).

Since the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century hard-core church-centrists have indulged in increasing deifying processes of all sorts: Christ has to a large extent lost his human creaturely side, even his resurrected humanly side. What remained was the pure and perfect, the divine Son of God, the divine ghost in the human body who ascended to the heavenly place where ‘he is sitting on the right hand of the Father’ as the divine Son of God and as the middle agent of the eternal trinity; the Church has lost its human side – the residue is the divine body of God (or Christ) in the world; the Bible is no longer the “Words of men and women”, only the “Word(s) of God” which is in an inerrant and infallible sense mirrored by God’s Spirit, brimming with divine readiness to be copied by people into their lives; and people’s experiential patterns of faith, belief and trust and their communities of faith (= churches) have lost their human-creaturely side in favour of divine transformational face-lifts and an overlay of holiness.

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century liberal and human-minded Christianity has operated mainly from the worldly side of the church-centred “church/world” scheme. Any reference to something divine around Christ, the Church, the Bible and faith experience has been regarded throughout as naïve and therefore had to be subjected to a critical modern consciousness. Liberal and human-minded Christianity, although operating with a mixture of fear of and haughty disdain for the naivety of an extreme church-centred emphasis on the “churchly” side of the church/world system, sent themselves on a fishing expedition to discover skills and tools of the historical-critical, social-critical and critical-rational kind. The liberal change of the sense-making lever of the “church/world” coordinate system on the worldly side amounted to taking issue with hard-core church-centred approaches within their own divinely instituted and constructed domains.

Modern liberal and human-minded Christians view their skills and tools of the worldly kind as a means of achieving the goal of discussing God, the Church, the Bible and faith in a theoretically objective and neutral scientific way. Therefore, they also maintain that societal processes such as the secularisation process – which amounts to the emptying of church pews and the diminishing of the church’s domain in society – can be described without adopting an evaluative stance (Berger 1973:112).

### **The church/world coordinate system**

As noted, the church-centred (= secularisation) approach is constructed mainly around the coordinates of “church/world”. “World” in church-centred circles is used, firstly as the societal space outside and external to the Church and churches, and secondly the “world” is the realm of dimensions and domains where sin and evil have the upper hand. In various church-centred approaches the term “world” is used as a fuzzy mixture of a spatial terrain and sin-drenched dimensions and domains. For the coordinates “church” and “world” one could substitute other pairs such as “religious/sacramental  $\wedge$  secular”, or “sacred  $\wedge$  profane”. The sense making view which emerges from these pairs is ambivalent: while religious institutions are portrayed as divine islands in secular societies, these divine islands determine and test every trace of the divine in the worldly side of society and people’s everyday worldly acts and doings for authenticity and probity.

Depending on where one puts the emphasis, the church  $\wedge$  world problem-setting can be depicted as two concentric circles (cf. diagram 1).

Diagram 1

Church

World

The church-centred “church  $\wedge$  world” approach has been two millennia in the making. Many of the later church-centred tendencies were born during the early centuries of the Common Era, especially during the years of Constantine. During the Middle Ages (500-1400) the main tendency of a *corpus Christianum* (= the body of Christianity) was largely associated with the ambience and the margins of the Church of those days. The late medieval societal picture is far more complicated than is usually historically constructed, especially with the growing number of studies on the impact and contribution of the Muslim-Arab Enlightenment of the years 900-1400CE. George Makdisi’s *The rise of humanism in classical Islam and the Christian west* (1990) has melded divergent material from Islam, Christianity and Judaism into a portrayal of the period that surpasses any church-centred historical perspective. Movements that gradually separated the arts, science and culture from the authority of the Church began during the European Renaissance

(1400-1600), or possibly a trifle earlier. Whereas medieval culture is sometimes called a unitary ecclesiastical culture, the process of the diminishing and receding power and influence of churches in society has been labelled 'secularisation'. In the modern era positive and negative tendencies were singled out in the vast literature about secularisation processes of societies, depending on what sense making clues a specific writer could discover and gather from such a process.

Ironically, when the, or a, church is designated on the whole as the divine or idolised partner of the coordinate system or dichotomy of church society/worldly society, then the seeds of secularisation of the encroaching and increasing secularised cleansing of God or anything religious from large sections of worldly society is an incipient yet unalterable given that essentially prefigures at least the initial steps of the secularisation process. The church as the sole divine representative of God, covering large parts of society at the beginning of the process, remains the sole divine representative of God in the most secularised society, albeit in ongoing recession, moving to increasingly minute outposts of society. In a dualistic church-centred mind the church is identified with God and God's primary actions and the world – cleansed of God – is identified with worldly reason and rationality. Yet, ironically and strangely the slightest hint of independence in the worldly arena will mean a rapidly diminishing role, not only for the Church, but for God.

Anyone who thinks for himself or herself in a worldly (i.e. a reasonable) way will not be dictated to by clerical office-bearers, church bureaucrats or, for that matter, by a theologian's theologistic web-design of how God acts, cares for and carries people in this world and the next. The idea that rationality and historicity in the worldly arena are cleansed of any experiential traces of God is usually carried by the knock-on view, especially in Western history, that rational and historical processes are easy to understand and explain, irrespective of a person's ideological or sense making God-life-and-world view. Hence the phenomenon of secularisation is viewed and made sense of in terms of a non-evaluative approach. The pitfall in this line of reflection is to assume the full weight of secular rationality and historicity in the worldly realm alongside a societal but divine ecclesio-centric island, the church where God-talk is the normal language of the day. One has to bear in mind that this approach crops up in umpteen guises depending on whether the input is from the religious (= church) or the secular (= worldly) side. The sociologist, Peter Berger, starts from the worldly side with what he claims to be a value-free sociological analysis. Theologians and church-technocrats as a rule start from the religious/church side where commitment to the church (i.e. God) is the highest value of life and eternity. The latter procedure exudes either a fear of the secular world or an attitude of divine superiority towards the secular world where scientific and objective rationality and historicity are supposed to rule public discourse.

### **Variants of the church/world scheme**

Many catholic, orthodox, protestant and religious conservative people think and operate in terms of a far stronger emphasis on the "church" than on the

“world”. Strictly human- and liberal-minded groups conversely emphasise the “world” rather than the “church”.

Two approaches with the emphasis on the church in the problem-setting of church/world are discussed below:

- a. Sacramentalist church-centred approach
- b. Populist church-centred approach

The first set of variants of the relationship of “church” and “world” revolves around the centre where God’s presence is localised and concentrated in either a sacred and sacramental domain - the house of God, or a gathering or fellowship of religious faith - where the Word of God is proclaimed. The smaller circle is the actual sphere of salvific sense and meaning. However, salvific sense and meaning applies to both spheres, for the world must be alerted to the criteria for salvific action and conduct that are propagated and accepted by the Church. This is the root of the ambivalence: the sphere and realm of the Church, which is largely identified with the Kingdom (= Commonwealth) of God, has to bring the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world (= non-Christians), and at the same time provide the orientation or guidelines for the worldly end of Christian life – its politics, art, culture. But the impact of the Church on the worldly end of the scheme is on low ebb in spite of the upsurge in religiosity in late modern societies.

Two approaches follow with the emphasis on the “worldly” leg of the problem-setting of church/world:

- c. Ernst Troeltsch’s historical-critical worldly approach
- d. Peter Berger’s societal-critical worldly approach

In the second set of variants of the “church/world” scheme the world is not antipathetic to the church which is only important as a historical, cultural or social phenomenon. The world – the sphere of “rational” and “historical” secular experience – is portrayed, not totally without salvific sense and meaning but as a vast realm of society which is cleansed of ecclesiastic interventions of church officials and bureaucrats and subsequently of interventions by God.

**a. Sacramentalist church-centred approach**

The “Church” in the sacramentalist church-centred approach is carried by the metaphor of a divine and eternal ship anchored in the ocean of history. The character of this eternal and divine ship, seemingly and supposedly moving through the centuries, right across the lives of Christians, is that the ship is subject to considerable undulatory disturbance in the ocean of history. While there is a bee-hive of industry inside the ship, the anchor of the *depositum fidei* is now and then taken from one side of the ship and dropped on the other side when the winds, waves and currents change direction and threaten to overwhelm the ship and dislodge it from its anchored position.



Sacramentalist church-centredness embodies a divine socialist caring and carrying ideology of salvific sense and meaning of life on earth, life hereafter, and eternity through the Church as the keeper, holder and provider of divine truth through the Captain – the Holier than Holy Father and his crew – the hundreds of holy fathers on the ship and the thousands of less than holy lay passengers making the trip to eternity. In a derivative sense every one of the protestant churches that has broken away from the Holy Mother Church sees itself as the true holder, keeper and provider of salvific sense and meaning. Like the Holy Mother Church, the other churches are – maybe in a lesser sense – idolised and revered as the only centres, instruments and signs of the meandering and roaming processes of the Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood and Prophetdom) of God in people's lives through many histories and many universes.

At least four divergent factors play determining roles in the grounding and moulding of the sense making approach of sacramentalist church-centredness:

### **The first supporting factor of a sacred and sacramentalist church**

The first factor amounts to the processes of the Commonwealth of God that are concentrated and located within the sacred and sacramental realm of One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the eternal body of God drawn as a metaphysical blanket over the whole temporal world. The processes and happenings of the divine and sacred, sacramental and religious realm are linked and connected in a concomitant and accommodating way to the natural and human, secular and profane counterparts of the realm of the world. Loisy's statement that "Jesus announced the Kingdom of God – what came then was the Church" could be taken as the sense making motto of sacramental church-centredness. The subversive motto should actually be written and installed above the entrance of every church building that operates as a sacred space, sacramental enclosure or house of God.

The sacred-sacramental  $\wedge$  secular-profane scheme as a sense making tool pair took on various forms in history. The origin of the sense making tool pair as well as the five main tendencies in which these modern tool pairs operate, is not my main interest here. In passing, the five main tendencies of the sacred-sacramental  $\wedge$  secular- profane approach detected in modern history are as follows:

- the two sets of pointers of the sacred-sacramental  $\wedge$  secular-profane approach are set in *opposition* to each other, or
- the two sets of pointers of the sacred-sacramental  $\wedge$  secular-profane approach *accommodate-complement* each other, or
- the two sets of pointers of the sacred-sacramental  $\wedge$  secular-profane approach ride a *dialectical- paradoxical* see-saw in relation to each other, or
- one pointer of the sacred-sacramental  $\wedge$  secular-profane approach is *irrupting* into the other, or
- one pointer of the sacred-sacramental  $\wedge$  secular-profane approach *is annulling and effacing* the other.

In the modern era traces of a wholesome but scattered sixth tendency have emerged within the Christian world: on the one hand driven by an assumption that the Commonwealth (= Kingdom) of God cannot be theologistically pinned down and located in the past or the present, or removed to the future or the end of time we assume that in the moving and meandering of the Commonwealth of God through the immense sweep of time of the many universes it is closely connected to the full spectrum of God's grand acts of creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation. On the other hand we assume that the wholesome and embracing character of the Commonwealth is detected in the simultaneous at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and the physical-organic environment through scattered traces and vestiges of experience, events and happenings wherever and whenever these are encountered in the world.

### **The second supporting factor of a sacred and sacramentalist church**

The second determining factor concerns the hierarchic structural character of the Holy Mother Church built with strong clues and cues from the ancient Greek view of cascading structural levels from God as the most pure and perfect, most holy and high to the lay person on the lowest level as the least holy and lowliest in the Church. Of interest is that the cascading hierarchical model is heavily indebted to both Plato through the neo-Platonism of 200-300 CE as well as on Aristotle as delivered by neo-Aristotelian Muslim and Christian philosophers of the later medieval period of 900-1300 CE.

One of the main clues which emerged through Platonic and neo-Platonic traditions is the idea of continuous *mimesis*, *mirroring* and *imitation* of the forms of the real heavenly world into the unreal ordinary world. When the shadows on the wall of the cave in the Platonic allegory are seen as the mimetic and mirroring processing agency of the real heavenly forms, the quality of the mirroring and imitation varied in Christianity from extreme brightness and clear images to shadowy and darkened profiles of the heavenly forms. The quality of mirroring varying from lighter to shadowy, from the sun as the lightest, the brightest and the most real reality to complete darkness as the most unreal of realities, determined among Christian mystics how near and close or how remote God and human beings are from each other. Some Christian mystics experienced God as the light of lights in a capsule-like area of the mind or in life as so genuinely mirrored and copied that the dividing line between God and created human being virtually disappeared. In this setup it seems sensible that if the distance between God and a human being were completely eliminated - a possibility that is strongly suggested here - a human being would encounter him/herself. Would a human being recoil smartly and resume a "respectable" (and convenient) distance? This question should constantly be directed at strong mirroring and imitation approaches. On the other hand the more shadowy and dark the mirroring and copying of God in a person, the more remote the experience of God becomes to that person.

The main clue that one can extract from Aristotelian traditions is that of continuous *actualisation processes* and *processing of movements* of which

the starting and finishing points are not only part of the processes but also the turning points where the processes move to and fro. These actualisation processes are seen as two processes constituting and consisting of one substantial process. Two detectable processes that are actually formalised and materialised as one substantial process are Aristotle's view of a human being's soul and body as a unitary substance. It was the Christian Aristotelians of the late medieval period who remoulded Aristotle's unitary human being under neo-Platonic influence into two substances: an immortal soul and a mortal body. Aristotle used the idea of *entelechy* as an actualisation process of pure and perfect forms transforming themselves into physical and matter-like bodies forming part of the real world. For example, the generic form of a horse is discernible in all horses in the world. Simultaneously, *entelechy* means the opposite matter-like body-and-thing process whereby the pure and perfect form receives its individual and particular character. Every individual horse in the world is a separate entity and differs a bit from others. The term "entelechy" is made up of the Greek words *en telei echo* which can mean 'to be in perfection' as well as "to be in completion".

A second clue from both these traditions is the distinction between the intelligible and sensible realms of the world. For Aristotle the intelligible or knowable (Greek: *noetos*) mode of the mind is to know in a top-down process from the top level where a philosopher is engaged as a theorist (Greek: *theoros* as God-seer or spectator) within the realm of the mind where the theoretical sciences (= theology, mathematics and physics) have their being. In the sensible (Greek: *aisthesis*) realm of the mind in a bottom-up process one perceives through the senses everything that is material and empirical as individualised entities which in turn endorse the particular forms in which they are moulded as entities. These two-way processes are to be taken as a unified substance in Aristotle's approach to the human mind. In the Platonic tradition the intelligible or theoretical (Greek: God-seeing) knowledge of the forms of the real world, the heavenly world of forms, is mirrored and imitated in the sensible world, the less real world of perception and the senses.

While the Western Church emphasised Aristotle more than Plato and the Platonic traditions – it could be asserted at least since Thomas Aquinas (d.1274) – the Eastern Church emphasised Plato more than Aristotle and the Aristotelians since early in 1054 CE. The formalising – in the literal sense of the word – and perfecting processes of oneness, goodness, truth and beauty are accessed through the role of being the "God-spectator" (Greek = *theoros*) – the Holy Father and his priestly male group of later years – either mirrored in the Platonic sense or processed in realising perfection in the Aristotelian sense lower down the line to all people in need of these divine insights of the God-spectator (or philosopher). The idea of a pope in this sense emerged from the following three factors: the Greek idea of the philosopher as the *theoros*, the highest and closest spectator of the mind of God, the ancient Roman idea of the Pontifex Maximus as the head of the ancient Roman religious college of Pontiffs (= bridge makers and overseers of the bridges) and the high priest of Israel's tabernacle and temple periods.

**The populace, the masses or employees used as fuel in the operations and actions of priests, politicians and CEOs**

The top-down cascading management structure of sacramentalist hierocratic (= management by holy men) churches has many counterparts in modern institutions, organisations and communities. Notable are the top-down managerial processes following the cascading route from the head of a government down to the citizens of a state, from the CEO of a company, corporation, university or marriage down to the employees, shareholders, players, stakeholders and marriage partners.

Different factors from different sense making approaches have been suggested as reasons why downward cascading societal structures have continued over centuries and even seemed to stand the test of time.

- The idea of a pecking order in the animal world when applied to human institutions and organisations seems fanciful to some but scientific observable fact to others.
- For many the obvious factor regarding the continuation of a cascading sacramentalist hierocratic structure is surely to be ascribed to God's guiding and caring actions through history.
- Populist social Darwinism ascribes the continuation of the top-down cascading organisational structure to the principle of the survival of the fittest. The strongest, hardest and fittest gain the most dominant position.
- An interesting multi-factoral pattern on the continuation of hierarchical top-down cascading structures can be mapped out by extracting a few clues and cues from the work of the French post-Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (d.1990), who ascribes the apparent durability of this type of structure in modern society to the materiality and utter concreteness of the ideological sense making tools and operations of an organisational structure (= church, state or corporation) embodied in the daily practices and rituals of such institutions or organisations. The sense making tools and operations of the institution determine to a large degree how, what and where the concrete and material practices and rituals make sense in the bodily actions and doings of members, citizens or employees. One must take into account that the vast majority of people at the lower end of the institution act primarily in terms of how these rituals and practices make sense for the sense makers at the top, thus the definers and presenters of the rituals and practices (= the priests, politicians and CEOs). For that to happen the member, citizen or employee at the lower end of the institution has to buy into the sense making of the institutional practices and rituals while dumping and scrapping large chunks of his/her own sense making experiences in the process, or repress these experiences for the period of his/her membership of the institution or organisation. There is reason to doubt, however, that the vast and ballooning numbers of the lowest echelons in our society, the destitute are really part of this dispensation. This is not a political statement, not primarily, that is, but only by default. The destitute

are the “faceless masses”, i.e. soulless, not *in line* for promotion because not *seen*.

Firstly, frustration and even revulsion sets in over time because of the dumping and scrapping or repression of sense making experiences which are not shared with the official practices and rituals of the institution or organisation (Balibar 1993:12-13). In some instances the dumped or repressed sense making experiences of the members and employees are expressed through group solidarity from below, i.e. labour or mob action and sometimes even revolt.

Secondly, the members allow their individual sense making experiences to be permeated and transformed, at least in appearance, by the practices and rituals of the institution, organisation or community in order to, or at least in the hope of achieving and acquiring something of great value, namely acceptance, dignity and respect, a position of power and status, making more money, a better life, or a fulfilment of a divine promise of going to heaven by strictly following the said rituals and practices.

Thirdly, in their managerial operations top managers (= priests, politicians and CEOs) use the church populace, political masses or corporate employees, willingly and/or unwillingly, as fuel for the indefinite continuance of the organisation and institution. This is the main reason why top managers (= priests, politicians and CEOs) present the practices and rituals embodied in the operational behaviour and actions of the institution and organisation as solely in the interest of the members and employees. While the operations and actions of top managers nearly always serve their own interests in the first place, if not exclusively, they vehemently deny any selfish motive at the expense of the lower ranks. In modern institutions and organisations such as churches, governments, corporations and universities the upper echelons always claim to have the interests of the lower echelons at heart, and therefore have to be revered, respected and, especially, paid beyond the dictates of justice and economic sense for their efforts to lead an institution or organisation that is in any case in action and operating more than satisfactorily without their leadership and management. Examples of smoothly operating organisations that are managed into ruin by managers who paid themselves exorbitant bonuses are rife in the current world scene. Thus the “grey areas” in society are always found out by opportunists and exploited to the detriment of the less alert, ensuring and shoring up the primacy of the “law of the jungle”.

### **The third supporting factor of a sacred and sacramentalist church**

The third factor in the formation of sacramentalist church-centredness has to do with the very mundane idea of a *templum* as a measured spatial surface, enclosure or room in ancient Roman society. The word “templum” was mainly used for a site on the ground or in a part of the sky demarcated by an *augur* (= a person reading and interpreting signs and omens) where signs and omens (= auspices) from the gods could be received and put into words (Adkins & Adkins 1996:23). The function of these demarcated sites or spatial enclosures in the Roman world was strictly connected to the gods that were inaugurated and allocated to a particular templum.

The first level of religious experience, or sense making experience of the connection between the gods, human beings and the physical-organic world was that of ordinary rooms, spatial enclosures or *templa* (plural of *templum*) of the household (Stamper 2005). An ordinary *templum* was any societal area where people experienced themselves to be in contact with the specific god for the occasion at the demarcated surface or where the occasion and event took place within the enclosure designated by an augur. What we regard as the kitchen today involved a god of the hearth – the Romans called her Vesta. The hearth was under the care of women. To let the hearth fires die was a disgrace. Small offerings would be fed to Vesta at the evening meals. Venus the goddess of love played her role in the spaces of sexual and fertility activities in private homes. Wherever a designated flat or three-dimensional space was used for a specific function a specific god was associated with that space.

The second level of religious experience in Roman society was that of families, or clans, called *Gens*. They honoured common ancestors and specific deities which the clan claimed as their own.

The third level of religious life in Rome was that of public spaces or state *templa*. The state maintained a large network of religious officials who presided over temples and public spaces, events and festivals. The public *templa* or sacred precincts were the sites where the awesome faces and attributes of the gods were on display. Public rituals were performed at these sites to honour the gods who were also divine role-players in profane spaces like private homes and public buildings. For instance, the six Vestal Virgins had the duty of watching over and tending the sacred hearth of the state in the temple of Vesta in Rome. Venus was the Roman goddess of love, beauty and courtesans to whom many public temples were dedicated in Rome. The *Pontifices* (or priests) were responsible for state and public religion (Adkins & Adkins 1993:221; Richardson 1992:1-2).

The fourth level of Roman religious experience comprised the mystery cults which were essentially the only type of substantive sense making experience that the average Roman citizen could utilise to establish and maintain a close relationship with a supernatural agency.

The distinction of later Roman Catholic Christianity between “sacred” (holy) and “secular” (nearly cleansed of anything holy) received a strong impetus from the ancient Roman approach to ordinary surfaces and enclosures where the daily faces and role playing of the gods were experienced and the special sacred temple-type of surfaces and enclosures where the more powerful side of the gods was contemplated, worshipped and asked for advice, especially by the *augurs*. Note that “contemplation” conveys something of its original meaning of being (reverentially) in the presence of a god within a designated enclosed space (= *templum*) inaugurated (consecrated) by an *augur* (= the omen and sign reader who usually inaugurated or set the margins of the enclosed space).

**The fourth supporting factor of a sacred and sacramentalist church**

### The veil of the holy realm of the Old/First Testament

The fourth factor operating as a support system for the sacred-church/secular-world divide can be characterised by the elaborately decorated curtain (veil) in a pristine intact state between the Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place, or the most holy inner room that sheltered Yahweh's unseen presence and the Holy, the Holy Place, or the less holy outer room of the Tabernacle and later Temple of Israel (Ex 26:31-37). The veil between the holier than holy and the holy in the tabernacle and the temple signifies the located and erected and temporalised and established holy presence of the name of God, Yahweh. The holy presence of God, gathered from consensable negotiated clues in divergent Old/First Testament texts, is manifested in the following reflective pattern: God's presence is holy as and when the presence of the Godness of God is *intact, in the act* and *ex-act, out of the act*, thus very near and close yet totally other and different from the humanness of human beings and the naturalness of nature (= the universe-ness of the universe).

Holy in the Old/First Testament sense is where the experience of the connectedness and otherness of God, human beings and nature are processed in the same configurations and patterns of experience, intact in the same acts of experiencing atonement as at-one-ment in the old English sense. But in pressing to the limits of the mystery of holy and holiness one has to add to at-one-ment the makeshift term at-other-ness or at-other-ment which is expressive of the radical otherness of God, human beings and nature from each other. The mystery of being holy and holiness manifests itself in the simultaneity of the *location and concentration* of the *closeness and otherness* of God's Godness, human beings' humanness and nature's naturalness, a process, pattern, configuration or act of experience.

The salvific sense and meaning of pockets and packages of holiness in the Old/First Testament periods of Israel's history are characterised by distinctive events and forms which were in some or other form veiled from what eventuated around them with other people. The narrative about Yahweh, Moses and the burning bush event of Exodus 3 expresses something of such an ambience of veiled holiness in which God, the human Moses and the burning-bush as a physical-organic entity are in holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment with each other in the setting of the narrative. The mobile Yahweh stretches out to the past history of holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment with Moses' fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and stretches out to the future process of delivering (= in holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment) the people of Israel from the oppression of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and thus bringing them to a good and large land, a land overflowing with milk and honey (Ex 3 and 4). The scene of the burning bush discloses the dimension of the veiling and partition of the holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God with the people of Israel and nature as distinct from other people, their gods and their interaction with nature. In the events of the burning bush the Godness of God comes into being through God's self-designated name: "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14).

The Old/First Testament ambience of the narrative of the burning bush does not allow a severing of a person's "essence or being" from that person's "acts or doings". Being is acting out in being an act, and an act is being in becoming an act. The mobility and dynamic processing of Yahweh's being-in-action in the burning-bush scenario militate against a halving into separate realms of a person's being and a person's acts, a person's inside and outside. The supernatural agency of an unmoved mover of Aristotle or the modern idea of an absolute human subject is not expressive of the concentration and location of Yahweh's presence in the burning bush before the sandal-less Moses. The shifting and turning presence of God's holiness in action, thus at one and at other with Moses, the human being and the pocket of nature, the burning bush on Horeb, the mountain of God (Ex 3:1) seems veiled to anyone outside the at-one-ment and at-other-ment history of the past, present and future of the people of Israel.

In the Old/First Testament the theme of veiled holiness of events, happenings and human actions involves in every instance the at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and nature. The theme of veiled holiness is detected in the Davidic tradition of the fulfilment of the ancient promises of Yahweh in the Davidic/Solomonic Kingdom as a high point in ancient Israel's history. In the Mosaic and prophetic contractual and covenantal relationship between God, human beings and nature the theme of veiled holiness is brought into sharp focus in the covenantal rule of law. In obedience and adherence to the multiple contractual stipulations one is embraced with Yahweh's blessing while disobedience and transgression elicits Yahweh's wrath and punishment. The priestly processual patterns and extended frameworks of offerings are an expression of the centrality and keystone character of the cult in Israel. The tabernacle and later temple with its physical veil between the inner and outer chambers sets the nexus between heaven and earth, between the realms of holier than holy and (less) holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and nature (Neusner 1992:36).

In the era of Israel's tabernacle and later temple the qualities of holy and holiness in the sense of the mystery of the close-connectedness and faraway otherness of God, human beings and nature, were located and concentrated in the space of the holier than holy, the *sanctum sanctorum* or the Most Holy part of the tabernacle behind the intact and untorn veil or curtain. The intact and untorn veil signifies the partition in the coordinate system of "most holy and holy", "holier than holy and holy" or *sanctum sanctorum* and *sanctum*. The comparative localities and concentrated presences of holiness or at-one-ment and at-other-ness of God, human beings and nature on both sides of the partition should not be viewed as "holy" and "unholy" but rather as "holy" and "less holy".

Correlative to the concentration and placing of the name and presence of Yahweh in the most holy place one has to indicate the embracing tendency of "desacralising", "demythologising" and "denaturalising" in Israel's history, especially in correlating Israel's history with the surrounding Near Eastern God-life-and-world approaches (Berger 1973:121-128; Weber 1952:225-255).



The people of Israel, whether only a tribe or a conglomerate of tribes, had to define themselves time after time amidst the sense making approaches of the surrounding cultures which operated with strong continuities between sacred and divine forces which were permeating, mingling and mixing the human and the natural physical-organic worlds. Israel's God was not only the creator of the world but the *only* God. One of the essentials of the Torah is found in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." According to Van Selms (1978:38) the Hebrew text is best translated as, "Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is a loner". He indicates further that the OT is using the word "one or solitary being" to signify persons who were living alone in a place where they had no family ties, like Abraham in Canaan, and Lot in Sodom. God appears without mates or offspring, unaccompanied by a family of gods. When it was said of the Lord that God is one, it meant that God is in no way related to the families of gods or pantheons known to the Canaanites or the Babylonians. Van Selms adds, however, that though there is no link whatsoever between the God of Israel and the gods of other nations, the approach of Deut 6:4 is not yet monotheism in the accepted sense that there is only one God. The belief that the Lord is "one" does not deny the existence of other gods on earth or beyond: it merely emphasises that the God of Israel is different from all other gods in the henoteistic sense (Van Selms 1978:38).

Furthermore, characteristic of the God of Israel is that God acts within the historical processes of human beings with radical demands as to how they should act and conduct themselves. The God of Israel also acts simultaneously in the natural processes as God's own tools and working ground. Though the earlier Israelite notions of God cannot be easily identified with the one expressed by Amos, Hosea and Isaiah in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, there are many features that the God of Israel apparently possessed from the earliest times, probably before the arrival of Israelite tribes in Palestine. The mobile, solitary and divine being Yahweh, whatever God may have been before Israel experienced their covenantal chosenness and adoption was for Israel a God who was totally other but close at hand, immediately present. This mystery of simultaneous otherness and at-one-ment of God, Israel as a human community and cosmic nature signifies that God was not a local, tribal or family god for Israel but the creator of all things in heaven and on earth. The strong linkage between Yahweh, Israel and physical-organic nature has been expressed by the notion of a covenant of which a series had been established in different eras of Israel's history. These covenants or (as they were experienced by Israel) benevolent, one-sided, divine contracts made by God, entailed very specific obligations and rules of obedience. The linkage could be broken if these obligations and rules of conduct were not fulfilled as a complete, indivisible package by the whole of Israel. The prophets of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE poignantly delivered the terrible message that God could break the covenantal linkage if God's commands were not obeyed in their totality.

Peter Berger expressed the mobile, solitary and divine being of Yahweh, following Max Weber's description in his work *Ancient Judaism*, as follows:

Yahweh was consequently a 'mobile' God, who could not be tied down either geographically or institutionally - he had chosen Palestine as the land of Israel, but he was not tied to it - he had

chosen Saul and David as kings over Israel, but the monarchy was by no means an institution of divinity in the Egyptian or even the (modified) Mesopotamian sense. This 'mobility' of Yahweh was well expressed in the portable character of the ark of the covenant, which was only 'accidentally' deposited in this or that sanctuary, but even when it finally came to rest in the temple at Jerusalem the latter could in no way be regarded as Yahweh's necessary habitat (with the tremendously important consequence that Israel survived the destruction of Jerusalem first by the Babylonians and then, in a different form, by the Romans). This God demanded sacrifice, but he was not dependent upon it. And, consequently, he was fundamentally immune to magical manipulation (1973:122).

The location and concentration of Yahweh's presence in the most holy place is manifest in two directions, first in the sequence and series of societal roles, functions, pockets and packages which share in the holier than holy side of the sense making God-life-and-world approaches of different periods of Israel's history; and secondly in the roles, functions and operations which, as counterparts to the holier than holy dimension, were viewed as less holy. Veiled holiness of the intact and untorn veil bisected and cut through every grouping and classification of facets, structures, customs, human beings, animals, plants and things in the world of Israel:

- Israel as a nation (holy)  $\wedge$  other peoples and nations (less holy).
- House of God where God's name dwells (holy)  $\wedge$  other houses, homes and shelters of human beings and animals (less holy).
- Laws of God (holy)  $\wedge$  mode, rules and customs of people (less holy).
- Sabbath day (holy)  $\wedge$  six days of the week (less holy).
- Priest (holy)  $\wedge$  other duties, functions and vocations of people (less holy).
- Tithes (holy)  $\wedge$  other resources, monies and life-sustaining wherewithal (less holy).
- Blessings from God (holy)  $\wedge$  blessings in ordinary life (less holy).
- Clean animals and food (holy)  $\wedge$  unclean animals and food (less holy).
- Unmixed cloth (holy)  $\wedge$  mixed material and cloth (less holy).
- Men (holy)  $\wedge$  women (less holy).
- Appropriate use of the name of God (holy)  $\wedge$  use of terms and names referring to human beings, animals, plants and things (less holy).

The veil between the "holier than holy" and the "holy" space in the tabernacle of ancient Israel and later in the temple designated one of the most important sense making cleavages of the social engineering of ancient Israelite society. The cleavage between holy and less holy in every part of society was symptomatic of the establishment, the embodiment and erection of the holier than holy name of Yahweh in the most holy part of the tabernacle and later temple of Jerusalem.

### **The torn veil of the holy realm of the New/Second Testament**

In terms of the New/Second Testament the processes of the reconciliatory simultaneity of the *at-one-ment* and *at-other-ness* of God, human beings and nature are narrated as a series of events of Jesus' death on the cross, the torn

veil of the temple and Jesus being raised from the dead by the Spirit of God as the first act and fruit of the renewal process in creation. The raising from the dead is affirmed and endorsed on the day of Pentecost as the negotiation process of renewal with human beings and natural universes as to how narrow and how broad, how deep and how high, and where and when the locality and intensity of the interconnectivity and otherness of God, human beings and nature are to be experienced.

It is remarkable that the torn veil played such an unemphatic, unassuming, unappreciated and unobtrusive role over centuries in most church-centred approaches. The events of the cross and the resurrection had their fair share as major players in people's sense making approaches through the ages. Even in the most questionable instances the lone cross on the roof of the church had the overbearing and reductionist impact on the butchery theologies of blood and guts, passion and suffering without joy and celebration of new life and empowerment and liberation to this life characterised by the resurrection. When loosened from its intrinsic connection with the resurrection the cross is deprived of the empowerment and liberation of salvific sense and meaning that should be experienced as good earthly human living in *at-one-ment* and *at-other-ment* with God and physical-organic nature. In an unclear sense certain church-centred views on the resurrection are permeated with modern-day Gnostic features in letting the resurrected Jesus walk and pass through closed doors and partitions like a superman of the modern film industry without emphasising the "materiality and objective" character of the torn veil as the real and material designation of any attempt to penetrate borders and partitions, breaking through hard-core doctrines and dogmas, and petrified codes and modes.

According to the biblical narrative the event of the tearing of the veil is a minor and nearly negligible event in the greater scheme of things, squeezed in somewhere between a somewhere of the cross and a nowhere of the resurrection of Jesus on the outskirts of the universe. The impact of the narration of the event of the torn veil by Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45 appeared in two thousand years of Christianity merely as an appendix to the martyrdom on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. The church-centred partial or complete processes of sewing back the veil stands in the way of an open passage which is endless in time and limitless in space. The endless and limitless open passage should have brought about a whole matrix of qualitative open spaces and time zones that people were to be sucked into as diasporic processes embodied in, embraced and surrounded by the presence and ambience of God and physical-organic nature.

The tearing of the veil follows the mysterious closing and narrowing, constricting and descending location and concentration of the sharing of presence and encountering of ambience of God, human beings and nature in a veiled holier than holy place and time zone in the history of Israel. The sense making of the background factors regarding the questions: Why was Israel the chosen one? and Why were the holy *at-one-ment* and *at-other-ness* of God, humanity and nature located and concentrated in the most holy place of the tabernacle? are shrouded by the mystery of God's salvific acts in history (Van Ruler 1955:8). However, the veiling of the most holy spatiotemporal zone

was conjointly, exponentially and cumulatively located and concentrated in the most holy name of God, that is Yahweh, the most holy nation Israel, the most holy law of God, the most holy Sabbath, the most holy contribution of the tithes, the most holy priest, and umpteen most holy other everyday codes and modes of ancient Israel from the smallest communal tribal setting to the largest Davidic society.

The mystery of the veiling of the most holy place in Israel's history is followed by the mystery of the tearing of the veil as an affirmation and endorsement of the reopening and rewidening, redeepening and reheighting of the universes as holy playground and the holy time zones of God's encountering ambience and sharing presence with the ambiances and presences of human beings and physical-organic nature in their simultaneous nearer than near *at-one-ment* and further than far *at-other-ness* of what they are supposed to be in an episode of time and a demarcated context of space.

### **The sewing back of the torn veil with Old/First Testament yarn**

In many church-centred approaches numerous and dubious sense making roles have befallen the event of the tearing of the veil of the temple of Jerusalem. Nearly all Christian churches have in some way or other selective traces and vestiges of restitution of the torn veil. A number of these churches refuse to relinquish the untorn veil as a central sense making energy. It is as if the parting of the veil of the Jerusalem temple in the New/Second Testament narrative was to be either spiritualised or denied as of no consequence regarding good earthly living in its true salvific sense and meaning flowing from the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. The character of various exhortations in the Old/First Testament narrative to keep and adhere to pockets of the veiled holiness tendency for ever and ever prevented many churches from employing a radical torn-veil policy. Fundamentalist mirroring and reading of the exhortations of keeping and holding on to the Sabbath, the tithes, clean food and Israel as God's chosen people to be holy – be on the most holy side of the veil – energised many church-centred approaches in the Christian world to sew back the torn veil selectively and partially with Old/First Testament yarn.

The sewing back attempts of Christian churches amounted to a total sewing back of the veil to its pristine state as an intact, untorn and undamaged holy partition that keeps Yahweh's concentrated and located presence inside the most holy realm with the prescribed once-a-year entry of the high priest. A sacramentalist partial sewing back process amounts to the whole priestly class set in all their doings on the most holy side of the horizontal plane of societal experience while vertically the Israelitic veil and nexus between God and human beings, between heaven and earth, is occasionally parted in the sacramentalist church version by the high priest or pope as the representative of heaven and earth. It seems that even two thousand years of sacramentalist toil are not enough to part the veil between men as (holy)/women (less holy). Women in many churches are still kept out of church office.

The continuation of the untorn veil in the sense making approach of sacramental church-centrists explains the hard bargain driven in sustaining

the concentration of the super-holiness ambience in a particular male person. In addition to the super-holiness concentration in a person, the holy sacramental church as the full succession and replacement of ancient Israel hijacked the mysterious meandering and narrowing, intensifying and widening processes of the Commonwealth of God.

In nearly all Christian churches principles of selective and partial continuation of the “untorn veil” guided and accompanied selective and haphazard sewing back processes undertaken with Old/First Testament yarn. In various cases partial restitution of the torn veil with Old/First Testament yarn provided people with worked-out and composed sets of sense making principles and clues for the structuring of the societies they found themselves in, and ethical compendiums for their members to follow as guidelines for living in that society. In some evangelical and Protestant churches the keeping of the Sabbath, the upholding of the tithes, the idea that a pastor and minister is in the full-time service of God and that a woman should not be a pastor and minister, and especially the idea that the nation of Israel continues to be God’s holy chosen people, can without doubt be attributed to attempts to partially sew back the veil of the temple.

The irony and an uneasiness of centuries of church-centred discrimination against Jews converged strongly in the aftermath of the Nazi holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s in myriad approaches from within Christian circles which emphasised the idea of veiled holiness of the Jewish nation, the special status of the Jewish people as God’s chosen people and the notion that God’s promises to ancient Israel are still in effect and are to be fulfilled by God through special dealings with Israel before the end of the world. For many Christians dynamic Judaism presents God’s ongoing veiled and holy actions with Israel as God’s specially chosen people alongside the Church as God’s most holy body of people in the world.

**Biblical images of the commonwealth of God (*Kingdom of God & heaven*) hijacked, baptised and refurbished as images of the church**

The Presbyterian P S Minear’s book *Images of the church in the New Testament* (1960) and the Roman Catholic Marie-Henry Keane in *The church* (1992) – following the views of A Dulles’ book *Models of the church* (1976) and H Küng’s book *The church* (1976) are excellent expositions of church-centred sense making approaches in which biblical references, images and dimensions of the Commonwealth of God (kingdom, priesthood, prophetdom, etc.) are church-centrally hijacked, permeated with sacredness and theologically refurbished as exclusively applicable to the Church and churches.

The central objection, firstly, that to declare the Church divine in the Roman Catholic sense and semidivine in the Protestant sense is essentially a sense making blunder rather than a sin. Secondly, however, to hijack, permeate and baptise images and dimensions of the Commonwealth of God such as “people of God”, “fellowship of the Holy Spirit”, “body of Christ”, “the building of God”, “household of God”, “sacrament-*Mysterion*”, “servant”, “priesthood”, “prophetdom”, “gathering of Kings”, “messianic community”, “alternative

community” or “agent, experiment, instrument, sign or state of God” as pertaining exclusively to the Church and the churches is an unforgivable sense making sin. However, from a church-centred viewpoint these exclusivist church-centred appellations are generally regarded with the highest degree of reverence as the only way God, the Bible and Church Tradition can be viewed and mirrored into this world.

It is precisely at this juncture that the blind spot of the ideology of church-centredness is manifested: what a Spirit-directed diasporist reckons to be an idolising and worshipping procedure of a global societal body, the Church with the many incorporated churches as derivatives, would be viewed by church-centrists as holy and sacred appellations that deserve to be concretised as the holiest intimations of obedience to God, the Bible and tradition.

Minear, a modern Protestant, tracked down 96 minor and major images and analogies in the Bible – mainly the New Testament – which are exclusively applied to the Church (Minear 1960:268-9). A quick perusal of Minear’s images of the Church leaves one with the impression that at least 80 of the 96 are images and analogies pertaining to the Commonwealth of God and are forced into the sense making clutches of church-centredness. Only about 16 of the images can be applied to a church as a local and contextual societal community.

Keane (1992:6f), a modern ecumenical Roman Catholic theologian, discusses six church-centred models of the church in the following context:

*They explain or synthesise* what we already know or at least are inclined to believe. A model, Dulles tells us, “is accepted if it accords with what history and experience tell us about the Christian life”. Models also have an exploratory or heuristic function. They can lead one to discover new theological insights. Since the Holy Spirit is ever present in the church, his enlightenment might also be taken very seriously when examining church models. Because during those periods in the church’s history when believers seemed less docile and less attentive to the promptings of the Spirit, the church life was impoverished – sometimes to an alarming degree.

### **The church a mystery or problem?**

Dulles describes the present state of the inner core of the church through the notions of “divine self-gift” and “mystery”:

There is something of a consensus today that the innermost reality of the Church – the most important constituent of its being – is the divine self-gift. The Church is a union or communion of men with one another through the grace of Christ. Although this communion manifests itself in sacramental and juridical structures, at the heart of the Church one finds mystery (1976:15).

What Dulles terms “the divine self-gift”, “the innermost reality of the Church” or “mystery” is the juncture where supernatural divine operations – from above

and from below the natural - irrupt into Catholic and Protestant natural church-centred machinations. If one is operating with a *hermeneutic of trust* towards the notions of mystery in Catholic, Protestant and other theological approaches one can accept that what they insert as a mystery or divine self-gift supernaturally as the innermost reality of the Church they just receive back as divine actions which can only be followed and observed to the hilt. However, if one is operating with a *hermeneutic of suspicion* towards the notions of mystery in these approaches it is totally incomprehensible that there is very little realisation that what they insert as mysterious supernatural realities in their day to day theological, church and (religious) faith operations are the expressions of their own sense making patterns of faith, thought or emotional interests and experiences.

When the pointer of “mystery”, which is only to be accepted as something impenetrable without any solution and explanation, is set on a continuum facing the pointer of ‘problem’ as something that can be solved and explained, the side to which you are leaning becomes intuitively clear in terms of the sense making approach you are operating with: to the mystery side of unquestioning acceptance only, or to the problem-solving side of things. My objection is not to the use of the term “mystery”, but to the strategies of either declaring something a problem to be solved when a mystery is at stake, or using the notion of a mystery to mystify a situation that is perfectly within the realm of mundane reality.

Theologistic sense making views of the supernatural order offer the Church firstly in modesty and servitude as the basic undercarriage of the Commonwealth of God in the world. Secondly, God’s Commonwealth pays a hefty price for allowing and letting the church play the modest role of being its sole servant and meaning provider in the world. Part of the deal is to make the world jealous through being the exclusive carrier, sign, instrument and message provider of the Commonwealth of God in the world. In this regard Dulles (1976:115) asserts:

Theologically the term “church” refers to the mystery of Christ as realized in the community of those who believe in him and are assembled in his name. To the Christian believer the Church is not a purely human thing; it is not simply of this creation or of this world; rather, it is the work of God, who is present and operative in the Church through the Holy Spirit, in whom Christ continues his saving presence. Sociologically, the Church is a fact of observation, accessible to persons who do not have faith. Theologically, the Church is a mystery of grace, not knowable independently of faith.”

When trained church-centred eyes and ears encounter Mary-Henry Keane’s list of church models they see and hear the full range of an ecumenical church-centred sense making view of the church as the sign, instrument and undercarriage of the Commonwealth of God:

- The church as the people of God.
- The church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.
- The church as the body of Christ.

- The church as God's building.
- The church as God's sacrament.
- The church as God's servant.

If the above designations representing six models are qualified by adding the words "part of", a mere glance reveals traces of the nonsensical nature of Keane and Dulles' church-centred sacred permeation and sacramental-baptising procedure. It is astonishing to see how the said amplification of Keane's formulations liberates fragments and moments that jell into wholesome vistas of pockets and packages of the infinite meandering, narrowing and widening processes of God's Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood, Prophetdom, etc.) in the universes. From a church-centred sense making perspective the qualifier is an insignificant quibble of natural theology to some, while to others it is a heathenish sweet endearment whispered in the darkness of a fallen world.

From a diasporic Spirit-directed sense making approach the simultaneity of the at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, humanity and natural physical-organic universes is a real mystery. No solution and clarification springs forth when any one of the threesome is set in opposition to the rest, one positioned complementary to the rest, one dialectically and paradoxically defined in relation to the rest, one irrupting into the rest, or one annulling and effacing the rest. Only the mystery of interconnectivity and otherness, at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, humanity and nature makes sense. In this regard the mystery of pockets and packages of holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, being human and nature happens and eventuates everywhere and at any time in the multiversity of universes, within the meandering, narrowing and widening processes of the Commonwealth of God.

#### **b. A populist church-centred approach**

One of the fundamental problems of the church-centred approach is that Church people – clergy and laity alike – had to become jacks-of-all-trades because the ecclesiastically restricted adage "Thus saith the Lord" or "According to the Word of God", had to be proclaimed in every walk of life. Naturally it is impossible to be an authority on every area of society (= the world). Usually the problem is resolved by certain Church people becoming educationists or missionaries while others occupy themselves with public morals, and yet others, theologians as reflectors of religious faith, try to make "the gospel" profitable and relevant to the sciences. In the process society is duplicated, which in turn means that the image of God as the Creator of all things is split into general and particular or direct and indirect experiences of salvific sense and meaning.

In the church-centred approach salvific sense and meaning is reserved for the Church, with the result that the secular world is either half-emptied or in extreme cases totally emptied or theologistically cleansed of such experience. The ghetto approach, as we will see below, extends the dividing line across the whole spectrum of human society, thereby reserving the full experience of salvific sense and meaning for one side of the line, that is all the organisations and institutions that have been Christianised, leaving very little for the other



side. Furthermore, if a person or a societal institution is declared divine, whether by doctrine, church tradition or a particular reading of biblical material, and is therefore effectively proclaimed the centre of the Commonwealth of God, then such a person or institution becomes a golden calf which pretends to lead and guide our salvific experience in the created world (= God's worlds or universes). The term 'world' is used ambiguously by many theologians, theorists of faith and run-of-mill Christians. Sometimes it means the "world as part of the many created universes", and in other instances "world as a universe of sin, evil and temporality". The central question is: To which of these "worlds" is the Christian message of salvation, sense and meaning directed? Do church-centred Christians try to proclaim salvation of the world in the sense that it should become like the church? How often is it not heard that church-centred Christians should lead exemplary and witnessing lives in order for the world to become like them. In terms of a diasporical, wholesome lifestyle, however, it is true that a Christian should especially witness and be the salt of the earth towards the idolised, that is, the putative divine or semidivine societal animals called churches.

On the premise that the Church is the divine centre of Christian life and thus of the Commonwealth of God one could formulate the well-known list of antitheses between (holy) church and (less holy) world:

CHURCH	WORLD
The divine organisation of the Church as percolating into the world, and as the 'house of the Lord' in the sense of a building, is created and maintained by the grace of God. The Church has thus a divine dimension which may not be criticised by other disciplines than Theology, and a human dimension which may be criticised by disciplines such as Sociology and Psychology.	In the world as the domain of human beings, social structures are organised, established and maintained by people. Because God is indirectly involved in the functioning of the worldly structures, these structures as human doings may be fully criticised.
The presence of the Lord is experienced directly in the Church. Therefore reading the Bible, prayer, worship and fellowship and church attendance become genuine religion or spiritual life.	The presence of the Lord is experienced only indirectly in the dimensions of life outside the Church. Non-church activities are called 'ordinary' or 'everyday' life.
The offices of the Church presuppose a special full-time vocation to serve the Lord. Office bearers in the Church are known as ministers, pastors, priests, prophets, apostles, servants of the Lord, God's anointed or clergy.	Occupations in extra-ecclesiastic spheres do not need a vocation - at any rate not a special full-time devotion to the Lord. The criteria are their interest, happiness, inclination and a good income. People in so-called secular occupations are in everyday non-spiritual jobs.
Preaching the Word of God through and under the auspices of the Church and its office bearers is regarded virtually as a communication of revelation by God-self which derives its authority from the Word and the Spirit of God.	Political speeches, philosophical lectures, teaching and conversations can at most be regarded as serving oneself or a group of people. Their authority is mainly human and therefore pertaining to this worldly existence.
Sunday or Saturday is set aside as a Sabbath, a day of rest, or the day of the Lord, a holy day devoted to spiritual and eternal matters.	The ordinary weekdays, from Monday to Saturday, have purely temporal meaning since they belong to everyday secular, profane and less holy life.

Contributions to the Church are called tithes, money for the Lord or thanks and gift offerings to the Lord and his service.

The rest of a person's income is indirectly connected with God since it should at least be used responsibly and accountably, that is, with due deference to human society.

Theology, the science of the Church and God, is the fundamental Christian or Church science dealing with a 'higher truth' than any other science, namely the Word of God (= Holy Scriptures), the divine Church and religious faith. Theology is partly divine and partly human.

The non-theological sciences are ordinary human sciences concerned with how human beings implement their God-given 'rationality' and 'intelligence' to study the physical environment of human beings and society, animals and plants and things and universes.

In Protestant and Catholic circles alike there are two sides to faith, namely divine and human. While religious (Christian) faith is a trusting response to an ultimate reality, namely God; human faith is a trusting attitude toward other human beings and reality (Hill, Knitter and Midge 1990:32).

All other fields of experience, such as thinking, feelings, verbalising, imagining, loving, producing are only human and natural and temporal. They are indirectly related to God through the experiential field of religious faith.

### c. Ernst Troeltsch's historical-critical worldly approach

A third variation of the "church and world" approach can be formulated as follows: Still in accordance with the church-centred approach, the opposite vantage point, namely the "world" in the scheme of "church-world" is taken as the main access point. In other words, the relationship of the religious and secular spheres is approached from the secular or worldly angle. As a rule this provokes vehement opposition from traditional theologians and church people who experience such an approach – which takes its cues and clues from the "world" – as a total secularisation of the Church and a denial of "the faith". In view of the built-in dualistic dilemma of the church-centric approach there is considerable merit in such objections. If one accentuates secular "rationality" and all other secular fields of human experience in one's definition of the antithesis between the religious and the secular spheres one is bound to reduce the religious sphere to vestigial proportions. Note that no matter how minute the island to which the religious realm is reduced, it cannot be wiped out entirely – at least not if the cultural or social theorist still wishes to pass for a Christian. In terms of the sense making assumptions of the church-centred secularisation approach the essence of Christianity resides in the church-centred religious sphere.

Even if a society is totally secularised, a religious-ecclesiocentric island inevitably seems to emerge somewhere in the societal ocean of secular historicity and rationality cleansed of traces of God. We find a fine example in an article written in 1898 by the famous cultural philosopher Ernst Troeltsch (d.1923). He writes that our entire life with its thought processes should be viewed historically. As a result he will have no truck with the authoritarianism of dogmatic method, since it lacks the critical relativising of the historical method. For Troeltsch "dogmatic" is therefore, equivalent to "absolute". The historical process, on the other hand, is relative. In this same essay Troeltsch nonetheless points out that this relative process of historicity is penetrated at two points – in the religion of the prophets of Israel and in the person of Jesus Christ. He hastens to add that this penetration is no dogmatic absolute, no isolation of Christianity vis-à-vis history with its fixed data and variables, but a cut-off point accessible to a historical-philosophical approach and sufficient for

human needs (Troeltsch 1971:123). Here the religious island of the church-centred secularisation approach is progressively reduced through secular-historical rationality until it is no longer perceptible on the surface of the historical process, which then again admits it through a minute fissure, the prophets of Israel and the person of Jesus. The historical method in the “worldly” mode is not pursued consistently. Without that fine fissure in the smooth surface of the historical process Troeltsch would have had to bid the God of Christianity adieu.

**d. Peter Berger's societal-complementarist worldly approach**

Among sociologists of the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Peter Berger is representative of the secularisation approach. In *A rumour of angels* his premise is that “whatever the situation may have been in the past, today the supernatural as a meaningful reality is absent or remote from the horizons of everyday life of large numbers (very probably of the majority) of people in modern societies, who seem to manage to get along without it quite well” (Berger 1969:18). It is interesting to note that Berger's “supernatural as a meaningful reality” in fact defines religion as a dimension distinct from other dimensions. He also ignores the historical problem completely.

In his *The Sacred Canopy* he defines the secularisation process more explicitly. Despite criticism of the hypothesis he insists that the process can be expressed without any ideological-(philosophical) connotations, whether Marxist or Christian. Consequently it is not necessary for a sociologist to adopt an “evaluative stance” with regard to secularisation, but simply to describe it as a contemporary historical process cleansed of any sense making portrayal. His detailed definition is as follows:

By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. When we speak of society and institutions in modern Western history, of course, secularization manifests itself in the evacuation by the Christian Churches of areas previously under their control or influence – as in the separation of Church and state, or in the expropriation of Church lands, or in the emancipation of education from ecclesiastical authority. When we speak of culture and symbols, however, we imply that secularisation is more than a social-structural process. It affects the totality of cultural life and of ideation, and may be observed in the decline of religious contents in the arts, in philosophy, in literature and, most important of all, in the rise of science as an autonomous, thoroughly secular perspective on the world. Moreover, it is implied here that the process of secularization has a subjective side as well. As there is a secularization of society and culture, so is there a secularization of consciousness. Put simply, this means that the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals whose outlook on the world and their own lives owes nothing to religious interpretations (Berger 1969:107-8).

This definition affects not only Berger's view of individual "religiosity", but also societal forms and culture generally. Berger's definition of religion, formulated in the 1960s, is in perfect accord with his view of secularisation as a global process. He sees religion as "the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established". "Sacred" is interpreted as "a quality of mysterious and awesome power", not intrinsic to but influencing humanity, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience (Berger 1969:25). It is therefore not surprising that his exposition of the secularisation of individual religiosity focuses on religion as a dimension distinct from other dimensions, and specifically on the "secularisation of consciousness". He points out, however, that this form of secularisation is not homogeneous in the western world. Secularisation has a greater impact on men than on women, on people in middle life, on urbanites, the working class, Protestants and Jews. In his research he drew mainly on the work of French sociologists of religion. Berger is fully aware that the problem in the United States differs somewhat from that in Europe and Britain because American churches "still occupy a more central symbolic position" (Berger 1969:108). Although secularisation is afoot in America too, the churches have managed to hold their own "by becoming highly secularized themselves, so that the European and American cases represent two variations on the same underlying theme of global secularization" (Berger 1969:108).

Robin Gill points out in his book *The social context of theology* that there is something amiss with Berger's interpretation of the differences between the American and the European evidence. He maintains that a theory of secularisation "which is able to interpret evidence of both decline in individual religiosity in Europe...and persistence (of) individual religiosity in the States, as equally counting for a process of secularization must be suspect at least on grounds of non-falsifiability" (Gill 1975:87). See also Robin Gill's book *The myth of the empty church* (1993) in which he rejects the usual answer that after the First World War, and largely as a result of secularisation, people stopped going to church in Britain as a myth that has misled a generation of scholars and church leaders. Gill's argument leads one to surmise that, despite his insistence to the contrary, Berger in fact has adopted an "evaluative stance".

When he comes to the secularisation of social institutions and culture, Berger moves on surer ground. To his mind secularisation of social institutions is manifest mainly in the move away from ecclesiastic domination in western countries. It is perfectly true that church control of social institutions has diminished drastically since the Middle Ages and that this is an ongoing process. This brings us to the very problem that we mentioned earlier, namely that one's sense making approach to religion, ideology or value systems determines the type of reading of the secularisation process a person advocates. Berger's definition of religion as one dimension among many will necessarily narrow its scope. Hence it is progressively in recession from the realm of secular social rationality. In terms of the idea of the Commonwealth of God the same phenomenon can be seen as a positive differentiating process in which Church domination has dwindled steadily. Whereas Berger maintains that religion is undermined, we view it as a gain in sense making apparatus in which diasporic traces and experiences of God can be encountered in the so called secular realm.

The research of the British sociologist David Martin, mainly captured in his book *A general theory of secularization* (1978), confirmed the thesis that salvific sense and meaning are pervasive in any so-called highly secularised society. Martin in his analysis of secularisation in different countries operates with a limiting but societal comprehensive concept of religion that relates to the overall process of differentiation of “religious” meaning in modern societies. The conservative nostalgia of the secularisation approach concerning the process of the Church losing ground through the ages is turned around through a more holistic evaluative sense making stance in the reflection of secularisation as a problem.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of the church/world approach**

The strength of the “church and world” approach is that people could be organised into a coherent body to be sent into society (= the world) as witnesses, people of God and salt of the earth.

The main weaknesses are: first, the preprogramming of people’s experience of God, salvific sense and meaning to an extent where at times it would seem that in supernaturally dealing with humanity and the physical-organic natural environment, God is compelled to act according to rules prescribed by theologians and expert readers of the Scriptures. The second main weakness is the church-centred sense making assumption that the realm of the church is “replete” with salvific sense and meaning, while the worldly realm is “devoid” thereof. In turn this is based on the pretence that the churches are divine escapist safe havens, with the result that when people do not experience salvific sense and meaning in the world they lose their trust in the Church as the eternal socialist caring mother from birth to death into afterlife.

The flaws of the position that the Church is the sole experiential realm of salvific sense and meaning are usually admitted without demur. In fact supporters of the “church and world” approach tend to add that the Church is expected to do more for transformation and social change than other social institutions because it is supposed to be inherently divine and miraculous. Whether one subscribes to this view would depend on whether one agrees with its underlying sense making assumptions. This may sound tautological and repetitive in the philosophical and faith-theoretical sense, but it sounds “logically divine” to theologians and run-of-mill Christians who experience their Church as a divine or semi-divine area where people can freely talk about God and can worship and revere God with people who share similar sense making experiences.

## **3 THE GHETTO APPROACH**

*There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: “Mine!”* - Abraham Kuyper

The second societal approach at issue here will be discussed as the ghetto approach. Originally a ghetto (from Italian *borghetto*) was a Jewish quarter to

which Jews were restricted by law since the late medieval period. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century legal restrictions fell into disuse. However, in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, ghettos were revived by the Nazis, for example in Warsaw in the 1940s. The notion of a ghetto is used in this essay, not to express the basic antithesis between Church and world, but between Christian and non-Christian organisational and institutional forms. The ideal of Christianising a society is expressed in the approach of the establishment and erection of Christian organisations and institutions in the whole of such a society. A concerted Christianising attempt carries with it an awareness of an antithesis between Christian and non-Christian. The activities and organisations flowing from an emphasis on an antithesis between what is Christian and what is non-Christian turn the Christianising idea of extending the Commonwealth of God into the whole of society against its basic intention with the result that the initiators find themselves ringed around by a society that has closed ranks against them. That is to say, diverse but antithetical sense making groupings and social blocks of people are formed as a result. Thus the antithesis or dividing line between how things make sense to Christians and to non-Christians is extended throughout the varied constituent elements of society, embedded together in an interlocking pattern like tessera in a mosaic, with the same antithetic split evident in each element (see diagram 2).

*Diagram 2*

Churches	Political party	Trade union	University	etc.				Christian life
<b>ANTITHESIS</b>								
Other religions, etc.	Political party	Trade union	University	etc.				Non-Christian life

The antithesis constitutes the problem. The ghetto approach is an improvement on the church-centred secularisation approach which contrasts a Christian Church full of divine salvific sense and meaning with a non-Christian, neutral world without it. The ghetto approach expresses a tendency to see non-Christian organisations as falling under God's common grace and providential caring. Therefore non-Christian organisations and activities are not totally devoid of salvific sense and meaning. What about Christians who belong to non-Christian organisations? Surely many of them experience salvific sense and meaning in the sense of good earthly human living? It is interesting to note that wherever and whenever the ghetto approach has been applied in history, non-Christian organisations were not regarded as neutrally secular, as is the idea of a "worldly" sphere of the church-centred approach. There we found that Christian and non-Christian alike live in terms of general, "neutral" rationality (or "neutral" common sense) in the worldly sphere. The ghetto approach strips all organisations and institutional forms of their neutrality and objectivity hence they are either for or against God's

Commonwealth. This introduces an aggressive note in societies where this approach is dominant. Non-Christians were more or less obliged to organise themselves accordingly, as happened in the Netherlands at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Christians who belonged to these organisations were considered renegades to the cause because they were trying to remove the antithesis set by God-self. Non-Christians were forced into a measure of aggressiveness not of their choosing. A similar problem cropped up in the “church/world” antithesis in that Christians who experience problems with the divine faces of churches are considered to be in opposition to any institutional embodiment of being a church. In many instances Christians who have their daily experience outside churches do not object to the idea of a church as an organisation and community of faith, but to the divine façade of being the exclusive divine body of God - body of Christ - in this world.

Sometimes the premises of the ghetto approach are traced back to Augustine (d. 430). The problem is that there are at least two (and possibly more) trains of thought on the interrelationship of “church and non-church” in Augustine’s writings. First he expounds an extreme Roman Catholic view of the church which he develops consistently in the Donatist controversy, namely that the Church is an outward and visible hierarchical institution for salvation. In addition there is a second approach that he built up around the doctrine of predestination – that of the Church as the *congregatio sanctorum* (communion of saints) or the *communio praedestinatorum* (communion of the elect). The first of these is the basis of the Catholic conception of the Church; the latter influenced the pre-Reformation critics and the reformers of the sixteenth century (Adam 1965:294-296). Augustine worked out the relationship of Church/Non-church in his famous *De civitate Dei* (City of God) (1972) and in his letters. In the history of Christianity the term “state”, as used in the familiar antithesis of Church and state, usually represented the prevailing opinion on non-ecclesiastic spheres. Augustine sees human life in terms of two basic, conflicting principles: the realm of grace (the *civitas Dei*) and that of earthly society (*civitas terrena*). Both are of super-terrestrial origin – the one celestial, the other diabolical (Augustine 1972: Book15, ch 1). World history, which is enacted in six periods, is a mingling of and a war between these two *civitates* (states). Although the state does not actually derive from sin, it is an instrument of power and as such closely linked with sin. When it serves the church, for instance in suppressing heretics, it may attain a higher value. This struggle – the antithesis between two realms – is the first Augustinian clue cited by exponents of the ghetto approach. The second clue deriving from Augustine is that Christian salvific experience extends far beyond the outer boundaries of the church (Adam 1965:293).

Calvin (d.1564) laid even greater emphasis on the idea that human experience of salvific sense and meaning is more comprehensive than that offered by the Church. Church and state should live in harmony and cooperate in obedience to the will and the Word of God. Each should have its own area of jurisdiction. The state has power in civic matters and the Church in spiritual affairs. Calvin abolished the clause concerning the privileges of the clergy from canon law and subjected himself and his fellow-clergy in Geneva to ordinary magistrates in all civic matters. The magistrates in turn were placed

under the jurisdiction of the church council in all spiritual matters. Calvin saw the state – rulers and subjects – as a body composed of Christians.

In Calvin's view the state was instituted by God because of sin, and it operates as an instrument of "common grace" (Rothuizen 1962:234). This is something that functions, not to regenerate humans from within, but to maintain non-ecclesiastic (secular) life. Although many Reformed theologians interpret Calvin's teaching as implying that civic duties are on the same plane as service in the Church, there is a subtle difference. The Church trains human conscience in piety in order to serve God, while the state instructs people in works of charity and civic duty (Calvin 1960: Institutes Book III, ch 19, par 14-16). For this reason the Church is more important and must take precedence over government and subjects in crucial issues. Calvin sees the Church as the "soul" of the state which exercises decisive influence on the laws that are promulgated.

Despite criticism of the dual-level approach to salvific sense and meaning, H Richard Niebuhr expresses Calvin's tendency to wholeness as follows:

Calvin's more dynamic conception of the vocation of men as activities in which they may express their faith and love and may glorify God in their calling, his closer association of Church and state, and his insistence that the state is God's minister not only in a negative fashion as a restrainer of evil but positively in the promotion of welfare ... above all his emphasis on the actuality of God's sovereignty – all these lead to the thought that what the Gospel promises and makes possible as divine possibility is the transformation of mankind in all its nature and culture into a kingdom of God in which the laws of the kingdom have been written upon the inward parts (Niebuhr 1951:217ss).

Calvin's significance for the relationship of Church/non-Church is that he provided one of the earliest inputs for the notion that no societal forms can ever exhaust the riches of God's kingdom – although one has to reiterate that he provided merely the first inklings of this notion.

Anyone who omits the seventeenth-century Puritans from a description of the ghetto hypothesis is guilty of continental prejudice. The historian William Lecky writes about them, as follows:

It is difficult indeed to overrate the debt of gratitude that England owes both to her own Non-Episcopal Churches and to those of Scotland. In good report and evil, amid persecution and ingratitude and horrible wrongs, in ages when all virtue seemed corroded and when apostasy had ceased to be a stain, they clung fearlessly and faithfully to the banner of her freedom. The success of the Great Rebellion was in great measure due to the assistance of the Scotch, who were actuated mainly by religion, and to the heroic courage infused into the troops by the English ministers and to the spirit of enthusiasm created by the noble writings that were inspired by Puritanism (Lecky 1910: 177).



Lecky, the rationalist, describes the Puritans in quite rosy colours, but we usually hear of them as austere, sombre people who speak in pious tones, opinionated people with no *joie de vivre*, uncharitable in their judgment of others, assertive in maintaining their own rigid life-style, and possibly – just possibly – a trifle hypocritical. Whether this portrayal is accurate or not, our real concern is with their social approach.

In his now classical work, *Religion and the rise of capitalism*, R H Tawney subjected Puritanism to a searching scrutiny. How does he see it? I quote:

If the inward and spiritual grace of Puritanism eludes the historian, its outward and visible signs meet him at every turn, and not less in market-place and counting-house and camp than in the student's chamber and the gathering of the elect for prayer. For to the Puritan, a contemner of the vain shows of sacramentalism, mundane toil becomes itself a kind of sacrament. Like a man who strives by unresting activity to exorcise a haunting demon, the Puritan, in the effort to save his own soul, sets in motion every force in heaven above or in earth beneath. By the mere energy of his expanding spirit, he remakes, not only his own character and habits and way of life, but family and church, industry and city, political institutions and social order. Conscious that he is but a stranger and pilgrim, hurrying from this transitory life to a life to come, he turns with almost physical horror from the vanities which lull into an awful indifference souls dwelling on the borders of eternity, to pore with anguish of spirit on the grand facts, God, the soul, salvation, and damnation (Tawney 1972:199-200).

Tawney (1979:234, 32), who evaluates Puritanism according to a weak version of the church-centric approach, refers to its all-embracing approach to life:

For it was not merely as the exponent of certain tenets of theology and church government but as the champion of interests and opinions embracing every side of the life of society that the Puritan movement came into collision with the Crown. In reality, as is the case with most heroic ideologies, the social and religious aspects of Puritanism were not disentangled; they presented themselves, both to supporters and opponents, as different facets of a single scheme.

Finally we quote Tawney's (1972:269) concluding summary:

It would be misleading to dwell on the limitations of Puritan ethics without emphasizing the enormous contribution of Puritanism to political freedom and social progress. The foundation of democracy is the sense of spiritual independence, which nerves the individual to stand alone against the powers of this world, and in England, where squire and parson, lifting arrogant eyebrows at the insolence of the lower orders, combined to crush popular agitation as a

menace at once to society and to the church, it is probable that democracy owes more to Nonconformity than to any other single movement.

In the nineteenth century the theory that society did not offer a neutral ground for Christians found fresh support in the Netherlands from people such as Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). In his founding lecture of the Free University of Amsterdam on 20 October 1880, *Sphere sovereignty* (*Souvereiniteit in eigen kring*), Kuyper said the now famous words which have almost become the slogan of this movement:

Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!" (Kuyper 1998:488).

From 1885, Kuyper and his followers, found themselves outside the NHK (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk) in a state of "doleantie", thus "mourning" and "aggrieved" by its faithlessness. James D Bratt described this period in Kuyper's life as follows:

Some 10 percent of its members, parts of several hundred congregations, had come with him. This was not the reformation of the church he had hoped for, but it was all the reformation he would get. In 1892 his movement joined the churches descendent from the secession of 1834 to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (GKN).

The founding of the Reformed church of the Netherlands in 1892 was preceded in 1880 by the founding of a university on Christian principles – the Free University of Amsterdam. In the turbulent society of late nineteenth-century Holland Kuyper was one of those rare intellectuals who actually led a popular movement. He expressed and articulated a Christian (Calvinist) God-life-and-world approach out of which came a newspaper *De Standaard*, a complete school system and his country's first mass political party, the Antirevolutionary Party (ARP) in 1879. From 1901-5 Kuyper was prime minister of Holland.

The result of Kuyper's actions was that political parties, school associations and labour unions were established on ideological and religious principles. To some extent these organisations, which mushroomed everywhere, were sponsored by churches, with the result that each of the two Reformed churches (*Gereformeerd* and *Hervormd*), as well as the Catholics, had their own array of organisations. In some cases they cooperated, especially later in politics. Liberals and Socialists joined the complete diversification of Dutch society into various religious and ideological pillars (Dutch=zuilen). In the pillarisation (Dutch=verzuiling) of Dutch society Christian, socialist and liberal organisations operated along sense making religious and ideological lines. Because churches – whether popular or otherwise – played such a major part in the whole process, the church-world antithesis intersected with the antithesis of Christian and non-Christian organisations, institutions and

associations. It was especially noticeable in the distinction between common and particular grace. Particular grace refers to “direct” experience of salvific sense and meaning within the realm of the church whereas common grace implies that everything outside the church is maintained through common grace, divine care and providence. Bratt (1998:16) describes Kuyper’s idea of common grace as follows:

By God’s bountiful good pleasure non-Christians excelled in certain fields, and all their efforts had excellent points. None of this might be squelched, out of respect for God’s providence in the world. All of it had to be appreciated, so that the pious might come to respect real learning. Common grace gave the saints incentive and the sinner safe passage.

At the level of common grace the experience of God, salvation, sense and meaning is largely “indirect”. One could say that the authentic radiance of particular grace shines on society through the windows of the Church. A dialectical idea of religion as a religious island surrounded by a semi-religious societal ocean lurks in this approach.

The opponents of this approach are on the whole representative of extreme versions of the church-centred, fideist and pietist approaches. Those who presume the centrality of the church argue that the importance of the church, hence of their own position in society, is at stake. And those who espouse the worldly pole of this antithesis object to the fact that “religion” is encroaching on the neutral and rational territory of secular society. In the past opponents of the ghetto approach were haughtily derisive of its ideals. In the Netherlands they pointed out that the exponents of this approach only had to found a Christian club for marble-players, whereupon everything would be Christian in a Christian’s life-world. Caricatures proliferated, to which the behaviour of the protagonists contributed. Today the dialogue is less vehement – to the extent that the efforts and contributions of exponents of the ghetto or Christianising approach are recognised as a dialogue partner in the debate about wholesome Christian life which reaches far outside the realms of churches. Pockets of the wholesome Christian (ghetto) sense making approach is found in South Africa, especially at the University of North West (Potchefstroom) and to a lesser extent at the University of the Free State (Bloemfontein). In the USA at Calvin College, the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship (CCCS), in Grand Rapids, Michigan and in Canada in Toronto, The Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) are well known.

### **Luther’s compromise between the church-centred and the ghetto approach**

Luther’s approach to the two kingdoms – of God and the world – constitutes a compromise between the basic tenets of the ghetto and the church-centred (= secularisation) approaches. In his view there are two realms (of God); in other words, God rules in two ways, in two kingdoms and in two realms. In the first kingdom, or the spiritual realm, earthly laws do not apply. Here there is no question of the external coercion used by worldly rulers. Since in this antithesis coercion is totally lacking in the spiritual realm, the accent is on the fact that human beings submit voluntarily to Christ. Humility is therefore the

prime Christian virtue. Because the element of coercion is not present, Luther and Lutheranism generally almost invariably have problems with their theory on Church discipline.

The second kingdom, the realm of this world, must not be played off against the first or made to rival it. Because the worldly realm embraces all of reality the Christian can never retreat from it, for it is a realm of God. Christians must do God's will in this realm too.

This is the heart of the problem: can a Christian do the will of God in the worldly realm? Luther points out that Christians really live in the spiritual realm and therefore have no need of the kingdom of the world. As Christians they know that the latter is a realm of God, the sphere where they can demonstrate the love of their fellow humans that God requires of them. To clarify this point Luther uses the distinction between a Christian and a worldlyling. Christians can engage in business, but only as worldlylings – not as Christians. The one concerns his existence before God (*coram Deo*), the other their life before humans (*coram hominibus*). This dualism in Christian life is also evident in Luther's distinction between the person and his/her office. As people Christians are charitable and do not take oaths; yet when a Christian assumes the office of, say, a magistrate, he or she does take an oath (Ebeling 1970; Rothuizen 1962:226-233).

It is significant that Luther actually does not acknowledge Christian life as distinct from worldly life. Christianity actualises itself in earthly ties. This concept was really a reaction against the Roman Catholic concept of the times, namely that one can only attain to Christian living in monasticism. Bear in mind that Luther interrelates the two realms so that they seem identical although they are not. This is one reason why the secularisation hypothesis has less impact on Lutheran Christians: the “worldly” realm – although equally devoid of God and salvation – is in constant interaction with the “spiritual” realm. Christians' existence before God in the spiritual realm must always permeate their existence before people and created reality. “Permeate” does not mean, however, that there will be a point when the separateness of the two realms is abrogated.

However, the doctrine of the two kingdoms poses a problem in that one realm cannot really be permeated with the basic motifs (grace, experience of God and of salvation) of the other. This is apparent in Luther's highly conservative doctrine of “everyday vocations” in the worldly realm: although government, emperor, monarch, home and school all embody divine reality, they are not susceptible to grace (salvation), the spiritual realm's basic motif. This causes a conservative tendency in everyday vocations and the societal institutions they are linked to. When God's grace as one of the fulcrums of real change and renewal in the world is withheld from them they stay as they are handed on by traditional custom and grounded in a highly realistic mirrorised Lutheran reading of Genesis 1-3 whereby these vocations and institutions are seen as mandated and ordered by God the Creator of all things.

#### **4 DIASPORA APPROACH**

*I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weakness but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in a human being's life and goodness ... God's 'beyond' is not the end of our cognitive faculties. Transcendence of the theory of knowledge has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. God is the "beyond" in the midst of our life – Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Everything that happened around Jesus' cross, the tearing of the veil of the temple and the resurrection were part of the diaspora package of announcing and amplifying and disseminating of the message of the Commonwealth of God in the world. The opening up, amplification and final dissemination of salvific sense and meaning is actually what has to eventuate everywhere all the time throughout the universe. The term "diaspora" is a collective reference to Jewish communities outside the land of Israel, since the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Stern 1974). By analogy, therefore, it is employed in this approach as a designation for the sense making idea of scattered and diasporical pockets and packages of holiness as holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment between God, human beings and the surrounding physical-organic environment in daily situations, contexts and circumstances. Thus, the terms "holy" and "holiness" are used here as concrete pointers and directional markers of situations, contexts and circumstances when and where the Godness of God, the humanness of human beings and the naturalness of nature are simultaneously very near, very at one and very different, very at other.

### **The origin, the ongoing course and goal of the Commonwealth of God vague and fuzzy**

The answers to the questions why, how, what and from where the origin, why, how and what of the ongoing procession, and the why, what and how of the future goal of the Commonwealth of God are vague and fuzzy. Even the time, the *kairos* episode of the determinative announcement, amplification and dissemination of the processes of the Commonwealth of God in the cross, the tearing of the veil and the resurrection are vague and fuzzy. We are left with the imprecise and intangible storyline of the ancient history of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the subsequent elaborated history of Israel. In what is regarded as the Old/First Testament in the Christian world or the Tanak, the name of the Hebrew Bible of modern Jewish scholars, two exoduses are prominent, first the patriarch's exodus from Mesopotamia, and second the great exodus from Egypt under Moses. Both these exoduses were not only geographical, survival and political migrations in the ancient or the modern sense of the word. Rather, they consisted in roaming, meandering and travelling from one set of God-human-and-world views and approaches to another – Israelite in this instance. In the whole process tendencies of competition, complementariness, dialectical paradoxes, irruptions and fusions took place with and especially from the side of the cultural mindsets, surrounding nations and groups and their sense making approaches. The Reformed J Ridderbos asserted in 1926 what many regard today as old hat:

Moreover, Scripture bears the marks of the period and of the milieu in which it was written and it shares in part these marks with the

culture of the entire Orient, a culture which in many ways was interrelated to that of Israel. This is true for writing, language, style, literary genre, ideas, conceptions, world view (cf. the three-decker universe in Ex 20:4) (Berkouwer 1975:182).

### **The problem of connecting or bridging God, human beings and nature**

The modern positing and setting of the connectivity and otherness of the threesome of God, being human and cosmic nature as a problem which has to be solved by any member of the threesome, has a very long history going right back to prehistory. In our society many people do not regard the experience of the threesome, each in a separate avenue, as a problem which has to be solved: either because the sense making procedure of experiencing the Godness of God in a separate divine and religious avenue, the humanness of being human in a separate human avenue and the naturalness of nature in a separate natural cosmic avenue is accepted as part of the sense making "logic" of modern societies; or because the problem of three separate avenues of experience was solved long ago through a connection established by one of the partners in the threesome. In history the initiating and connecting agency between the three partners in many approaches was either God, or human beings, or the natural cosmos. The majority of these attempts foundered because the mystery of the simultaneous connection and otherness of God, human beings and cosmic nature was speculatively upgraded to the level of a problem that has to be solved through rationality and thinking, faith and believing, or language and speaking. One cannot separate the experience of God, being human and nature into three distinct avenues with the aim of establishing the appropriate connection between the avenues in a subsequent reflection procedure of rationality, faith or language. The acceptance of the mysterious connection and otherness of God, being human and nature in experiences of human beings militates against their separation. How and by what means do we bring together what God has mysteriously brought closely together in creation? The main problem with God operating supernaturally in the world is that God is in the hands of the theologistic theologian who lets God establish interventions and connections with God's own handiwork and playground, God's creation to which God is already closely connected. Humanists that construe and thus connect their construction of God and nature to themselves, and scientific naturalists that let God and human beings evolve from natural cosmisation processes are caught up in a similar one-sided connection and bridging procedure.

In a sense the struggle since the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century between "theologists", "anthropocentrists" and "cosmologists" clouded the issue of the mystery of the at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and the natural world. The pre-eventuated setting apart of God, human beings and nature necessitates the bringing together through a bridging operation and process of either a theologistic neo-orthodoxy, or an anthropocentric humanising, or a natural cosmisation. In most cases the handiest tool for the bridging operation has been the world of analogies and metaphors (anaphors). The irony is that what God has brought together, thus God-self, humanity and nature through the inauguration of the mysterious meanderings and moving processes of the Commonwealth of God in, through and with the "grand-acts" of creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation are

revoked in a superseding way by tripartite reductionist processes of setting apart and then bridging the gaps through a person's favoured reductionist stance.

Thus in the first place the bridging takes place one-sidedly by assuming either a theologistic, anthropocentrist or cosmologicistic stance. If the theologistic stance is favoured the gap is theologistically bridged, if the anthropocentric or humanistic stance is favoured the bridging is of anthropocentric allure, and if a process is carried out from the stance of cosmisation - scientific naturalism in the modern era - a similar bridge building initiating power or agency is ascribed to cosmic nature. This, at least, happens in the recent atheistic reductionist book of Richard Dawkins, *The God delusion*, written from a strict naturalistic or scientific cosmisation perspective in which natural selection and other scientific theories are viewed as superior to a "God hypothesis" in explaining the living world and the cosmic universe. Without going into this problem in too great detail it is worthwhile to point to the similarity of Dawkins' reductionist naturalist cosmisation stance - in which Dawkins is the rational and scientific medium (priest) of the cosmisation processes from which human beings and their god-constructs emerge - with the reductionist theologistic revelational stance - in which traditional theologians are descriptive mediums of God's supernatural sacred and sacramental acts concerning human beings and nature. The shift brought about by 16<sup>th</sup> Protestant Reformation allows nearly everyone to be an interpretational medium of God's revelation which is captured in the human words of the holy Bible. The range of possible mediums is hereby greatly enlarged without really changing the supernatural theologistic stance.

Secondly, the access realm of solving the problem - which is actually a mystery - of the Commonwealth of God from beginning to end is established in a reductionist way, either through a one-sided accessing of God's creation, or reconciliation (Jesus) or renewal of all things (Holy Spirit), or the rolling process of consummation into the future.

Thirdly, the theologistic, anthropocentric and cosmologicistic procedures operate in each case with a double bottom or layer and can be compared with two drops of water that look exactly alike when placed together and viewed from a particular angle. The theologistic theologian is compelled to construe two subjectivities or agencies for God, first the transcendent God, God-in-God-self, and second God immanent to the world of human beings, thus God as God-for-us as human beings. An anthropocentric humaniser similarly construes two agencies or subjects in a human being, an absolute subjective agent deep inside the human self, and an empirical subjective agent in ongoing consecutive roles of being a father, a child, a worker, a church-member, a citizen, a Zulu, an ANC member, an academic and a friend. Similarly, in nearly all cosmisation schemes from ancient history to modern scientific approaches the cosmos or universe is viewed as two layered agencies, the first being the matrix, the womb, the originator and life-giver of everything possible, and the second the self-processing agency replicating itself in the ordered and structured environment of the physical-organic world from which God and human beings evolve.

Theologians who took up the cudgels for God as the initiating agency of all events, happenings and processes in the world, especially with regard to the books of the Bible, Holy Scripture with its grouping into Old/First and New/Second canonical Testaments are bound up with supernatural divine initiatives and interventions from above and divine interventions and eruptions from below the (natural) created world. Overarching theologistic notions which express the initiative and primal agency in the hands of God in regard to the Bible and biblical history are termed “sacred history”, “revealed history”, “revelational history”, “divine history”, “salvation history”, “God’s revelation” and in high modernist theologistic fashion even the “Self-revelation of God”.

The modern approach of devising and constructing a bridge from one to the other, as is happening in the sense making approaches of theologism (Godism), humanism (anthropocentrism) or worldism (scientistic naturalism and cosmologism), is exacerbating the current apartheid of people’s experience and is still endorsing and vindicating a division of the sciences into three broad realms. God, being human and the physical-organic world are not experienced separately in the field or mode of experience of faith, belief or trust as two or three types of faith experiences, as is happening in many traditional theological schemes. The experience of God, being human and the physical-organic natural environment are interconnected in every one of the various fields of human experience with sufficient and meaningful but mysterious weight of otherness given to each in the simultaneous but discursive, coterminous but interactional experience of the threesome.

**Are the grand acts of God incarcerated church doctrines or experiential power and energy pointers in people’s daily lives?**

Few modern people have the experiential awareness of the intrinsic embeddedness of their humanness and the physical-organic environment in God’s grand acts of creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation. The grand acts of God are rendered unworkable and impractical as sense making power and energy pointers in people’s daily life-world by either viewing them as incarcerated doctrines in churches or by only focusing on one of the grand acts in their daily lives.

What made the grand acts as energy pointers impractical and unworkable in sacramentalist churches is that they become divine or semi-divine doctrines which must constantly undergo church-centred doctrinal and purifying treatment from the clergy and theologians. Construed in the purest and most sacred and perfect theologistic and ecclesial reflection, these doctrinal constructs take the place of the real and genuine living God as church-centred actions directed to the laity. Declaring these grand acts of God to be the preserve of theologistic and ecclesial doctrinal reflection is to render them impractical and unworkable in people’s daily experience.

On the other hand, when God’s grand acts operate in evangelical, pentecostal, charismatic and conservative protestant experience they are either reduced to a creationistic embedding of creation in the first chapters of the biblical book of Genesis, or one-sidedly reduced to a reconciliatory salvific divine Jesus nestled in a person’s heart (ego-centre) as the driving force of all



his/her doings in this life and afterlife, or renewal is one-sidedly reduced to baptism in the Holy Spirit as the only solution, or consummation is transferred to people's salvation one day in heaven.

A first step for any sacramentalised mindset of church-centredness that does not want to continue with the modern incarceration of theologistic sacramentality, divine-knowitallness and a sacred doctrinal attitude, is to dedoctrinalise and desacralise the doctrines of creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation and let them become power and energy pointers in people's lives that are facilitated in all fields of daily experience. This requires that the Church, faith and theology be desacralised and dedoctrinalised. In such a community of faith a priest, minister and pastor's role as one of the facilitators of faith experience is simultaneously more modest and fragile and more powerful. Being modest, powerful and fragile means that in facilitating they let the people overcome their fear and cosiness of being in the hands of priests, ministers and pastors for questions and answers about the origin, the course and goal of their lives.

A first step for Evangelical and Protestant churches who want to step out of the mould of their semidivine doctrinal encaging and incarceration of preaching is to turn their reductionist views around, first to let go of the notion that God's Commonwealth is only to be carried into the world by preaching the Gospel. Secondly, by telling the full story that the Commonwealth of God is not served through a church in which a quarter-, a half- or a three-quarter gospel is embodied and manifested. The full gospel of the Commonwealth of God is not only directed and embodied in communities of faith but is directed and embodied in other societal institutions and organisations. Many churches and their theologistic spokespersons one-sidedly emphasise either a quarter, half, three-quarters or, rarely, a full gospel:

- a quarter-version of the foursome Gospel message amounts to an exclusive emphasising of either Jesus Christ (reconciliation) or the Holy Spirit (renewal) or God the creator (creation) or God the fulfiller of everything (consummation), or
- a half-version of the foursome Gospel message amounts to an exclusive emphasising of either creation (nature) and reconciliation (grace, recreation), or reconciliation (Word = Jesus Christ) and renewal (Spirit), or renewal (Spirit) and reconciliation (Word = Jesus Christ), or reconciliation (Jesus Christ) and consummation (Apocalyptic/prophetic future events), or renewal (Spirit) and consummation (apocalyptic/prophetic future events), or
- a three-quarters version of the foursome Gospel message amounts to an exclusive emphasising of any three of the foursome grand acts of God, or
- a full gospel message is seldom encountered in church-centred divine or semidivine churches and the deliberations of their theologistic spokespersons.

**Again the New/Second Testament tearing of the veil**

A mysterious narrowing down of the passage (= stenosis) and thus the localising and parochial concentration of the holiness processes of the at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and nature occurred in the history of the patriarchs and of Israel. What was supposed to happen regularly and routinely at any time and everywhere in the universe is narrated to us through the historical thin line of the peregrinations of the nearly prehistoric patriarchs and the later Israel.

Jesus came to announce, amplify and disseminate the Commonwealth of God after the “mysterious” and “temporary episode” of narrowed down history of God’s presence amongst the patriarchs and Israel. The Commonwealth of God has its inauguration in the creation of everything, the reconciliatory concentration and amplification, extension and dissemination of the Commonwealth of God in Jesus’ death on the cross, the tearing of the veil between the holier than holy and the holy space of the temple and the resurrection of Jesus. The tearing of the veil of the temple is highly significant in that it signifies the start of the renewed unbound shifting and disseminating of the located presence of Yahweh from the holier than holy to the whole of created reality and history. The concrete and material expression and encapsulation of the holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment of the Godness of God, the humanness of human beings and the naturalness of the physical-organic nature in the cross, the tearing of the veil and the resurrection of the person of Jesus, happens through God the Spirit as the realising agent of the nomadic, disseminating and localising processes of holiness anywhere and at any time in the world.

The tearing of the veil announcing the unbinding of the concentrated presence of God from the location of the most holy place is an announcement of the end of religion as the tying of something human or natural exclusively to God. Even the slightest whiff or hint in the use of the word “religion” as exclusively bound to God or something divine is already an attempt at sewing back the torn veil. The theologistic theologian Karl Barth (d.1968) earned the distinction that on the one hand he regarded all religion as unbelief and a pseudo-divine, exclusively human construction, while on the other he is also highly regarded in neo-orthodox circles for replacing religion and the notion of religion with faith as a gift from God which is directly directed to God and indirectly to human beings and nature. Although Barth states page after page in his Church Dogmatics that faith happens and eventuates on the same level as the experience of thinking, feelings and imagination, one cannot help feeling that faith is drifting on thinking, feelings and imagination like oil on water. It does not have real contact.

The Spirit of God – the operating and implementing agent of the cross, the torn veil and resurrection of the person of Jesus – goes through a process of change which culminates in the announcement and proclamation in and through Pentecost by which the Spirit of God has been affirmed and vindicated as the Spirit of holiness, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, on the one hand, drives and guides the holiness and renewal processes in the world as choreographer of renewal and, on the other hand, is constantly activated as participating companion in the world by the dynamics of the cross, the torn veil and the resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit embodies and participates in,

contributes and guides new pockets and packages, new contexts and localisations of at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, being human and the physical-organic environment in the world. In this sense the Holy Spirit incorporates and embeds every atom and molecule in the physical-chemical world, every cell and organism in the biotic world, every emotion and feeling, every thought and belief, every love action, and every bit of justice in human experience. We do not know how and in what sense the Spirit of God incorporates and embeds thing after thing and being after being in the many universes. What we do know is that to have insight through a cosmic Spirit of the universes is far too meagre, lean and reductionistic. And to pretend that we know through an omniscient human spirit in and amongst the many universes is to be trapped in a similar meagre, lean and reductionistic impasse. Finally, to be dragged into the quagmire of the modern notion of the domesticated Self-revelation of God in the human and the natural worlds, is to adorn oneself with holy certainty, obtained through theologistic speculation pretending to have insight into the self-acting side of God through the human and natural worlds. The closest and the furthest one can get to the Godness of God, the humanness of being human and the naturalness of nature is to experience and encounter God, oneself and nature through living one's life with the awareness of being in creaturely, reconciling, renewing and consummating mode.

### **Sin and evil and the connectivity and otherness of God, being human and nature**

Sin and evil are part of the interconnectivity of the holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and the physical-organic environment. In what sense we truly do not always know. What makes sense to us and what we do know is that the Holy Spirit through God's tools of the cross, the torn veil and the resurrection of the human being Jesus convinces and persuades us to be taken up and drawn along in the concreteness of the series of events of the cross, the torn veil and the resurrection. The purpose of this acquired certainty and persuasion is to realise, to be empowered and liberated to face and approach "sin and evil" as parasitic and paralysing attempts to derail and rob God of God's Godness, human beings of their humanness and the physical-organic environments of their naturalness. Maybe the "biggest sin and evil" in this regard is to worship and respect God, human beings or nature in isolation at the expense of each other. In a way one can describe the series of events around the cross, the torn veil and the resurrection as a mysterious "team effort" of God, the human being Jesus and nature. However, the expression "team effort" is not used here in the sense of the old theologian's bugbear of synergistic cooperation between God, human beings and nature.

The expression "team effort" points to the sphere of reconciliation between God, human beings and natural universes, thus denoting one of the leading motifs of the Commonwealth of God of which we can only pick up and unearth traces and vestiges in our daily experience as being encapsulated and taken up in the grand acts of the God of creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation. The theologistic temptation of prying into God's mind, even with the help of Scriptures or the theologistic modern concept of God's Self-revelation as to why God created, why God reconciled, why God renews and

why God brings everything to fulfilment, is not to be mirrored in a fundamentalist sense from Scriptures or from a theologistic interpretation of God's mind through the theologistic interpretational extrapolation of God's being in action as actually revelational and trinitarian. The theologistic interpretational approaches of Barth and the Dutch theologian Noordmans are prototypes of how not to play around with supernatural - above and below the natural - speculations about God at work.

### **Theanthropocosmic principle: theology or a theory of faith?**

In moving away from the three traditional separated avenues of three experiential realms (i.e. the avenues of God, religion and God-talk; human beings and human doings; and nature and natural processes) the threesome made up of God, being human and the physical-organic environment should be encapsulated in a dynamic pattern of ongoing at-one-ment and at-other-ment in each field, mode or dimension of experience and in each scientific discipline. This includes theology which when hauled up from its knees may be resurrected as a more modest theory of faith. Thus, I suggest that the realities of God, humanity and the physical-organic natural environment in their radical interconnectedness and otherness be compositionally lumped together in a *theanthropocosmic* sense making principle which has to play a concrete and determining role in everyday life, as well as in scientific disciplines and philosophies. In introducing a much more modest way of talking about God, human beings and the physical-organic universes in each science, I am fully aware that the traditional approach of three separate avenues of experience is still broadly embodied in three types of scientific complexes of knowledge at modern universities, namely the religious-theological disciplines, the humanities and the sciences. Many theologians and religious scientists still try to access their experience of God as separate from their human experience and their experience of the physical-organic environment. Similarly, many subject specialists in the human sciences or humanities at universities still try to access the experience of human beings separate from God and the natural physical-organic environment. And sciences or natural sciences within the science faculties of universities still try to access the experience of the physical-organic environment as separate from their experience of God and themselves as human beings.

On the one hand, from a diasporic but wholesome, negotiatory and Spirit-directed stance, theology's reflexive pattern of faith is extended to include God, the human self, other human beings and nature in the broadest differential and integral sense possible. On the other hand theology is allotted a more modest role as faith studies or a theory of faith because the basic experiential pattern of God, the human self, other human beings and surrounding physical-organic nature are viewed as part of every other field, mode and dimension of experience, albeit with alternating emphases or perspectival headings such as thinking, feeling, loving, proportioning of justness and verbalising.

Traditional theologians who regard themselves as notaries and spokespersons of God usually find it hard to swallow that they have to share their age-old spiritual wherewithal of the Gospel in such a diasporical but all-

embracing approach – as theorists of faith who reflexively pattern people's experience of faith – with colleagues who concern themselves with theories of thinking, feeling, loving, verbalising, proportioning of justness, etc. at the university. The best advice to a theology which has to relinquish the avenue in which all religious and divine operations are encapsulated is to re-establish the meaningful human and worldly parts of faith enterprises into aware patterns of *faith, belief, trust and confidence experiences*:

- as whenever faith, belief, trust and confidence towards and of oneself = faith, believing, trust and confidence towards and of God = faith, believing, trust and confidence towards and of the neighbours (=human, animals, plants and things in the micro- and macro-universes)

The basic pattern of experiential indicators can be alternately expressed with loving, justice, thinking, and feeling emphases. Precisely the opposite is true of Karl Barth in his *Church dogmatics* (1975: Volume I, Part1, 4-9) who withdrew theology as a simple testimony of faith and life and of the service of God, a discipline full of acts of God from being a science in the ordinary sense of the word, and thereby left the scientific approaches in their ambiances of exactness and Godlessness to themselves.

If the gaps of Godlessness that opened up in modernity are not filled by scientists, theorists and technologists through their own emphasis and heading of their science it is not given in the hands of theologians to claim and hijack God into their realm as the God avenue. If someone is taking up the challenge outside "theology" of filling the gap of Godlessness of modern science in their theories of loving, proportioning, thinking and feeling in theoretical and aware patterning and description of daily experiential processes it may run along the following lines:

- In *loving, love and free gift* experiences and patterns: as whenever love towards and of oneself=love towards and of God=love towards and of the neighbours (= human, animals, plants and things in the micro- and macro-universes);
- In *proportioning of justness, justice and legal* experiences and patterns: as whenever proportioning of justness towards and of oneself=proportioning of justness towards and of God=proportioning of justness towards and of the neighbours (= human, animals, plants and things in the micro- and macro-universes);
- In *thinking + thought* experiences and patterns: as whenever thinking + thoughts towards and of oneself=thinking + thoughts towards and of God=thinking + thoughts towards and of the neighbours (= human, animals, plants and things in the micro- and macro-universes);
- In *feelings + emotive* experiences and patterns: as whenever feeling + emotions towards and of oneself=feeling + emotions towards and of God=feeling + emotions towards and of the neighbours (= human, animals, plants and things in the micro- and macro-universes).

**In Pentecost the canon of the Second Testament is brought to a close and the Third Testament is inaugurated**

The Spirit of God as God's operating agent in Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, the attendant tearing of the veil of the temple and the raising of Jesus from the dead has undergone a change from being the Spirit of God to being the Holy Spirit, the life-giving force of everything everywhere and at all times. The tearing of the veil in the series of events of the cross, torn veil and resurrection presents us with the link that designates the real change-over to the day of Pentecost as the definitive inauguration of the canon of the era of the Third Testament and the closing of the canon of the era of the Second Testament. Everything and everyone that used to be encapsulated in pockets and packages of holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment are co-actors, co-writers and co-doers of the Third Testament with the Holy Spirit in the direction of the consummation and fulfilment of history and the universes. The process of the Commonwealth of God that comes to fulfilment and consummation "at the end of times" has been inaugurated "at the beginning of times" in, with and through the creation of everything.

The tearing of the veil and the raising of Jesus from the dead by the Spirit of God inaugurates the changeover from the Spirit of God as in the located and designated presence of the name of God in the Most Holy Place to God's Holy Spirit at work everywhere and all the time. In the ambience of reflection of the diaspora (and partially in the ghetto) approach the raising of Jesus by the Spirit of God from death enacted and set in motion the renewal process which was further affirmed and vindicated through Pentecost. Pentecost intensified, affirmed and vindicated the dawn of the Third Testament era which is at the same time the closure of the canon of the Second Testament. In the day of Pentecost as the dawn, annunciation and proclamation of the era of the Third Testament we begin to participate diasporically and nomadically as co-writers, co-composers of, and co-contributors to the Third Testament.

"Purity" and "perfection" as the age-old carriers of the ideal of holiness are not discarded but are removed from their prime position as eternal look-a-likes of church-centred doctrinal mass production. The holiness ideals of purity and perfection have been subsumed diasporically and nomadically under the headings of irreplaceable uniqueness and excellence of holy at-one-ness and holy at-other-ness of the Spirit of God, human beings and physical-organic nature in people's life-worlds of everyday. The canon of the First/Old Testament was brought to a close by the tearing of the veil of the temple; the annunciation of the closure of the canon of the Second/New Testament happened on Pentecost day which simultaneously ushered in the era of the Third Testament of which we are cowriters and coactors.

The diaspora approach has a long history. Although not explicit or widely accepted as the church-centred approach, it emerged strongly as a sense making approach in the late modern era. People within the sense making ambience of the diaspora or Spirit-directed approach react strongly against the church-centred idea of a divine or semidivine church, divine or semidivine field of faith or divine or semidivine discipline of theology. Such a church, faith or theology is not intrinsically part of this world and not created and born out of

the “stuff” and material of this world, which as God’s handiwork is embraced and permeated by God’s Spirit in the microscopic spheres of atoms and molecules embodied and embedded in God’s Spirit in the intermediate and median spheres of human consciousness and contracting and expanding by virtue of God’s Spirit in the macroscopic spheres of the universes. The veil is torn and should under no circumstances be sewn back with Old/First Testament yarn. The veils, partitions and walls between sacred and secular, sacramental and profane, religious and worldly, and church and world should never have been repaired and rebuilt, neither from the sacred churchly side nor from the secular worldly side. Neither should the partition first be put in place and then be wiped out from one of the two sides. The sewn-back veil is heathenish and paganism of the real sort which can only be described as having an idol, namely the church which can only be revered and which is of a very parochial nature in the breadth and depth of God’s Commonwealth. Not partitioned and closed but torn and open. Open means eternally and limitlessly open in order that episodes and enclosures of the inner sanctum type, the most holy places and zones of the simultaneous at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and the physical-organic environment are diasporically disseminated and scattered into every corner and time speck of society, in every situation and location across the globe and on every Venus and every Mars of all the universes.

### **Stewardship, responsibility and accountability of God, humanity and nature**

Jesus on the cross, the tearing of the veil of the temple and the resurrection of Jesus express the margins of responsibility and accountability of human beings and the physical-organic environment towards God. By his death on the cross and his resurrection Jesus responded and accounted for bringing the era of the located and temporalised presence and name of God in the most holy of the temple to an end, and thereby, through the torn veil, disseminated and broadened the scope of the Commonwealth of God to the end of the universes as the playground for the moving presence of God’s name. The Commonwealth of God in its moving and meandering processes from beginning to end through creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation is the playground and workplace where the stewardship, thus the responsibility and accountability of God, human beings and physical-organic nature towards each other, are enacted and worked out. The Commonwealth of God is conjoined to the grand acts of God: the *creation* of everything, God’s tools of *reconciliation*, the cross, the tearing of the veil between the most holy and the holy space in the temple and the resurrection of Jesus. The located holy presence of God opened up and is disseminated into the whole of creation through the micropassage of the torn veil. The day of Pentecost as the endorsement of the Spirit’s raising of Jesus from the dead was the announcement of the closure of the period of the New/Second Testament. Simultaneously, the day of Pentecost was the inauguration of the era of the Third Testament in which God, human beings and the physical-organic environment were constituted as stewards of renewal in at-one-ment and at-other-ment towards each other on the way to the future *consummation* and fulfilment of everything.

The sacramental church-centred approach keeps the presence of God located and concentrated in a holier than holy space with the slight change from the First Testament situation that not only the high priest may enter the holy of holies once a year, but that all people may enter the space where the throne of the presence of God is situated through the new high priest, the holier than holy vicar of God, the Pope with his whole global array of male priests. In other instances the veil has not been sewn back with First Testament yarn.

The semisacramental Protestant church-centred traditions opened up the veil a bit wider, but the veil is still selectively and partially sewn back with First Testament yarn through the creation of situational pockets and centres of holiness to which God is more closely attached than to other less holy daily experiential pockets and centres of life. Consider a few of these privileged holiness pockets and centres:

*First:* the common way of experiencing a church as “the house of God”, “the people of God” or of regarding a fellowship gathering as “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” which may easily be termed holy while sites and areas of encounters in daily life may be seen as “less holy” is a partial sewing back of the veil.

*Second:* keeping the Sabbath or even keeping its half-hearted transition to Sunday which received the gloss of the narrative of the first day of the week as resurrection day, especially since the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE effectively orders the sewing back of nearly the whole veil to its pristine state.

*Third:* the practice of maintaining and honouring the tithes in churches is another attempt at sewing back substantial proportions. In this regard, Malachi 3:8-10 played the role of a central locus of support and provider of enough Old/First Testament yarn for sewing back the veil to within an inch of completeness. Malachi tells us that God speaks of being robbed by Israel because they do not adhere to the rules for the tithes and offerings. God cursed Israel for this robbery and threw out a life-line of blessing by challenging Israel to test God by obeying the exhortation: “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house, and try me now in this, says the Lord of hosts. If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive” (Malachi 3:10).

Sense making clues, cues and hues winkled out and gathered from constant negotiation with the Spirit of God in the most ordinary of our daily experiences – including the Bible – are continuously coposited, consensed and embodied in compromised designs, in the double sense of compromised as jointly promised and compromised as encountering the other half way, derived from consensible negotiation with the Second/New Testament reports of the cross of Jesus, the torn veil and resurrection of Jesus. For example concerning the tithes, in our Third Testament setting we are composers, copromissories (presenting joint promises) and cotrendsetters of the renewal and consummative direction of the Third Testament process to the future. With regard to the tithes, the cross is the location where the curse of God is fought out and settled, the torn veil is expressive of the breaking down of any



partition between holy (= sacred, sacramental, etc.) and less holy (= secular, profane, etc.) in the world, and the resurrection of Jesus through the Holy Spirit is the prototypical empowerment and liberation in every situation and locality, every structure and centrality in the world as possible, imaginable and viable realms of holiness and renewal where the at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, being human and the physical-organic environment are to be responsively and accountably managed and stewarded as unique and excellent experiences in the future direction of the consummation and fulfilment of all things. Needless to say the events taking shape in every possible realm of holy renewal should be “team efforts” of responsibility and accountability in a stewardship ambience of God’s Spirit, human beings and the physical-organic natural environment to let God be God, human beings be human and nature be nature.

*Fourth:* one of the most interesting examples of the Protestant partial sewing back process is the position of the nation of Israel. Church-centred views vary from, on the one hand, partial sewn-back positions such as Israel as a nation that receives special privileges in virtue of outstanding promises God made to them during their special covenantal partnership in Old/First Testament times, to the position on the other hand that the veil is untorn with regard to the position of Israel as if God has totally different operational plans for the nation of Israel that he is pursuing in addition to his plans for the Church as the mainstay of the Commonwealth of God.

*Fifth:* the evangelical, pietist and holiness tendency in Christianity draws Jesus Christ as the divine ascended Son of God “on the right hand of the Father” – disconnected from Jesus’ humanity and the events of the cross, the torn veil and the resurrection – into the heart or created ego-centre of a human being to perform as the driving force of all good actions and doings in this life and the afterlife. A holiness time-and-space realm where the veil has not been torn is hereby erected between the inside (holy) and the outside (less holy) of the person. This acquired holiness centre, the divine Jesus in the heart of a person is the moving carrier of the person approaching the throne of God, the holiness realm of the Father in different situations of life where the veil is partially sewn back. A good example of the veil being partially sewn back is the daily operation of pietists called “quiet time”, established as a holiness realm where God is directly encountered through prayer and the direct Word(s) of God conveyed through the human words of the Bible.

The same applies especially to institutions, organisations and communities of faith, belief and trust such as churches, synagogues and temples because of their idolised and presumptuous pretence of being the sole carriers of the message of the Commonwealth of God. In the church-centred sense the blueprints and the templates of institutions, organisations and communities of faith flow directly from God and God’s Word, but only mediated to human beings “by special appointment”, so to speak, as theologians, priests, ministers, pastors and various oracular appointees in these communities.

Thus, in most instances the template, structure and offices of a church, tabernacle, synagogue or temple are viewed as divinely mediated and portrayed in a Holy Book. In terms of the diaspora approach all events,

activities and processes in churches and mainly outside them, as well as the well-known gigantic ecclesiastical institutions typifying and setting into operation a sort of divine socialism of eternal caring for people from birth to afterlife, should be fully dismantled and deconstructed by the diasporical tension of the “yet” and “not yet” of the Commonwealth of God which sweeps and meanders, widens and narrows through creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation.

### **Diathètèke, Covenant and First, Second and Third Testament**

The Septuagint translated the Hebrew word *berith* (English: “covenant”) from the Greek word *diathètèke*. In ancient Greece the word was used to denote a legal concept: it referred to a ruling made by a party to which another party could only respond by accepting or rejecting it. The other word Greeks used for a covenant was *synthéké* which referred to a mutual agreement between partners. The Septuagint consciously avoided the latter word and made a choice for the first one in which presumably the relationship between God and Israel is not a mutual contractual agreement but unilaterally conceived and enacted through the will of God.

Later, in the Latin translation of the Septuagint, known as the Vulgate, *diathètèke* was rendered as “testamentum”. In this way people came to read: Old and New Testament or First and Second Testament. The term Third Testament follows the traditional sequence of Testaments. The era of the Third Testament, the era of renewal is inaugurated with the day of Pentecost. While the canons, the benchmarks of the First/Old and the Second/New Testaments are closed, the canon of the Third Testament is still open. One of the central sense making clues of a diasporical approach in the era of the Holy Spirit, the era of the Third Testament, is that we as people are pushed, guided and drawn along in the sweeping and meandering, widening and narrowing processes of the Commonwealth of God as comakers, cowriters, coactors and conegotiators of the experiential texts and theories, stories and doings of the Third Testament era.

I encountered the term Third Testament in other sense making approaches such as the speculative cosmological symbolism of the Danish writer Martinus (1890-1981) who titled the totality of his writings *The third testament*. It comprises his main work *Livets Bog* (The Book of Life) (7 volumes), *The Eternal image of the world* (3 volumes), *Logic* and 30 smaller works (Martinus 1990: 139).

### **Mirroring, interpretation or consensible negotiation of texts, theories, natural processes and human doings**

The sense making approach of fundamentalist mirroring of texts, theories, natural processes and human doings in people’s lives has an immense hold on many modern people’s approaches to life. It seems that the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been witness to an upsurge in mirroring, mimicking and mimetic fundamentalisms of all sorts. Global processes and the shifts and turns thereof have caused uncertainty and insecurity on a large scale. One of the remedies utilised to gain certainty has consisted in resorting wholesale to

the realm of inerrancy and infallibility, purity and perfection of texts, theories, natural processes and human doings. The sureness and the certainty of people's experience of salvific sense and meaning is then found in the mirroring and mimicking in their lives of certain texts, theories, natural processes and human doings. The main notions of a fundamentalist approach belong to the family of *mirroring, imitating and mimicking* of texts, theories, natural processes and human doings. The fundamentalist process fulfils itself as *mirroring* → *re-mirroring* → *appropriation* of a text, a theory, a natural process or a human doing into the life world of people.

Since the Renaissance period (1400-1600), and endorsed to a certain extent by the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the interpretation and hermeneutical approaches made immense strides. The interpretationist paradigm is effectively the main approach of the modern era (1600-2000). The basic idea which openly or tacitly crops up in the majority of interpretational and interpretationist approaches is nearly always what a text, theory, natural process or human doing is *actually* or *really* saying, portraying, signifying or expressing. The main notions of the interpretationist approach belong to the family of what a text, a theory, natural process or human doing *actually, authentically, genuinely and really* portrays and wants to say. The interpretation process fulfils itself as *understanding* → *explanation* → *application* of what a text, a theory, a natural process or a human doing is actually and really saying. One useful outcome of the whole upsurge of postmodern philosophies and operational strategies in the last thirty years is that the objective and scientific rules for interpretation have been unmasked as the *intersubjective, agreed-upon rules of a group* of scholars to whom these rules make scientific sense. The *multiplicity of interpretations* in the modern era, *vying for recognition as the actual, the real, the objective and the definitive interpretation*, caused users and readers to proceed in two directions, either into the fundamentalist mirroring way which at least has given them back a comfort zone of security, or into the postmodern fragmentising and relativising way which actually allows a reader to discredit the original author or compiler of a text through a two-pronged strategy: first through a sort of postmodern rewriting or recomposing of the text; and second by announcing the death of the author or authors.

In the approach entailing consensible negotiation the sense making view and experience embodied in a text, theory, natural process and human doing are consensibly dealt with in negotiation with your sense making view and approach. In a negotiation process of coposited interchange and consensible exchange between two sense making approaches fused into a compromise (co-promise or joint promise) design from where clues, guidelines and yardsticks can be consensibly derived, extracted and taken over by other people in the writing and composing of their own experiential stories and doings, texts and theories.

The main notions of consensible negotiation belong to the family of how *sense, sense making, meaning and significance* have to be negotiated with reference to texts, theories, natural processes and human doings. The consensible negotiation process fulfils itself as *consensible co-positing* → *consensible percolating and filtering* → *consensible fusing into a co-promise*

*design* from where clues, cues and hues can be drawn and folded into the mix of people's life worlds.

In the context of the Judaeo-Christian Bible I want to take up a clue from the saying that *the Spirit is more than the letter*. The reflective material undergirding this saying derives from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians in which the Corinthians are described as epistles of Christ written not with ink but by the Spirit of God, not on stone but on the fleshy tablets of the heart which can be entertained as the whole bodily existence as a writing-pad for the Spirit of God. In the new contractual situation (covenant) of Christ in relation to God, the Corinthians are ministers not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:1-6). My consensible negotiated reading of the saying that *the Spirit is more than the letter* in our current situation is that we do not have less of God's Spirit (Holy Spirit) in our negotiation with the Bible before us than either the transmitters of oral texts long ago, or the later compilers and writers of biblical texts. The oral transmitters, compilers and writers fused into their experiential contexts the oral compilations and writings of the generations before them as cumulative sense making experiences through interchange and exchange with past generations. What is different from an era like ours, however, is that we have in all fields, modes and dimensions of experience immense addition, accretion and accumulation of knowledge, skills and tools that were not part of generations before us. We live in a later era with similar and other sense making approaches about the interconnectedness and otherness of God, ourselves as human beings and the natural cosmic world. We look for the mystery of how experiential clues, cues and hues from long ago can be merged and fused with our current experience in a design of co(m)promise established in the process of interchange and exchange of what is similar and what is other between them and us. Therefore, my way of tackling the mystery is to do it in terms of the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the Bible, by asserting that we live in the era of God's Spirit (Holy Spirit) which can be designated as the era of the Third Testament, following the sequence of the Old Testament as the era of the First Testament and the New Testament as the Second Testament till Pentecost day which is the inauguration of the Third Testament.

God through God's Spirit is directly interconnected with the physical-organic environment and with human beings through the human senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, etc, and is present, for example, in the experience of feeling and emotions through the senses in a feeling way and in the experience of thinking in a thinking way. In a similar way, whatever number of fields of experience we agree on (e.g. feeling, thinking, believing, speaking, socialising, loving, imagining, etc), they do not have to be programmed or preprogrammed to flow through believing as is the confessional and doctrinal position of many people from church-centred Christian traditions.

Experience taught me that at the point where other fields, modes and dimensions of experience are upgraded to include the experience of God in a direct sense, and where religious faith is relativised to include the humanness of our experience and the naturalness of the natural physical-organic environment in a direct sense, there vehement reaction is elicited. The Bible is

then opened by primarily fundamentalist and mirroring imitators of the Bible who maintain that it is infallible and inerrant and that every word is a word of God, especially citing Paul of the letter to the Romans, chapters 1-5 where faith and belief are seen as basic to every other field of experience of human beings, and in some verses are even identified with God's grace. Mirroring fundamentalists proceeding from Paul's reductionist sense making approach to faith in Romans 1-5 assert that these views have to be mirrored in one's life and should not be relativised through clever interpretational techniques.

From the sense making view of consensible negotiation, however, we assume that we have as much of God's Spirit as Paul. Therefore we operate from our sense making experience which we put or posit alongside Paul's of Romans 1-5 and of 1 Corinthians 13. The sole purpose is to come up with a negotiated compromise (co-promise design) of the two sense making approaches – Paul's and ours – from which clues, cues and hues can be taken and extracted for fusing and mixing into our experience of today. [The term "compromise" is used here in both the sense of a "compromise", meeting someone's view halfway and "co-promise" as "joint promise" from which clues, cues and hues could be taken for further consensible negotiatory living]. The co-promise design, as a fusion implemented by the interchange and exchange between Paul's and our own sense making worlds, means that Paul's Spirit-induced sense making approach is brought into negotiation with our own Spirit-induced sense making approach. As people living in the era of the Third Testament – the era of the Spirit of God - we do not have to make any apology to Paul when we differ from views of his that do not make sense to us. That is to say, after hard negotiation with him about clues, cues and hues that make sense to us from a Spirit-induced Third Testament perspective, we may joyfully differ with Paul.

Paul changes direction in 1 Corinthians 13 where love (Greek = *agape*) is presented as the basic field in which God has to be experienced: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13). It is significant that many Roman Catholic traditions in history gave primacy to love (*agape* = Greek) (*caritas* = Latin) concerning the experience of God, the human self and the natural physical-organic environment. Despite the strong emphasis on faith and belief in the theological and philosophical work of Karl Rahner, the great Roman Catholic theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of his writings can be read from a perspective in which love has priority over faith.

In the present era of the Third Testament we are in an ongoing negotiation process with the Spirit of God. Being on the way, pilgrim and nomad of daily negotiation and wrestling with the Spirit about wellness and wellbeing or salvation, sense and meaning as good earthly human living are enacted and experienced conjointly with the physical-organic environment and the dynamic presence of God. While wellness and wellbeing as notions of wholesome experience of life include pain, suffering and disappointment we should not be poisoned by the riding of the high horse of the ideology of happiness which is commonly mistaken for being a better version of plain, ordinary and daily wellness and well-being.

Our main assumption concerning the Scriptures is that a sense making God-life-and-world approach embodied and expressed in and through a book, chapter and verse of the Bible, does not have more of the Spirit of God than our sense making God-life-and-world approaches as people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In our negotiation between two sense making views – that of the Bible in a particular text and ours in our situation today – a Spirit-filled negotiation process from both sides takes place.

An approach of consensible negotiation with the Scriptures and thus with the experiences of people of the First (Old), the Second (New) and the Third Testament (our era as that of the Spirit of God) means that in a particular field and mode of experience the nature and characteristic attributes of the field in action forms the leading emphasis of the negotiation between the sense making of the text and our sense making of similar experiences that the text is inferring, or is referring and pointing to.

The negotiation approach, let's say between the sense making approach embedded in the biblical text and an individual's personal sense making approach, moves to and fro in an oscillating, filtering through and percolating sense and fusing into a compromise (copromissory, joint promise) design from which people in our day and age can take clues, cues and hues into their life worlds.

One must bear in mind that the whole negotiation's ambience has the character of an experiential computational network in which the triad of God, being human and the physical-organic environment is at stake time after time. When love has the lead of the cluster of fields, then love of God, self-love and love for others through the physical-organic setting of nature, form the contextual and episodic basics of the sense making dot-connecting process of love from pointer to pointer, from beginning to end. Likewise when faith has the lead, believing God (not belief in God), believing your self (self-confidence) and believing others through the physical-organic environment form the basics of the dot pattern or pointer pattern of faith, belief and trust in the negotiation's ambience between the sense making view of the text and the sense making view of the negotiator. A similar main pattern of fluctuating basic markers or pointers is involved when any field of experience takes over the emphasising lead, focus or perspective in a consensible negotiation process.

A general description of the continuous process of the consensible negotiation approach in the computational shifting and turning sense will take the form of the individual's negotiation of texts, theories, natural processes or human doings, which amounts to consensible and therefore compromised (copromissory) designs from which clues, cues and hues are taken as consensible fragments and moments into the formation of other texts, theories, natural processes and human doings that people are engaged in.

**The diasporical, mysterious, provisional and intangible character of the Commonwealth of God**

Using terms such as “diasporical”, “mysterious”, “provisional” and “intangible” in referring to the Commonwealth of God does not invalidate the authenticity, the closure and completeness, the very humanness of human actions and structures, but merely acknowledges that they are relative and provisional, fragmentary and dispersed. Hence they also do not signify an antithesis between Church and world as in the church-centred approach; nor do they come between Christian and non-Christian organisations as in the ghetto approach. Instead they denote a contrast between the experience of salvific sense and meaning, episodically and fragmented throughout human life and the fullness of sense and meaning at the infinite and limitless borders of time where God continues to be the “beyond” in the “midst” of new life and a new physical-organic reality. Bonhoeffer (1953:93) expresses this in a letter from prison:

I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weakness but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in a human being’s life and goodness ... God’s “beyond” is not the end of our cognitive faculties. Transcendence of the knowledge of theory has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. God is the “beyond” in the midst of our life.

People as individuals and as groups and communities experience God as the beyond in the midst of their lives, which means that the experience of the simultaneity of the holiness of the at-one-ment and at-other-ness of God, human beings and the physical-organic environment is diasporically occasioned and sporadically located in society.

The diaspora approach does not identify the biblical term *ecclesia* used in the same context as the phrase “the body of Christ” in the letters to the Ephesians 1:15-22 and Colossians 1:15-20 with the Church as a divine or semi-divine Body of God or Christ in created reality. In an essay in 1969 the Canadian Hendrik Hart was one of the first philosophers from the ghetto- or Christianising societal approach who had the courage to state, in the face of the vast majority of church-centred believers and theologians in the world, that

the body of Christ, the human race in the second Adam, the new mankind, constitutes the reinstatement of the viceroy (Hart 1995:3).

Though many of the notions in Hart’s essay are still couched in one-sided Christianising and Reformed language about Christ as mainly a king and a lord over created reality, he at least escaped the theological clutches of church-centredness at this point by equating the “body of Christ in the world” with “the human race, the new humanity”. The problem with the approach that emphasises Christianity as an entity in the world but not of the world is that it runs into the powerful indraught of the church-centred realm, the so called *Christian ekklesia*. The blind spot in the historical hunting and gathering of clues about the origin of the term *ekklesia* and its use in biblical contexts is that it is read with the bifocals of “theological/religious ... secular” or “Christian ... secular” sense making slant. In this sense J W de Cruchy (1995:397-400) superimposed his dualistic modern sense making slant on that of Hellenic Greek society of the first century CE when he states:

Ordinary Greeks may well have been puzzled by the theological way in which Christians used the word (*ekklesia tou Theou*). For Hellenistic Christians it would have suggested an analogy to the secular assembly of citizens, with the implication that Christians had a responsibility to ensure not only that their own community but also wider society was well-governed (cf 1 Cor 2:6).

The Latin-speaking Christian West in the first millennium had difficulty translating the term *ekklesia*. Tertullian translated the term as “curia”, which was the term used for one of the 30 sections in which the older Roman citizens, the patricians were organised. Such a curia had a priest as chairman. In earlier Rome the 30 curiae together comprised the totality of Roman patricians. However, in later Rome all citizens, such as clients (literally: “listeners”) and plebeians were part of the curiae (Petrie 1963:13ff; Gjerstad 1973:292-306). The great North African Augustine (d.430) translated *ekklesia* with *civitas Dei* (the state or city of God). In many instances the term has been left untranslated because it seems essentially untranslatable.

“The body of Christ” is truly *ecclesia* (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22), but not in the sense of the Church and churches. Both in an individual and societal sense people are collectively “called” to be the salt of the earth or the yeast of the dough in a diasporical but a continuum-like matrix of experiences of salvific sense and meaning in society. The other two approaches affirm something similar, but in an antithetical way. Their basic problem is that of the preprogramming of salvific sense and meaning as if it belongs and is exclusively confined to certain divine or semidivine realms in society.

The fullness of the body of Christ, the human race in the second Adam, the new humankind has to be seen as

*Ecclesia*, those who are called forth, not conceiving of themselves religiously as specially favoured, but as wholly belonging to the world (Bonhoeffer 1953:92).

The diaspora approach sees the church, or any organisation of faith, as a fairly important social structure where people share in the fellowship of human faith. In other words: an organisation of faith is a corner-shop of faith that deals in mutual faith, belief and trust in which God is involved and present as in any other societal structure, organisation or institution. The Church or a church is not a millimetre more sacred and not a gram more sacramental than any other institution, organisation or community in society. This makes it but one social structure among many in a differentiated modern society which should have the openness for “Commonwealth of God” experiences.

The idea that the force that stimulates people, draws them out of the past, engages them in the present and impels them into the future is the idea of the Commonwealth of God that cannot be identified with any human social structure, context, situation or activity. Any societal organisation overlaps diasporically but is not on par or to be identified with the Commonwealth of God as is occasionally alleged in church-centred circles. From a viewpoint of a hermeneutics of trust a church-centred sense making approach has no choice



but to idolise, sacramentalise and provide *the*, or *a* church with a divine or semidivine countenance.

The operational application of the *theanthropocosmic principle* is a critical limiting concept of “yet” and “not yet” that places all human life and physical reality under the proviso of the Commonwealth (= Kingdom, Priesthood and Prophetdom) of God. Real life and true reality are there where people live and where true human life enters the “Kingdom” of God which is interconnected with natural reality as the universes, stars, suns, oceans, animals and trees (Heering 1968:12). This nearly tautological statement warrants that people’s experience of salvific sense and meaning is fragmented and scattered in human activities and doings across the whole spectrum of human society and the physical environment. At no point do we have an isolated, chosen funnel through which God and salvific sense and meaning enter society – neither an institution and organisation that is idolised like the Church, as in the church-centred approach, nor the state (as with 19<sup>th</sup> century Hegel), nor a group of preprogrammed Christian or religious organisations; yet it *could* be an organisation of faith, the state, science, marriage, labour union, family or sport, or any other phenomenon. No single structure of the human world may be excluded as if it were by definition unsuitable for salvific sense and meaning. In terms of this approach traces, fragments and moments of God, being human and the physical-organic environment can only be compositely experienced when and where the interconnection and simultaneous otherness of the Godness of God, the humanness of human beings and the naturalness of nature (= physical-organic-cosmic environment) coincide.

True, authentic earthly life can be found wherever the rolling pattern of the extended *ubuntu* motto and the extended central biblical commandment of love are enacted in people’s experience. The traditional *ubuntu* motto reads as follows: “a human being is a human being through other human beings” (*motho ke motho ka batho babang* (Sotho) - *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Nguni). And the traditional central biblical commandment of love reads: “love God above and beyond anything else, and love your neighbour as yourself”. This motto is to be extended and differentiated to include different fields, modes and dimensions of human experience such as loving, thinking, feeling, socialising, believing, proportioning justness, imagining, empowering, economising, producing and speaking. An extended and differentiated formulation reads as follows:

*A loving human being is a loving human being -  
through other loving human beings,  
through a loving human self,  
through the physical-organic cosmic environment connected to  
loving, and  
through a loving God.*

and

*A believing human being is a believing human being -  
through other believing human beings,  
through a believing human self,*

*through the physical-organic cosmic environment connected to  
believing, and  
through a believing God.*

and

*A thinking human being is a thinking human being -  
through other thinking human beings,  
through a thinking human self,  
through the physical-organic cosmic environment connected to  
thinking, and  
through a thinking God.*

In a similar way the process of the central biblical commandment of love: "Love God above and beyond anything else, and love your neighbour as yourself" should not only be extended in four divergent directions of love experience, but differentiated at the same time to roll and evolve through faith and belief, through thinking and rationality, through justness and justice, and so forth, changing to other leading emphases in one's experience of feeling, socialising, imagining, empowering, economising, producing and speaking. Thus, inclusive extension and differentiation reads:

Love in action is the leading emphasis of a patterning process of love acts:

*Love God above and beyond anything else,  
love your human neighbours,  
love your animal, plant and thing neighbours,  
love yourself as a human being.*

Faith or belief is the leading emphasis of a patterning process of acts of faith:

*Believe God above and beyond anything else,  
believe your human neighbours,  
believe your animal, plant and thing neighbours,  
believe yourself as a human being.*

Similarly, thinking in action is the leading emphasis of a patterning process of acts of thinking and thought:

*Think about God above and beyond anything else,  
think about your human neighbours,  
think about your animal, plant and thing neighbours,  
think about yourself as a human being.*

etcetera.

Pockets and packages of the holy at-one-ment and holy-at-other-ment of God, human beings and natural environment do not necessarily happen and eventuate in a particular area and part of society. Sometimes an inkling of the Commonwealth of God becomes for a while visible in a particular church or an organisation of faith; at other times that same church organisation is merely

another organisation in which only certain members still reflect some inkling of true, authentic earthly living in the faith sense of the word. The same can be said of a given state, scientific tradition, university or labour union. The church and the many churches have no privileged function in the Commonwealth of God – unless, of course, one espouses the church-centred approach. At times it may even be advisable to leave your organisation of faith (church) and join another if the divergent fourfold of believing God to be above and beyond anything else, believing your human neighbours, believing your animal, plant and thing neighbours, and believing yourself as a human being is better enacted and given real substance in authentic community living.

The critical factors do not depend on the existence of a majority or critical mass of a particular brand of the Christian sense making persuasion in a particular social institution. If the dominant vibe is Christian it does not necessarily add up to an institution that is Christian per definition, or into the, or a church. What is of importance depends far more on the quality of people's daily experience of faith, thinking, loving, feeling or speaking in continuous alternating experiential patterns, each of which includes the fourfold rolling and evolving pattern: towards God, themselves, other human beings as their neighbours and their animal, plant and thing neighbours.

## 5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In these days of excitement about the new genre of science-fiction exemplified in Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, an underlying hard-core church-centrist experiential doctrine is discernible among people revering the Church, namely that the age-old continuation and survival of God's Church can be taken as proof of the existence of God. Of course, to exponents of the diaspora hypothesis it is unthinkable to put an exclusive and absolute guarantee on God's salvific acts and, moreover, to sanction any act of God with the belief that the centuries of the church's existence in its diverse forms proves that God exists. In defencelessness the Commonwealth of God sweeps and meanders, narrows and widens through creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation without providing us with an unshakable solution to the mystery of the vital tension occasioned by events and experiences of holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and the physical-organic universes in every field of human experience and in every walk of life.

It seems to me that the primeval question about God is not whether, but how God exists. The statement that God exists is almost, if not in fact, an overstatement of the obvious. The question whether God exists is of necessity a question about the existence and identity of the human race. God-consciousness is probably identifiable with the dawn of human consciousness, or let's say at least that the probability that it is so is much greater than the probability that it is not so. And if we are not part of nature as the physical-organic environment, then we are part of nothing. This is proclaimed by the blood in our veins. So nature-consciousness is a given that is part of our human consciousness, and therefore of our God-consciousness, or vice versa, any which way. The composite and coincidental consciousness of God, being human and the physical-organic environment is at stake where and when traces, fragments and moments of the Godness of God, the

humanness of human beings and the naturalness of nature (= physical-organic-cosmic environment) oscillate, percolate and fuse in the depth and broadness people's daily experience and life-worlds.

Clearly, God, human and nature consciousness can be separated notionally but not in real life, i.e. only in the sense of the mysterious simultaneity of their at-one-ment and at-other-ment. These references or orientation points are examples of how one can map a position from which one can verify that, or whether, the above statement is of the essence, and if so, then how indeed, God exists. So if God-consciousness is a delusion – the bottomline concern of Dawkins' book *The God delusion* (2006) – then so be it since it is integral to the human condition and the condition of nature.

Sin and evil as parasiting on, paralysing of and derailing daily events and contexts of holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, human beings and nature are damaging to God, human beings and the physical-organic environment. We do not have certainty and we do not know what, where and when God's Commonwealth is really in operation in the events and contexts of holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment. To call in the help of religious faith in this regard is again to create a holy shrine in a temporal or spatial sense. The torn veil of the temple of Jerusalem is the surest warranty that any holy shrine, holy place or holy book should be viewed as a theologistic delusion that gives temporary relief to wounded heads and fearful hearts or as a pious illusion that a heaven one day will be the relief of our present miserable living conditions and depressed minds. This is strikingly similar to 19<sup>th</sup> century Karl Marx's accusation that God is the opiate of or for the people. Thus for temporary relief of people's present miserable conditions and circumstances people are promised eternal bliss in afterlife.

In the sense making approach that I espouse in this essay the Commonwealth of God is taken up in, through and with the events and grand acts of God's creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation against the background of First, Second and Third Testament perspectives. Furthermore, the sense making pointers of the Commonwealth of God and the theanthropocosmic principle of holy at-one-ment and at-other-ment of God, being human and the physical-organic nature operate in relativising and subversive ways in regard to divine sacramental and semidivine evangelical protestant churches. The main point to keep in mind is that salvific sense and meaning of the Commonwealth of God *may be* embodied and manifested in the or a church, just as it may be manifested in other societal institutions and endeavours such as a state, marriage, family, business, sport and science or in any snippet of human experience. A divinely privileged position should not be claimed for any institution or enterprise in society because the earth and everything in it, or the fullness thereof, is the Lord's (Psalm 24:1). The fullness of the earth of Psalm 24 can definitely be consensibly negotiated in modern and postmodern terms to express "the fullness of the created, reconciled, renewed and consummated universes". The main metaphor of good-earthly-human-living which carries our sense making approach of salvific sense and meaning as events and experiences of *at-one-ment* and *at-other-ment* of God, human beings and physical-organic nature surely include good human living with God amongst the stars of the many galaxies.

The British physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking, although not an admirer of God, speaks in his well-known work *A brief history of time* (1988) and in his recent work *The universe in a nutshell* (2001) about billions of galaxies and universes that astronomers know of. God's Commonwealth or Kingdom cannot be exclusively concentrated in the inner life of human beings or in the parochial localities of the Church and the churches which are scattered over the globe, nor is it even reserved for the earth itself or removed to the end of times; rather it is included in the fullness of the galaxies and universes that we know of, the localities of the inner and outer life of a person, all societal institutions, including the and a church, the natural physical-organic environment, and the beginning and end of time.

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