SOUTH AFRICA: FROM CALVINISTIC EXCLUSIVISM TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 1652-2008

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Abstract

Although South Africa was never officially a Christian country, Calvinistic Christianity has been the dominant religion since the European settlement. The three hundred and fifty years since Christianity was officially introduced to South Africa can be divided into three major periods. During the first 150 years, no denomination other than the Dutch-Calvinistic tradition was officially recognised in the colony. This exclusivity was broken in 1804 when marginal religious tolerance was introduced. Calvinistic Christianity, however, continued to dominate almost every aspect of life until the end of the second millennium. Other Christian traditions and denominations entered the country during this time while new states were formed in the northern and eastern parts of the country. Early in the 20th century the states were consolidated and the Calvinistic church reinforced its privileged position, influencing the governing of the country. In 1994 religious freedom was introduced alongside the democratic government system and most of the Calvinistically inspired laws changed. It seems as if South Africans (both the Christian churches and individuals) are still struggling to come to terms with the consequences of religious freedom. The current situation gives freedom to the church to be of service in the world without interference and restrictions or demands from government. The church is free to act as an instrument of healing in every sphere of a sick society while individuals must learn that choices are not based on laws or relevance but on biblical mandates and faith.

1 INTRODUCTION
In general, most people tend to describe South Africans as “intensely religious and their faiths today can be characterised as comprehensive” (Oladipo 2006:85). Looking beneath the surface, however, one quickly concludes that

... those who regard themselves as Christian do not live out their faith in their daily lives ... being “Christian” is merely a label and not a belief or value system. This is supported by the statistics on crime, violence and other ethical and moral issues (Froise 2004:7-8).

The 2001 census showed that approximately 80 percent of the South African population regard themselves as Christians, who are not supposed to participate in any form of criminal or bad ethical and moral behaviour. Another 15 percent of the population declined to indicate an affiliation, or belong to no particular religion (Census 2001:31). Only 5 percent of the South African population indicated that they participate in other religions, including Islam (1.5 percent), Hinduism (1.2 percent), traditional African beliefs (0.3 percent) and Judaism (0.2 percent).

The slaves that were imported from Madagascar, Indonesia and India between 1680 and 1731 brought Islam to the country and by the mid-1830s most Cape Town slaves were Muslims (Giliomee 2003:100-101). Hinduism came with the labourers to the sugar cane farms of Natal after slavery was abolished in the 19th century (Chidester 1992:168ff). Today, the South African Hindu community is the third largest in the world following India and Sri Lanka (Oladipo 2006:74). Hinduism in India is associated with a caste system, but in South Africa the openness of the South African culture and the influence of Christian education prevented it from making a permanent impression on the local Hindu community (Oladipo 2006:75). Jews only started to immigrate to South Africa in numbers after 1820 (Hellig 1993:61), but after the Second World War, only the United States surpassed South Africa as a destination of Jewish immigrants from Europe (Oladipo 2006:75).

Long before these foreign religions were brought to the South African shores, the first inhabitants of this region, moving in from the northern and central parts of Africa, brought with them their traditional African
religions. They performed religious rituals every day, and engaged in many religious activities. It can be said that, from the earliest times, the phrase *Homo religiosus* (Oladipo 2006:14) truly applied to South Africans.

Calvinistic Christianity became the dominant religion after the European settlement at the Cape in 1652. Calvinism, a type of reformed theology within the Christian faith, is the theological system of thought stemming from the work of the French Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvinism became a historical development of Calvin’s thinking as laid out in his *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The synod of Dort (1618-1619) set forth what has become the standard summary of the major tenets of Calvinism (Grenz, Guretzki & Nordling 1999:23).

The specific trend of Calvinism that impacted South Africa was Dutch Calvinism that was noted for its distinctive understanding of Christian doctrine. “Doctrine was not meant merely for the mind to reflect upon. Doctrine was seen as arising out of the Christian experience in which the whole man had encountered God in Jesus Christ. Doctrine was seen as speaking to the whole man in the totality of his existence” (Cameron 2007).

When describing the Dutch Calvinism in South Africa as exclusive, we should explain that this word refers to two different meanings. On the one hand, exclusivism in Christianity and therefore also in Calvinism refers to the theory that salvation is found only in and through Jesus Christ to the exclusion of all other religions or beliefs. Exclusivism also generally argues that Christ must be believed in and explicitly confessed in order for a person to qualify for salvation (Grenz, Guretzki & Nordling 1999:49). On the other hand, exclusivism in the South African context means that only the Dutch Calvinistic religion was tolerated by the government. No religious freedom was allowed in the colony. Religious freedom is the notion that people of religion can freely partake of the practices of their religion without any opposition. This would include not only private devotions, but also acts of religious significance within the realm of government. Beza, Calvin’s successor, called the idea of religious freedom a devilish and Mohammedan dogma (Neff 1953).
Although the impact of Calvinistic Christianity on traditional African beliefs was slow at first, the missionary input of the 19th century replaced the traditional African beliefs almost completely. In reaction to this alienation of culture and religion, the African people developed their own strand of Christian religion in the 20th century, called the African Independent/Indigenous/Initiated/Instituted Churches or AIC (Hayes 2006).

If we look at the statistics from a religious perspective, South Africa can be called a Christian country, but South Africa was never officially a Christian state. Viewed from a political point of view, South Africa is a democracy with a modern and liberal constitution that proclaims neutrality and freedom of religion for all. Both these statements are true, but one must keep in mind that life in South Africa is not simple and that the influence of the history of the country on both the religious and political aspects of life cannot be underestimated.

Christianity, on the one hand, is like the other Abrahamic religions, both an imported and a proselytising religion that came to South Africa embedded in Western culture. Some aspects of the Christians’ world view (like the exclusivity) are in direct contrast to those of the rest of the world (Stegan 1993:126) and this complicates matters when religious freedom is on the table. The Cape was not colonised by people of a single European nationality and the colonists used their Calvinistic Christian identity as a political identity, calling themselves Christians (Giliomee 2003:41) in order to distinguish them from both the indigenous population and the slaves. The Calvinistic religion that was brought to Africa by the Europeans was so strong that it influenced the juristic, economical and social aspects of life in the settlement until the end of the 17th century (Oliver 2008). Strangely enough, there was no flaming desire to spread Christianity to the non-Christian part of the population living in and around the Cape. The Missionary Society was only founded in 1799 (Gerdener 1959:55), and most of the early missionary work was done by missionaries who came from outside South Africa.

The 1996 South African Constitution, on the other hand, was developed in response to apartheid and under pressure from the international community (Ackermann 2004:5). The Constitution and
Bill of Rights are “truly modern” and they are based on international human rights norms (Goodsell 2007:109), but most South Africans can be described as conservative and some of the liberal human right laws set out in the Bill of Rights do not reflect the sentiments of the majority of the South African population. After more than 13 years of living under the new Constitution, the gap between the theory as outlined in the Constitution and the real life experiences of the South African society seems to be too great to close. In order to explain this statement the following issues can be highlighted:

- The abolition of capital punishment is seemingly not accepted by the general public. This can be concluded from the public killing of crime suspects by members of the community (Angry crowd releases “mob justice” eight 2006) as well as the crowds gathering at court buildings demanding the death penalty (Hang them 2003).
- The ANC promised legalised abortions as part of their pre-elections campaign. “Despite the fact that an estimated 10 percent of all South African women have abortions annually, reliable market research conducted in 1995 found that 78,8% of ANC supporters are opposed to legalised abortions” (Gevisser 1997:250). The ANC experienced a public split of opinion within its caucus over the issue when parliament passed the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Bill. According to Gevisser (1997:25) the reason behind this can be found in the fact that “as in other areas (like gay rights and the decriminalisation of prostitution and pornography), the liberal and feminist elite of the African National Congress finds itself miles ahead of its own constituency” while “South Africans of all races remain socially conservative and beholden to organised religion”. In February 2008, the laws regarding abortion were relaxed even more (Parliament relaxes abortion law 2008). The majority of the religious public more or less passively accepted this act.
- In the past, the churches in South Africa were incapacitated by apartheid and by the fear of the brutality of state-sponsored oppression. The churches either withdrew from the world, or collaborated creatively with an unjust society (Oladipo 2006:10). By the turn of the century, postmodernism already had a devastating effect on the Christian church. Osborn (1999:108-
111) notes seven areas where the postmodern shift can be seen in the church, changing the character of the church to such an extent that it has lost its influence on and appeal to society.

- Currently, government policies like that on HIV/AIDS and religious education in schools go against the grain of most religious groups but churches are seemingly paralysed and numb, offering no guidelines or strong stances on these and other critical issues.
- Some of the churches (like the Dutch Reformed family) are internally divided. They are experiencing major crises regarding issues such as homosexuality and the ordination of women, leaving church members confused and disillusioned, with nowhere to turn to for spiritual guidance on how to bring their faith into line with their lifestyle.

In order to understand the current trend of dissatisfaction, confusion and the destabilising of the society with regard to issues linked to religion and faith, one must understand that the current situation is the result of a long and complicated history of religious freedom in South Africa.

We are far more conditioned by our past than we can hope to understand. Many of our present crises (be they economic, socio-political or the daily trauma of violence and conflict) are the fruit of a historical harvest; a confirmation of the truism that, in spite of the good intentions of the harvesters, one can only reap what one sows (Pillay 1991:1).

The aim of this article is to give an outline of the history of religious freedom in the country and to use this information as an explanation for the current situation while also making suggestions on how the current situation can be handled by the Christian part of the population so that they may act as instruments of healing in South African society.

The three hundred and fifty years since Christianity was officially introduced to South Africa can be divided into three major periods.
1. During the first 150 years after colonisation, no denomination other than the Dutch-Calvinistic church was officially recognised and there was no religious freedom in the newly formed country at the southern tip of Africa.

2. This exclusivity was broken in 1804 when marginal religious tolerance was introduced. Calvinistic Christianity, however, continued to dominate almost every aspect of life until the end of the second millennium. Other Christian traditions and denominations entered the country during this time while new states were formed in the northern and eastern parts of the country. Early in the 20th century the state was consolidated and the Calvinistic church reinforced its privileged position by influencing the governing body of the country.

3. After 1994 religious freedom was introduced by the democratically elected government in a religiously neutral state and most of the Calvinistic inspired laws changed drastically to accommodate other religions and different viewpoints.

Graphically, these periods can be compared to a traffic light with the lights slowly changing from red to yellow and finally to green during a time frame of more than three hundred and fifty years. Next, these periods will be examined in greater detail before making a few final comments on the current situation.

2 1652-1803

In 1602 the Dutch parliament granted the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) a charter giving it a trading monopoly with all countries east of the Cape of Good Hope in Africa and west of the Strait of Magellan in South America (The Netherlands 1998). By 1650 the DEIC had become the world’s largest trading enterprise (Giliomee 2003:3) and two years later the DEIC sent Jan Van Riebeeck to build a halfway station at the Cape of Good Hope to provide the merchantmen on their way to and from the east with fresh supplies of food and water.

The years when the Cape was under supervision of the DEIC were also the time when the Calvinistic influence was at its highest level in the Netherlands (Ruperti 1963:1). Calvinism spread from Geneva over large parts of Europe, including the Netherlands, Scotland and England. The Calvinistic ideas were carried to the Netherlands by the
writings of Calvin, Beza, and other leaders of the reformation (Bloemhof 1980:151). The principle of “one state, one church” gave the Protestant or Reformed church a privileged position (Booyens 1963:30). Very soon, the thoughts of Calvin determined “all aspects of life” in the Netherlands (Muller [s.a.]:314) and it spread to the colonies via the mercenaries. The ecclesiastical court at Batavia, being in charge of the colonies, was instructed on matters of faith and policy by the classis (synod) of Amsterdam who used the church ordinance of Dort (Hattersley 1969:57) which was also implemented in South Africa.

The DEIC, as the governing body of the colonies, made a great effort to assist in the religious wellbeing of the settlers. During the two hundred years of its existence, the DEIC sent out about 900 ministers of religion, as well as hundreds of sick comforters and teachers (Booyens 1963:21). The company also donated money to build churches and paid the salaries of church officials and educators. The DEIC made laws regarding religion to keep good order (Booyens 1963:28). According to the report of the sick comforter at the Cape, Willem Barendts Wijland, to Amsterdam in 1655, the people were religious and no one was excused from religious meetings without a proper reason (Jooste 1946:42). Every evening a prayer was said and two to three spiritual songs were sung. On Sundays a sermon was read (Jooste 1946:43). Attendance at all sermons was compulsory and there were stern laws to punish those who did not comply (Jooste 1946:242). The laws regarding activities on Sundays were extended when a comet showed in the sky in 1665 (Jooste 1946:243). Several days of prayer and/or fasting were issued whenever the government saw a need for it (Jooste 1946:47).

The church functioned as part of and in service of the government and all church officials were on the government’s payroll. Calvinistic Protestantism was the only religion recognised by the state and practised by the colonists, as can be seen in the following statement made during the reign of W A van der Stell:

We stand as one race, one people, with one faith, one privilege, one calling and one destiny; and together we will win the world for our one Lord Jesus Christ (Burton 1927:22).
An exception to the zero tolerance of other religions at the Cape was made for the Lutherans. The first Lutheran church was built in 1774 in Cape Town and religious freedom was officially granted in 1778 (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:25).

Islam, the religion of the imported slaves, was to be tolerated only at a private level (Omar 1993:75). Islamic marriages were unlawful, Muslims were refused citizenship, and they could not possess land or leave their homes without a pass (Omar 1993:76).

To summarise: during the first 150 years after the Dutch settlement at the Cape, religious freedom was not part of life. Calvinistic Christianity has been an important cementing factor of South African society (Oladipo 2006:86).

3 1804-1994

This exclusivity was broken in 1804 when marginal religious tolerance was introduced. South Africa moved from zero tolerance (the red light) in religious matters to a policy of religious tolerance (yellow light) that became the distinct characteristic of the religious situation in South Africa for the next 190 years.

The first changes came about with the church ordinance (Provisionele Kerken-ordre voor de Bataafsche Volksplanting aan de Kaap de Goede Hoop) that was implemented by De Mist in 1804 and stayed operational until 1843 when it was replaced by Ordinance 7. The government was still in charge of church affairs but people could now choose or change their religion (Booyens 1963:118). Islam was recognised as a religion (History of Muslims in South Africa) and the Roman Catholic Church also received recognition as a religion. The first Bishop only settled in South Africa in 1838 (Brady 1951:116).

The first part of the church ordinance provided general rules for all religions and the second part dealt with the Dutch Reformed Church as the privileged church of the colony (Jooste 1946:90). The government was still in charge of the Dutch Reformed Church, appointing ministers of religion, and deciding where they would work.
and serve (Jooste 1946:91). The government even had the right to impose taxes payable to the Dutch Reformed Church (Booyens 1963:115).

By 1842 the Voortrekkers had already formed their own independent branch of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Transvaal. Fear that the strong grip of the government on the church in the Cape would expand to their part of the world was the reason why they did not want to stay part of the church in the Colony (Schutte 1943:31). Strong-minded leaders and difference of opinion led to further schisms and eventually the Dutch Reformed Church split into three different branches but Calvinistic Christianity continued to dominate the religious scene as new states formed in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

Early in the 20th century the state was consolidated into a union and the Calvinistic church reinforced its privileged position, building it up to a crescendo after the 1948 victory of the National Party. The preambles of South Africa’s three apartheid constitutions between 1910 and 1983 state the first national goal as “the upholding of Christian values and civilised norms” (Du Plessis 2001:443). This materialised in, amongst other things, the opening of meetings of the national assembly and parliament with prayer while in courts a Christian oath bound all to speak the truth (Hofmeyr 1913:3).

During the years of apartheid, most religious movements were allowed to operate freely, as long as their activities did not challenge the apartheid structures (Omar 1993:74), but there was no religious freedom. Islamic, Hindu and traditional African marriages were not recognised by the state and legal system. Dietary laws interfered with some religious ceremonies (Sooka 1993:83). Non-Christian religions had no access to state media and only Christian holidays were public holidays.

During this second phase in the religious history of South Africa, a number of laws regarding religion were passed. Although not all of them were implemented to safeguard the Christian religion, the influence they had on the religious composition of the population must not be underestimated. Two examples are the Cape Immigration Restriction Act of 1902 and the Immigration Quota Bill of
1930 (together with the Alien Act 1 of 1937). The reason behind both these laws was economic but it also prevented non-Christians (like Jews and people from the East) from immigrating in large numbers to South Africa (Hellig 1993:66-67).


Other laws were made explicitly to protect Christianity. The European Sunday observance and celebrating of Christian holidays were brought to South Africa by the first settlers but even in the early years laws were needed to keep people orderly on Sundays. At the first national synod in 1824, concern was expressed about commercial activities, noise in the streets, sport, gambling and open bars on Sundays (Jooste 1946:242). Four years later a law was made to stop commercial activities and keep places of entertainment locked on Sundays (Jooste 1946:27). The law of 1837 outlawed working in the fields and the handling of firearms on Sundays (Jooste 1946:248).

Rosslee (1955:16-22) summarises the laws regarding Sunday observance in the later four provinces of South Africa. After the discovery of gold and diamonds, the laws were changed to adapt to the functioning of the mines and industry on Sundays (Rosslee 1955). Until 1993, cinemas and other forms of entertainment were not accessible on Sundays (Sooka 1993:86). Sport on Sundays, the selling of liquor, and trading hours were all regulated by laws to benefit Christianity (cf. Van der Vyver, [s.a.]:1; Van Wyk 1981:1)

Due to a strong alliance between politics, law, Western culture, and Afrikaner civil religion in pre-1994 South Africa (Du Toit 2006:678), not all Christian groups were treated equally. The South African population is not a homogeneous society. The Christian community was divided by language, race, culture and politics (Kritzinger 1993:7). There are no less than 32 languages spoken in South Africa of which 11 are official mediums of communication (Johnstone, Johnstone & Mandryk 2001:576). The majority race in South Africa consists of blacks and they are divided into different nations and
tribes, each speaking its own language and having its own culture and customs. Oladipo (2006:13) does not see the (black) South Africans' adoption of Christianity as a conversion but rather as a transformation of their faith. He describes the 20th century transition by Christianity from a white, European-dominated religion to a vibrant black-majority religion rooted in African idioms and cultures as one of the most important developments of Christianity in South Africa (Oladipo 2006:93). In reaction to the 18th and 19th century European missionary-driven conversion to Christianity by black South Africans, the AIC came into existence. The leadership of the mainline churches was and still is generally slow or unwilling to ordain Africans as pastors, and reluctant to give them full responsibility in financial matters, or admit them as equals. Missionaries generally refuse to relax ultimate white control of the missionary-initiated churches (Oladipo 2006:82). Tired of being treated as inferiors, some of the AIC leaders made attempts to break the shackles of white domination while retaining the creed and some forms of ecclesiastical structure of the mother church (Ethiopian churches) while others, (like the Zionist churches) developed around strong leaders and their families.

Twenty-five percent of the Asian population in South African are Christians (Statistics South Africa 2004:28). They also have their own culture, languages and customs that are different from the other Christian groups.

The coloured communities of South Africa are in general Afrikaans-speaking and nearly eighty-seven percent are Christians (Statistics South Africa 2004:28). Their culture and customs started off as a combination of those of other groups from which they derived but over the years they developed into a unique worldview that only overlaps on some aspects with the other Christian groups in the country.

The white population can be divided into Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking people, each with their own unique customs, culture and way of interpreting their faith. For a long time in Western societies a theological view of the world was central to the formation of public policy. Theological truths were taken for granted as real knowledge of the world (Cochrane 1991:52) and the white population
who was in charge of the government let their views influence every aspect of life.

During the 20th century, most of the South African Christian churches have set a pattern of silence and indifference, of no official statements (Camp 1994:172) and no radical appeals for action by its members. Resistance came from the other communities but the white churches were comfortable and numb in a “do not disturb” mode, enjoying the advantages of being in the pound seats.

The different denominations and theological strands within Christianity divided the churches within the same race and weakened their influence on and authority in politics and social life.

In summary, one can say that there was religious freedom for the Calvinistic Christians during this period and variable degrees of religious tolerance for other Christian groups and most other religions.

4 AFTER 1994

The light turned green as the last of the three historical eras began when the democratically elected government introduced religious freedom. Prior to 1994, the government was associated with a specific theological pre-text, which led to the fact that certain practices which restrained religious freedom were banned. All this changed in 1994. When Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as president, the official ceremony included a religious service. The service was not, as in the past, restricted to the Christian faith, but it included participation by other major religions (Van der Vyver 1999:670). The Bill of rights restricts religion to the private and individual spheres (Du Toit 2006:695) and Calvinistic Christianity suffered a severe blow regarding its influence on government. However, the new South Africa is not a secular state. It seeks to uphold religiously neutral practices that grant equal opportunities to all religions. This means that another political party could take over the reigns and govern the country differently from the ANC, while remaining within the parameters of the same Constitution, because the current Constitution is open to different interpretations and different ideological frameworks.
The 1996 Constitution’s emphasis on human dignity, freedom, equality, and individual rights contrasts starkly with the preceding history (Du Toit 2006:681). The Preamble to this Constitution also refers to God but it is offensive to some Christians. They argue that the word “God” is too general because it means different things to different people. It certainly does not refer to the Christian God alone. Atheists and persons adhering to a non-theistic religion such as Buddhism are also offended by the word (Van der Vyver 1999:650).

Social life changed drastically as the laws made during the preceding era changed one after the other to make way for religious freedom. But it seems as if the majority of South Africans are not happy with these developments. Various religious groups have criticised the new laws as conflicting with their beliefs and practices. They include provisions dealing with discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender, which displease Christian and Muslim citizens. Abortion provokes opposition from Christian groups, and provisions relating to bodily integrity are in conflict with the traditional practices of the indigenous African population (Du Toit 2006:677).

In the modern history of South Africa, Christianity is both a burden and “a tool of liberation” (Oladipo 2006:15). Part of the national anthem can be used as an example. *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* was composed in 1897 by Enoch Sontonga, who was a teacher at a Methodist missionary school in Johannesburg. The first stanza was originally written in Xhosa as a hymn. (In 1927 seven additional stanzas were added by the poet Samuel Mghayi.) Rev. Dube’s Ohlange Zulu Choir popularised *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* at concerts in Johannesburg, and it became a popular church hymn. However, it was also adopted as the anthem at political meetings. For decades *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* was regarded as the national anthem of South Africa by the oppressed and it was sung as an act of defiance against the apartheid regime (ANC). After 1994, this hymn became part of the national anthem, representing both the burden of the past and a celebration of freedom. Faith, that was once a burden to the majority of South Africans − because the apartheid leaders professed Christianity and used it as a weapon of oppression − was also used as a tool for liberation and is now celebrated in the new dispensation.
Currently, the emphasis on Christianity is moving from the north to the south and South Africa is one of the countries where Christianity is growing. But this is a qualified growth. While the numbers of most of the white Christian churches are declining, the biggest growth is within the AIC where black South Africans are recognising echoes of their ancestral religion in Christianity, and the lines that separated their religion from Christianity are now blurry (Oladipo 2006:15).

After more than 300 years, religious freedom has been given a green light in South Africa. But after years of experiencing religious freedom as part of everyday life, court cases and public opinion show that there is still a long way to go before the majority of South Africans will fully adapt to the situation.

5 CONCLUSION

Wood (quoted by Mosoma 1993:49) explains religious freedom as the inherent right of a person to religious commitment according to one’s own conscience, in public or in private, to worship or not to worship according to one’s own understanding or preferences, to give public witness to one’s faith – including the right of propagation, and to change one’s religion – all without threat of reprisal, discrimination because of one’s religion, or the abridgement of one’s rights as a citizen.

In theory, most South Africans would probably underwrite this definition. The problems arise when theory is put into practice in day-to-day life. To a large part of the population, the past 14 years have brought uncertainty, turmoil and discontent, both in their individual lives and in the community life of the Christian churches. The main causes, among others, of this are the issues of religious education, abolishing of the death penalty, abortion on request, gay rights, business on Sundays and the legalisation of gambling (Du Toit 2006:593). It seems as if the drastic changes regarding legislation of these matters caught a large number of people off guard. On the one hand, in the light of South African history, they may have thought that such drastic changes would not really take place while, on the other hand, people felt abandoned and without proper guidance as a result of the split opinions regarding these matters within the mainline churches.
Laws and the Constitution are no longer the restrictions on religious freedom, but people’s minds, their perspective, one-way thinking patterns and their prejudiced way of looking at matters, both religious and material. It seems as if Calvinistic Christianity started to crumble the moment the cushions of protection by law and government were removed from it. Contributing to this is the way Calvinistic Christianity approached the issue of religious freedom. Taking an antagonistic and negative stance towards the changes or thinking that controversial issues would go away if they were ignored was not the correct way to guide Christians into the new era. Du Plessis (2001:464) said that Christians have to learn to organise themselves for the purpose of asserting their rights under the Constitution which “so generously protects them”. But this lesson is still to be learned by the South African Christian community. Early last year, the vice president, Jacob Zuma, asked Christian churches to take their rightful place in society and to be more outspoken to ensure the making of laws that will reflect the will of the majority of the population (Beeld 2007).

The South African population is known to be a religious people. Living in a country with guaranteed religious freedom, it should not be difficult for religion to speak for itself and for Christianity to have its say in day-to-day affairs too. First of all, Christians must stop lamenting about lost protection and new liberal laws and the past. We need to face the current situation and start living and practising our faith. The Christian church needs to look beyond South African history to the history of the first century to find guidelines on how to handle the current situation. The first Christians did not have state protection but their radically different manner of living managed to change the world in a short period of time. By letting faith, and not the laws of the country or the government, set the boundaries for actions, South African Christians can turn the tables. Religious freedom does not mean that Christians have to participate in any of the “freedoms” guaranteed by the state. It means that we have the freedom of choice to live within the boundaries set by our faith. For example:

- If no Christians go to abortion clinics, who will use the services?
- If Christians do not visit the gambling houses, how will these businesses be able to keep their doors open?
If the religious population of South Africa boycott television shows with sex and violence, who will watch TV?
If Christians boycott businesses on Sundays, will all the stores still be open or will we be able to tell the Muslims from the Christians by observing their business hours?
If clergy stop fighting and making spectacles of themselves over issues like gay rights and women’s rights, they could use that energy, time and money for spreading the gospel and bringing life and light into Africa and the rest of the world.

We expected Christian institutions and believers to have problems with the changes, but what we did not expect, was the way Calvinistic Christianity seemed to collapse when the support systems was removed. South Africans need a change of heart. Faith must provide the rules we live by. The state and its laws can only contribute and be supplementary to the main laws of life which are provided by religion and act as the foundation of all actions, thoughts and words.

The religious institutions are vital and powerful media of communication to a large number of South Africans. They have access to a captive audience as well as a traditional authority which cannot be undermined. In this capacity alone, there is already a definite role for religion in the reconstruction of society (Assabi 1991:77). The current situation gives the church freedom to be of service in the world without interference and restrictions or demands from government. The church as a national institution that can reach into even the most remote areas and to people on all levels of society is free to act as an instrument of healing to a sick society. Individual Christians who have learnt that choices are not based on laws or relevance but on biblical mandates and faith will serve on all levels of society to reach people at grassroots level to give guidance, change perceptions, and save lives and souls. The church that is in a troubled world is also the church that is in a position to be an agent of healing (Oladipo 2006:8).

South Africa has come a long way from a time when religious freedom was not even considered – through nearly two hundred years of religious tolerance – to a time where religious freedom is part of everyday life. South Africans need to adjust to the changed circumstances and religious institutions; for instance, the Calvinistic
Christian churches urgently need to take stock and teach Christians that the choices they make in day-to-day life, must be based on the biblical foundation of their faith and not influenced by peer pressure, political correctness or the “freedom” granted by laws.

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