Between Capital and Cathedral:

Essays on Church-State relationships

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Review panel

Preface

Nothing in this world is static. Not even Church[1] and State[2] relationships. As change is ringing in the social, political and ecclesiastical spheres of South Africa, so it is necessary to relook the notion of Church-State relations in this country. Coming from a past where the Church held a dominant position in society – both in the promotion of and in the resistance to the apartheid system – the Church now finds itself in a new context, a constitutional democracy. All of a sudden its voice has to compete with other voices, its power limited to the understanding that it is but one role-player in a society which is trying to find its feet. What does this mean for the identity, place and role of the Christian Church? This collection of essays seeks to address specifically this question.

In the first essay, a well-known voice in South Africa regarding Church and State relations, Prof. Peter Storey, outlines the critical distinction that needs to be made between the place and role of the Church and that of the State. Speaking from his experience of a past where the lines were blurred all too often, Storey urges the Church to remain faithful to its roots, namely its devotion to God, while playing a critical prophetic role in society. The Church needs to find its own identity and should not succumb to the temptation of becoming an instrument of the State by being entertained in the halls of Caesar. Another real attraction that should be resisted is the idea that the State could serve as an instrument of the Church.

On this point, Prof. Rieger speaks from the perspective of the United States of America, which is largely seen as a nation which functions under a Christian democracy. Although the USA may deny this notion, Rieger clearly outlines the influence the Church has on the State, warning that the Church's close proximity to the State leads it down a path where the legitimacy of its prophetic voice is called into question. Is it easier for a Christian to live in a Christian State than to live in a non-Christian State? Rieger concludes that it is not. A Christian State is not ideal for a diverse community which shares many cultures, religions and belief systems. When the Church is situated too close to the State and the State is caught up in controversy, it becomes all too easy to demonise the Christian religion, thinking that the State is a true representation of that which the Church stands for.

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[1] Throughout this work, "Church" refers to the universal Church, while "church/es" refers to local worshipping communities or denominations.

[2] Throughout this work, "State" refers to powers of governance, while "state" refers to the noun which depicts the subject of discussion's particular condition.

How do Christians then understand and interact with democratic systems? Klaus Nürnberger, another familiar theological voice from South Africa, then speaks about the particularly Protestant interaction with democratic systems. Giving an historical-theological overview of Lutheranism, the Reformed tradition, humanism, evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, Nürnberger suggests that the Protestant interaction with democracy does not have a flattering history. Interestingly enough, this essay was first published during the closing years of the Apartheid era (1991), but it is clear to see, almost two decades on, that the struggles Nürnberger highlighted have come to fruition. The Church obviously has a long road to travel in terms of interacting with and using democratic systems wisely, not only for its own relevance in society, but for the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

What does it mean then for South African Christians to be citizens of a democratic country while still pledging their allegiance to Christ through their affiliation with the Church? Dr. Le Bruyns gives valuable insights into how the Church and State in fact share some common ideals. "Hope", "power" and "grace" for the people are advanced in the messages of both the Church and the State. Although given from different vantage points, these principles give some scope for a constructive, cooperative relationship between the Church and the State in South Africa. However, sharing some ideals does not suggest that South Africa is heading towards becoming a Christian State.

Forster argues convincingly that the most helpful model for governance, especially in the South African context, is the secular State. Citing historic examples of unhealthy relationships between different States and faith communities, ranging from religious States to areligious States, Forster suggests that the secular State is the best option for ensuring religious freedom, a critical-prophetic role by faith communities and an equality among people who share different belief systems. The South African Constitution has certainly made provision for this, but has it worked in practice?

In Bentley's essay, it is argued that because the State has not been able to deliver on its promises and the Church's role in society has become ambigious, many people are growing disillusioned with both these entities. Asking what the Church's role in society is and what its relationship with the State should be, Bentley urges the Church to remember that it did not come into being merely to be a body concerned with spiritual matters, but by internalising Jesus' twofold law of love, its expression of faith becomes a political act which in itself bears a prophetic witness to the State of what it is responsible for and whom it is accountable to.

The Church's role in society must not be underestimated. It carries with it a rich history of shaping leaders in the South African context who have been able to facilitate change for the benefit of all people. It did so, first

of all, by means of education. If it were not for the Church's role in establishing centres of education and formation, one wonders whether the South African story would have turned out any different. Khuzwayo writes about both the good and the bad of the history of education in South Africa, challenging the Church not to let go of this vital gift which it shared in for centuries. As much as Church-based education played a role in the formation of prominent leaders in South Africa's past and present, so the Church can sow the seeds of leadership for the future by participating in this vital area of personal- and communal advancement.

The Church does not only sow seeds for the future, but Christians can and already are making an impact in their communities. In the closing essay, Kretzschmar gives practical suggestions of how Christians in particular can become more proactive in engaging the State, their Church communities and Society. It is not helpful to compartmentalise one's life, thinking that one's faith should be seperated from one's social awareness. Here too, Kretzschmar puts forward the argument that one's Christian faith must naturally lead to holding our leaders accountable, working towards the well-being of all and so making the Christian hope tangible. This necessecitates a healthy relationship between Church and State which would then translate into a healthy democracy.

Being a work produced by the Research Institute for Theology and Religion at the University of South Africa, all essays were reviewed by members of a review panel appointed by the Research Institute for Theology and Religion for subsidy purposes. The essays were all approved by the review panel. The editors would like to thank each contributor to this publication for their commitment to the project and for the countless hours spent, preparing their individual essays for this book.

It is our hope that this publication will spark a renewed conversation both in the Church and the State concerning the essential place of faith communities and the State in the well-being of society. We hope that the thoughts expressed here would inspire the reader to take seriously their individual role in establishing a society which fosters life, rights, justice and faith.

Wessel Bentley
Editor

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Essay 1

Banning the flag from our churches:
learnings from the Church-State struggle in South Africa

Peter Storey[3]

During the 1980s, at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa banned the South African flag from all its church buildings. The reason was clear: the regime's injustices had put it beyond the pale of civilised nations and its orange, white and blue flag had become a pariah symbol of racism and oppression. In 1994, when transformation came, a brave new banner, representing a liberated 'rainbow' nation, was hoisted to joyful acclaim. Most people assumed that with the birth of the new South Africa, the old ban would fall away, but it was retained and they wondered why. "After all," they reasoned, "this new flag bears none of the stains of the past; it is innocent of wrong." The short answer was: "Just you wait." And sure enough, less than two decades into the life of the new democracy, our bright banner has already gathered some grubby marks due to actions of the present government.

But the reason for banning the nation's flag – any nation's flag – from Christian places of worship goes deeper than the deeds of a particular regime at a particular time. It roots in the essential nature of both Church and State, and the relationship between them. During the struggle years, Christians were forced to revisit this relationship, to read their Scriptures with new eyes opened by the abuse of State power all about them, and to refigure how the Church should engage with Caesar. The result was a prophetic witness by parts of the South African Church that became a watchword of faithfulness all over the world.

What has been most surprising, however, is how quickly lessons learnt in those years have been forgotten. In 1994, when South Africa's system of government was radically transformed away from minority domination and toward fully participatory democracy, most citizens rightly rejoiced to see the old system die, but many made the mistake of assuming that because a sys-

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tem had changed, the *essential nature* of the State, and therefore its relationship with the Church, had also changed. In fact nothing of the sort had happened because nothing of that sort is possible. A simple rule of history – and surely of sound theology – is that Caesar will always be Caesar and God will always be God. Some Caesars may be more humane and just than others, but their DNA remains the same. South Africa's post-liberation Caesars can claim much of the credit for bringing us to a brave new South Africa and in most ways they have behaved much differently than their Apartheid predecessors, but they are subject to the temptations that all Caesars *by their nature* must contend with. Therefore there are good reasons why we need the robust democratic institutions put in place in 1994. This somewhat pessimistic truth is fundamental to the building of a realistic and theologically defensible relationship between Church and State.

Scripture and good governance

Considering the Caesars of history, Scripture oscillates between shafts of light, wistful hope and despair:

> Some day there will be a king who rules with integrity and national leaders who govern with justice. Each of them will be like a shelter from the wind and a place to hide from storms. They will be like streams flowing in the desert, like the shadow of a great rock in a barren land. Their ears shall be open to the needs of the people. – Is. 32: 1–3.[4]

"Some day!"

There have been moments in history when such a ruler may have been experienced. South Africans will feel that we knew a ruler like that for an all too brief five years, someone who broke the mould of hubris, self-interest and mediocrity, and upon whom power sat lightly and gracefully, a leader in whom the world saw true greatness. The fact that Nelson Mandela seemed so unique, however, makes him one of the exceptions that tend to prove the rule.

Scripture would certainly regard such a ruler as an exception. The Biblical tradition finds rulers, whether Pharaoh, or Nebuchadnezzar, Saul or David or Solomon, or Herod, Pilate, or Agrippa … indeed the whole breed, mainly problematical. It is worth recalling that in reluctantly conceding to Israel's incessant demands to "... have a king over us like other nations,"

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[4] All citations from Scripture in this essay are taken from *The New English Bible*.

Yahweh declared that in this choice the people were in fact rejecting him: "It is I whom they have rejected, I whom they will not have to be their king" – 1 Samuel 8:6 and 8.

When the fateful choice was made, however, Yahweh did not give up, but still sought to give guidance. There are Scriptural precepts describing Yahweh's expectation of rulers. In Deuteronomy, Yahweh provides for an atypical king who will not acquire many wives, or horses, or quantities of silver and gold, because these attributes are sure to lead the people back to Egypt. Instead, he will keep a copy of the book of the law beside him and "... read from it all his life so that he may fear the Lord his God ..." – 1 Samuel 17:14–20. Throughout the prophetic tradition, including Jesus himself, there is hope for something different:

Sifted from Scripture, here are some of what we may call 'Biblical precepts for good government':

- Rulers are accountable. They have a special responsibility to 'shepherd' their people because 'their' people are not actually theirs, but God's (Ezek.34). Therefore rulers are accountable to God. "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord," is the supreme biblical accolade for rulers, but that phrase is sadly outnumbered in the Bible by its opposite: "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" - I and II Kings.
- Service, rather than self-aggrandisement, is required of rulers. The trappings of high office beloved by so many of them will be judged always by the king who was born in a stable, who worked in a carpenter's shop and died on a cross. "If I your Lord have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet." - John 13: 12–17.
- God requires integrity in rulers. Nothing erodes respect for public office faster than corruption. "Don't be surprised when you see that the government oppresses the poor and denies them justice and their rights. Every official is protected by the one over him and both are protected by still higher officials." – Eccl. 4:8. The story of Naboth's vineyard is about the consequences of corruption in leadership (1 Kings 21:1–25), and that of David and Bathsheba traces the link between private morality and public office (2 Samuel 11:2–25).
- Righteousness is what exalts a nation. The word 'righteousness' is translated in the New English Bible as 'justice', but even that word needs a greater biblical depth. The best way to describe it in English would be 'compassionate fair dealing' – what Micah describes as "...

doing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with your God" - Micah 6:8.

- Economic justice is paramount. Scripture understands that behind the struggle for political rights is the need for economic liberation, because behind most denials of political liberty is the desire to retain unjust economic advantage. The love of money, land and resources, which bring power, lies at the root of most oppression (Micah 2:1–3, Leviticus 25:8–10, Amos 8:4–7). The Biblical concept of 'Jubilee' was about restitution and the righting of economic imbalances through the periodic redistribution of land and the cancelling of debts. Jesus spoke more about money than almost any other subject because he knew this was the bottom line of most oppression and wrongdoing.

- The rich and strong are most in danger of God's judgment. In the Bible, sins which flow from strength are more harshly judged than those emanating from our weaknesses. The abuse of power to deny a poor person bread will always be a greater sin than the theft of bread by a poor person. When theologians say that God is on the side of the poor, it is not because the poor are sinless, but because they are most sinned against (Exodus 3:7–10, Proverbs 31:8–9, Luke 4:16–21).

- Society will therefore be judged by how the most vulnerable are treated. In Biblical days, the most vulnerable were widows, aliens and orphans and the first recorded welfare legislation of any kind is to be found in Leviticus 19:9–11, instructing that a portion of each harvest was to be left for their needs. In Matthew 25:31 and following, it is not individuals, but nations that stand before Christ to be judged, and the criteria are whether they visited the sick and prisoners, clothed the naked and fed the hungry, housed the stranger and refreshed the thirsty. In today's world, it is the task of each nation to identify who 'the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters' are, and to care for them. That will be the true measure of their greatness.

- Each person has intrinsic worth. We carry in our personhood the image of God, defaced perhaps, but still God's image, waiting to be restored by grace and forgiveness. This makes each person a royal being, to be treated with unconditional regard. We are valued most, not because we add value, but because Christ died for us (Gen 1:26, Rom. 5:6–11). This worth counts more to God than our wisdom, performance or wealth. In the parable of the hired labourers, their needs as persons come before their performance (Matt. 20:1–16). This worth also counts more than any accident of skin-colour, ethnicity, gender, orientation or culture, because God has no favourites (Acts 10:34–35, Gal.3:28–29). It follows that policies of Government must

be judged primarily by their impact on the lives of ordinary people, because people are not 'ordinary' at all. Policies that injure family life, rob people of their rights, demean human dignity, stunt growth, silence conscience, foment war, encourage exploitation and perpetuate poverty, must be judged as wrong and displeasing to God.

- God requires reconciliation and respect between those who are different, rather than enmity and division. Leaders who exploit or manipulate division and prejudice for the sake of gaining or retaining power, are disobeying God. Rather, they are obliged to bend their energies to bringing unity and the healing of divisions (Eph. 1:1–10, 2 Cor. 5:18–20).

These are some of the biblical criteria for good governance and the accountability required of rulers.

What then of democracy?[5]

The coming of democracy to South Africa was rightfully a moment of rejoicing, and none among us would choose to return to the dark night of Apartheid's brutal oppression. Nevertheless, the years since 1994 have surely persuaded us that democracy is not to be equated with the arrival of the reign of God. Democracy is an inefficient and messy business and its virtues have to do more with its realism about human imperfection, than with any systemic genius. Therein, however, may lie its true value. When Winston Churchill described democracy as, "...the worst form of government – except for all those other forms that have been tried,"[6] he was, albeit unknowingly, making a *theological* statement. Scripture offers no direct guidance as to how societies should order their governance and there is no form or system of government that bears the divine stamp of approval. The list of principles we have seen above, however, are not easily misunderstood: the Hebrew Scriptures are predicated on a great act of liberation from tyranny and are replete with warnings never to return to such tyranny. If these principles about governance are to be honoured, all forms of tyranny are ruled out. Thus

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5   Some of the thoughts under this heading were first developed by the author in Peter J. Storey, "The Role of the Church in the Formation of Democratic Assumptions and Patterns of Behaviour," in *A Democtratic Vision for South Africa,* ed. Klaus Nürnberger, (Pietermaritzburg: Encounter Publications, 1991), 580–585.

6   Winston Spencer Churchill in the House of Commons, 11 November, 1947.

for democratic systems, however imperfect they may be, offer the strongest bulwark against tyrants.

It may be that one can even make a further, cautious claim: to the question of whether democracy has any justifying theological rationale, it may be possible to give a qualified 'yes', not because there is any direct Scriptural sanction for it, but because democratic systems do seem to take serious account of the two primary Biblical truths about humankind: *that we are made for goodness and for God,* and, *that we habitually lose the plot and fall into wrongdoing.* Democracy is predicated on the one hand on the optimism of Grace, and on the other, the inevitability of the Fall. We permit aspirant governments to promise newness and difference – a 'better life for all' as one slogan has it – and then see them gradually betray their promises. The chance we give them by electing them expresses the hope that maybe, this time, they will get it right. The opportunity to later reject them at the polls, affirms again the fallibility of all human rulers.

Reinhold Niebuhr reinforces this notion: "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."[7] Democratic institutions, while representing the nobility of our aspirations toward the good, even more express our suspicion of the utopian vision. We design them in hope, but more so, they are there to rein in the powerful, to subject them to public scrutiny and to hold them accountable to the people and the rule of law.

Important as it is that democracy helps us express the people's will, enabling the election of those whom the people choose, even more important is that democratic institutions permit us to get rid of them in a reasonably civil and nonviolent manner. The greatest strength of democracy is not that it provides for the peaceful gaining of power, but that it facilitates its peaceful *surrender*. It may be argued that the noblest moment for any democracy is when a defeated leader says, "The people have spoken", and begins to pack his or her bags.

This does not mean that democratic systems are not open to manipulation and massive abuse. Today, democracy is under attack less from totalitarian systems than from the power of big money, and its ability to buy politicians and votes, of globalised corporations not answerable to any electorate, and domination by market forces beyond the control of governments. The recent US Supreme Court ruling that corporations have the right to pour as much money as they wish into election funding because they are 'legal persons' in US law and therefore have the First Amendment rights of

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[7]   Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and Darkness* (New York: Scribner's & Sons, 1932), xxxii.

any citizen[8] – has changed the already obscenely money-driven US political landscape for the worse, removing it further from the reach of ordinary citizens. The refusal by South African political parties to reveal the sources of their funding is inconsistent with the transparency that characterises our Constitution. Thus, in democracies round the world, systems that have sufficed for decades will need to be revisited and redesigned to meet the challenges of a very different world, but that is not under our purview here. Sufficient to say that just because democratic systems are preferable to any other form of governance, they do not get a free pass: they need still to be judged by the high demands of God's precepts.

What of the Church and the State?

Church history shows varying stances toward the State at different times. For an outstanding overview, see Charles Villa-Vicencio's "Between Christ & Caesar - Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church and State".[9] Mainstream Church tradition acknowledges the State's legitimate place in God's purposes but cautions about its tendency to exceed its divine mandate. Karl Barth affirms that, "… the State, as such, belongs originally and ultimately to Jesus Christ; that in its comparatively independent substance, in its dignity, its function, and its purpose, it should serve the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ and therefore the justification of the sinner."[10] He recognises, however, that the State "... can of course become 'demonic' and the New Testament makes no attempt to conceal the fact that at all times the Church may, and actually does, have to deal with the 'demonic' State"[11]. While it is not inevitable that the State becomes a 'demonic' force, this happens, he says, when the State loses its "... legitimate, relative independence",[12] when it renounces "... its true substance, dignity, function and purpose, a renunciation which works out in Caesar worship, the myth of the State and the like".[13] The relationship between Church and State, according to Barth, is not a static

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8   Supreme Court of the United States of America: Citzens United vs Federal Election Commission, 2010. In the US, the freedom to spend one's money as one wishes is equated with free speech rights enshrined in the First Amendment.

9   Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ & Caesar, Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church & State* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1986).

10   Karl Barth, *Community, State and Church: Three essays,* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1968), 118.

11   Barth, *Community, State and Church,* 118.

12   Barth, *Community, State and Church,* 118.

13   Barth, *Community, State and Church,* 118.

thing, nor is it a matter of the Church living in relation to the State, in "...a night in which all cats are grey"[14]. It is rather a "...question of continual decisions, and therefore a distinction between one State and another, between the State of yesterday and the State of today".[15] In its discernment the Church uses as its measure, "...the future city in which Christians have their citizenship here and now…"[16] which is not merely an ideal: it is real, and the fact that Christians have their true or first citizenship there, "makes us strangers and sojourners within the State, or within the States of this age and this world".[17]

Thus, the Church has a role in helping the State fulfil God's expectations, by reminding it of those expectations, and holding it accountable to its task. In so doing, however, Christians need to remain watchfully mindful of the claims arising from their dual citizenship. As a Christian, I have two identity documents: one declares me a South African citizen by birth, but the second declares me a citizen of God's realm by baptism and conversion. I must understand that whatever demands are placed upon me by the first, are always informed and often trumped by the second.

This is at heart what the Church struggle against Apartheid was all about. Christians had to decide which of their two identity documents had greater claim over their lives, and then determine how to bring the primary claims of the one to bear upon the real, but lesser, claims of the other. For the Church to faithfully perform its function *vis a vis* the State in the face of growing pressure, it had not only to be energised by its vision of 'the future city', but also had to *embody* that vision in the painful present of Apartheid South Africa. It had not only to be heard in the words of its prophets, but seen in the lives of *prophetic congregations*, communities actually living out God's future for South Africa in the demonic present of the 1970s and 80s. An instance was the racial integration of the historically white Central Methodist Mission congregation in Johannesburg at that time. This deliberate action was as prophetic as any pronouncement from its pulpit, or any protest march through its doors. In addition to the occasional arrest of the minister and invasion of its premises by security police, the witness of its life together precipitated inner crisis, with the loss of some 200 white members. Nevertheless, that was judged to be cheap at the price, because in place of a monochrome reflection of Apartheid society was born a congregation that was an

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[14]   Barth, *Community, State and Church,* 45.
[15]   Barth, *Community, State and Church,* 45.
[16]   Barth, *Community, State and Church,* 123.
[17]   Barth, *Community, State and Church,* 123.

embodiment – a visual aid – of what God intended for all South Africans, a people deciding that their primary citizenship lay beyond the Apartheid State.

During that era, it was unfortunately a minority of Christian churches that struggled to become models to the world of the proper function of the Church *vis a vis* the State. Others became models of the State co-opting the Church. This latter was particularly true of the Dutch Reformed Churches, but not those alone. English-speaking local clergy may not have been as openly supportive of the regime, but fearing either the wrath of the authorities or unpopularity with their members, most were silent when they should have spoken. Apartheid may well have ended at least a decade earlier had it not been for so many cowards in the pulpit.

The Apartheid State, however, did give the English-speaking churches a crucial gift: it expelled them from their previously comfortable familiarity with the political power. Not a single member on the government benches of the 1948 Parliament belonged to any of the English-speaking or 'multi-racial' churches and few even knew anything about them. Exchanges in Parliament around the avalanche of discriminatory legislation of the early 1950s reveal a growing antipathy toward the Church of the Province of SA in particular and English-speaking churches in general. These churches had once enjoyed a cordial relationship with the Smuts government, but now they were exiled; they could no longer define themselves by the degree of influence they wielded with Caesar. *This unfamiliar distancing was to offer them their salvation*. It forced them to re-examine their identity as Church of God, and the degree to which they had been chaplains to the pre-1948 dominant culture. While great chunks of Church could not make the transition, some gradually found the prophetic distance that freed them to witness truthfully to the State and a new proximity to the poor and oppressed that gave legitimacy to that witness.

The process was a long and painful one, and its markers were planted in declarations such as the Methodist *One and Undivided* statement of 1958, the *Cottesloe Statement* of 1960, the *Message to the People of South Africa* in 1968, The Christian Institute's *Divine or Civil Obedience* when on trial in 1973, the SACC's *Conscientious Objection* statement of 1974, the World Lutheran Federation's *Status Confessionis*, the Catholic Bishops' *Declaration of Commitment,* the Methodists' *Message of Obedience '81,* the Reformed Churches declaring Apartheid to be a heresy, the *Belhar Confession* of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church of 1982, the SACC leadership's witness before the *Eloff Commission of Inquiry* in 1983, and the *Kairos Document* of 1985. Also significant were *Evangelical Witness in South Africa – Evangeli-*

cals Critique their own Theology and Practice of 1985 and *The Road to Damascus – Kairos and Conversion* of 1989.

The titles of all these documents plot a growing clarity about the church's identity as Body of Christ, as *Alternative Community* and as *Contrast People*. They were steps to the new way of being Church in relation to a State that had become increasingly 'demonic.' The South African Council of Churches and the Christian Institute, together with the Catholic Bishops' Conference, were the ecumenical flag-bearers not only of the Church struggle, but of a rediscovered, and theologically appropriate relationship. They led us ultimately to join a long line of Christians who felt obliged, with Scriptural authority, to enter acts of civil disobedience, or more correctly, "Godly obedience" – Acts 5:29. It became common cause that the relationship between Church and State might require that the Church withdraw its co-operation from the State and even disobey its laws if, after seeking to persuade the State otherwise, those laws continued to conflict fundamentally with our understanding of the will of God. Following the examples of Jesus and the Apostles Peter and Paul, many South African Christians defied the Apartheid laws and suffered the consequences in various degrees.

In my own need for accountability, I sought at the time to encapsulate this new role for the Church in terms of four imperative practices[18]. Apart from guiding individual Christians, I believe they also offered a helpful framework for the shaping of faithful congregations:

- The first was to bear *witness to the truth:* to be a truth-telling community, exposing the lie without fear or favour, offering instead God's contrasting intention for God's world, and confidently declaring that God's way would prevail. Because the roots of politics always lie beyond politics, such truth-telling needed to be born out of scriptural and theological conviction rather than any secular ideology. To fail in this duty of truth-telling would be to fail altogether;
- The second was to *bind up the broken:* to locate the Church as far as possible with those oppressed and wounded by the systems of power, and to offer ministries of pastoral identification, healing and practical care, enabling the Church to be a sign of God's presence with them. Apart from this being a plain Christian duty, such costly identification with the victims of injustice gave essential credibility the task of truth-telling.

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[18]   These were first articulated by the author in an address entitled *Which Way South Africa?* at the Central Methodist Mission, Sydney, Australia, in 1966.

- The third was to *live the alternative:* to seek those inner transformations necessary for the Church to be a sign of God's reign breaking into the world – a visual aid to God's justice and reconciliation. Unless the Church authentically *embodies* what it proclaims, it loses authority. For the South African Church under Apartheid this meant at minimum removing race-based discrimination in its denominational structures and integrating its congregations to become inclusive, multiracial communities;
- The fourth was *seeking methods of transformation consistent with the mind of Christ:* to enter the costly struggle to confront, to pressure, hopefully to transform, but ultimately to end the systems of injustice. This raised questions of methodology that were often controversial and never simple: acts of protest and of civil disobedience and debates around the issues of economic sanctions and divestment, violence and nonviolence, were vigorous and sometimes divisive, but they sharpened our understanding of what it meant to be Church in the context of a liberation struggle.

These four practices helped define and enable authentic witness for me. Each was central to the mission of Jesus, and each challenged the Apartheid regime's priorities in particular ways. Each might also involve the defying of unjust laws. Such were the necessary risks of dual citizenship. I believe that to the degree that we were able to engage Caesar in these ways, we were a prophetic Church; to the degree that we fell short of them, our witness failed.

The fact is that most Christians, black and white, to avoid suffering, or to preserve privilege, were part of the disease, rather than the cure. However, God doesn't need a majority and the miracle is how effectively God used the witness of a small minority to bring about change.

The State and change

Can the State repent, change, transform? The answer may be couched in the useful South African phrase, 'Ja-nee.'[19] We South Africans must testify 'yes' because of the transformation brought about in 1994. Those who argued that the Apartheid regime was beyond redemption and incapable of change were ultimately proved mistaken. However, we might just as readily say 'no' because the change that did come was certainly not self-motivated. A combination of consistent moral challenge, international outrage, economic pres-

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[19]   Afrikaans: 'Yes-No.'

sure, an unwinnable war, and above all, the refusal by millions of black South Africans to go on collaborating in their own oppression, finally pushed an Apartheid State President to make a speech on 2 February, 1990, reversing 40 years – possibly 300 years – of South African history.

If governments can 'repent', it is not by saying sorry, but by changing their policies. They may do so in ways designed to lose them as little face as possible and they seldom, if ever, come to such decisions willingly, but when they do make significant shifts and the changes are for the betterment of their citizens, they deserve the Church's affirmation and support. The Church should both urge such changes upon the State and applaud it when they come about. President De Klerk's 1990 speech should be a permanent reminder to us that God can sometimes do surprising things with even the most intransigent of Caesars.

So much for the 'Ja'…

But the 'Nee' won't go away. It resides in the essence of who Caesar is and what he is about. Because he is in the business of seeking and exercising temporal power, he will always have difficulty respecting the line between the power permitted him by God, and the divine prerogative. The fact that he can change direction in positive ways does not alter Caesar's fundamental DNA: nor the need to remind him of his place in the divine purposes. The most consistent temptation for all rulers is to begin to think that they are God (Acts 12:21–23) and to chafe at limitations on their power. One of the shocks less than 20 years into South Africa's new democracy has been the attacks by members of the governing party on some elements of the Constitution they themselves wrote, because of real or perceived brakes on their power by media and judiciary.

Jesus' famous statement about the Roman coin (Mark 12:13–17), places permanent limits on the authority of Caesar. Coins with his image stamped upon them might belong to Caesar, but Jesus' next words, "Give to God what belongs to God", carry an unmistakable warning that anything or anyone stamped with that other image, the image of God, is God's sole property. This means that we have a duty to hold all Caesars accountable for their conduct towards their citizens.

Church witness in the 'new' South Africa

This being the case, the question arises, "Do these things always hold true?" Are they relevant only for churches in totalitarian and oppressive societies, or do they remain valid in a constitutional democracy? I would contend for the

latter because, liberation or not, and democracy or not, Caesar remains Caesar and God remains God.

The question most important to God is not whether a particular Caesar is democratically elected (as if that provides insulation from critique), but whether any actions of today's democratically elected Caesar impact destructively or harmfully or violently upon those, especially the most marginalised, who bear the *Imago Dei*. If so, they must be critiqued, challenged and countered by the church.

I would further contend that we can only do this if we rediscover and value the 'prophetic distance' so painfully learned during the anti-Apartheid era. Unfortunately, this is what today's Church has lost, and with it seems to have gone our prophetic voice. Somewhere in the euphoria of 1994, seduced by the newness and joy of becoming a democracy, we exchanged our 'prophetic distance' for a concept of 'critical solidarity' in which the churches would throw their energies into assisting the new African National Congress (ANC) government in its nation-building task. It all felt so very promising, and because of the remarkably humanising policies of the Mandela administration with its promised reconstruction and development priorities, and its commitment to truth and reconciliation, those days had an almost New Testament ethos about them.

Soon, however, it became clear that for many new-generation Church leaders, and some of the old, 'critical solidarity' was going to consist of more solidarity than critique. Indeed, there were times when the relationship looked much more like co-option.

We should have seen the signs. I recall the national thanksgiving service organised by the churches in Soweto on the weekend before President Mandela's inauguration. He was invited to be present that Sunday afternoon, to join the thousands giving thanks to God for our deliverance. Those of us arranging the service, received a call from the inaugural organisers, asking us to move the service from the Sunday afternoon to the morning to accommodate the President-Elect's extremely busy schedule, meeting arriving world leaders. We indicated firmly that, important as that might be, the morning worship services people attended in their own churches would take precedence over anything else, and no public or State event could trump them. The inauguration organisers tried to persuade us, suggesting that Mr. Mandela might not come at all. We indicated that it was God's presence we would be primarily seeking and that if the President-Elect came, it would be to join us in seeking the blessing of God. They realised then that this item of the weekend programme was going to be non-negotiable. Mandela did come, the

service went well, and we chalked it up as an early blow for healthy Church-State relations!

This is not to suggest that there is anything intrinsically wrong with Church-State co-operation. A mature relationship between the two will find wide areas in which the Church can be open to such co-operation and where the State can be assisted in its always difficult task. In Australia, for instance, a massive network of institutions caring for children, homeless and elderly persons is provided and managed by the churches, with State financial support. The philosophy is simple: churches are likely to offer more motivated care than the State, and at less cost. Therefore it pays the State to give the financial support needed, and all citizens are the beneficiaries.

The emphasis, however, must be on the maturity of such relationships. If the lines are not very carefully drawn, things can go awry. In the USA, President George W. Bush crossed the previously sacrosanct Church-State separation line in ways that advantaged Christians of his ideological stripe and marginalised those with more liberal standpoints.

In South Africa, a somewhat similar situation once pertained. In the pre-Apartheid era, nearly 90% of black South Africans in school were in institutions and colleges run by the churches, with a matriculation standard actually higher than in white State schools. The deal, (with the exception of the Roman Catholic institutions, which had the advantage of low-paid teaching nuns and brothers), was that while the churches built and administered these institutions in their entirety, the State paid the teachers' salaries. Even given the racism and paternalism of those years, this was a mutually beneficial arrangement. The State recognised that the churches offered passion, commitment and cost benefits that could never be matched by government employees, so it provided the one ingredient the churches did not have – money – and the black scholars of that era fortunate to be in mission schools benefited most. However, when doctrinaire Apartheid came in and the Bantu Education Act was passed in 1953, this financial tie became the new regime's weapon to force the takeover or closure of the great mission colleges and to sink the best education in South Africa. The churches were blackmailed into submission and a great heritage was lost, with consequences we are still living with.

In the light of this history, it would be foolish indeed for the churches to permit themselves to ever again be in a position of such financial dependency upon government. With the coming of democracy, however, the real problem with the early Mandela era was that so much was right and good. The mistakes this beneficent Caesar made were easily forgiven, precisely because they were the mistakes of beneficence, and the noises from Government were almost uniformly responsive to concerns the churches had

voiced for years. The example of President Mandela was inspiring, and he openly invited the critique of the faith communities, asking them to "…continue to play your prophetic role, always seeking to hold this nation and all its leaders to the highest standards of integrity and service".[20] True to his commitment, he did what other leaders seem to have found most difficult: he stepped down when he promised to.

And the Church dropped its guard

Church leaders whose theological clarity had been forged in the heat and burden of the struggle, were plain weary. Three of the strongest Church voices of the struggle era were silenced in different ways: one partly muted by being appointed to the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, another sadly compromised by scandal and jailed for theft and fraud, and a third abdicating his prophetic authority by signing on to Caesar's payroll. Others rightly bowed out in favour of a newer generation. Many new leaders, however, untested in the struggle years and filled with understandable pride in their new government, seemed to have a much more elastic understanding of Church-State relations. Longstanding personal friendships with the new political elite sometimes blurred the lines even more.

Co-operation or co-option?

Suddenly Church and State were 'co-operating' on too many levels. Politicians were being invited to address Church conferences, party political mayors were once more offering bumbling speeches of welcome to Church Synods and Assemblies, candidates for office even began intervening in services of worship to court the votes of Church congregations. Perhaps the most blatant example was pastor Ray McCauley's offering of an election campaign platform at his Rhema Bible Church to Mr Jacob Zuma in 2009.

The launch of the 'National Interfaith Leadership Council'(NILC) by McCauley and ANC chief whip Mathole Motshekga, materially assisted by ANC parliamentary resources,[21] further muddied Church-State waters. A clear attempt to marginalise the SACC and other credible church platforms, which had begun to voice some criticism of the ANC government, it carried

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[20] Address by President Nelson Mandela to the 112th Conference of the MCSA, Umtata, 1994.

[21] Mandy Rossouw, "Zuma's new God squad wants liberal laws to go"*, Mail and Guardian*, September 11, 2009.

with it a faint echo of the Apartheid regime's backing of religious fronts for a similar purpose.

Such theological amnesia in regard to the proper distance between Church and State also led to Church leaders apparently seeing no contradiction in attending State-sponsored 'moral regeneration summits,' also arranged by the ANC's religion desk and chaired by Mr Zuma. With hindsight there is presumably some embarrassment at the irony of this, given his appetite for multiple spouses, his later incrimination in what a judge called a 'corrupt relationship' with one of the arms deal villains and his embarrassing evidence during his rape trial.

The biggest rape victim, however, may have been the Church. There is a seductiveness about proximity to power, and Church leaders are not exempt from its charms – not unless they have done their theology. My own denomination, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), with its association with so many of the liberation leaders during the struggle years, its claim on both Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe as 'sons of Methodism,' and its numerical strength in the ANC stronghold of the Eastern Cape, is particularly vulnerable. While not as blatant as McCauley's political pandering, the presence and laudatory speech of President Zuma at the farewell to an MCSA Presiding Bishop raises serious questions about whether Methodism too is becoming the ANC at prayer. Given our hard-won understanding of Church-State relations, it is mystifying that any Church leader could fail to see the irony of a "Well done, good and faithful servant", from Caesar. Surely too enthusiastic a salute from that quarter casts doubt on one's prophetic effectiveness? These questions are further exacerbated when a Methodist currently acts as 'chaplain' to the ANC, a deviation in spirit if not in the letter, from the denomination's discipline, which forbids its ministers being seconded to "... positions of a party political nature, or any appointment that compromises the necessary independence of the Church in its witness to the Gospel in society".[22] The simple fact is that proximity and praise lead to silence. You can't dine with Caesar on Friday and prophesy to him on Sunday. It just doesn't work that way.

The aftermath of 1994 also brought a 'culture of deference' toward political leaders that does not sit well with a vigorous democracy. Many Church leaders were understandably uncomfortable about criticising compatriots now facing the tough task of government and too many seem unwilling or unable to break free of this deference. Democracies, however, cannot thrive without a degree of 'loyal disrespect' for the politician class; especially their pomposity and conceits. Leaders must accept that part of the price of

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[22] MCSA *Laws & Discipline, 11th Edition*, (Cape Town: Salty Print, 2007), 42.

power is to be regularly skewered in secular satire and cartoon. As far as today's Church leaders are concerned, sustaining a robust democracy requires what was so hard-learned by their predecessors in the struggle years: that one of the first signs of prophetic leadership is finding the backbone to challenge one's own 'kith and kin' in the places of power. It is always much easier to oppose another group than to take on one's own. Addressing the ANC in its centenary year, the latest *Kairos Southern Africa* document highlighted this as it recalled the witness of Dr. Beyers Naude who stood up against his own Afrikaner *Volk*: "One of Oom Bey's key legacies is one that takes often a painful position of conscience from within the context of his or her own people and what he or she grew up with and cherished".[23] It is also worth being reminded that the traditional white preaching bands or 'tabs' worn by clergy (and the legal profession) once signified a special privilege of free speech or fearlessness in the presence of authority – such were the only persons who could address the king without waiting to be spoken to first.

Consequently, since 1994, a number of significant political issues affecting the lives of millions of South Africans have been allowed to go almost unchallenged by the churches.

- First among them was the corrupt Arms Deal, the 'original sin' of the new South Africa. Costing R43 billion that could have been used for Reconstruction and Development (RDP) projects, this deal will not only continue to haunt Mr Zuma and other politicians of that era, but it gave permission for a culture of corruption to invade every sphere of government where money changes hands. Meanwhile, the RDP died an early death.
- Another issue was the AIDS denialism of the Mbeki administration, estimated to have caused more than 300 000 needless deaths,[24] more than were suffered in the battles of the anti-Apartheid struggle. The astounding hubris of a President who believed he could defy the medical wisdom of the whole world while his people were dying is still inexplicable.
- A third was the blind eye turned to the atrocities in Zimbabwe, demonstrating the culture of deference at its worst, showing more

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[23] Kairos Southern Africa, *Theological and Ethical Reflections on the 2012 Centenary Celebrations of the African National Congress,* 28 December, 2011.

[24] Pride Chigwedere, George R. Seage, III, *et.al.* "Estimating the Lost Benefits of Antiretroviral Drug Use in South Africa," *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes* 49/4 (2008):410.

concern for the sensitivities of a deadly demagogue than for the hundreds of thousands of people violated by him and his henchmen.

- A fourth, more subterranean concern has been the shift in vision from a 'rainbow nation' to one of a black republic. The language of inclusion was replaced in the Mbeki era by a growth in what Xolela Mangcu calls "racial nativism". This may well have been partly in response to white slowness to embrace change, but the result is that little official energy is spent on making South Africa's experiment in non-racialism a priority. The "100% Zulu" T-shirts that blossomed at the start of the Zuma era added a hint of ethnic chauvinism to the mix.

- Looming over all these, of course, is the most intractable issue of them all: poverty and joblessness, exacerbated by the pandemic crime-wave visited upon private citizens in their homes and the looting of the public purse through corruption. Meanwhile the seeds for a 'second revolution' are being sown in the desperate conditions in which millions of South Africans still live, their problems largely unaddressed, with little sign of urgency in government circles.

All of these issues fall into the ambit of the moral and spiritual because all impact directly on the lives and welfare of 'the least of Christ's sisters and brothers.' In each case, Caesar's actions or inaction have harmed or ignored people bearing the *Imago Dei,* and in each case those in power should therefore have felt the strong condemnation, challenge and resistance of the Church.

The fact is that in each of these issues, with the possible exception of that of Zimbabwe, official Church reaction has been muted, tepid and ineffective. In the case of Zimbabwe, when some Johannesburg church leaders did speak out, they were castigated by former church colleagues serving inside the ANC structures.

It is to be hoped that a new generation of Church leaders will rediscover and implement the proper balance required for healthy Church-State relations. The first flush of democracy has faded and the tawdriness and venality of much of our present political scene is now undeniable. Corruption is a direct robbing of the poor and can no longer be ignored, while, of the issues listed above, only that of AIDS has seen any significant change in Government action. A robust, independent and courageous Church voice is vitally necessary.

There are signs of hope:

- After allegations of infiltration by Motshekga's office into a meeting of the National Church Leaders' Consultation, that body issues a

trenchant joint statement "… strongly resenting the efforts of the Dr. Mathole Motshekga, the ANC Parliamentary Caucus and the ANC desk for Cultural and Religious affairs to muscle in on and manipulate Church Leadership Structures" and says, "We are leaders in our own right and lead by biblical mandate".[25]

- An Anglican Archbishop faces up to government as it attempts to turn back one of the freedoms won at great cost in the liberation struggle;[26]
- An incoming MCSA Presiding Bishop pleads, "Pray with me and for me that I may remain faithful to the principle of keeping a critical distance from the governments [of the five countries covered by the MCSA] and be faithful in the ministry of speaking truth to all",[27] and goes on to give a spirited challenge to the ANC on the occasion of its Centenary.[28]

These examples, together with the release of the 2012 *Kairos Southern Africa* document,[29] are signs that the churches are reasserting their separate and prophetic role, however gently. Perhaps Prof. Denise Ackerman voices their growing concern: "We should remain engaged, but never become embedded".[30]

And so to our bright and beloved new flag: Christians are no less patriots than any other citizens, but we are required to be *different* patriots, whose love for our homeland must leave us unsatisfied while God's requirements of 'compassionate fair dealing' are ignored and whose higher citizenship of that 'other country' will always interrogate the nature of our loyalty to this one. We may wave our national flag and honour it, when appropriate, but we will not permit it in God's house, because it doesn't belong there. We love it no less, but it is Caesar's banner, not God's, and when we stand up to preach there must be no confusion about whom we represent, nor whom we love most.

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[25] Joint statement by National Church Leaders' Consultation, 18 October, 2011.

[26] Open letter from Archbishop Thabo Makgoba to President Jacob Zuma protesting the Protection of State Information Bill, 27 November, 2011.

[27] Address by Bishop Zipho Siwa at his Induction as Presiding Bishop of the MCSA, Fort Hare, 27 November, 2011, quoted in *New Dimension,* Dec 2011/January 2012.

[28] Address by Bishop Zipho Siwa on the occasion of the Centenary of the founding of the ANC in the Wesleyan Church, Waaihoek, Bloemfontein, 8 January, 2012.

[29] Kairos *Theological and Ethical Reflections,* 28 December, 2011.

[30] Media release re *Kairos Southern Africa's* meeting with ANC leadership, 8 February, 2012.

Peter Storey

So with democracy: the issues may be different in our democracy than in Apartheid South Africa, and the space to raise them under our Constitution at present is certainly wider, but the essential tension between State and Church remains. Caesar is still Caesar – of that we can be sure – and God is still God. The question is whether the Church is still the Church?

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Essay 2

Being a Christian in a "Christian country":
theological reflection

Joerg Rieger[31]

Introduction

Growing up as a Christian in the secularising landscape of Germany, I sometimes wondered what it would be like to live in a context where Christianity was more prominent. Today, after twenty years of living in the so-called "Bible Belt" of the United States of America, I have indeed experienced Christianity at work in a context where it is quite prominent, but I keep wondering what it would be like to live in a context where Christianity makes a real difference.

In this essay, I will take a look at what it might mean for Christianity to make a real difference in the world, and how this challenge might best be addressed from a theological perspective. Living in a country like the United States where Christianity is prominent poses some real questions in this regard, because the prominence of Christianity is often tied to its support of the political, economic, and cultural status quo. While the fact that Christianity is prominent in the United States is at times disputed by conservatives, who like to talk about the United States as a "post-Christian country," the numbers tell a different story. Surveys show that numbers of people believing in God or some higher power in the United States are consistently high, most recently at 92 percent, with 71 percent reporting that they believe with "absolute certainty." The numbers of regular church attendance are quite high as well: around 39 percent of the population attend once a week and 33 percent once or twice a month.[32] And even if people tend to exaggerate some-

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[32]   These numbers are reported in the *Washington Post*, based on a poll by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Jaqueline Salmon, "Most Americans Believe in Higher Power, Poll Finds," *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2008, on the web: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/06/23/ST2008062300818.html.

what about their church attendance when surveyed, I keep observing a good deal of traffic on Dallas roads on Sunday mornings.

At the same time, living in a country like Germany where Christianity has long been declining and losing its prominence, also poses some questions. Recent statistics report that in Germany, 47 percent of people believe in God (an additional 25 percent believe in some "spirit or life force"),[33] while less than 10 percent go to church on a regular basis.[34] Here, too, people appear to exaggerate about their church attendance, as the streets in Germany on Sunday mornings are rather empty. Nevertheless, in this context there appear to be some similar assumptions about what it would mean for Christianity to be prominent, for instance when it is taken for granted that this decline can only be stopped by adjusting better to the political, economic, and cultural *status quo*. Clearly, in this context the question what it might mean for Christianity to make a difference in the world is relevant as well, and addressing it will help us broaden the horizons of our investigation.

Living in a "Christian country," and its discontents

Let me begin by giving some examples, some about life in a Christian country and some about life in a secularised country, for the sake of contrast. In the United States, it is hard to imagine a presidential election without reference to God. It is hard to imagine how anyone could win a presidential election at present without expressing faith in the God of Christianity. The character of this reference to God, however, must not have programmatic qualities; its purpose is to justify the way things are and to declare the candidates' support of the way things are. The most frequent mention of God in this context is, therefore, in the petition "God bless America." While asking for God's blessing can mean many things, including asking for God's guidance that might include challenges, in this case "God bless America" commonly means that America is on the right track because God has already blessed this country, and that God will stay the course of giving Americans what they want. This was perhaps most clear during the first Gulf War in 1991, when "God bless our troops" became the mantra even of newscasters on TV and other public figures that are not expected to be particularly religious. That God stood for the causes of the United States was taken for

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[33]   Official survey by the European Union in 2005, on the web:
        http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_225_report_en.pdf.
[34]   See numbers provided by a Gallup report, September 21, 2004, on the web:
        http://www.gallup.com/poll/13117/religion-europe-trust-filling-pews.aspx.

granted to such a degree, that it was not seen as inconsistent that God could be petitioned for supporting the American troops without any soul-searching about the will of God before the troops were deployed. The implicit assumption was that God surely was on the American side.

In Germany, on the other hand, public references to God by people other than Christian professionals are hardly appropriate. If politicians, for instance, were to claim divine guidance or any other form of divine inspiration, they would lose credibility, even if their party was the conservative "Christian Democratic Union" (CDU, the party of the current Chancellor Angela Merkel). Even the churches have, by and large, adapted to this situation. If they make public pronouncements, they often tend to appeal to arguments of common sense and universal reason, rather than to particular arguments of divine revelation. At the Methodist Seminary in Germany, for instance, a professorship was established in recent years that is dedicated to "the communication of the gospel in the secular society," rather than to the more traditional fields of "mission" or "evangelism"— terms that would be perfectly appropriate in theological education in the United States. Christianity, in this context, seeks to reach out and relate to secular society without challenging it too much, or without asking for too much.

Situations of pressure often reveal more clearly what is at stake. In the early 1980s there was a short window of opportunity for Christianity in Germany when Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was debated publicly. The context of that debate was the United States under President Ronald Reagan pushing for increased military presence in Europe through the stationing of additional cruise missiles and other long-range ballistic weapons on German soil. This program was opposed by many Germans, many of whom became engaged in reflections on the Sermon on the Mount. In the end, German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, a Social Democrat and a Christian, sought to conclude this debate by declaring that the world simply could not be ruled with the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. Nevertheless, that the Sermon on the Mount could be debated publicly for some time shows that Christianity can present challenges even in secular situations − although it does not come as a surprise that the powers that be will seek to shut things down.[35]

What may come as a surprise, however, is that while the Sermon on the Mount could be debated in a secular context, it has rarely been mentioned in public debate in recent memory in the Christian context of the United

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[35]   Much of this debate is reflected in the widely read and debated book by Franz Alt, *Frieden ist möglich: Die Politik der Bergpredigt* (Munich: Piper, 1983).

States. Even President George W. Bush, who frequently declared his admiration for Jesus Christ in public and who talked about his efforts to follow Jesus, never saw the need to mention any of the numerous challenges, which Jesus presents in the Sermon on the Mount. Moreover, this President proudly authorised both the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq with strong support from the majority of Christians. It appeared as if neither he nor the majority of his Christian followers had any awareness of Jesus blessing the meek and the peacemakers (Matth. 5:5,9). All of this is even more surprising because the sort of conservative Christianity espoused by Bush and many of his followers puts strong emphasis on the authority of the words of the Bible, and the words of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew are certainly quite prominent in the Bible.

It seems that in a Christian Country like the United States, the Church frequently ends up justifying the *status quo*, often without being aware of it and without necessarily intending it. After all, there is a long and time-honoured tradition in the United States of the separation of Church and State that is based on the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Founding Fathers of the eighteenth century, still vividly remembering the European situation, knew some of the dangers of symbioses of Church and State first hand. In many European countries, the Church had been linked to the State so closely that the heads of State were sometimes the heads of the Church (as was the case with the monarchs of England), and that the heads of the Church tended to be quite influential in government. This led not only to severe restrictions of religious freedom (some of the first immigrants to the United States were persecuted religious groups), but also to a constant meddling of *status quo* religion in the affairs of government.

It is widely debated how much this principle of the separation of Church and State is followed in the current situation in the United States, where religion is often harnessed for the purposes of the political *status quo*, especially along conservative lines. Since the election of Republican President Ronald Reagan in 1980, conservative politicians have relied more and more on the votes of conservative Christians. It is estimated that two-thirds of all Christians in the United States voted for President George W. Bush, who was able to present his agenda as the Christian agenda, based on the rejection of homosexual marriage and a stated interested in preserving conservative moral values. Christianity in this context has been increasingly presented in one light only, and the Democratic Party and any other oppositional movements have been actively portrayed as opposed to Christian values and religion: "secular humanist" became the label applied to virtually anyone who

did not agree with conservative Christianity and its political causes. Many Christians themselves have bought into this caricature, including progressive Evangelical leader Jim Wallis of the Sojourners community, who penned a bestselling book titled *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*, claiming that the left lacked interest in Christianity.[36] Yet Christianity in the United States cannot be pigeonholed so easily, and here lies our hope, as the awareness of alternative forms of Christianity is on the rise again.

There is, however, another problem in this Christian country that is potentially even more dangerous than the transgressions in terms of the separation of Church and State. After all, governmental politics is still often viewed with a critical eye from various Christian perspectives – conservatives challenge the role of government in matters of welfare, other smaller groups challenge the role of government in matters of support for big business ("corporate welfare") or international aggression. While politics is thus critiqued to some extent, what is lacking almost completely is a critical approach to the world of economics. Even in the midst of the grave economic crisis of 2008 and 2009, economics as such was not heavily scrutinised. Where problems are noted in regards to economics, they are presented in terms of moral failures like fraud or the greed of individuals, rather than as systemic problems that would warrant a critical view of economics as such.

What is virtually absent in this context is what, in analogy to the separation of Church and State, might be called the "separation of Church and economics."[37] The current relation of these two fields has become so close that both economists and theologians have concluded that the dominant economic model of the free market ‒ capitalism ‒ has assumed a religious aura.[38] The belief in the invisible hand of the market promoted by classical economics in the wake of Adam Smith, claiming that the market will always create an economic equilibrium, is just the tip of the iceberg. The belief in the miraculous powers of the free-market economy, expressed in the famous expectation that "a rising tide will lift all boats", is so strong both in

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[36]   Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

[37]   For a deeper analysis see also Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 10, 61.

[38]   See, for instance, economists Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), and Duncan K. Foley, A*dam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

economic and religious circles, that empirical evidence to the contrary is often dismissed.

This religious quality of economics has had various consequences. To begin with, the particular form that the free-market economy has taken in the United States is often sanctioned and defended with quasi-religious fervour. There is little awareness that other models of free-market economics exist in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere. And even the efforts of President Barack Obama to regulate some of this economy's wild growth need to be seen in this light: the temporary nationalisation of the debt of banks that was suggested, for instance, in order to bring financial institutions and big businesses back on track, was never conceived as a challenge to the free-market economy, just the opposite. Temporary nationalisation was just another expression of the common effort to protect the free-market economy by nationalising losses and privatising gain, as nationalisation would be reversed when gains where to be made again. The halo of free-market economics is thus preserved intact, even after its most drastic failure since the Great Depression in the United States of the 1930s. This spirit of the free-market economy is increasingly taking a hold of Christianity, especially through the so-called Gospel of Prosperity that has expanded far beyond the borders of the United States.

This Gospel of Prosperity claims that God wants Christians to be wealthy and successful economically, far beyond their wildest dreams. Many preachers of prosperity proclaim that all who follow in the ways of God will prosper and become rich. Sometimes clear conditions for success are spelled out, like for instance regular donations of money, or regular attendance of religious services, all tied up with the firm belief that God's greatest concern is to create wealth for individuals. A journalist who investigated this phenomenon a few years ago contacted me before his article was published in order to find out why even mainline Christians like Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians would, at times, fall for this sort of thing. In my response to him, I summarised what I think is not just the problem of the open adherents of the Gospel of Prosperity but of Christianity in a context of wealth and power in general: even if it is not pushing the Gospel of Prosperity explicitly, mainline Christianity in the United States shares some of the same theological presuppositions. It is commonly assumed that God is "up there," located closer to those who are successful, powerful, and wealthy, than to those who are not. Even most of mainline Christianity's efforts to support the less fortunate support this idea of God as "up there," as the idea is to lift them up and integrate them into the economic *status quo*.[39]

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[39] The report on the Gospel of Prosperity appeared in 2006: David Van Biema and Jeff Chu,

My greatest worry, after having spent three months in South Africa in 2008 and traveling to Latin America on a regular basis, is that much of the Christianity that is expanding around the globe at present is of this kind. While it is perfectly understandable that people around the globe would like to share a piece of the economic success of the United States – the Gospel of Prosperity promises precisely that – the real question is whether the sort of Christianity that is promoted on these grounds can really deliver the goods to the masses. Reports that individuals have become wealthy through faith in prosperity are usually interpreted as if the Prosperity Gospel would work, but I would argue that this evidence points in the opposite direction: that the large majority of people is not benefitting and forced to look on as the "winners take all."

The other question that is never asked in this context is whether there might be deeper problems with the religious promotion of economic wealth and happiness, and whether it might behoove the churches and Christianity as a whole to keep a healthy distance. What if the problems of those who are "less fortunate" are not self-caused, as the Gospel of Prosperity and many mainline Christians in the United States believe, but caused by an economic system that benefits the wealthy and powerful more than anyone else? Here, it might serve us well to take a closer look – informed not only by current tools of social analysis but by our theological traditions as well. Already John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, knew that the poor in his day were poor because they were exploited by the wealthy, and so he developed a form of Christianity that was able to make a difference in this context.[40]

"Does God Want You to Be Rich?" *Time,* September 18, 2006: 12, 48–56, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1533448,00.html. The authors make no mention of the parallels to mainline theology that I pointed out to them, as this would have challenged their thesis that the Gospel of Prosperity is a phenomenon that has little to do with respectable Christianity.

[40] In his "Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions" of 1772, Wesley talks about various causes of poverty, including the monopolising of farms by the "gentlemen-farmers" and the luxury of the wealthy: "Only look into the kitchens of the great, the nobility and gentry, almost without exception … and when you have observed the amazing waste which is made there, you will no longer wonder at the scarcity, and consequently dearness, of the things which they use so much art to destroy." *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley,* ed. Thomas Jackson, 3rd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprinted Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), Vol. XI, 56–57.

Joerg Rieger

Searching for alternative voices

Living in a Christian country, where Christianity is inextricably related to the *status quo*, those who seek to be different have a difficult task. Due to the prominence of a particular sort of *status quo* Christianity in the United States, it is often overlooked that there are many individual Christians and Christian movements who make valiant efforts not to be assimilated by the dominant culture and who have a sense of the problems that occur in this context. Nevertheless, the difficulty is how to identify where Christianity must not go along with the *status quo*, and in which ways it should be different.

Being different and countercultural was part of the early Methodist traditions, and it was still valued in the German Methodism in which I was raised. As a minority church (there are currently less than 60 000 Methodists in a country of 80 million), German Methodism used to be proud of its distinctiveness. Methodism in Germany until the 1970s was different, for instance, because it held on to its time-honoured traditions of not smoking, dancing, drinking alcoholic beverages, or going to the movies. Unfortunately, however, what had been lost at that time were the deeper reasons for it all. Forgotten was John Wesley's fight against the drinking of hard liquor, which had to do not with moralism and pious efforts to be "holier than thou," but with making a contribution to the liberation of the working class families of his time, which were weakened by alcoholism fueled by despair.[41]

Since the deeper roots and the theological meaning of the prohibitions of smoking, dancing, drinking hard liquor, and going to the movies were no longer clear, German Methodism in the 1970s by and large abandoned them. The theological consensus that came to replace the old stance emphasised John Wesley's principle of love in all things, rather than particular counter-cultural practices.[42] What was lost in this context was an unique opportunity to update the slate of countercultural practices of the church through theological reflection and a constructive dialogue with the Methodist traditions. What if the prohibition of going to the movies, for instance, would have been revitalised in terms of promoting critical scrutiny of the propaganda of the corporate media and the related question what really is revered as divine in the world today? By abandoning the countercultural stance of Methodism in Germany, the minority church was now free to make efforts to be accepted

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[41] See, for instance, the argument of Ted Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

[42] In this theological climate change, Manfred Marquardt, *Praxis und Prinzipien der Sozialethik John Wesleys* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1977), (translated as: *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter [Nashville: Abingdon, 1992]), was one of the foundational texts.

and to fit in with the mainline churches and, ultimately, with the *status quo* of society. Yet since mainline Christianity does not generate a great deal of interest in Germany and since the societal *status quo* is hardly interested in religious justification, Methodism in Germany has been on a course of steady decline.

In the United States, on the other hand, while "fitting in" was the great principle of the mainline churches, including United Methodism, there have also been efforts at being countercultural. One of the most prominent of these efforts is the promotion of pacifism on theological grounds. Related to minority efforts spearheaded by Mennonites and others, some mainline Christians and theologians like Methodist ethicist Stanley Hauerwas have declared themselves pacifists. This is, no doubt, a commendable stance in a country that is as heavily invested in the military-industrial complex as the United States, and that has frequently resorted to military action as an extension of everyday politics. Speaking out against military aggression is a countercultural move in a country where "God bless America" often directly translates into "God bless the troops" (and their various military efforts).

Even in this context, however, the question still needs to be raised what exactly needs to be resisted, what it means to be really different, and what the deeper theological reasons are for this countercultural stance. Stanley Hauerwas' frequent claim in his lectures that "Jesus told me not to kill" tends to impress seminary students, some of whom have never given any thought to the possibility that Christianity might be countercultural. But several problems emerge here: support of pacifism is often addressed primarily in terms of the rejection of killing in war, which in the United States is not the problem of the general population. Since US soldiers are not drafted but hired as professionals, those who reject killing in war generally have the option to stay out of the military. In this situation, the discussion of killing in war easily deteriorates into the sort of discussion between the supporters of football teams about what "their boys" should or should not do, with the result that the supporters never have to feel as though they are part of the problem themselves. Debates between pacifists and the supporters of "Just War theory" often take on precisely that character. Another problem has to do with the theological reasoning involved: what does it mean to say that "Jesus told me not to kill"? If Jesus would have really said that, what would he have meant? What would have been his main concerns? Might not Jesus' concerns have included, besides killing in war, the untimely death of 25 000 of the world's children who die every day due to hunger and lack of preventive care? Would an issue like this therefore not also have to become a concern for Christian pacifism?

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My point is that the countercultural efforts of the Church will only make a real difference if they are in touch with the underlying problems and guided by deeper theological analyses. If pacifism in a military nation fails to address the underlying problems for the lack of peace and the fact that even the opponents of war benefit from war, its countercultural stance is compromised, sometimes to such an extent that it is no longer countercultural. In order to move to the next level in this situation, the questions that would need to be addressed are what interests lead to war, how recent US wars have been deeply tied to the principles not only of society and politics but also of the economy, and how the citizens of the United States benefit from war, no matter what their ideological stances are.

Another example where current countercultural efforts in Christian theology and ethics fail to engage the deeper problems is the critique of "the State," that has become somewhat fashionable for those British and US theologians who have put together the theological school that has given itself the name of "Radical Orthodoxy." One of the main critiques that is leveled from these quarters is that the State has taken on too big a role in society; the State is charged with presenting itself as salvific and with trying to take over all aspects of life with its logic, which is alleged to be secular. The only alternative, according to the theologians of Radical Orthodoxy, is to return to a time when religious logic ruled over all of life, and to let the church be at the centre of life again, as in pre-modern times.[43]

In so far as the Church has indeed accommodated the political *status quo* in order to maintain its power, this critique is helpful, as it reminds the Church that its role is not in adapting to the world but in making a difference in the world. There are several important issues, however, that are overlooked here. What if the religious logic of the Church itself were part of the problem, and what if the problem with this logic was not that it was secular but that it was based on a mistaken interpretation of religion? Examples for this problem abound, particularly in situations where the Church occupied substantial positions of power during its long history. Moreover, what about the challenges to the logic of Christianity that are posed not from the side of the State but from the side of the economy? D. Stephen Long, a supporter of Radical Orthodoxy, suggests that the solutions to our current predicament will come "... by the ecclesia through the corporation without the State."[44] Long's suggestion that the Church should take over a leadership role in the

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[43] See, for instance, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). This book is one of the early foundations of Radical Orthodoxy, written at a time when the school was not yet named.

[44] D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 260.

economy by promoting its ideas and by shaping the imagination of the business world demonstrates my concerns: how can we assume that economics would be any more amenable to guidance by the Church than politics? Is this not underestimating the power of the economy and what really drives it? The assumption that the Church in the current situation of global capitalism, when left to its own devices, would be able to steer us in the right direction, adds to the problematic nature of this approach.

In our search for alternative voices, we need to admit that the Church itself has often failed to be an alternative voice, not only where it adapted to some other *status quo*, but also where it was in charge. The Crusades of the Middle Ages might be the most blatant example of such failures, but history is full of examples of the Church seeking to build its own empires – refusing to follow Jesus' example and his admonition that the greatest shall be the least and the least shall be the greatest. The history of the Church, just like the history of Israel, is often the history of falling away from God not by becoming "secular" but due to a false religiosity that manifests itself in the invention and service of idols and in the related support of growing gaps between those on top and those at the bottom. It is no accident that early on, in the books of Exodus and of Leviticus, these sorts of things were already addressed and combated (see, eg, Ex. 32 and Lev. 25). In addition, in the United States and other Christianised contexts, the struggle is not so much with a secular State and secular economics, but with forms of government and economics that have been deeply influenced by distorted forms of religiosity.

Let me add one more example for the difficult struggle of the Church against assimilation and for viable alternatives. One of the great accomplishments of mainline Christianity in the United States is that it has encouraged a strong volunteer spirit among its members. Many Americans are involved in service projects and many donate substantial amounts of money to such causes. Most of these service projects support charities: a good number of churches are involved in efforts to provide support for poor people through food pantries, distribution of used clothes and household items, and building projects. Youth groups and other active people, for instance, travel to the inner cities or other economically disadvantaged places, both in the United States and abroad, to help renovate houses in need of repair or build cinder block houses for those who lack housing. When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, for instance, and the US government provided very limited support to the victims, the United Methodist "Volunteers in Mission" organised numerous support efforts, including the reconstruction and repair of churches as well as private residences.

Clearly, such volunteer efforts have done a lot of good in a country where the welfare system has many gaps, and where disadvantaged people are often very quickly abandoned, especially when compared to other wealthy nations. Yet what is missing in most of these programs is a deeper understanding of the underlying problems. Rarely do these volunteer groups ask the question why people are poor, hungry, and homeless, and why this is going on even in one of the wealthiest nations of the world. Fortunately, these questions can never be completely suppressed, but they are hardly ever encouraged and pursued further by the leadership of these groups. While it might be proudly stated that church volunteer work refuses to assimilate to a culture where the poor are simply brushed aside, this sort of volunteer work often supports the workings of this culture without knowing it, by enabling it to continue virtually unchanged and unchallenged.

The current debate about universal health care in the United States may serve as an example: providing healthcare free of charge, as some churches do in conjunction with volunteer teams of medical doctors and nurses, is a great service in a country where thirty percent are not covered by health care. But joining the struggle for universal healthcare – which is constantly opposed by the interests of the private healthcare industry – is a qualitatively different act, and few churches have stood up for this cause. Even in this context it might be said that some of these volunteer efforts ultimately help support the *status quo* without knowing it, because they help cover up the deep-seated problems created by the political and economic interests that keep funneling money to the rich, and away from the poor. We are dealing here with a perennial problem if volunteer efforts are not explicitly linked to the underlying problems which they are trying to remedy, for example, if providing food to hungry people is not explicitly linked to a fight against the causes that leave people hungry, or if providing financial support to struggling families is not explicitly linked to the causes that leave so many families without financial support.

More faithful and radical alternatives

Whether living in a Christian or in a secularised context, Christians need to seek out more radical alternatives if they want to resist the constant temptation to assimilate to the *status quo* and to remain faithful to the Gospel. While analysing the context and its deeper problems is more crucial that is often realised by Christians, the first step needs to be a theological one.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian who lost his life in the resistance against fascism in Adolf Hitler's Germany and who has been referenced in other contexts of resistance as well – including the South African struggle

against Apartheid – once described US Protestantism as a "Protestantism without Reformation." Reflecting on a journey to the United States in 1939, Bonhoeffer points out a major deficit in US Protestant Christianity. While he acknowledges the differences of Protestantism in Europe and the United States, Bonhoeffer notes that US Protestantism has never been able to understand the critique induced by the Word of God. Already after his first stay in the United States as an exchange student in 1933, Bonhoeffer had made a similar observation, noting that US Protestantism domesticated the Christian message: "In New York one can hear sermons on almost any topic, except on one set of issues; at least I was never able to hear it: on the gospel of Jesus Christ, on the cross, on sin and forgiveness, and on death and life."[45]

What is missing here, according to Bonhoeffer, is the radical challenge of the Word of God and the Christian faith. As an example for this lack of challenge he quotes theologian Edward Scribner Ames' definition: "God is life as you love it."[46] Even a casual visitor in US mainline churches today is bound to notice that this problem persists: the main mode of Christianity in the United States is one of welcoming and comforting people, of assuring them that God is on their side, regardless. Challenges to the congregation in sermons and other forms are often lacking, especially in the more liberal churches, and the challenges that are pronounced in more conservative contexts are mainly focused on others who are different, who do not belong to the group of those who make up the core of the Church.

In this context, Bonhoeffer reminds us that any true encounter with the Word of God first of all leads to radical crisis and to the challenge of even the best of our human intentions. God is first of all the crisis of human efforts, not only of those human efforts that are clearly headed in the wrong direction, but also of such well-meaning institutions as religion, the Church, and ethics. Here is a strong parallel to the thought of the early Karl Barth, another theologian who wrote in a world that understood itself as Christian and that failed to see the challenges posed by God.[47] The problem with these "Christian worlds" is that they fail to understand their shortcomings, which have to do with the assimilation to the *status quo*, and that they conflate their Christian institutions with the reality of God. In response to this situation,

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[45] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Bericht über den Studienaufenthalt im Union Theological Seminary zu New York 1930/31," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 1 (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1958), 94, translation mine.

[46] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Protestantismus ohne Reformation," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1958), 353.

[47] See, for instance, Karl Barth, "The Christian's Place in Society" (1919), in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

sometimes called "culture Protestantism" in Europe, Bonhoeffer makes a strong argument for the fact that God founded the Church not on religion and ethics but on the person and work of Jesus Christ.[48]

The purpose of preaching the Word of God, when seen from this perspective, is not first of all to make us feel good about ourselves, about our ethical achievements, or about our churches; preaching the gospel means to preach the radical challenge of Jesus Christ that seeks to transform both Church and world. The good news in this situation, often overlooked, is that in both of Bonhoeffer's reports about his American experiences he notes that such radical challenges do exist in the religious landscape of the United States after all: despite the shortcomings of mainline Christianity, the Gospel of Jesus Christ was indeed being preached. In the 1930s, Bonhoeffer found the gospel alive in some of the Black churches, where most other mainline observers hardly would have looked.

Bonhoeffer talks about how he found the Gospel of Jesus Christ alive in the Black churches in the United States, in the midst of Black suffering and hope. "In these churches," he says "...one could still hear and talk about sin and grace and about the love for God and about the final hope in Christian terms."[49] Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the few theologians who has picked up on this is South African theologian John de Gruchy, who notes how deeply Bonhoeffer was impressed "...by the vibrant faith and spirituality of Black Christians in the ghetto of Harlem, where he taught Sunday school at the Abyssinian Baptist Church."[50]

Bonhoeffer's famous remarks about viewing things from the underside need to be seen in this light. Towards the end of his life, from a German prison cell, Bonhoeffer wrote those words at the end of 1942: "It remains an experience of unmatched value that we have learned to see the great events of history from the underside, from the perspective of the eliminated, the suspect, the abused, the powerless, the oppressed, and the ridiculed, in short, from the perspective of the suffering."[51] This perspective from the underside must have made a difference in the Black churches in Harlem as well, whose experience of suffering and oppression put them in a unique position to provide an alternative to US White mainline theology's ongoing temptation

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[48]   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Protestantismus ohne Reformation," 354. Bonhoeffer acknowledges that there are certain exceptions like Reinhold Niebuhr's critique of liberalism, 350 ff.

[49]   Bonhoeffer, "Bericht über den Studienaufenthalt," 97, translation mine; see also "Protestantismus ohne Reformation," 349.

[50]   John de Gruchy, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ. Selected Writings* (San Francisco: Collins, 1988), 11.

[51]   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Der Blick von unten," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1959), vol. 2, 441, translation mine.

to domesticate both God and the neighbour. The view from the underside – from those who have to endure systematic oppression in any form or shape – has the potential to add some clarity of perspective in a situation where the real problems of the world are often covered up. A truly countercultural vision needs to begin here; as the perspective of the underside throws fresh light on the deeper problems created by dominant culture, politics, and economics.

People who are forced to endure conditions of poverty, for instance, have unique opportunities to develop a deeper awareness of the conditions that contribute to their predicament, as they have first-hand experiences with the underbelly of the economy that even the greatest economists lack. Likewise, people who endure the pressures of racism in their own bodies are in a better position to grasp what is really going on in a racist society than those who are unaware of the enduring problems of racism, and so on. It is only from the perspective of the underside that the all-pervasive effects of the Gospel of Prosperity and its mainline variants can finally be addressed and alternatives be envisioned. A truly countercultural perspective cannot be built in the context of the Gospel of Prosperity, where God is consistently identified with those at the top levels of society. Bonhoeffer's logic of the underside has been taken up and developed further, not only in subsequent works of Latin American liberation theologians, but also elsewhere, including in the context of the United States.[52]

This perspective from the underside is built on a fundamental theological argument that is sometimes overlooked. The view from the underside is not just about epistemology – about how to see and understand better what is going on; neither is it just about how to be countercultural in the most consistent and effective fashion. The primary concern of the view from the underside is not to be different for difference's sake, but to identify the work of God and to take a stand with God. The most important task of Christianity and the Church, no matter whether it operates in a Christian society or in a non-Christian one, is to take a stand with God. A theological account of this matter tells us that the view from the underside is, ultimately, the view of Godself.

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[52] See, for instance, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, transl. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 222–234, who refers to Bonhoeffer directly. The theme is picked up in Joerg Rieger, ed., *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology*, American Academy of Religion, Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

There are many strands in the Judeo-Christian traditions where God can be found in this unexpected position, on the underside: when electing a people, God chooses not the powerful Egyptians but a band of their slaves, and leads them to freedom. Through the proclamations of the prophets of the Old Testament, God is once again taking the side not of those in control but of those who experience injustice and oppression; the Psalms pick up similar concerns. In Jesus Christ, God becomes a construction worker who lives his life in solidarity with a variety of the outcasts and oppressed of his society. The Apostle Paul knew as much, when he praised God for electing those who are weak, without educational privileges, the nobodies, and challenging those on top: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are" (1 Cor. 1:27–28).

Bonhoeffer, it must not be forgotten, also started from a similar theological insight. The underside is not just a tremendously important part of human experience that is too often neglected in mainline Christianity; the underside is where God is at work, and this is where theology and the Church need to be located as well. In the words of his biographer and friend Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer believed that we have to look for God where God had already preceded us – at the underside of history.[53] If we fail to look there, we will miss the reality of God altogether, no matter how Christian our societies purport to be.

Conclusions

Being Christian in a Christian society is no easier than being Christian in a non-Christian society. In some ways, it can be more difficult because of the common assumption that things are well when Christianity is widely accepted. It is harder for Christians to see through the smokescreens in a Christian society, and one of the greatest challenges is to understand that many references to God in a Christian society do not necessarily refer to the God of the Bible.

The confession of early Christianity that "Jesus is Lord," which is widely used in many churches, may serve as an example for what is at stake here. When Christians use this phrase, it all depends on what is meant by "Lord," that is, what kind of power is described by this term. Is Jesus Lord in the sense that his power resembles the power held by the wealthy and the

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[53] See Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage* (New York: Harper, 1970), 771.

powerful in our societies? Or does Jesus as Lord embody a different sort of power?

During the early history of Christianity, confessing Jesus as Lord meant confessing that the one who claimed to be the supreme lord at the time was not lord at all. There was a choice to be made: was Jesus Lord, or was it the emperor? Since religion was a public thing in the Roman Empire, and since the Roman emperor was a religious figure as well, it was not possible to split up the answer by saying that Jesus was Lord of religion and the emperor was lord of the world.[54]

Today, we face a similar choice, but this time we cannot limit the choice to the politicians; we need to include the movers and shakers of the economy as well, who often operate in the shadows of politics and who frequently spawn the sort of political corruption that is often bemoaned without a deeper awareness of where it originates. In this context, it all depends on whether we understand that Jesus embodies a different sort of power than that promoted by many of the powerful of this world: he does not rule by coercion and force, from the top down (Matth 4:8-10), but in solidarity with those who are pushed to the margins of this world (Luke 6:20-25). The ultimate yardstick for measuring how Christianity is doing is not how countercultural a church is, but how it embodies the reality of Jesus in its own context. This is one of the questions that was on my mind during my three-month visit to South Africa in 2008; in the end, I came away surprised about how much ground the Gospel of Prosperity now occupies even in a country like South Africa that has such a distinctive Christian tradition of liberation.

Can Jesus – the Word of God – once again challenge us in our various contexts to live by the beat of a different drummer? The good news is that alternatives exist in many places: in the US, I see some of these alternatives, for instance, in the growing coalitions of religion and labour, where a different sort of power is promoted, from the bottom up, more akin to the Lordship of Jesus. In Europe and South Africa, similar developments might be reported, where Christians embody a different sort of power that moves from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. The good news is that God is not finished with us yet – and neither are we with God.

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[54] For a more detailed account, see Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), chapter 1.

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Essay 3

The reluctant insight:
Protestantism and democracy[55]

Klaus Nürnberger[56]

Introduction

In the present essay I shall offer a brief survey of the main Protestant stances against democracy. They are those of Lutheranism and Calvinism, of the Humanism and Pietism of the 17th century and their modern counterparts and of modern political and liberation theologies. Because Protestantism has to be seen in the context of their Catholic mother tradition, I shall begin with a few remarks on the latter.

The Catholic tradition

In the Western Church, theological thought about politics changed dramatically when under Constantine the persecuted Christian minority became a privileged and powerful majority. Christians soon began to persecute their enemies. Emperors utilised the Church as a civil religion to hold the empire together and often interfered unscrupulously in doctrinal decisions and other internal affairs of the Church. The Church in turn tried to gain power over the political realm. The initial marriage of convenience between throne and altar in time turned into an intense rivalry for power. This development is reflected in the theology of the time. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, said that the spiritual authority of the Church is above the secular authority of the State just as the soul is above the body. The papal encyclical *Unam Sanctam* of Boniface VIII (1302) declared that both "swords" belong to the Church.[57]

Moreover, the quest for power on the side of the Church gradually changed from theocratic authoritarianism to totalitarianism. The claim of the

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[57] Niels Hansen Søe. *Christliche Ethik: Ein Lehrbuch* (München: Kaiser, 1957), 323.

Church to possessing the truth became absolute, and the imposition of this truth became tyrannical. The persecution of heretics, the conversion of Germanic and Slavonic tribes by force of arms, the inquisition, the crusades and the conquest of Latin America in the name of Christianity all bear witness to this fact. It stands to reason that many centuries of authoritarianism affected the Christian tradition and cannot easily be dismantled, especially when powerful interests have entrenched themselves in the structures of the church.

In recent times, the attitude of the official Catholic church, and especially of leading Catholic theologians, has shifted dramatically on this point. Pronouncements on the desirability of democracy and human rights in the secular sphere made by Catholics are often far more enlightened than those made by their Protestant counterparts. There are also strong pleas for a democratisation of the church itself. On the other hand, the Catholic hierarchy has not abandoned its claim to absolute power and unquestionable truth. The new emphasis on the full body of the church and the role of the laity is not translated into democratic procedures. The church in effect continues to claim that its hierarchy, and the Pope in particular, are mandated by Christ, the eternal ruler of the universe. The images both of God and his representative on earth remain authoritarian.

The Lutheran tradition

In view of the unhealthy entanglements between Church and State at the end of the Middle Ages, the Reformation had good reasons for insisting that the spheres of the Church and the State should not be confused. Luther maintained that God restrains and overcomes sin and evil in two ways: outwardly through the institutions and offices of the State, and inwardly through the proclamation of the Word of God, both as law and gospel, by the ministry of the Church. The Church should not rule and the State should not preach. But the Church should be subject to the laws of the State and the State should be subject to the proclamation of the Church.[58]

Luther believed that the gospel liberates Christians both from selfishness and from the law. Believers become free, therefore, both to serve their neighbours and to use their reason in all decisions of life, rather than being bound slavishly to a set of regulations. This freedom to serve and to act rationally is particularly true for the State. There is no "Christian State"; the best form of the State has to be determined time and again under changing

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[58]   See Nürnberger, 1985 for Luther's political ethics.

circumstances by reason informed by conscience.[59] This approach opened up a space in which the best form of the State possible under any set of circumstances could, theoretically, be created without any religious interference. Since the State was a secular matter, not a matter of revelation, Christians were to use their God-given powers of observation and reason in the secular sphere. Of course, as Christians they would do so motivated by the love of Christ and in responsibility to God.

Alas, for three centuries this relatively enlightened (and ultimately victorious) approach was not given a chance to prove itself. Because of political circumstances during the time of the Reformation, the Church in the Lutheran territories ended up under the tutelage of the princes. Understandably, the latter were only too eager to take over the role of the Pope. As they were at the mercy of an increasingly absolutist monarchy and dependent for their livelihood on public stipends, theologians and Church leaders alike became docile servants of the State right down into the 20th century. Ostensibly the form of the State did not matter; after all a Christian could live responsibly in any kind of State. Here the old misconception that renewed personal attitudes obviate structural change became operational. Moreover, Luther's later uncompromising stance against the peasant rebellion reinforced paternalistic notions for centuries to come.

In this situation, Lutheran theologians found it convenient to transform Luther's imprecise formulation of the dialectic between the "two kingdoms" into a dualism which separated the two realms and which, unintended by Luther, was to become identified with Lutheran political ethics. It reached its peak in neo-Lutheranism, particularly in the theology of Werner Elert (1957), but also in the thought of Paul Althaus, Walter Künneth and others. On the one hand, the State could largely be seen in negative terms: the "sword" was an emergency measure of God against sin, his "left-hand" (inauthentic) rule, and theology had little to say about it. This is the root of the often bewailed Lutheran quietism. On the other hand, the idea that the State was "God's rule on the left hand" could be appropriated uncritically as a second source of revelation. The vacuum created by Luther's appeal to reason in public matters could easily be occupied by secular ideologies. In fact, prominent Lutheran theologians like Emmanuel Hirsch and Friedrich Gogarten supported Hitler's movement.

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[59]   Søe, *Christliche Ethik,* 324.

Another fateful legacy of Luther was that he had wrapped the State in the imagery of the family.[60] Generations of Lutherans have come to believe that the State, personalised in the king or emperor, is the big parent of the nation to whom respect, loyalty and obedience is due. This image is highly misleading, particularly when the parent is also seen in authoritarian terms. Functionally a parent is an interim guide and protector of immature persons who cannot as yet take responsibility for their own lives, a role to be fulfilled until those persons can guide themselves. The State is nothing of the sort. The State is the overarching social structure which is meant to enable mature citizens to ensure the application of justice, to facilitate collective decision-making and cooperation, to embark on commonly beneficial projects, *et cetera*. Our attitude towards the State should not be fear and obedience but critical responsibility and participation. Of course, Luther himself did not yet know the modern State; authority was largely personal during his time.[61]

If one considers the political conditioning of theology in this case, it is not too surprising that one of the most powerful arguments for democracy came from a Lutheran theologian and social philosopher, Reinhold Niebuhr. It is also illuminating that the Lutheran paradigm enabled him to be critical of its idealisation. All that took place in the USA, where democracy was a fact of life. The celebrated Niebuhr-dictum that the human being was good enough to make democracy possible and bad enough to make it necessary is worth noting.

The failure of German Lutheranism to cope with the rapid transitions from Empire to the Weimar Republic (the first and unsuccessful attempt to establish a democracy on German soil) after World War I, to Hitler's dictatorship in 1933, to starkly contradictory forms of government in East and West Germany after World War II, slowly convinced Lutheran theologians that the form of the State was not a matter of indifference. The positive experiences and challenges of the democratic order not only led to a rejection of the authoritarian State but also of the purely negative view of the State as an emergency measure against evil. Positive and responsible participation in public affairs has come to be viewed increasingly as a Christian value and explained with reference to Luther's treatise "On the Freedom of a Christian".

A few examples must suffice: Before the war one finds few Lutheran theologians who have anything to say about the form of the state, let alone something positive about democracy. Not even Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the

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[60] Wolfgang Huber, *Protestantismus und Protest: Zum Verhältnis von Ethik und Politik* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1987), 50.

[61] Christofer Frey, *Die Ethik des Protestantismus von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1989), 41.

celebrated martyr of Hitler's dictatorship, tackled the problem in his Ethics. "Without doubt the Church of the Reformation has no right to address the State directly in its specifically political actions. It has neither to praise nor to censure the laws of the State, but must rather affirm the State to be God's order of preservation in a godless world". [62] After World War II the situation changed. A fierce debate followed Martin Niemöller's provocative 1945 statement that "Democracy has, after all, more in common with the Christian faith than any authoritarian form of the State which denies the rights and freedoms of the individual".[63] Walter Künneth, a conservative Lutheran, deplored the traditional Lutheran indifference to the form of the State.[64] Helmut Thielicke could already take the firmly established German democracy for granted. Significantly, he began with an analysis of the modern State and then showed how the Lutheran heritage is still relevant under the changed circumstances. In his opinion, human reason is at work as much in an autocracy as in a democracy.[65] Trillhaas devoted a whole chapter to democracy, discussing its origin, critique and ethical considerations.[66] Wolfgang Huber saw the theological basis of human rights in the dignity of the human being, given by God, which no State has a right to deny. From there the rule of law, social securities and democracy follow. [67] Quoting Luther's treatise on the "Freedom of a Christian", he introduced his concept of "communicative freedom" which replaces deadly competition with enriching openness.[68] Trutz Rendtorff begins by defining the human being as a social being.[69] Self-determination and autonomy are treated as positive values and the traditional authority-obedience ethic is rejected. The democratic State requires "the productive and constructive participation and cooperation of its citizens because only in that way can it attain inner cohesiveness and be distinguished from a political order based solely on external force".[70]

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[62] Quoted by David Nicholls, *Deity and domination: Images of God and the state in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 97.

[63] Wolfgang Huber, *Folgen christlicher Freiheit: Ethik und Theorie der Kirche im Horizont der Barmer Theologischen Erklärung* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), 47.

[64] Walter Künneth, *Politik zwischen Dämon on Gott: Eine christliche Ethik des Politischen* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954),170.

[65] Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics. Vol 2: Politics (*Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 5.

[66] Wolfgang Trillhaas, *Ethik (*Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970), 453.

[67] Huber, *Protestantismus und Protest, 104.*

[68] Huber, *Protestantismus und Protest, 199, 209.*

[69] Trutz Rendtorff, *Ethics. Vol 2: Applications of an ethical theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 14.

[70] Rendtorff, *Ethics,* 42.

Often, human rights and democratic assumptions are based on the *image of God* concept. Lutherans should, however, base it on the doctrinal core of the Reformation, namely justification by grace, accepted in faith. In Christ, God accepts us into his fellowship irrespective of our performance or achievement, thus unconditionally. Unconditional acceptance into the fellowship of God implies equal dignity. Equal dignity implies justice, that is equal access to life's chances, resources and power. Equal control over the use of power can only become practical policy in a democracy.[71]

The Reformed tradition

Calvin took over both Luther's doctrine of law and gospel and Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms of God, but the emphasis shifted considerably. For Calvin the overriding concern was not, as in Luther, God's forgiving and self-giving love in Christ, but God's eternal glory. God is glorified when God's will is fulfilled. It is God's glory that the gospel is primarily meant to restore. As a result, Calvin's concept of Christian freedom differed from that of Luther. According to Calvin, the gospel frees us from sin, but not from the law. On the contrary, a forgiven sinner is empowered and directed by the "third use of the law" to do God's will.[72] Thus while Luther emphasised the use of a liberated reason in ethical decision-making, Calvin gave well-defined and rigid content to the will of God. Biblical precepts, which Luther had utilised freely and applied situationally, remained the prime ethical guideline for Calvin.

The consequence was that Calvinism tended towards a much stricter Christian ethic and a more definite concept of Christian political involvement. This could work in the direction of a theocracy, as in Calvin's Geneva, but it could also work in the direction of a democracy, as in Britain. In fact, James H. Nichols believes that Puritanism provided the fertile soil in which democratic attitudes were able to grow – in contrast to the authoritarian climate of Catholicism. Arthur Holt, a Presbyterian, also sees a close affinity between Protestantism and democracy.[73] His book provides us with persuasive arguments for the contention that the Christian faith generates a

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[71]   See Klaus Nürnberger, "By grace alone. The significance of the core doctrine of the Reformation for the present crisis in SA" *Transformation* 3 (1986): 41–48.

[72]   For the difference between Luther and Calvin concerning law and gospel, see Klaus Nürnberger, "The law-gospel debate as a possible basis for a theological ethic," *Theologia Evangelica* XIV(1981): 25–47.

[73]   Arthur E. Holt, *Christian roots of democracy in America* (New York: Friendship Press, 1941), 7.

democratic spirit. Presbyterianism and congregationalism developed in the Reformed, not in the Lutheran tradition.

However, due to its emphasis on God's glory and the unquestionable validity of God's law, the Reformed tradition also continued to contain a good dose of authoritarianism. A democratic constitution does not prevent authoritarian attitudes on the side of pastors, elders and councils. One could quote many examples. In spite of its unquestionable achievements in the development of democratic attitudes and institutions, Puritanism was also a particularly authoritarian version of the Calvinist approach. Max Weber ascribed the rise of capitalism to Puritan self-discipline and efficiency. The no-nonsense discipline and efficiency of the Prussian army and bureaucracy which continued to determine German public life well into the 20th century was based on the Calvinist creed of the Prussian dynasty. More recently, Rubem Alves has given us a devastating analysis of Brazilian Presbyterianism from the perspective of liberation theology.[74] In South Africa, Reformed Afrikaner nationalists who professed democratic traditions, set up a repressive authoritarian regime, applied tight social controls within Afrikanerdom and promulgated a rigid personal ethic among believers. The reasons for this apparent discrepancy are not difficult to find. Nicholls explains:

> ... many Puritan parliamentarians maintained that the kingship of God implies that all people, including kings, are his subjects. Their resort to an authoritarian image of God to oppose the authoritarian State was perhaps effective while they were in a minority, but it had the result of confirming, by analogy, the concepts of authority and domination which they were contending against. The Cromwellian State manifested some of the worst features of royalist autocracy.[75]

There is a marked difference between German-speaking Reformed theologians in Germany and Switzerland who are deeply influenced by a Lutheran theological atmosphere and the much stauncher Calvinists in the Netherlands, Scotland, the United States and South Africa. Emil Brunner, for instance, the Swiss Reformed contemporary of Karl Barth, is very "Lutheran" in his approach. Written before World War II, his works are also very authoritarian.

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[74] Rubem Alves, Protestantism and repression: A Brazilian case study (New York: Orbis, 1985).

[75] Nicholls, *Deity and domination,* 127.

Brunner's great political ethics is called, significantly, "Das Gebot und die Ordnungen" (Command and orders). The "divine imperative" (the title of the 1937 English translation) is the centre of ethics.

Karl Barth, too, was still geared to an authoritarian or "decisionist" frame of mind, yet his dialectical method was versatile enough not only to accommodate, but actually to demand both democracy and socialism as a necessary implication of the gospel.[76] The direct deductions he made from revelation to political-structural principles are not always very convincing, but the underlying approach is important to note. God's sovereign and holy subject implies the crisis of the impotent and sinful human subject, but in Christ the latter is taken into the dynamics of the former. In this way, human dignity is restored. On this basis, Barth blazed a trail for continental theology which has determined much of the ensuing debate. Note that Barth was Swiss and Switzerland had a democratic tradition. But Barth was also a Calvinist, and he lived in the Europe of the 1930s!

Nicholls draws attention to the fact that there was a rather irrational "decisionist" mood in Central Europe at the time which favoured leadership and followership.[77] In times of acute political instability "...people look to groups which seem able to provide strong leadership and to have the power necessary to impose order in a situation of impending chaos." Not principles but saviours are expected to provide the answers.[78] There seem to be affinities between the enthusiasm with which Hitler was being followed as the "Leader", the existentialist idea of the autonomy of the authentic individual, and the enthusiastic reception of Barth's deduction of theology as a whole from the simple axiom that God reveals himself as Lord,[79] Bonhoeffer's "discipleship" *et cetera*. "These churchmen were in search of some sovereign authority with which to confront the totalitarianism of Hitler."[80] It was Nicolas Berdyaev, Russian Orthodox and a former Marxist, who dared to question a concept of God based on sovereignty and authority in favour of "... a God who is characterised by a loving and suffering involvement in the tribulations of the world and who inspires and liberates rather than dominates humankind".[81] Philosophers in the United States, such as A.N. Whitehead,

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[76] See the last two essays in Karl Barth, *Community, state and church. Three essays.* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968) and Ulrich Dannemann, *Theologie und Politik im Denken Karl Barths* (München: Kaiser/Mainz: Grünewald, 1977), 242.

[77] Nicholls, *Deity and domination,* 88.

[78] Nicholls, *Deity and domination,* 89.

[79] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Vol I/1: The doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1936), 349.

[80] Barth, *Church Dogmatics Vol I/1,* 108, 117.

[81] Nicholls, *Deity and domination,* 120.

W. James, J. Dewey and C. Hartshorne, embarked on similar enterprises.[82]
The concern to overcome an authoritarian concept of God was also taken up
by many politically sensitive theologians in the second half of the century,
for instance Jürgen Moltmann in *The Crucified God*, Leonardo Boff in
Trinity and Society, and Gordon Kaufman in *Theology for a Nuclear Age*, to
quote only three of the more prominent. Feminist theologians obviously
oppose a God of male domination.

For South Africa, at least the most prominent Dutch theologian and
statesman at the close of the 19th century, Abraham Kuyper, must be
mentioned. His project of establishing God's sovereignty over what he con-
sidered to be autonomous dimensions of life (verzuilen) had a powerful
impact on the development of Apartheid theology.[83]

Humanism, evangelicalism and Pentecostalism

By the 17th century, Protestant theology, both Lutheran and Reformed, had
developed into an orthodox system of thought which was felt by many to be
sterile and void of life. There were two reactions to this system, the
Enlightenment and Pietism. The Enlightenment jettisoned the orthodox
system and its claim to reveal truth altogether in favour of freedom – freedom
from untested authorities such as inspired Scriptures and dogmatic traditions,
freedom for rational thought, freedom for individual responsibility. In
Germany, the Enlightenment tried to remain within broad Christian para-
meters; in France it developed atheistic, in Britain empiricist tendencies. In
all three cases the human being became the centre of the universe. Human
dignity became a prime consideration. The battle for individual freedom and
human rights gained momentum.

Since the Church had aligned itself with the conservative powers, it
became one of the prime targets of the battle for freedom. The result was an
even greater retraction into conservatism. Democracy was seen by many
Christians as an invention of the devil. The choice between faith and unbelief
seemed to go along with a choice between authoritarian and liberal ideas.
What a tragic development, both for the project of human freedom and for
the Christian faith!

But there was also another reaction to Protestant Orthodoxy: Pietism.
In Pietism the spiritual rebirth of the individual became the prime goal of the

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[82]   Nicholls, *Deity and domination*, 131.
[83]   See Johan Kinghorn, *Die NG Kerk en apartheid* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1986).

Christian gospel: not correct dogma, but personal dedication to Christ became the centre of attention. Pietism left the dogmatic system intact, including the Orthodox idea of the verbal inspiration of Scriptures. While Luther had stressed the preached Word on the basis of Scripture, Scripture now became the divine Word to which the believer responded in his/her daily conversations with his/her Lord. Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement were further developments in the same direction. Political motifs found in the Bible did not fit well into this essentially personal and private atmosphere, and were either spiritualised or ignored. Public matters belonged to "this world" and were taken care of by the State, which God had established and which a Christian was bound to obey.

Thus political activity became something foreign to the true believer. Although Pietism gave emphatic expression to Luther's concentration on one's personal relationship with God, it jettisoned Luther's equally powerful concern for the public repercussions of the Christian message. It did take over some of Calvin's ethical rigorism - but again mainly for the private realm. Pietism became attractive to an increasing number of people whom industrialisation and urbanisation had uprooted and thrown into an individualised and socially impotent situation. It also became attractive to the upper middle class, who unconsciously desired to have a free hand in public affairs, especially in politics and business. During the 19th century Pietism spread rapidly by means of evangelisation campaigns and revivals. Its momentum has not diminished to the present day.

As might be expected, the vacuum left by Pietism in the public sphere proved to be dangerous: it led to widespread political indifference and lack of public responsibility among Christians. The space left empty by a spiritualised faith could also be occupied by political ideologies. It is important to note that a reaction against political indifference or the naïve legitimation of an intolerable *status quo* has emerged from within the evangelical camp and has spread appreciably in recent times. The American journal *Transformation* is a current mouthpiece of this movement.

Evangelical faith as a root for public responsibility is, of course, not a new phenomenon. The social impact of John Wesley's ministry is well known – though his motive was personal love rather than social justice. The Salvation Army is another example. In the USA, Walter Rauschenbusch, the father of the "Social Gospel", was nurtured in the evangelical school of thought. In Germany, Pietism led to the establishment of large Christian social undertakings, as well as to Protestant diaconate orders dedicating themselves to self-sacrificing work. Many other examples can be cited, including the South African Evangelicals who contributed to this volume (Caesar Molebatsi, Moss Ntlha, Anthony Balcomb, Hugh Wetmore). Evangelical organisations

such as African Enterprise have become outspoken in terms of social and political issues.[84]

Once the exemplary dedication of the evangelical to his/her Lord is combined with social awareness, the dynamic generated can be substantial. But are socially aware Evangelicals also committed to democracy? That depends. A lot of work still has to be done to draw out social-ethical implications of basic theological assumptions. We also have to mention, at least in passing, the peace churches (Mennonites, Quakers and others) with their enormous contribution to political ethics. Going back to the time of the Reformation and earlier, they have done a great deal to demythologise the State and arouse the conscience of people against violence and war – for which they were often heavily persecuted. While social structures and the form of the State were usually not their primary concerns, their emphasis on love of neighbour as basic motivation always implied human dignity on which arguments for justice and human rights can be built.

Political theology

In the late sixties, a new mood concerning social issues emerged among intellectuals the world over. In the political realm it was the time of decolonisation. The United Nations became a forum for Third World opinions and demands. The World Council of Churches offered a similar platform to Christians in the Third World. In Western social philosophy there was the enormous impact of the *Frankfurt school* (Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas) and other neo-Marxists or "revisionists". Latin American social scientists developed "dependency theory" as a militant alternative to Western "developmentalism" as explanation of Third World poverty. Marxist social analysis became not only respectable but, in many circles, a new orthodoxy.

In this atmosphere, a new approach to theology became inevitable. Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of hope* was inspired by Ernst Bloch's *The principle of hope*. Moltmann, the feminist Dorothee Sölle, the Catholic theologians Johann Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx and many others forged what has become known as "political theology" in Europe. There were similar movements in the United States (e.g. Richard Shaull). Almost simultaneously Latin American Liberation Theology, American and South African Black Theology, and Feminist Theology developed. In the heat of the debate some theologians argued quite persuasively for Christian participation in

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[84]   See Michael Cassidy, *The passing summer* (Ventura Ca: Regal, 1989).

violent revolution.[85] The mood became so aggressive that even sympathetic sociologists and theologians found it difficult to cope with the revolutionary zeal and increasing intolerance of their students.

A decade and a half later they had been given a chance to catch their breath. The title of H.M. Kuitert's book *Everything is politics but politics is not everything* suggests that mainline theology is back on course. By the beginning of the 1990s both Marxist socialism and Liberation Theology had been pushed into a defensive posture, not least through the restorative policies of the Vatican under Cardinal Ratzinger. But it would be wrong to assume that Liberation Theology is dead. It has become a sophisticated and multi-disciplinary approach with at least some form of institutional basis and the self-assurance of a new orthodoxy.

What the various Liberationist Theologies have in common is the struggle for justice, freedom and dignity of hitherto oppressed population groups. One would expect a particularly strong commitment to democratic values and principles in this kind of theology. However, the picture is ambiguous. Dom Helder Camara can assure his readers: "We are democrats, and we are using democratic processes, pure and simple. We believe in the power of ideas. We want to persuade, not only to prevail".[86] It grieves him to see that young people turn away from democracy because it has not delivered the goods.

And this brings us to the other side of the story. Western observers often note a considerable ambiguity in the stance of liberation theologians towards a liberal democracy – inextricably combined with their stance towards socialism.[87] One needs to understand, however, that the majority of Latin Americans have gone through one disappointment after another: a feudal system in which democracy only meant that a dependent and intimidated population voted their "patrons" into power in the hope of receiving some reward; populist regimes of ruthless leaders; corrupt and inefficient liberal democracies; ruthless military dictatorships; the oppressive national security state and failing democracies of the liberal type. In contrast to South Africa, where the police and the courts have had to enforce unjust laws, in Brazil progressive laws have been circumvented by the police and the courts. Moreover, Western liberalism has been experienced mainly in the form of

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[85]   John G. Davies, *Christians, Politics and violent revolution* (London: SCM, 1976).
[86]   Helder Camara, *Revolution through peace* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 52.
[87]   See Paul Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and John Pottenger, *The Political Theory of Liberation Theology* (New York: State Univ of NY Press, 1989).

"dependent capitalism" with its devastating economic effects on the majority of the population.

Democracy is a hollow concept where it does not actually empower the powerless. So it does not surprise us that, following Paulo Freire, liberation theology has increasingly placed the emphasis on conscientisation, on grass roots participation in decision-making, on small group empowerment in base communities, on the merely facilitative role of "organic intellectuals" (a phrase coined by Antonio Gramsci) – to such an extent that writers often have to remind their readers that democracy must also work through to the level of the State.

Goals on the national level have not always been sorted out among those whose agenda is the liberation of the oppressed. There are those who advocate Western liberal values and institutions, those who tend towards Marxist (revisionist) arguments and those who insist that it is the experience of the poor themselves that has to define policy. These protagonists of divergent goals are more and more agreed, however, that empowerment and participation must work from the bottom up. Anything that is imposed from the top is doomed to failure. It is for this reason that so much is expected from the Christian message. Liberation is first and foremost a spiritual process, based on the gospel. Those accepted by Christ discover their own dignity, gain self-confidence and insight, expose the mental and social structures of oppression, build up power to resist them, develop community and cooperation, and so forth.

One thing is clear, I think: whatever the weaknesses present in Liberation Theology, the lessons to be learnt from it are crucial for our times and those who ignore it do so at the expense of their relevance.

Conclusion

When we look back, the record of the Church and its theology concerning democratic attitudes and commitments is not very flattering. There seems to be a yawning discrepancy between the direction of the biblical tradition, as analysed in the last section, and what the Church has understood to be the right attitude to political power for most of its history. In authoritarian situations the Church has usually succumbed to authoritarianism and adopted it for its own leadership structures. In democratic situations, democracy has simply been taken for granted as the current form of the State without any theological reflection on the assumptions of democracy. It cannot be denied that on occasion there have been powerful moves towards democracy, and the spirited contributions of theologians such as Niebuhr, Holt, Camara,

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Rendtorff and many others should not be discounted. But on the whole the picture is rather disappointing, and we need to understand what happened.

Three factors seem to play a part in the formation of religious political ethics:

1.   *The ability of a tradition or an institution to acquire and exert power in society*, whether by direct influence over its members or by aligning itself with the powerful in society. It goes without saying that because of their history and the size of their institutional structures, Catholics are more prone to strive for political influence than, for instance, the Quakers. Moreover, ruling elites and grass roots members may have conflicting attitudes concerning authority and democracy. Power, like financial resources, is irresistible for most people, whether they are believers or not. Once it is in hand, its use or abuse will be legitimated, even if quite subconsciously. Defining the location of both the receiver and the sender of a message in the social power structure is necessary to expose the hidden agendas in the processes of communication. We shall come back to this phenomenon in the next section.

2.   *The "mood" of the times (Zeitgeist)*. David Nicholls[88] has shown convincingly that a powerful correlation exists between the social circumstances, the fashionable ideology and the theology pertaining to a particular historical-cultural context. One has to be careful, therefore, not to mistake a given theological approach for a pure idea unrelated to its social context – least of all for a timeless revelation of God. Compare the "crisis theology" of Karl Barth with the American civil religion characterised by H Richard Niebuhr as: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministration of a Christ without a cross".[89] At best, the Word of God can be channelled through these cultural-historical wrappings but its detection takes some discernment. This calls for a thorough reflection on the whole hermeneutical process and I have advanced a few arguments in my paper on *The seed that cracks the rock*[90] in this regard.

3.   *The dead weight of the tradition.* Professors of Theology tend to sit in ivory towers reformulating old answers to inherited problems, often quite oblivious of the actual needs and challenges of their own times.

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[88]   Nicholls, *Deity and domination.*
[89]   Nicholls, *Deity and domination,* 87.
[90]   In Klaus Nürnberger, ed., *A democratic vision for South Africa: Political realism and Christian responsibility* (Pietermaritzburg: Encounter Publications, 1991), 75–88.

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The State as one of the "orders of creation" (rather than as an over-arching social structure), the relation between "Church and State" (rather than Christian responsibility in public affairs), the State as God's "emergency measure" to restrain evil (rather than as an arrangement to facilitate social justice and cooperation), the use of the term "sword" (rather than psychological, propagandistic, nuclear, biological, chemical and electronic weaponry) are just a few examples of outmoded traditions that persist.

To counteract this tendency we need to develop a missionary approach to theology. The function of tradition in the biblical faith is to channel the living Word of God through time and space into every new situation, not to perpetuate its historical forms. A missionary approach implies that we deliberately follow an inductive method: we begin with an analysis of the current situation, utilising the tools of the secular social sciences, and then figure out which kind of response the essential content of the Word of God could make to the problems and agonies of the day.

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Essay 4

The Church, democracy and responsible citizenship

Clint Le Bruyns[91]

Democracy – and political responsibility?

The notion of 'participatory democracy' or 'active citizenship' is in political vogue in and beyond South Africa. It has become a way of talking about the responsibility all people must assume for the integrity and advancement of their life together.[92] The aim of this essay is to introduce the notion of responsible citizenship as a relevant and constructive contribution to the revitalisation of grassroots democracy in South Africa today. The theological capital within the ideas of power, hope and grace are employed as virtues for social transformation that might be discerned, activated, deepened and advanced in and through Christian social engagement in public life. To this end, the quality of democratic life has the potential to be enhanced and transformed as together, ordinary people take responsibility for their political life through a renewal of theological resources put to constructive use for the common good.

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[92]   The theoretical emphasis in this chapter rests with theological sources in relation to the general idea of responsible citizenship. Furthermore, this forms part of ongoing research on the theme. Recent reflection on these notions are elaborated upon in more detail and with the complexity it deserves in the following literature: Andrea Cornwall and Vera Schattan P. Coelho (ed.), *Spaces for Change? The Politics of Citizen Participation in New Democratic Arenas* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Gianpaolo Baiocchi, Patrick Heller and Marcelo Kunrath Silva, "Making Space for Civil Society: Institutional Reforms and Local Democracy in Brazil" in Social Forces, Vol. 86, No. 3 (March 2008), 911-936; Nora McKeon (ed.), *The United Nations and Civil Society: Legitimating Global Governance – Whose Voice?* (London: Zed Books, 2009); Geci Karuri-Sebina, David Hemson and Jonathan Carter, "Putting People First Versus Embedding Autonomy: Responsiveness of the Democratic Developmental State to Effective Demand Side Governance in South Africa's Service Delivery" in *Syst Pract Action Res* 23 (2010), 87–100; Daniel Friedrich, "Historical consciousness as a pedagogical device in the production of the responsible citizen" in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 31/5 (December 2010), 649–663.

Clint Le Bruyns

In her review of democratic South Africa, Mamphela Ramphele emphasises that ordinary people need to learn the ways of democracy and share in its ownership by asserting their rights and exercising reciprocal responsibilities.[93] Hans Küng makes a teleological argument for this responsibility: the goal of human life "…must remain being and becoming truly human, humane persons" as Christians "…stand up for humanity, freedom, justice, peace and the preservation of creation".[94] John de Gruchy, cognisant that Christianity has often seemed to be out of touch with intellectual and moral challenges in public life, advances a theological argument for 'a Christian humanism' that must take responsibility for the renewal and transformation of all of life, especially in regard to the quality of our life together.[95] Jürgen Moltmann locates this ethic in the church's affirmation of "… God's claim upon human beings" as reflected in their being created in the image of God as a right to responsibility for creation and its future.[96] Augustine Shutte draws attention to the political sphere as "the sphere of authority", and contends that "real authority" – in making rules concerning resources, ownership and various aspects of life together, coupled with the power and responsibilities it implies and demands – is rooted in the people themselves as a political community.[97]

Oliver O'Donovan discusses political activity as a continual act of judgment. By judgment he means "an act of moral discrimination that pronounces upon a preceding act or existing state of affairs to establish a new public context".[98] This is an important perspective in the light of our checkered history in political South Africa. As an act of moral discrimination, political action seeks to resolve moral ambiguity and to make clear the division of right over wrong.[99] In establishing a new public context, it is concerned with the good order within which we may act and interact as members of a community.[100] Good political activity is creative to the extent

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93   Mamphela Ramphele, *Laying Ghosts to Rest: Dilemmas of the Transformation in South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2008), 131.

94   Hans Küng, *Credo: The Apostles' Creed Explained for Today* (London: SCM, 1993), 189.

95   John W. de Gruchy, *Being Human: Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (London: SCM, 2006), *passim*.

96   See Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1984), 3–18 but especially "Christian Faith and Human Rights", 19–35.

97   Augustine Shutte, "Politics and the Ethic of Ubuntu" in *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics,* ed. Munyaradzi Felix Murove (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2009), 377.

98   Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment (Bampton Lectures)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 7.

99   O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment,* 7.

100   O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment,* 8.

that it brings forth new possibilities of action.[101] This is similarly an important perspective given our new democratic context in South Africa. We might call it responsible action, depending on the quality of its consequences. Citizens are thus engaged politically as they take responsibility for the common good and creative forms of life together through arguments, debates, elections and various other initiatives.[102] O'Donovan thus challenges people in general and the Church in particular to an engaging participation for the common good.[103]

Courtney Sampson assesses the state of political life in South Africa and finds it greatly wanting.[104] There have been some important gains in the past as far as political ideals, institutions, legislation and role-models are concerned. There are also areas of contestation. Some political leaders are merely concerned with self-enrichment rather than self-giving. Power, while crucial in promoting the common good, is used manipulatively and destructively. Identity, especially race, is employed as a means to divide communities. Public opinion is more often than not informed by an elite minority in the media as opposed to the voices of ordinary people being heard. Issues of representation, justice, reconciliation, peace, human rights, human dignity, and transformation are other cases in point of ambiguity within the political arena. Sampson envisions a participatory democracy or active citizenship by which ordinary people take responsibility for the integrity of their life together in democratic South Africa.

The 'good' in political life is reflected in our moral consensus document, the national *Constitution*, which includes a "Bill of Rights".[105] Its themes include social justice; unity in diversity; a human rights culture; improved quality of life for all; and human dignity, equality and freedom. Ramphele finds that these values point to the ordinary person's role in active citizenship as expressed in the preamble through such verbs as 'recognise', 'honour', 'respect', 'believe', 'heal', 'improve' and 'build'.[106] The need for an ethics of responsibility remains a pressing task. "The redefined public domain in our country demands that we express our social interests in accordance with the ethical standards to which we have committed our-

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[101]   O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment*, 8–9.
[102]   O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment*, 10.
[103]   O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment*, 149.
[104]   Courtney Sampson, "Ethical Leadership in and through Politics," in *Ethical Leadership and the Challenges of Moral Transformation,* ed. Gordon Dames (Stellenbosch: African SUN Media, 2009), 131–142.
[105]   *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act 108 of 1996, see chapter 2.
[106]   Ramphele, *Laying Ghosts to Rest*, 125–126.

selves", she asserts, and adds: "We have established the institutions that allow social interests to be expressed politically, but we have yet to embed the practices that are rooted in a democratic culture that holds each of us to standards of appropriate behaviour.[107]

William Gumede contends that the nurturing of a democratic political culture with the kind of responsible engagement in mind involves the participation of various public role-players.[108] Political life cannot be confined to the workings of the State; on the contrary, "a vibrant, diverse and critical civil society" is essential in regard to civic competence, leadership development, the generation of democratic norms and values, political participation, and the accumulation of social capital.[109] Gumede's use of the term 'culture' is appropriate and of fundamental importance for considering the quality of political life together. "One way of measuring whether a democracy is of the lasting sort," he argues, "...is to determine whether a democratic political culture has developed".[110] Unfortunately there are "staggering post-liberation disappointments" as "liberation and political movements that valiantly opposed authoritarian regimes often behave in markedly undemocratic ways when in power themselves".[111] He proceeds to underline a critical connection between power and culture, that is, how power is managed by movements, institutions and governments necessarily breeds a particular quality of political culture.[112]

Hope – to the people! Political responsibility against nihilism and despair

When people in their personal or positional capacities are moved to take responsibility for the advancement of their life together in a political community, what is it precisely that moves them? We should appreciate the power of hope in responsible citizenship. In this regard, Alan Mittleman provides a comprehensive and resourceful study on hope as a virtue for public life.[113] Hope involves agency, reason and possibility. It is responsive – to God, to others, to life, to the future – and is thus participatory. It has a vision of abundant life, incompatible with fatalism. It is restless with the

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[107]   Ramphele, *Laying Ghosts to Rest*, 132.
[108]   William Gumede, "Building a democratic political culture" in *The Poverty of Ideas: South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals,* ed. William Gumede and Leslie Dikeni (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2009), 11–34.
[109]   Gumede, "Building a democratic political culture", 21–23.
[110]   Gumede, "Building a democratic political culture", 11.
[111]   Gumede, "Building a democratic political culture", 11.
[112]   See Gumede, "Building a democratic political culture", 11ff.
[113]   Alan Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion, and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2009).

status quo and refuses to accept its prevailing realities. When 'hope' is conceived, it is secular hope, faith in progress, and belief in the new.[114] Through the act of hoping, he explains, we affirm "the enduring goodness of being" as we choose life, repudiate despondency, and assert a truth about goodness in a context of nihilism and despair.[115]

Since "Hope finds meaning in the depths of experience and finds those depths protected by the best of inherited traditions and practices",[116] Mittleman argues for a theologically-informed understanding of hope. He presents it as "a civic virtue in a democratic age … in so far as it helps to promote civic association, cooperation, initiative, and effort on behalf of the common good".[117] Without it, political and other systems would collapse. The political agenda is actually limited; it is primarily facilitative rather than formative in its focus. He explains: "Modern politics prepares us neither for classical virtue nor for heaven. Its principal aim is the restraint of evil and the securing of order. In its pure form, it does not hope to make us better or to impede us, as private persons, from becoming worse".[118] The fact that in itself "being hopeful in the moment can be expressive of our dignity as persons"[119] helps account for the empowerment people can experience in their ordinary and professional lives, driving them toward participatory action in public life. Nurturing hope as a public virtue can thus renew the prospects for responsible citizenship and life-sustaining civil society.

According to Mittleman, it is necessary, however, to revisit our "hope locutions".[120] By this he means what we believe about hope. The quality of our hope demands critical assessment, given that our situations today are characterised by a plurality of competing or conflicting struggles, ideas and expectations. Genuine hope must be a reasonable hope. It is important not simply *that* we hope, but moreover *how* we hope.[121] While a healthy democratic life cannot survive without the virtue of hope, it is with a sober rather than a fantastic character of hope in mind. There are many autocracies with modern hopes for prosperity, power and control, marked with damaging ideologies. Furthermore, it is a hope transcending private interests and commitments, compelling people in their personal and professional capacities

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[114]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 11.
[115]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 262.
[116]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 262.
[117]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 12.
[118]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 9.
[119]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 34.
[120]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 37.
[121]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 54ff and especially 258–270.

to work for and sacrifice for the common good. Responsible citizenship is thereby underlined for its vocational import. It holds political communities and their role-players accountable in terms of what they are called to be and to do, as opposed to them withdrawing from public participation in the unfolding of the future.

Mittleman concludes with an important point on socialisation and moral formation in relation to the virtue of hope. Hope should have abiding value and meaning. It "should be deep and wise; it should draw its strength from the abiding values of the society and from the ancient traditions of value that precede the society".[122] He then frames the realm of civil society as a moral realm, "a sphere where values are articulated, pursued, and realised in the lives of citizens and associations".[123] As such it "is the primary sphere for the moral formation of persons and is as such precious" in the course of providing "the set of social conditions without which hope would be unintelligible".[124] He contends that it is not by way of "the formal mechanisms of government" that we learn "social trust, the sense of worth, reciprocity, confidence in joint action, critical thought, and tolerance on which a self-governing society rests".[125] The necessary "habits and virtues needed for democratic self-government" are learned, instead, "in such forums as the family, the voluntary association, the community, the Church and, on some accounts, the market".[126]

Power – to the people! Political responsibility against impotence and entrapment

It is one thing to possess a hopeful consciousness; it is quite another thing to talk about power. The issue of power in Church-State relations is more often than not confined to discussions of the Church's agency, its influence, and its public impact. Jacques Ellul bemoans the Church's preoccupation with "the attempt to justify or validate political power" as a common characteristic in mainstream theological thinking on State politics.[127] As he reviews the broad outlines of biblical teaching, however, he finds that the Bible "always contests political power"[128] as "a message that is against power, against the

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[122]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 262.
[123]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 263.
[124]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 263.
[125]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 263.
[126]   Mittleman, *Hope*, 263.
[127]   Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 113.
[128]   Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 116.

State, and against politics".[129] Through "participation in politics, by the seeking of power" comes "the perversion of revelation", he contends, by which he means the development of a Christianity and a theological paradigm at odds with the teaching of the Bible and the life of Christ.[130]

On the one hand, it seems as if Ellul conceives of a 'phantom Church', nowhere to be seen yet lurking above society. It is a Church possessed by an unworldly gospel, bearing no relation to the daily realities of public life. On the other hand, however, Ellul may well be reacting against the easy adaptational and assimilational tendencies that have historically compromised and corrupted the Church's public witness.[131] The ways in which Christians participated in politics often perpetuated a *status quo* theology, validating and deepening many an unjust power. The "State Theology" in Apartheid South Africa is a notable example. Ellul finds this to be revelationally deficient, since "Revelation inevitably meant a break in the human order, in society, in power".[132] When this revelatory impulse which "unavoidably challenges the institution and established power, no matter what form this may take" is missing, Christianity turns out to "become a religion of conformity, of integration into the social body … [and] to be regarded [simply] as useful for social cohesion".[133] It is evident in democratic South Africa that 'State theologies' can also exist, which ideologically provide uncritical support to the State and to the *status quo*, or which sociologically may simply regard the Church as a strategic role-player in public life.

The value of Ellul's critique is that it challenges churches today to revisit their perspective and exercise of power in political community. But there is an additional challenge which demands attention. It is the problem of the Church's doctrine of power in Church-State relations reduced to political agency of the Church in public life. The attention should arguably shift from the political power of the Church to the empowerment of the people for responsible citizenship. Notwithstanding the unfathomable paradigm of hope discernible in the approach of many people in their personal and professional lives, a leading motif in the narrative of the most ordinary members of our political society rests with their experience of a trapped existence.

As a definitive study by the World Bank on the views, experiences, and aspirations of tens of thousands of poor men and women from numerous

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[129] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 121.
[130] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 124ff.
[131] See Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 113–136.
[132] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 133.
[133] Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 133.

countries makes very clear, "powerlessness seems to be at the core of the bad life".[134] This sense of "powerlessness is described as the inability to control what happens, the inability to plan for the future, and the imperative of focusing on the present".[135] It includes "a complete sense of political impotence", "having no control over sources of one's living and therefore no control over one's destiny".[136] They are trapped in poor places,[137] ensnared "in a web of disadvantages including isolation, problems of water and energy, sewage, garbage, pollution, filth, environmental hazards, ill health, seasonal exposure to the worst conditions, insecurity of person and property, and stigma of place".[138] "The challenge for policy and practice is to empower the powerless in their struggles to find a place of dignity and respect in society", the study pleads, and then concludes with more specific expectations: "It is to enable [them] to enhance their capabilities and claim their rights. It is to increase their access to opportunities and resources. It is to enable them to take more control of their lives and to gain for themselves more of what they need".[139] It is a power affirming their hopes.

Grace – to the people! Political responsibility against necessity and normality

Without grace there can be no liberation from nihilism and despair or impotence and entrapment in political life. Without grace there can be no meaningful and constructive agency on the part of people in their personal and professional capacities to take responsibility for their political vocation and destiny. Leonardo Boff describes grace as a 'liberating grace'.[140] On the one hand, it "signifies the presence of God in the world and in human beings" with its consequent impact of healing, upliftment, justice, life, freedom, consolation and intimacy.[141] On the other hand, it "also signifies the openness of human beings to God" with its consequent impact of "relationship, exodus, communion, encounter, openness, and dialogue".[142] It "is always an encounter between a God who gives himself and a human being who does

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[134] Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera Kaul Shah and Patti Petesch, eds, *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the World Bank, 2000), 36.
[135] Narayan, et al., *Voices of the Poor*, 36.
[136] Narayan, et al., *Voices of the Poor*, 36.
[137] Narayan, et al., *Voices of the Poor*, 84–88.
[138] Narayan, et al., *Voices of the Poor*, 88.
[139] Narayan, et al., *Voices of the Poor*, 260.
[140] Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1979).
[141] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 3.
[142] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 3.

likewise. By its very nature grace is the breaking down of realms, or worlds that are closed in upon themselves".[143] It is thus "something more than time, more than history, more than humanity. It is ever something *more* which happens with unexpected gratuitousness".[144]

Participatory democracy or active citizenship demands this sense of openness and transcendence implied in Boff's articulation of grace. The ambiguous realities in political life with all its challenges and barriers demands a mode of engagement that resists these realities as something necessary and normal. Grace implies for humanity "the possibility of being something more and relating to others" since we "are not just a being-there; [we] are an ex-istence".[145] "God's salvific will … finds historical mediations through which it can visit all human beings in their concrete life situation", Boff explains, as "It penetrates the historical project of humanity, of a nation, of a political and economic system, and it touches the heart of individual persons and society".[146] He refers to this as 'habitual grace' and adds: "But if this presence is to be effective, God's gracious sympathy is not enough. The presence of the human being in God is also necessary".[147] In this regard, he refers to 'actual grace' as "really habitual grace being implemented and fleshed out in reality".[148]

Without hope, there can be no meaningful political life together. Without power, there can be no liberating political life together. Without grace, there can be no effective political life together. What remains "…at stake is *the presence of God and his love in the world and the corresponding human experience*".[149] For this reason, the constructive and ethical role of the Church is critically important. Grace inhabits those oriented towards God and God's mission, making them new creatures, which "…implies a correspondingly new way of acting" and "finds expression in basic attitudes and ways of acting that translate into a new life".[150] Theologically speaking, these are 'virtues'. Boff proceeds to consider some of the fundamental ways whereby God's grace is revealed in human beings – through faith, hope, love, friendship, peace, joy, a critical spirit, courage, and humour.[151] How might

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[143]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 3.
[144]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 3.
[145]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 4.
[146]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 124.
[147]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 124.
[148]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 137.
[149]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 213.
[150]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 163.
[151]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 164–174.

such mediations of grace be relevant in our engagement in a participatory democracy?

For those *within* the structures of the State, 'a critical spirit' is a noteworthy example. As Boff explains, a critical spirit is synonymous with wisdom, thus a gift from God.[152] Since "…we live in a world that is riddled with contradictory ideologies and hierarchies of value", criticising "is not to destroy" but rather "knowing how to distinguish the true from the false, the good from the bad, in every concrete situation".[153] Opening the way to transformation rather than surrendering to conformation, a "critic looks about without illusions and detects the ideologies camouflaging reality … possesses good judgment … tact … and good sense".[154] Boff aptly refers to Jesus as "…an expert in using the critical spirit to liberate human beings from legalism, traditionalism, preconceptions, and false representations of God" and, as such, he "sought to make people more aware of God's concrete will as it manifests itself in history and their own activity".[155]

Having moved from an Apartheid, illegitimate State to a post-Apartheid, democratic State, it is indeed tempting for those on the side of the struggle for liberation to adopt an uncritical supportive stance in political life. Political 'comrades' and heroes, now in power, required the necessary support in their commitment and desire to contribute to a new South Africa, yet a nation characterised by an extremely complex past. The political leadership of the ruling party in 1994 and thereafter was one that inherited the ongoing legacy of Apartheid. They needed support rather than reactionary criticism. It was important to keep in mind these were 'new' political leaders, who should be judged differently, perhaps, than the continuing political masters of the past.

This notwithstanding, the potential of a progressive 'constantinianism' cannot bode well for a healthy democracy and responsible citizenship in the future. It ends up engendering an unchecked solidarity with the State rather than the people. We lose our critical edge and prophetic witness. The Church and the State are seemingly soulmates, making differentiation difficult. As people in South Africa generally, and churches in particular, we might readily assume an absolutist perspective of the political powers. We, as uncritical supporters of the political leadership or indeed those forming part of this political leadership itself, might entertain little or no room for diversity of opinion and especially for dissent. Given some signs of

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[152]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 171.
[153]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 171.
[154]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 171.
[155]   Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 171.

repression of popular opinion when it takes issue with prevailing opinions of the political leadership, there is the need for further reflection on the question of what I call 'an ethics of dissent'. It is not altogether certain that we, as a young democratic nation, know 'how to disagree' in ways that advance our democratic journey together rather than fragmenting and polarising the people at large.

Boff suggests it is especially in our "critical spirit and function" that "grace takes concrete shape".[156] With the same critical spirit from the Spirit by which Christ brought about the experience of liberation, "we can break the absolutism of systems closed to the future, whence God comes to summon human beings toward their eschatological fulfillment".[157]

For those *within* as well as those *outside* the workings of the State, grace as courage is another important mediation to consider. According to Boff, it involves "the prophetic task of annunciation and denunciation" in the wake of social injustices, human rights violations, suffering, totalitarian States, absolutist ideologies, and so on.[158] Courageous engagement is cognisant of the painful hardships and serious consequences that historically come about as a result of this prophetic mode.[159] By the grace of God, nevertheless, we "…can endure obstacles, persecutions, and even physical liquidation" as this divine strength "leads us to brave danger, to assume the consequences of boldness, to overcome inhibiting fear, and to speak out boldly".[160] Boff concedes that the temptation to be silent rather than courageous is great; reasons to justify our prophetic absenteeism range from it being "easy and convenient" to the appeal to "…the need for good order, discipline, (false) unity, and noninvolvement in political questions".[161]

For those *outside* the formal political structures and institutions, one of the more basic yet foundational facets of grace to reflect on is grace as friendship. A lot of emphasis is placed on formal political processes within our political life, but so much more attention should be devoted to the nature and quality of our relationships. We have emerged from an extremely violent, hostile, racist, sexist, disparate, disgraced past, with the signs thereof continually manifesting itself in our political rhetoric and life together. Boff underlines friendly relations as potentially symbolising "…the authentic friendship that is established between God and graced human beings" with its

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[156] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 171.
[157] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 172.
[158] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 172.
[159] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 172.
[160] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 172.
[161] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 172.

concomitant aspects of openness, mutual acceptance and intimacy.[162] Boff refers to Aquinas in his commentaries on Aristotle for other elements regarding the nature of friendship, as follows: "1. benevolent love, which goes beyond love based on mutual interests; 2. mutual love; 3. a love that is stable, constant, and consciously accepted; 4. personal interchanges and mutual participation in each other's lives, … 4. mutual presence, which creates a community of 'we,' a *koinonia*, so that love makes each resemble the other more and more".[163] South Africa still has a long way to go in terms of growing together not simply as a political democracy, but as friends against the background of a painful past. Apart from a renewal of grace as friendship in political life – a role churches and civil society organisations can best fulfill – the quality of our democracy will look good on paper but be found greatly wanting in practice.

Conclusion

The quality of our democratic life is intimately bound up with the quality of our Church-State relations. The aim of this essay has been to direct attention to the contribution churches and other faith communities can offer towards the nurturing of a responsible citizenship in political life together. It recognises and applauds the role of the State itself in advancing the common good, but resists the tendency among many who confine this role to the State alone. Church-State relations are typically discussed simply with reference to Church and State, with a blind spot for the people comprising our political community. Responsible citizenship affirms the meaningful and constructive role ordinary people in their personal and professional capacities can fulfil towards the common good. It consequently discussed the notions of hope, power and grace as some of the concrete ways through which a more participatory democracy or active citizenship might be envisaged, embodied and practiced by the people as part and parcel of their political responsibility together. Each of these aspects bear implications for the contribution churches can provide in public life as they nurture as well as exercise this sense of responsible citizenship.

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[162] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 169.
[163] See Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 169.

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Essay 5

God's Kingdom and the transformation of society

Dion A. Forster[164]

Introduction

Rob Bell writes that, "A Christian should get very nervous when the flag and the Bible start holding hands. This is not a romance we want to encourage".[165] Many Christians would agree with this statement in principle, yet in practice the lines seperating Church and State are not always that easy to distinguish.

When I travel in America (and other places in the world), I frequently find churches that display their nation's flag alongside other liturgical icons and symbols in the sanctuary. On numerous occasions I have heard sincere Christians praying that God would establish a 'Christian government' or bring their current political leadership to a faith in Christ. In other settings I have seen how Christians submit themselves, uncritically, to the governing authorities of their nation, frequently citing Romans 13:1 as their reason for doing so. Of course there are many places across the world where religious institutions and the State seem to be one and the same thing. Then, on the other side, one also finds Christian individuals and groups who are radically opposed to their government. Some pray against the leaders of their nations, as some Christians did during the years of Apartheid in South Africa, others even turn to action in the hope of seeing change in the leadership of their nations.

One feature that appears to run as a common thread among all of these divergent perspectives is the thread of a sincere desire for obedience to God's will. Each of these groups (and individuals) believes that they are honouring God by holding a particular position and working for the establishment of that position in society. How is it possible that people who share the same faith, read the same Bible, and sincerely seek to honour the same God could

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[165]   Rob Bell and Don Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 18.

hold such different views on the relationship between the Church and the State? Moreover, what should the relationship be between the Church and the State?

In this essay, I propose what I believe to be a theologically and Biblically responsible understanding of the relationship between the Church and the State. In summary, it is my contention that the best possible form of government that the Church can work and pray for is a secular government. This may sound contentious to some Christians, however, I hope that my argument will be clear and convincing in this regard. In order to make this argument I will first present why I believe a secular State is the best option among the various possibilities. Then I shall consider the role of the Church in a secular democracy. I shall give a brief overview of the contemporary models of the relationship between the Church and the State. In conclusion I shall sound a call for the Church to take up its role and responsibility in society in order to work for true transformation and the establishment of the principles of God's Kingdom in the world.

Why a Secular State is a good idea

What kind of State do you think is best for the citizens of the country in which you live? I have asked this question of numerous Christians all over the world. As part of my work I have the privilege to travel a great deal. I have found that in most settings, Christians tend to give similar answers. Whether they are in countries such as South Africa or America, with a predominantly Christian population (even if it is nominal Christianity), or whether it is in countries like Malaysia and Turkey that have a predominantly Muslim population, or countries such as China or France that have a non-religious or post-religious social outlook, the answers from Christians seem to correlate. Most Christians would like to see Christians in power in their countries.

This perspective displays a naïve belief that if one's president or prime minister is a Christian, he or she would influence the country's laws and policies in favour of the Kingdom of God. Some even express the desire that a Christian leader would favour Christians above citizens of other religious persuasions. Many Christians believe that if a Christian political party governed their nation, it would bring them closer to the values and principles of God's Kingdom.

It is fair to say that most ordinary Church members have never reflected deeply on what a Christian State might look like, how it would operate, and what exactly it would mean for all of the citizens of their nation.

I have discovered that most Christians believe that a Christian State would be beneficial to their nation and their faith.

It is my contention that a Christian State is counterproductive to the aims and principles of the Kingdom of God in the world. However, before I get ahead of myself, let's consider for a moment the three broad kinds of State that one could have:

Religious State

The first is what could be classified as a *Religious State*. In this type of State, there is a clear relationship between a formal religion and the nation State. In some instances there is an overt relationship between the nation State and a particular religion. A contemporary example of a Religious State is Iran, where Islam is prescribed as the official religion of the State and the tenets of this religion are enforced by law. In other instances there is a less overt relationship between the religion and the State, however matters of State are strongly directed and even dominated by the perspectives and powers of a religious grouping within the State. The United States of America is an example of such in practice, even though the US constitution purports a stringent seperation between Church and State.

A Religious State is problematic in that it must compromise, and even deny the rights of its citizens to freedom of religion. This denial of religious freedom is frequently accompanied by the denial of other commonly accepted human rights – for example issues related to gender rights, and free access to democratic processes.[166] In some extreme cases, such as in Serbia and Bosnia, State-supported or State-sponsored religion has led to genocide.[167]

Furthermore, it would be naïve to think that even if the ruling party or grouping in a nation shared one's broad religious convictions (e.g., if they were Christian), there would be agreement on all matters of faith and life. The struggles between Catholic and Protestant Christians in Ireland and parts of Europe are a clear example of how religious and social differences within the same nation can lead to conflict and strife.

From a theological perspective, any nation that oppresses its people cannot be in line with the values of God's Kingdom. Pragmatically, it is also

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[166]   Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 172–174.

[167]   Michael A Sells, "The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia," *Comparative Studies in Religion and Society* 11(1998): xiii–xviii.

not sensible to expect that the principles of God's Kingdom would be upheld through State-sanctioned, or State-enforced, religion. As a Christian I would thus conclude that a Religious State is not desirable.

Anti-religious State

The second kind of State is what can be classified as an *Anti-religious State.* This is a State in which the government has a policy of actively working against religious conviction among its citizens. In such a State, religion is seen as harmful to the intentions of the State and so religious conviction and religious institutions are forbidden by law. Among the best-known modern examples of such practices are the anti-religious campaigns of the Cambodian Khmer Rouge and the anti-religious efforts in the former USSR[168] from 1921 to 1928. During this period the Soviet Union formally supported the elimination of religious ideals and institutions since they were seen as being counter to the national socialist ideologies of the State.[169] In some anti-religious States, some forms of religion are allowed to exist (for example the State-approved churches in China). However, these groupings often operate under extremely narrow and restrictive regulations that impinge upon everything from religious gatherings to doctrinal matters. Such a situation would significantly hamper the work of the Church, negatively impacting its mission and witness. As a Christian, I would thus conclude that an Anti-Religious State is not desirable either.

Secular State

The third broad category is what is commonly classified as the *Secular State.* Prozesky explains that the secular State secures, "…freedom of belief and associated practice for all belief systems, such as all the country's religions and that none of them has preferential status in law".[170] He further points out that it is a mistake to equate the Secular State with atheism or anti-religious sentiments.[171] Since the State seeks to secure freedom of belief and religious practice it will neither support, nor suppress, religious belief and the associated religious practice. The Secular State takes no formal position on

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[168]   United Socialist Soviet Republic, commonly referred to as the Soviet Union.
[169]   Dimitry V. Pospielovsky, "A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory, and Practice, and the Believer," in *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Anti-Religious Policies.* Vol. 2. New York: St Martin's Press, 1987:34, 50–55.
[170]   Martin Prozesky, "Is the secular state the root of our moral problems in South Africa?" *Alternation* 3 (2009):239.
[171]   Prozesky, *Is the secular state the root of our moral problems in South Africa?*, 243.

religion, rather such matters are left to religious communities (as long as they do not transgress the law of the State which has the primary intent of protecting all of its citizens). Prozesky gives four convincing arguments why Christians should support the concept of a Secular State.[172] I shall summarise, and comment upon, his arguments below.

The Secular State and religious belief

Religion is structured upon the premise that persons believe certain things that shape their lives. For religious belief to be sincere, and effective, it must be freely chosen. Faith cannot be compelled upon a person. This is the problem with a Religious State – the relationship between the State (which is an institution of social power) and the freedom to choose a faith perspective is inappropriate. Persons may tacitly conform to the pressure of the State-religion, but where faith really matters, such as in moral choices, sacrificial service, commitment to community ideals, and so forth, there will be no substantial commitment. The Christian faith certainly understands that personal belief is an essential element of true Christian faith. One cannot be born into Christianity, or be truly Christian simply by being associated with a particular social grouping, or performing a set of ritual activities if there is no personal conviction of the truth and power of these elements in one's life. Faith is a matter of conviction, not merely association or assent to power.

The Secular State and prophetic witness

There is no doubt that Religious States, and Anti-religious States, have led to the rise of strong prophets who have spoken out against evil, corruption, and sin from a religious perspective. In South Africa, persons such as Albert Luthuli, Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naude are prime examples. In El Salvador, Oscar Romero is another well-known example of a brave Christian prophet who stood for the truth of the Christian faith in face of the State's injustice. With a fair measure of certainty, however, such persons face rejection and alienation at best, and persecution and death at worst. Such brave prophets are wonderful and brave. However, as Prozesky rightly points out, "Society needs more than these rare, magnificent moral and spiritual heroes; it needs plenty of prophets. When a religion allies itself too closely

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[172]   Prozesky, *Is the secular state the root of our moral problems in South Africa?*, 249.

with the State and enjoys constitutional superiority, the prophetic voice weakens because pressure rises". [173]

Christians have a God-given responsibility to engage any power, whether an individual or an institution, that acts contrary to the principles of the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Christ. Every believer is to be a prophet, listening for the will of God in society and living to see *that* will enacted. This is best done where the State affords religious freedom to its citizens – creating sufficient space for them to express their convictions. An Anti-religious State does not allow such freedom, whereas a Religious State will frequently silence those who do not express the ideals of the State (either through abuse, or through coopting them into the State system). In South Africa, since the end of Apartheid rule, we have seen many former 'prophets' being silenced by being offered high-paying and powerful positions in the State.

The Secular State and the character of God

Prozesky's third argument is based on the Christian understanding that God seeks justice and mercy for all persons – see as an example Luke 15.4ff.[174] If this is God's character, then Christians should share God's desire for their fellow citizens, regardless of their religious perspectives. Christians should have the mission of working for the transformation of the whole of society for the good of all citizens. Of the three kinds of State discussed above, the Secular State is the only one that allows for such activity.

The Secular State and equality before the law

The Secular State ensures that there is no discrimination based on religion. It ensures that all citizens have equal access to the law, even if there is a particular religious group that dominates the country numerically. Fairness and non-discrimination are core values in the Christian faith, most clearly and succinctly expressed in the 'Golden Rule' of Luke 6.31 that says, "Do to others as you would have them do to you". Religious and political alliances can be fickle. The only assurance that one has of such fairness in society is not to create unhealthy alliances between religion and the State.

These three points make good theological sense in the light of the mission and identity of the Christian faith. It is for this reason that I argue that Christians should encourage and support the notion of a Secular State.

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[173]   Prozesky, *Is the secular state the root of our moral problems in South Africa?*, 249.
[174]   Prozesky, *Is the secular state the root of our moral problems in South Africa?*, 250.

My argument relies on two important considerations. First, that the State in question should be just, seeking the good of its citizens. Second, that the Church, and not the State, has responsibility for religious matters in society. It is not the responsibility of the State to further the aims of any religion – evangelism and mission are functions of the Church. One of the great hindrances to the proper functioning of the Secular State is a weak and ineffective Church. Where the Church fulfils its mission effectively and consistently it will not only evangelise the population of the nation, thus bringing about spiritual and moral transformation, it will also hold the State accountable for just and ethical governance for the good of all of the citizens of the nation.

In one of my previous books, *Christian and positive: Reflections on Christianity in an HIV+ world*, I showed how an innefective and apathetic Church contributed towards suffering in society by not fulfilling its mandate, and not holding the State accountable for its task. In short, I showed that a weak and ineffective Church does a disservice to the world that it is sent to love and transform[175]. Consider the following map of the world,[176] where instead of indicating the size of a nation by its geographical land mass, its size is proportional to the number of Christians that live within it.

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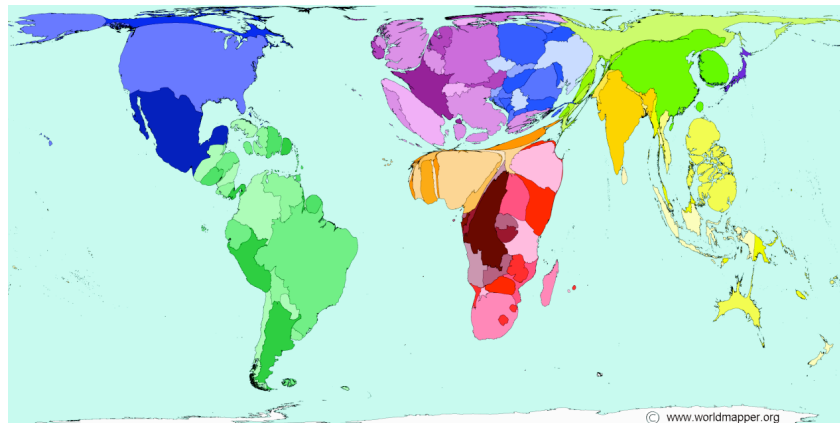
[175]   Dion A. Forster, *Christian and positive: Reflections on Christianity in an HIV+ world* (Cape Town: MMA Publishers, 2010), 22–29.

[176]   "Christians," accessed May 19, 2011,
http://www.worldmapper.org/display_religion.php?selected=554

As Christians we would like to believe that those areas of the world in which our faith is most prevalent will be free from some of the ills and evils of society, such as greed, disease, poverty and war. However, the maps that follow tell a different story. Consider the map below that shows military spending in the world.[177] This does not look like the work of 'peacemakers' (Matt 5.9) in some of the most densely populated Christian countries in the world.
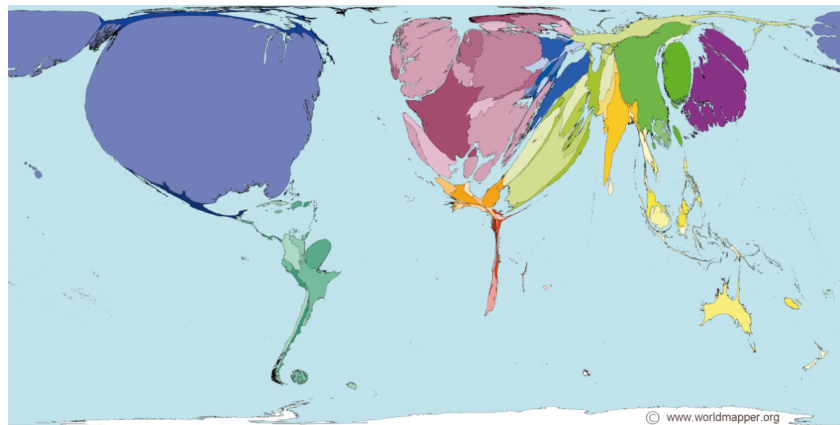
Next take a look at this map[178] that shows HIV infections in the world. What makes this map so striking is that 79.8% of South Africans indicated that they are Christian in the last national cencus. How could such an overwhelmingly Christian population allow such a tragedy to take place?

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[177]   "Military Spending 2002," accessed February 13, 2012,
        http://www.worldmapper.org/display.php?selected=279.
[178]   "HIV Prevalence," accessed February 13, 2012,
        http://www.worldmapper.org/display.php?selected=227.
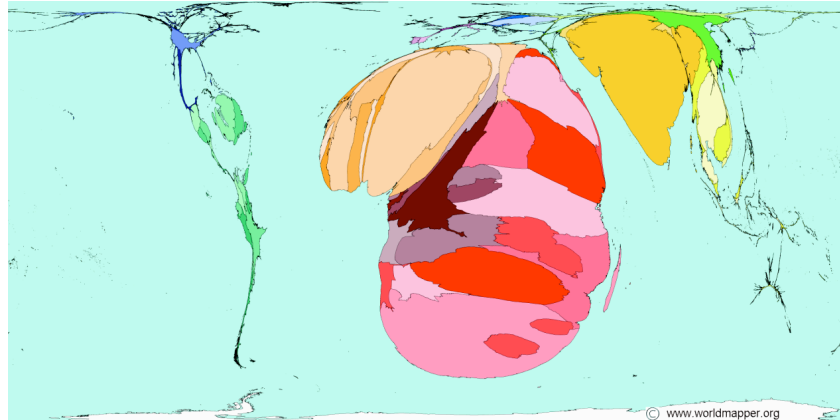
There is little doubt that many of the problems illustrated above could be dealt with far more effectively by the States concerned. However, one must ask, what percentage of those persons in America who send troops to war are Christians? What percentage of persons who are infected with HIV through extramarital sexual relationships in Southern Afrca are members of the Christian faith? The core of the Gospel is about social and moral transformation. The Kingdom of God, as expressed in both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian scriptures, espouses social justice, economic responsibility, peace for all people and stewardship of the earth's resources. Indeed, the Church has a critical role to play in the spiritual and moral formation of the nation. However, it must guard against simply being co-opted by the State. What models are there for functional and effective Church-State relationships?

An overview of the models of Church and State in contemporary Christianity

The question at hand is: what kind of relationship between the Church and the State would best facilitate transformation in society? This far I have made an argument in favour of the kind of State that would best facilitate transformation, namely a Secular State. I have also argued that the transformation of society requires an active, engaged and prophetic Church since it is the function of the Church, and not the State, to enact the will of the Kingdom of God. However, with this in mind, what should the relationship be between

the Church and the State? At the height of the Apartheid era in South Africa, Jaap Durand, a South African theologian, did a great deal of work in answering this question. Durand suggests that four primary models of relationship exist between the Church and the State in contemporary society.[179]

Durand's four models of relationship between the Church and the State

The first model is what Durand calls the **Roman Catholic Nature Grace Model.** This model came into being during the period of the *Corpus Christianum,* that is, the period of global Christendom.[180] The Roman emperor Constantine was the first to establish Christianity as the official State religion of the Holy Roman Empire. Society was viewed as a *congregation fidelium* – a mystical body that was governed by a combination of ecclesiastical cannon law (under the Pope) and Roman civil law (under the emperor).

This joint government was seen as an ontological alliance between ecclesial and civil governance that represented Christ who is the invisible Chief, or King of society. In this alliance the Church enjoyed priority over the State. Koopman explains, "The church served as institute of salvation and mediator of the grace of God, which does not nullify nature, but perfects it – *gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*".[181] However, as secularisation grew in Europe, this relationship to the State changed somewhat. In *Gaudium et Spes*[182] the Church is described as *sacramentum mundi*, a "sacrament to the world". As a sacrament to the world, the Church fully embodied the redemptive purpose that God has for the world and is working out in and through the Church in society. Thus, as the representative of Christ in the world, the Church had the particular role of serving the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed in society, redeeming and transforming the world as a humble servant.

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[179] Jaap Durand, "Kontemporêre modelle vir die verhouding van kerk en samelewing," in *Versamelde opstelle oor kerk en politiek*, ed. Jaap Durand (Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 1986), 14–19. Please also see the unpublished summary of Durand's work by Nico Koopman, "Classical models of church and state engagement" (University of Stellenbosch, 2010), 1–5. This unpublished article is based in large part on Nico Koopman, "Public Theology in South Africa: Lessons from the theology of Jaap Durand," in *Discerning God's justice in Church, Society and Academy: Festschrift for Jaap Durand,* eds. Ernst Conradie and Christo Lombard (Cape Town: African Sun Media, 2009), 69–80.
[180] Durand, "Kontemporêre modelle," 14.
[181] Koopman, *Classical models*, 1.
[182] *Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World — Gaudium et Spes* Promulgated by Pope Paul VI. (Vatican City, 1965).

Durand points to the Liberation theologians within the Catholic tradition as a prime example of this understanding of the relationship between Church and State.[183] Gustavo Gutierrez, for example, understood that the Church as *sacramentum mundi* means that the Church must function as an active agent working for the liberation of oppressed persons in society. There is a clear eschatological link between the redemptive work of the Church in the present time, and the anticipated return of Christ who will end all oppression and establish His Kingdom of justice and grace. Johan Baptist Metz is another Catholic liberation theologian who fits into this tradition, although with a slight variation. He feels that it is not enough that the Church merely penetrates the world through its exemplary Kingdom living, modeling the Kingdom of God in a fallen world. Rather he believes that the Church needs to take a further step of being a subversive, disturbing and critical force in the current world order.[184] Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of El Salvador, who was mentioned previously, embodied this understanding of the relationship between the Church and the State.

In this model, the Church takes responsibility for the establishment of God's Kingdom in society. While the State is responsible for enacting and upholding the social structures that make justice, equity and freedom a reality, it is the Church that exemplifies these realities within its own structures and living. Furthermore, where the State does not facilitate or uphold these common values, the Church has the responsibility to penetrate society in order to establish them, sometimes even disturbing the unjust or ineffective State in the process. The Church is to "…have a sacramental, exemplary, penetrating, elevating, transformative, liberating, critical, subversive and disturbing function in the world".[185]

Of course, when one considers this model of Church and State relationship, one can see that far too frequently the Church is passive, inward looking, and disengaged from this task. Consider for a moment the evangelical Christian Church in the United States. In large measure, this powerful community of Christian believers has been silent on issues of economic justice, foreign economic and political policy and the military action that the United States is involved in on foreign soil. In fact, we need to admit that it is Christians who are upholding and perpetrating these injustices in the world.

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[183]   Durand, *Kontemporêre modelle vir die verhouding van kerk en samelewing*, 14.
[184]   Koopman, *Classical models*, 2.
[185]   Koopman, *Classical models,* 2.

The second model that Durand discusses is the **Lutheran two Kingdoms model**.[186] The reformer, Martin Luther, believed that Church governance, family life, work life and government and politics all fall under the sovereign rule of God. The Gospel and the law respectively govern these areas of life. Since Christians live their lives within both of these governmental spheres (the altar and the throne), there should be, theoretically, harmony between the two Kingdoms.

Lutheran theologian Helmuth Thielicke suggests that there is an eschatological element to this relationship[187]. Christians, who live in both of these Kingdoms, also live in tension between the old aeon and the new aeon. The Christian must make compromises to live within the world. In this sense, a political party or regime could never be called Christian. Rather, it may have Christians within it who live for the ideals and values of God's Kingdom within the Kingdom of the world. Koopman summarises this by writing that through "… individual Christians the church engages in the infiltration (*Unterwanderung*) of the world. This infiltration has as purpose the conversion of persons and through them the transformation of social structures"[188]. In some senses the Church, through individual Christians, infiltrates every organ of the world, almost like white blood cells would go throughout the body bringing healing and renewal.

This view of the Church has a great deal to offer our understanding of how Christians can transform society from within. Devout teachers, lawmakers, politicians, police personnel, economists, homemakers, artists, and persons in every sphere of society can be agents of transformation, carefully and powerfully redeeming individuals and structures in society to transform them to the ideals of the Kingdom of God.

The next model that Durand discusses is called the **Reformed Christocratic Model**.[189] John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth are among the best known reformed theologians who uphold this model. In this model it is understood that Christ rules over both the spiritual and earthly kingdoms and that law and Gospel must be present in both. The function of the Church is to govern itself under the Spirit and the Word and to proclaim prophetically from the inner circle of the spiritual Kingdom to the outer circle of the earthly Kingdom the reign of Christ in that sphere.[190] The rule of Christ from the inner to the outer sphere (from the spiritual Kingdom to the earthly Kingdom)

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[186] Durand, *Kontemporêre modelle vir die verhouding van kerk en samelewing*, 20.
[187] Helmuth Thielicke, *Theological Ethics – Volume 2: Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 565–597.
[188] Koopman, *Classical models*, 3.
[189] Durand, *Kontemporêre modelle vir die verhouding van kerk en samelewing*, 24.
[190] Koopman, *Classical models*, 3.

is known as Christocracy and it was first discussed in detail by John Calvin. Kuyper took this notion further by distinguishing between the specific grace of God and the general grace of God.[191] The specific grace of God is at work in the Church to bring persons to salvation and transformation, whereas the general grace of God works through these transformed individuals to bring transformation and redemption to the structures of society. He, however, felt that it was not the role of the Church to operate beyond its own boundaries. The Church was not to be a prophetic voice to society, rather it had the responsibility of working rigorously with its members who would then go into all spheres of society, like an organism, bringing transformation and the establishment of God's prophetic will that is proclaimed in the Church.

Karl Barth understood the rule of Christ in the Kingdoms differently. He did not believe that there is an ontological separation between the spiritual and earthly Kingdoms, but rather that "All spheres of life should be understood in terms of the central confession of Christian faith: Christ the Crucified and Resurrected is Lord and King of God's Kingdom and of all kingdoms of this world".[192] Both the Church and the State are thus within the salvific will of God and wait upon the perfection and fulfilment of God's eschatological plan of transformation, renewal and healing under Christ. The State as the outer circle, is expected to give expression to the social and political aspects of the Kingdom of God (justice, safety, health, education, etc.) while the Church, as the inner circle of the two Kingdoms, is not to isolate itself from the State and the rest of the world. The Church is rather to be an *analogous* example of the Kingdom of God in Christ, exemplifying the principles and precepts of God's Kingdom to the world, although in imperfect ways. The Church must therefore reject all tyranny in society and work for the establishment of human rights, which are central to God's will for both Kingdoms. Barth encouraged the Church to be active in the establishment of God's will in political life and the transformation of political reality in the State. This is done within the Church through teaching and preaching among Church members, as well as proclamations from the Church to the State. Moreover, he encouraged individual Christians to seek and take up office in politics in order to be salt and light. Barth opposed the idea of a Christian political party since he believed that such a party could never be perfect and would inadvertently compromise the message of the Gospel and Christian witness.

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[191]   Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and wonder: Common grace in science & art* (Grand Rapids: Christians Library Press, 2011), 33–36.

[192]   Koopman, *Classical models*, 3.

The fourth model is the ***Revolutionary-Eschatological Model***.[193] This model was developed mainly in the two-thirds world among liberation, political and revolution theologians. Simply put, the theologians who developed this model had become increasingly dissatisfied with the manner in which the Church actualised and enacted their insights and beliefs about society. These theologians, such as Gustavo Gutierrez and John Baptist Metz, mentioned earlier, felt that the Church was being compromised in its relationship with the State. They felt that the State needs to find opposition where it is unjust, that conformity was a denial of the values of the Gospel and that negation and rejection of corrupt and oppressive political and economic systems is the mission of the Church in the world.[194] In many instances the Church was organised as a revolutionary counter-structure to the political organs of the State. This was particularly necessary where the State had shown disdain for the Church and would not heed its prophetic warnings for transformation and change. In general terms, this model of engagement had an eschatological intent – to establish the Kingdom of God in spite of the State.

In conclusion, one can see how each of the four models presented above offers some critical insights into the relationship between the Church and the State. What is clear to me is that, regardless of the model of relationship that is prevalent in your context, the Church has a God-given mandate to engage both the State and the members of the Church to work for the transformation of society and the establishment of God's Kingdom of justice and grace.

Conclusion

This essay considered what kind of relationship between the Church and the State would be most beneficial for the transformation of society. The argument was made that the Church should advocate and work for the establishment of a just Secular State since this form of government will best suit the principles of equality, freedom and social justice that are central to the Gospel of Christ. Next it was argued that, for transformation to take place in society, the Church will need to take up its role of establishing God's Kingdom in society. Establishing the principles of God's Kingdom in society is the ultimate responsibility of the Christian Church. Four models of relationship between the Church and State were considered, each proposing a different kind of engagement between the Church and the State. It was

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[193]   Durand, *Kontemporêre modelle vir die verhouding van kerk en samelewing*, 34.
[194]   Koopman, *Classical models,* 4.

concluded that what is common to all of these models is that God is sovereign over all creation, including the Church and the State. Christians have a place within society and should not withdraw from their responsibility to be agents of God's healing and transformation. What the world requires is a Church that can exercise its responsibililty to bring about personal, spiritual and moral transformation through evangelism, as well as social and structural transformation through effective mission in the world.

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Essay 6

The place of the Church in the new South Africa

Wessel Bentley[195]

> "…the world would not necessarily be lost if there were no Church".[196]

What? Can this be true? This quote must surely be a very recent, postmodern approach to the relationship between the Church and the world! This utterance seems to suggest that for centuries, in fact two millennia, the world may have been hoodwinked into believing that without the Church, the basic structure for the world's continuance would disappear, rendering it 'lost'. Well, who then will carry the responsibility of ensuring a cohesive society? What will keep the world 'together'? If it is not the Church, then can we honestly place this responsibility solely at the feet of politics?

We have certainly seen the power of politics on a global scale, from the uprising of the Nazi-movement, to the fall of Communism, to the surge in the drive for Democracy, only to name a few spectacular political events. Similarly, we must also admit that religion *per se* has had its muscles flexed in recent history, many times for the wrong reasons, but nevertheless, the battle (often physical) between for instance Islam and Christianity as well as Islam and Judaism has left a dark impression of the place of religion in society. It should come as no surprise that there is a growing voice asking whether the world wouldn't be a better place without religion. Would the world specifically be alright without the Church? Will the world cope better with issues of diversity and justice if left in the hands of politics?

These questions fly right in the face of the classic Christian understanding of the roles and places of Church and State. Noordmans, for instance, maintains that a close connection between the Church and State should exist, arguing that the "Church and State can never be totally separated. Whatever the form, in essence the Government of this world

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[196] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* IV/3.2. ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 826.

remains a theocracy."[197] Noordmans' image is that of a world which is created and owned by God and therefore God calls and/or allows structures such as the State to play a role in the structuring and maintaining of society. It assumes therefore that the State either deliberately or unconsciously participates in God's rule of the world. This view becomes problematic when one is faced with the situation of a tyrannical State, oppressing its citizens or even forcing the exploitation and suffering of those who do not form part of its vision. The question is then asked: "Is *this* the will of God?", "Is this the way God reminds us of our human inability to govern ourselves?"

Hauerwas offers a counter-balance to this problem, namely the Church. The Church, in Hauerwas' understanding "...must always stand over against the State because of the Church's conviction that history is in God's hands and not under State control".[198] This view gives the Church the moral high ground, acting as watchdog over the State and ensuring that the righteousness of God is reflected in the work of the State and in society. Once again, this view encounters problems especially when the brokenness and fallenness of the Church is exposed. Whenever the Church is embroiled in controversy, the validity of its critical relationship with the State is challenged.

Barth, who by the way, is the person who uttered the quote at the beginning of this essay, offers a softer approach. To Barth, "...neither the Church nor the State can lay claim to any divinely-appointed supremacy over the other, for both are subject to the sovereignty of the Word of God".[199] Neither the Church nor the State can see itself as being exclusively funda-mental for social cohesion. Nevertheless, Barth sees in both the Church and State, instruments which God can use effectively in order for humanity to take responsibility for the gift of community which God created. We will come back to this thought later on.

The problem for South Africa is that we have moved from a well-defined understanding of Church-State relations to a completely different paradigm. Theron describes it as a move from a Reformed Theocracy to a Secular Democracy.[200] It is well documented that Apartheid had its roots in a

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[197] Flip Theron, "From moral authority to insignificant minority: the precarious state of the Dutch Reformed Church in post-apartheid South Africa," *Journal Of Reformed Theology* 2/3 (2008): 237 and Oepke Noordmans, "Gestalte en Gees," in *Verzamelde Werken* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 205.

[198] Neville Richardson, "Sanctorum Communio in a time of reconstruction? Theological pointers for the church in South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 127 (2007): 115.

[199] Ernlé WD. Young, "A theological reflection on church/state relations in South Africa today," *Journal Of Theology For Southern Africa* 1 (1972): 43.

[200] Theron, *From moral authority to insignificant minority*, 236.

strongly argued theological approach which condoned not only the principle of separate development, but the divine injunction for people of different races to be valued differently in the eyes of God. Of course there was a strong Church-opposition to the State in the struggle for Democracy, but so the Church was not only in a relationship of conflict with the State, but in conflict with itself.

After the dawn of Democracy, a new era was heralded in South African history. South Africa became a country with a liberal Constitution, a Constitution not only guaranteeing freedom of religion, but ensuring that the State would be grounded in the principles set out in the Constitution. The Constitution would allow the judiciary to become the formal "watchdog" of any entity in South African society, including Church and State, using the values of the Constitution to ensure basic rights and overall cohesion of the community.

Needless to say, this development has left the Church's nose a bit out of joint, for it would no longer have the power it was used to under the former dispensation. The Constitution nevertheless created space for the Church to fulfil its prophetic role, but the place from where it would do so and the manner in which it would do it would have to change. In theory, the new equation for a Secular Democracy seemed promising with new voices and structures coming into play to ensure the wellbeing of society. Putting this into practice has been more difficult than expected and has led to a society which has become suspicious of both the Church and the State.

Disillusionment in the Church-State relationship

In terms of transformation in South Africa, it is feared that "... this rainbow is quickly disappearing under the searing African sun".[201] Secular Democracy has not delivered as was expected, rendering many disillusioned with those who now form part of the State, who made promises of changes that would come with our liberation from Apartheid, but who have not been able to deliver. Change has come for some, especially economic change, but it has not filtered down to the working-class citizen of the country. "In spite of the recent economic boom and the fact that black multimillionaires have increased at a terrific rate, the position of the poor has not improved, but apparently worsened. Some suggest that what is happening in South Africa is [the] reconciliation between the black and white elite".[202]

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[201]   Theron, *From moral authority to insignificant minority*, 233.
[202]   Theron, *From moral authority to insignificant minority*, 233.

Wessel Bentley

It comes as no surprise that there has been a sharp increase in public protests against the lack of basic service delivery. Furthermore, the militant utterances regarding economic liberation by youth organisations like the ANCYL (specifically under the leadership of Julius Malema), can hardly be brushed aside. There is a real and desperate need for transformation to be seen as being more than racial tolerance. There should be real, measurable and definitive changes made to the living standards of the great majority of citizens who live within the South African borders. This is not even taking into account the vast numbers of foreign citizens who need to be cared for and attended to by both the State and the Church. The matter is complex and admittedly there is no easy solution to this dilemma, but it has not stopped people from calling into question the political will of those in power to facilitate change. Someone has to bear the brunt of a growing civil frustration and the ruling party of South Africa has started feeling the effects of this. Although the ANC holds a great majority in Government representation, it appears that there is an increasing dissatisfaction with its governance and hence it is slowly bleeding voters to other political parties.

It is not only the State which has to confront people's disillusionment, but also the Church. The NG Kerk, for instance, is showing a steady decline in membership. In 2010 it was estimated that this denomination was losing about 10 000 members per year![203] The NG Kerk was one of the main theological voices which supported the Apartheid-era leadership, but since South Africa's change to a Democratic State, has struggled to be an equally strong religious voice in a society which is trying to find its new identity. In a country with a liberal Constitution, how will this denomination make its mark?

"For sure, we were theologically conservative – even in a fundamentalist sense, but in reality morals were our specialty. As a matter of fact, biblical fundamentalism and a leaning towards moralising go happily hand in hand".[204] The NG Kerk is not the only denomination struggling to find its place. Even if the Church is struggling to 'moralise' a liberal society, the moral voice of the Church has not been heard as clearly as when some denominations spoke out against the evils of the Apartheid regime. Very little has come from the Church in the form of a critical engagement with the South African Government on issues like the ineffective policies regarding HIV/AIDS between 1997 and 2007, the arms deal scandal which rocked the

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[203] "NG Kerk verloor 10588 in 'n jaar," Accessed February 24, 2012, http://www.rapport.co.za/Suid-Afrika/Nuus/NG-Kerk-verloor-10-588-in-n-jaar-20101106.
[204] Theron, *From moral authority to insignificant minority*, 230.

South African Government, the State's foreign policy regarding its 'quiet diplomacy' approach with Zimbabwe, and the list goes on.

Furthermore, there is a critique of some denominations' close proximity to the existing State. Some Pentecostal churches openly support certain political parties by allowing politicians to speak at church services prior to elections, while others bestow 'honorary ordinations' on prominent leaders of State. Mainline denominations, like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, invited the head of State to be the keynote speaker at the farewell function of a former Presiding Bishop. Although one may argue that there is nothing unethical about some of the events mentioned, there is clearly a blurring of lines in the relationship between Church and State in South Africa, so much so, that questions are being asked whether denominations like the MCSA is not merely taking on the same role as the NG Kerk during Apartheid.[205]

So, where do people go when they question their trust in the State's ability to improve their living conditions? Where do people go when the Church associates itself too closely with the State or when the Church simply does not involve itself with the daily affairs of people's lives? Theron suggests that people, and I assume that he is speaking mainly about white South Africans, are simply drifting away, especially from the Christian faith, with no intention of seeking another spiritual shelter.[206] With the growing global trend of disinterest in institutional religion, a new social awakening has occurred right underneath the Church's nose, suggesting to the world that the Church is not as central to its existence as it once may have thought. Rising voices, like that of Richard Dawkins, may wholeheartedly endorse this notion, claiming that it is about time that something like this was put out in the open. The areligious approach is becoming an increasingly attractive option. In response to this move, one must ask whether people are not simply replacing God with other 'gods'? Has God, for some, not merely been substituted by, for instance, a new Afrikaner Nationalism or a Black Nationalism, or capitalism or even hedonism? This will only become clearer as time passes.

On the other hand, Swart argues that communities and individuals are increasingly looking towards churches and other faith-based organisations to meet their welfare needs.[207] This is attributed to the State's general inability

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[205]   Richardson, *Sanctorum Communio,* 97.
[206]   Theron, *From moral authority to insignificant minority*, 234.
[207]   Ignatius Swart, "Meeting the rising expectations? On local churches as organisations of social welfare in South Africa," *Journal Of Theology For Southern Africa* 133 (2009): 74.

to meet the growing needs of communities and so the needy depend on faith communities to fulfil their needs, as they are much better placed to address problems at grassroots level.[208] The establishment of schools, clinics, training facilities, feeding schemes, housing projects, literacy courses and even the rehabilitation of those released from correctional institutions are now higher on the Church's list of priorities than what they have been probably since the times of the missionaries who sought to save 'wild Africa'. This 'return to the people' by the Church is not a bad thing at all. In fact, it is an act of repentance, for the Church has too easily surrendered its social responsibilities to the State, hoping that the State alone would deal with social needs while the Church could go on with its focus on spiritual matters. There is a call for a revisioning of what it means to be the Church in society, for if the Church exists exclusively for spiritual matters, it would soon become redundant. Churches need to change or they will simply fall along the wayside as institutions which have lost their meaning and have become irrelevant. Let us now focus on what it means for the Church to be in relationship with the State.

What is the Church supposed to do?

What is the role the Church needs to play in society? Where exactly does it need to stand in relation to the State? In a changing South Africa, these are difficult questions to answer, but let us refer to some models of the Church's relationship with the State. Young offers five models for reflection.

The first is called the Retrogressive approach[209]

From this perspective, the Church is seen to be responsible for 'saving souls' alone. This view promotes the thought that if the State is responsible for the wellbeing of society, and this wellbeing is hampered, then the cause for this may be placed at the feet of personal or communal sin. Consider, for instance, the example of communities who are impoverished because of maladministration of State funds and/or self-enrichment through corrupt practices. The basic sin which led to this suffering is greed. The Church's role in this model is then to actively engage both those in society and in the State to convict them of this sin and to work towards an individual or the State's salvation. It is assumed that if all people in society and in the State submit to

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[208]   Swart, *Meeting the rising expectations?*, 75.
[209]   Young, *A theological reflection on church/state relations*, 37.

the Lordship of Christ, then the natural outcome must then be a more just society.

The second is the Revolutionary approach[210]

This approach is popular with the different forms of Liberation Theology. It suggests that both the Church and State succumb to certain social trends that are unjust and so these systems need to be overthrown in order for the Church and State to be liberated and enabled to fulfil their rightful roles. Church and State are therefore both imperfect structures and are unable to satisfactorily speak on behalf of either society or God. The struggle is not between Church and State *per se*, but against the Church and State subscribing to systems which exploit and oppress society as a whole.

The Reactionry approach

The Reactionary approach[211] proposes that there should be a complete separation between Church and State, for it is the Church's role to act as watchdog over the State and it can only hold the State accountable if it is completely objective. This objectivity is ensured when the Church has no material or political interests in the State and *vice versa*. It does assume, however, that the State recognises the position and critique of the Church as a legitimate representation, not only of the Will of God, but of its own constituency.

Realism approach

Fourthly, the Realism approach**,**[212] which is based mainly on Niehbuhr's theology.

> Niebuhr's Christian realism entailed realism about human beings...he describes human beings as sinful people. We are, on the one hand, created in God's image and, on the other hand, we are also vulnerable, finite beings. This awareness of finitude fills us with anxiety. As anxious, finite persons, we do not

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[210] Young, "A theological reflection", 38.
[211] Young, "A theological reflection", 38.
[212] Young, "A theological reflection," 40.

put our trust in God. We rather use our freedom as image-bearers to oppose this finitude.[213]

Harnessing this description, this approach suggests that 'power' plays a significant role in the relationship between Church and State for the purpose of creating a structure in society that is controllable and sustainable. As the State exercises its power, the Church must in turn use its own to ensure that the State's power is not abused. If it is, it would be detrimental for society. The Church, on the other hand, cannot abuse its power for this would create confusion in society regarding what it perceives to be the Will of God in relation to its existential reality. The wellbeing of society therefore hinges on this power play between Church and State.

Mutual responsibility

Lastly, there is the model of Mutual responsibility.[214] Evolving from the Realism approach and featuring prominently in the work of Karl Barth, this notion suggests that neither the Church nor the State is autonomous, but that both should be seen as instruments which could (and perhaps should) be used for the wellbeing of society. From this model one can deduce a triangular relationship between Church, State and Society. None of the entities can exist independently. Society needs the State for its structural coherence and the Church for reinforcing its notion of spiritual belonging. Similarly, Church and State do not exist as islands, but need each other and society in order to find their own identity and mission.

The downfall of all these models for the South African context is that they are limited by the assumption that the only faith community the State is in relationship with, is Christianity. Is the Church the only faith-voice the State has to engage with? This cannot be and it is obviously not. The plurality of the South African society ensures a diverse religious community and it would be unfair to expect the State only to recognise and respond to the Christian voice. This reality in itself complicates the debate, but for the purpose of this essay, we need to limit the conversation to the relationship between Church and State.

This said, if we could choose any of the abovementioned models as an appropriate relationship between Church and State for South Africa, then

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[213]   Nico Koopman, "Churches and public policy discourses in South Africa," *Journal Of Theology For Southern Africa* 136 (2010): 48.

[214]   Young, "A theological reflection," 39.

what would it be? I would suggest that for the current South African context, the most viable model is that of Mutual responsibility, but not exclusively so.

Why not any of the others? The Retrogressive approach, with its emphasis on evangelism, does not take into consideration the richness diversity brings when allowed to flourish in the context of a diverse society. Its aim is too one-dimensional, proposing that the only effective and workable model for society is the Christian-evangelical one. If we were to follow this route and if it were to succeed, the outcome would be a Christian State, which is more or less where we came from.

The Revolution approach has its benefits. It is vocal enough to raise important issues that need to be addressed in both the Church and State. It exposes underlying systems which may benefit only a few, but its scope, too, is limited as it focuses almost exclusively on a few areas of its own concern without providing alternative models which take into consideration the complexity of society as a whole. It advances its own agenda and shows reluctance to compromise when faced with alternate views. In a country where there is such great plurality of cultures, languages, beliefs and customs, the Church would need to show some understanding for the society it serves.

Reactionary approaches, calling for a complete separation of Church and State, is not helpful either as they will cause the Church to fall into the trap of seeing itself as having the moral high ground in all situations, while its focus is mainly matters of the spirit. If the Church merely acts as watchdog, then the State could easily turn the tables, asking the Church how *it* is contributing to areas that the State is criticised for!

As with the Retrogressive approach, the Realism approach assumes too much in terms of the Church's place in society. 'Power' is not only shared between Church and State in the Democratic South Africa, there are other powers too that come into play, like that of the media, the judiciary, the public sector, the capital of big business, and so forth.

Furthermore, all of these approaches place the Church over and against the State, and as we will see in the Mutual Responsibility approach, this is at times necessary, but is not a fixed location for the Church. Swart argues: "... that local churches and other faith-based organisations on the ground should be seen as potentially the most important partners of Government and the State because of their proximity to people in need, their infrastructure, their well-developed networks and the current range of their services".[215] The place of the Church is, by its very nature, with the people.

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[215]   Swart, *Meeting the rising expectations?*, 77.

This is not a new development at all, for we already witness the Church, as well as the Jewish faith community of the Old Testament, activity involved in the lives of civil society. By playing a substantial role in the wellbeing of, amongst others, orphans, widows, foreigners (or strangers) and the poor, the testimony of Scripture demands that the love of God cannot be separated from one's love for your neighbour. Love for neighbour was expressed in the intentional acts of compassion which related directly with one's devotion to God by observing the law. Perhaps one of the most defining passages from Scripture describing this social awareness by the early Church is found in Acts 2:43-47. The Church's existence is manifested in a social presence and hence the practice of the gospel is a political act.

Now, technically, the Church could exist without social involvement, but then this would amount to no less than a gathering of people for the sake of their expression of worship. Church as community cannot be separated from social activity. By being community, the Church must be a worshipping body which is exposed to and interacts with people, their contexts, the environment and all other issues that touch the life of the society. How the Church responds and engages with all these aspects of life is where the Church's missionary witness is conveyed.

This missionary witness is the core of the Church's relationship with the State. Its interaction with the State is not limited to the Church serving as an opposing voice, watchdog, liberation movement or even of a pious community asserting its right to exist. The Church's missionary witness to the State is only possible because the Church is a people who cannot love God except by speaking on behalf of those who lack dignity, justice, humanity and compassion. Having said this, the Church carries vast resources (material and in the form of skilled persons) and can take the lead in facilitating social transformation without having to wait for the State to gather a political will for change. The term 'Critical solidarity', which has been used to describe the relationship between Church and State in post-Apartheid South Africa, here takes on a new meaning. The Church has the possibility to be a beacon of hope in a transforming society. Nico Koopman puts it as follows: "This faith and hope suggest that there is meaning in life that transcends the evidence of historical processes. Because of this hope upon Christ and His reign, we do not respond with cynicism and pessimism, apathy and withdrawal to tragic, ambiguous and ironic historical processes, but with criticism and responsibility".[216]

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[216] Nico Koopman, "Churches and public policy discourses in South Africa," 49.

What then are the practical steps the Church can take in furthering a progressive relationship with the South African State?

Where to from here?

Before answering the questions regarding where the Church stands in relation to the State, perhaps the Church has to first understand who (and not what) it is. The Church is constantly reminded through its symbols of why it exists, who it is made up of and where it is going.

First of all, let us look at the symbol of the cross, which is central to the Christian faith. Not only is it a symbol of faith, but it was also a symbol of the State. All, in the ancient Roman Empire, who saw the cross, knew that it was a symbol of power; a method of execution. To Christians, the cross refers to the death of Christ, which they believe to be one part of God's salvific act. One can read all kinds of images of Church and State relations into the symbol of the cross, but one image which was shared during my confirmation class, has always stuck with me. The picture is of the cross which is made up of two parts; a horizontal beam and a vertical beam. The vertical beam represents our relationship with God while the horizontal beam represents our relationships with our neighbour. The symbol of the cross therefore embodies the two-fold law of love which Jesus professed. Christianity, by its very nature, cannot exclude any of these aspects. The Christian faith is not only about our relationship with God, for then we would be left with only a symbol of a vertical pole. Christianity is not only a humanitarian exercise, for then it would be symbolised through a beam lying on the ground. We can only love God by loving our neighbour and by loving our neighbour we display our love for God. This twofold aspect of the Christian faith makes it essential for the Church to be socially aware and to act in society, for this is nothing more than an expression of its devotion to God. Anything other than this is an idolatrous expression of the Christian faith.

Secondly, the Sacraments bear testimony to the Church's identity. Limiting the conversation only to the Protestant Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, the Sacraments reinforce the idea of the Christian faith being grounded in the twofold law of love. Through Baptism, the Church celebrates what God has done for the individual; that the person dies to self and is raised to new life in Christ, but secondly, that this person forms part of a new community, which pledges its support to the individual in their walk of faith. By default this means that the Church is concerned with this person's wellbeing. Similarly, Holy Communion is a powerful instrument through which diverse people are brought together around a common table, cele-

brating the unifying nature of the Christian gospel and reaffirming the communal responsibility of the Body of Christ in remembering what God has done in and through Jesus Christ.[217]

The symbolic nature of clerical vestments, the liturgical calendar, colours associated with the liturgical calendar, the lectionary journey, the place and use of Scripture and the regular gathering of people for worship, all remind us that the Church is a community in progress. The Church is reminded of its place in society, especially in relation to God, and therefore expresses its spirituality through the commands of love which necessitate the Church's active involvement in proclaiming a gospel which promotes dignity, justice and compassion. The mission of the Church is not locked into the understanding that the Church is there to get people into heaven. The social relevance of the Church by meeting people's everyday needs because of its love for God and neighbour makes the Church 'real'. This mission would lead the Church to sometimes oppose or even challenge the State, while at other times the Church can display this mission by partnering with the State to ensure social progress. From the perspective of the Mutual responsibility model, both Church and State can find that they are reconciled by a common vision, albeit from different vantage points, namely social cohesion and true communality.[218]

It is the Church's role and duty to be aware of the world in which it lives and to respond to needs that manifest themselves. Responding to these does not necessarily mean that the Church is always diametrically opposed to the State. Cooperation is needed at times between the Church and State, for the State needs the Church (in terms of its location and ability to interact at local level) as much as the Church needs the State (for its resources and ability to sustain long-term development). In all of this, the Church is called to provide a hopeful voice.

This theological theory sounds very promising, but the true test of the Church's relevance in society and its ability to be in a constructive relationship with the State lies at the feet of the local church. Although church-structures and organisations provide for the mobilising of the Church in areas

[217]   For a detailed conversation on Holy Communion as a unifying Sacrament, see Wessel Bentley, "The reconciliatory role of Holy Communion in the Methodist tradition," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32/2 (2011).

[218]   Werner Krusche, "Parish Structure – A hinderance to mission? A survey and evaluation of the Ecumenical Discussion on the Structures of the Missionary Congregation," in *Sources for Change: Searching for flexible church structures*, ed. Herbert T. Neve (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), 60–61. Quoted in John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the nature of the Christian Community,* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 58.

of need, it is truly up to the local congregation to be aware of the context in which it operates and to facilitate actions of hope and change there. Local congregations can help with social transformation, by first taking seriously its identity, role and purpose in its local community. By choosing to employ the twofold law of love, it becomes an instrument which can inspire hope by creating opportunities in local communities which will restore people's dignity and speak to society as a whole regarding our mutual responsibility to ensure a progressive society.

When local churches cease to simply be places of worship, but express their devotion to God by engaging their communities, speaking to local or regional authorities in government, participating in projects of upliftment, and also challenging the powers to show a greater political will for the wellbeing of all people, then the Church acts prophetically.

Conclusion

I started this essay with a quote from Barth, suggesting that the world would not necessarily be lost if there were no Church. It would be remiss of me not to place this quote in its context. Barth said the following: "We may thus venture the three statements: 1. The world would be lost without Jesus and His Word and work; 2. The world would not necessarily be lost if there were no church; and 3. The Church would be lost if it had no counterpart in the world."[219]

I think this statement gives a vital clue to a responsible relationship between Church and State. First of all, as Christians, we recognise that the world would be lost if it weren't for the self-revelation of God in Christ. The Word and work of Christ is not limited to the actions Jesus performed during His ministry on earth, but is encapsulated in the acts of compassion, selfless-ness, grace and love which span from the early testimonies of the Old Testa-ment storytellers to current accounts of people showing these timeless traits. Some may argue that this boils down to humanism and that our salvation lies there, but for the Church, as described earlier in the symbol of the cross, humanitarian acts stem out of our relationship with God.

Secondly, the Church must not and cannot see itself as the saviour of the world. The Church serves as a people, an instrument pointing towards the Word and work of Christ. The Church too needs salvation, as history has taught us. The Church cannot and should not take over the State's responsi-bilities. The State plays a vital role in the structuring and cohesion of society

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[219]   Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 826.

and so the Church is asked to serve, guide and partner with the State as long as it does not surrender its devotion to its Saviour by doing so.

The State, on the other hand, should not be shy to partner, listen to and consult with faith communities (here I do not limit the faith communities to the Christian Church). The State would do well to take seriously the different faith communities' involvement in their local contexts, for it would inform the State clearly of underlying needs which do not always appear in the reports submitted to Government, but attitudes and questions asked at local level and the overall sentiment of people regarding their status and place in society.

The Church should therefore continue its work of love diligently, showing loyalty to its God who gave it this mandate. This will require the Church to maintain a critical distance from the State, but not seeing itself as the antithesis of the State, for the State is another instrument which exists in relationship with the Church, ideally striving for the wellbeing of society, the environment and the future of community.

> It means that the Church must remain prophetic in its stance towards a new democratically elected government, that it must continue to stand for the truth, but now on the basis of a shared commitment to the realisation of national reconstruction. Being in critical solidarity means continued resistance to what is unjust and false, and continued protest on behalf of what is just and true.[220]

The Church's role in establishing a community of peace and equality in a Democratic South Africa should not be underestimated.[221] It can do so most effectively while being in a healthy, independent, critical, yet cooperative relationship with a State, but only if the State adheres to the ideals set out in its own frame of reference, namely the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

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[221]   De Gruchy, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Transition to Democracy*, 356.

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Essay 7

Un-mining the undermined history:
the historical role of Education in transforming a nation

Sifiso Khuzwayo[222]

Introduction

A close examination of the reasons behind the formation of the liberation movements in South Africa reveals the role played by mission-based schools in the lives of the liberation movement's leaders. It is asserted that a change in the education of South Africans led to the current leadership crisis within the country. The Church is also challenged to own up to her role in the destruction of some of the basic teaching mechanisms that African society had established for herself. This essay argues that whilst Church and State may look for slightly different reasons behind the transformation of society, a partnership in terms of education is imperative for the transformation of South Africa.

It is the assertion of this essay that politics in South Africa has been founded on a precarious relationship between the State and the Church, and that education in particular has been key in this development.

An outline of possibilities will be given which will display the vastness of interlocking areas where both the Church and State must take ownership and responsibility for what I would call the crisis of leadership we are in, but also more importantly the opportunities that can be achieved for the transformation of all people.

In this essay the education system in South Africa has been broken into different eras, namely: mission-based schools, Bantu education and then the current democratic dispensation. I am not an education specialist. I engage this dialogue as a theologian and I don't seek to be prescriptive on the kind of education that is needed in South Africa. This paper is not a critique on the ruling party, nor its policies, but a theologically informed commentary

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of how the Church has been influential in mapping out the current social and political landscape of South Africa. This mapping out can be best done by viewing the role of education in the birth and rise to power of the current political party and its leadership.

The early founders of the liberation movements

It will be argued that the founding members of the black liberation movements of South Africa were taught and trained by missionaries.

> The origins of African political consciousness in Southern Africa can be traced back to the first half of the nineteenth century, to the impact of the Christian missions and to the development of a non-racial constitution in the Cape. As the century progressed, mission-educated South Africans came to exercise a limited but real influence within Cape politics, and the Native policy of that colony was seen to contrast favourably with those policies developing in the Boer republics and Natal. By the turn of the century a new African elite had emerged, committed to no-racial ideals gleaned from Christianity and supported by the theory, and to some extent the practise, of Cape politics.[223]

The history of the African National Congress shows many great leaders whose education and outlook on life was formed by the mission education they received. Walshe speaks highly of institutions like Lovedale (a mission-based school in the Eastern Cape): "The most outstanding educational institutions such as Lovedale were, even if few in number, directly instrumental in creating the new elite."[224] It was out of places like Lovedale that Walshe says:

> But it was from this environment that the majority of African political leaders emerged for the whole of South Africa, giving expression to their peoples' new political consciousness […] Only those who went on to the seminaries or left for Britain or America were able to further their studies, and by the first few years of the twentieth century somewhere between 100 and 400

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[223]   Peter Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress 1912 – 1952* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1970), 1.
[224]   Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa,* 8.

students were abroad. Building on their missionary training, increasingly aware of Negro progress in the United States and often hospitably entertained in Britain, they returned with visions of social, economic and political progress for their people, ideals of racial toleration and expectations of a gradual but steadily increasing participation of educated tribesmen, of Zulus, Xhosas, etc, in the wider and multi-racial South Africa.[225]

Amongst the leaders whom Walshe mentions are "the Rev. John Dube (USA); John Thaele (USA); Alfred Mangena (UK); R.S. Msimang (UK); S.M. Makgatho (UK); P.K.I. Seme (USA and UK) and G.D. Montsioa (UK). Others travelled overseas, for example the Rev. W. Rubusana, Sol Plaatje, S. Msane, the Rev. H.R. Ngcayiya and T. Mapikela."[226] As it can be imagined, of the 100 to 400 that Walshe claims had by this time been overseas to study, a great number of these people went on to become leaders of the black people's liberation movements. However, of even greater interest here for us is how most of these leaders themselves viewed both the education and the role that Christianity played not only in their lives, but also in the lives of the many black people whose emancipation they were struggling for.

The Rev. John Dube, who went on to become the first President of the South African Native National Congress which was later (1923) to be known as the African National Congress, had very strong views on these links.

> In all these directions what the Native youth needs is a sound Christian education and training, not only by literary learning, but of the mind, heart and spirit by a real education through the hand, the eye and the brain. It is my conviction that success in politics, industry and all forms of progress lies in education, if it is a real development of all the human faculties. That is the reason I have devoted all my life to this work.[227]

In the Constitution of the South African Native National Congress of September 1919, a detailed outline of the organisation's objectives is laid out

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[225] Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa,* 8.
[226] Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa,* 8.
[227] John L. Dube, *"Native Political and Industrial Organizations in South Africa,"* in *Christianity and the Natives of South Africa: A year-book of South African Missions,* ed. J.D. Taylor (South Africa: The Lovedale Institution Press, c1928), 59.

and whilst most of them are based upon the organisational structure and other matters of concern; particular attention is paid to both the influence of the Church and education within the life of African people.

> (12) To encourage and promote union of Churches from all sectarian and denominational anomalies;
>
> (13) To establish or to assist the establishment of National Colleges or Public Institutions from denominational or State control;
>
> (14) To originate and expound the right system of education in all schools and colleges and to advocate for its adoption by State and Churches and by all other independent bodies in respect thereto;
>
> (20) To all and everything directly or indirectly to maintain and uplift the standard of race morally and spiritually, mentally and materially; socially and politically.[228]

The question may then be asked, if this zeal for the emancipation of the African people was highlighted by the role education played in the lives of the few who had gone through the missionary education systems, what stood in the way of such a development and how did the early founders seek to overcome it?

The common cause

"South Africa must become a white man's country,"[229] said General Smuts to M. Louis Franck, a Belgian ex-colonial minister in a discussion on the future of South Africa. By the late nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, it had become clear that the once espoused freedom and franchise between the blacks and whites of South Africa was not going to happen. There were unjust laws and political reforms that sought to oppress the African people and there were also economic restrictions which prevented them from full participation in the land of their birth. It is against such a

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[228] Constitution of the South African Native National Congress, September 1919 [Extracts] (Typewritten, 29 pages) in Johns Sheridan, III. *The Establishment of the South African Native National Congress,* in *From Protest to Challenge: A documentary history of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964. Volume I: Protest and Hope,* ed. T. Karis and G.M. Carter. (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 78.

[229] Dube, *Native Political and Industrial Organizations in South Africa,* 52.

backdrop that Dube went on to say: "They have forced the Bantu people, politically inarticulate, to organise themselves for their own protection."[230]

Although the Rev. John L. Dube went on to become the first President-general of the South African Native National Congress, it was Pixley ka Isaka Seme (the first treasurer of the South African Native National Congress) who had a vision of a united African people's organisation. After qualifying as a lawyer overseas, through the assistance of the missionaries, he returned with this vision of uniting the African voice.

> … a new African political organisation, encompassing all four provinces and the three British territories of Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland. Seme argued that regional and tribal differences among Africans had to be overcome by promoting a spirit of African nationalism. The organisation he envisaged would provide a forum for all African viewpoints, forcefully present African grievances to the new government and to white opinion, and serve as a new rallying point for political pressure on behalf of Africans throughout South Africa.[231]

As the movement got off the ground, an already burning piece of legislation pertaining to land was on the table and the government within South Africa seemed not to be interested in hearing the pleas of the Africans. It was then resolved to send a delegation to England to appeal this legislation that was being considered in the colony. John Dube recalls: "In 1914 there was a phenomenal response to the appeal to the Bantu people to contribute money to the deputation sent to England to protest against the Native Land Act. For once it seemed as though there was no Xosa, Musuthu, Zulu or Shangan [sic]. It looked as if a narrow tribalism, that enemy of unity, had broken down."[232]

It is significant for our endeavour to note that this unification of the 'Bantu' people is constantly seen as working hand in hand with Christianity by almost all the leaders. The Rev. John L. Dube, in an extract of a pamphlet addressed to all Christians who may have by chance read his plea, went on to

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[230] Dube, *Native Political and Industrial Organizations in South Africa*, 52.
[231] Johns Sheridan, III, "The Establishment of the South African Native National Congress," in *From Protest to Challenge: A documentary history of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964. Volume I: Protest and Hope,* ed. T. Karis and G.M. Carter (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 61.
[232] Dube, *Native Political and Industrial Organizations in South Africa*, 54

say: "Christianity will usher in a new civilisation, and the 'Dark Continent' will be transformed into a land of commerce and Christian institutions."[233]

Pixley ka Isaka Seme, an articulate and slightly more philosophical lawyer, was never shy to show the correlation that both education and Christianity had brought to the development of the African person and how these will remain critical in an African's future. In "The regeneration of Africa" he pleads "… having learned that knowledge is power, he *(Africa)* is educating his children. You find them in Edinburgh, in Cambridge, and in great schools of Germany. These return to their country like arrows, to drive darkness from the land."[234] It was five years later that he would still argue that a spirit of progress and cooperation is within every person: "This spirit is due no doubt to the great triumph of Christianity which teaches men everywhere that in this world they have a common duty to perform both towards God and towards one another."[235]

Another Lovedale alumnus that can be mentioned in the same league as these great Africans is Tengo Jabavu. Walshe says Jabavu: "...as an editor and through participating in Cape politics, did more to orientate his fellow-African to the new political reality than any other man of his generation."[236]

I could go on and cite a myriad of African clergy and educated men and women of the era, but the underlying fact would still remain: they all had great regard for the political emancipation of the African which was based on the influence they gained from the education they received from the Christian missionaries. Why is this assertion critical for the current project? It will later be argued that one of the tools necessary for a partnership between Church and State in twenty-first century South Africa to bring about significant regeneration, is education. Another highly significant point in all this is the involvement of clergy persons in the struggle for the liberation of the African

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[233]   John L. Dube, *"A talk upon my native land."* 1892 Pamphlet extract in Johns Sheridan, III. *The Establishment of the South African Native National Congress,* in *From Protest to Challenge: A documentary history of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964. Volume I: Protest and Hope,* ed. T. Karis and G.M. Carter (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 69.

[234]   Seme, P.K.I. "The regeneration of Africa." Article in *The African Abroad*, April 5, 1906 in Johns Sheridan, III. *The Establishment of the South African Native National Congress,* in *From Protest to Challenge: A documentary history of African Politics in South Africa 1882–1964. Volume I: Protest and Hope,* ed. T. Karis and G.M. Carter (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 69.

[235]   Seme, P.K.I. "Native Union." Article in *Imvo Zabantsundu*, October 24, 1911 in Johns Sheridan, III. *The Establishment of the South African Native National Congress.,* in *From Protest to Challenge: A documentary history of African Politics in South Africa 1882–1964. Volume I: Protest and Hope,* ed. T. Karis and G.M. Carter (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972),71.

[236]   Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 3.*

people. This seemed natural and unquestioned simply because the clergy were the people who had gone on to seminary or even received overseas education and thus understood Western politics well.

African leaders also developed under this missionary education which, according to Walshe: "…provided moral principles for individual righteousness. Given the questioning and often the partial rejection of tribal ethics and organisation, these principles were then extended to social and political activity, so providing the motivation, not for political assertion, but for moral appeals to justice even if these appeals were not backed up by effective political organisation."[237]

The African leaders were well aware that to win this battle, it had to seem as if they had shunned their African tribal ways of life and embraced the Western education and way of living. They went on to organise themselves in such a way that they were able to forge ties with and fight the social evils they faced; for these political matters were moral issues. Walshe succeeds in bringing across the point that so united was Christian education and the political movements of African people that "Later, when new political organisations came into being in the first decade of the twentieth century, their membership was made up almost entirely of mission-educated Africans.[238]

A common cause had been established, the emancipation of the African people. An amicable solution found, in the education of the African, through the resources provided by the churches. Strangely, however, a rift seemed to form between politics and religion within the country. The next section is an in-depth look at the reasons for some of the estrangement issues that took place within the country.

The painful estrangements

> A small but influential group of political leaders continued to live and think in committed Christian terms, looking upon their faith as a social cohesive which transcended tribalism and offered an ultimate goal of inter-racial harmony based on the brotherhood of man. The Rev. James Calata… remained committed to a vision of the Church filling the vacuum created by the collapse of tribal life and providing new loyalties from which 'we could hope to build up the Bantu into a Christian

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[237] Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa,* 7.
[238] Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa,* 9.

nation.' At a wider level of race relations, *(the Rev.)* Mahabane saw the solution as dependent largely on the evangelisation of Africans: it was 'the spirit of Christ that had led and is still leading men to the truth of the common brotherhood of man irrespective of race, colour or creed'. As the British Crown had been a symbol for inter-racial unity within the Empire, so he argued, a universal acknowledgement of Christ as common Lord and King would break down the social, spiritual and intellectual barriers between the races.[239]

In the period between 1924 and the end of World War II, a great deal of social justice issues were brought to the fore within the general ethic of Christianity. It was also at this time that the notable silence by many white churchgoers towards the atrocities committed against African people was questioned.

The black elite began to see that the church was not as unified in the struggle against oppression and the ill-treatment of black folk as it should have been. There were suddenly divisions between whites and the blacks within the Church body. An instance is cited when one of the leaders, Kadalie, had been in conversation with Bishop Carey who had exhorted him to control the provocative speakers, attack drunkenness and clear a way for co-operation between 'decent Whites and decent Natives'. Kadalie responded by arguing that "... the church had, throughout history and in every denomination, been 'thoroughly reactionary and drifting from Christ's teaching, has sided with the rich against the poor, opposing every effort towards social and economic freedom for the masses.'"[240]

This rift highlighted by Kadalie above carried on post World War II. Walshe noted that a growing influential Marxist faction of the Congress began to reject Christianity, the majority of the members of the Congress recognised the failure of the missionary mother churches in the movement for social and political reform but they didn't reject Christianity as a whole. The likes of Dr. A.B. Xuma were also very quick to point out that "the 'Liberation movement,' in seeking full scope for African progress, was not anti-white but working for the good of South Africa and to 'promote the ideals of Christianity, human decency and democracy.'"[241]

The other element that was significant in the structuring of education and thus the plight of the African person in South Africa, was government's

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[239] Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 158.*
[240] Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 162.*
[241] Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 341.*

taking over of the education system. A period existed during which government and Church were involved in the education of all citizens until legislation was enacted which was to be called the Bantu Education Act of 1958. The State withdrew funding for Church schools – and so Church schools closed because the Church was not prepared to put money into fully funding its schools. Only the Roman Catholic schools continued – along with some elite Protestant church schools that allowed the wealthy to fund them. It is during this period of the Bantu education and elite 'Christian' schools that the education system that enabled a strong liberation movement was thwarted.

My contention is that the decrease in the standard of education led to the vacuum in leadership that is being experienced currently in our country. The period which saw great leaders being trained by the missionaries has faded and the ideals that these leaders held have now been replaced by a new leadership who have not been well nurtured under the guidance of the founders and thus are not well espoused to the ideals that the African National Congress had been founded upon. The absence from society of these missionary-educated leaders, who were mostly isolated in prison or out in exile somewhere else in the world, meant that constant mentorship could not be afforded to those who were to come into leadership soon after them. The idea that education will be the tool to usher in the freedom of the African people as stated by the above founders was soon replaced by the idea of an armed struggle. Now, while a lot of people will argue for the necessity of such an armed struggle, it is however not the intention to argue such merits or demerits here but to point out the significant shift in focus. Preceding Verwoerd as the Minister of Native Affairs, H.A. Fagan had been heard to say "... with regard to the fear that Natives would be given a different kind of education, it was the present tendency of all education to let the child specialise in the practical things he will require in life. Any education, whether designed for Europeans or Natives, ought to be such as to fit the people for the positions they are going to occupy."[242] This rift surrounding education was amongst other matters that African people felt discriminated against. At its root is the idea that one needs to only equip people with the education required for the jobs they would perform. The government's stance was that there was no need to waste State resources on educating African

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[242] Report of a Deputation from the ANC and the Congress of Urban Advisory Boards to the Minister of Native Affairs, May 15–17, 1939, in *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary history of African Politics in South Africa 1882 – 1962 Volume 2: Hope and Challenge 1935–1952,* ed T. Kari and G.M. Carter (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 149.

children for jobs reserved for white people as stated by the above principle, and when they will only be required to be servants in the white people's homes and offices. This culminated in the necessity for the proposed change in medium of instruction to Afrikaans so that the Africans could be 'more useful' to their masters. The 1976 student uprising was the way in which this Government had degenerated to the total disregard of the humanness of all people. This problem of inferior education was not unique to South Africa, because W.E.B. Du Bois also wrestled with it within American's segregated life.

> And men ask this to-day all the more eagerly because of sinister signs in recent educational movements. The tendency is here, born of the slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day, to regard human beings among the material resources of a land to be trained with an eye single to future dividends … And above all, we daily hear that an education that encourages aspiration, that sets the loftiest of ideals and seeks as an end culture and character rather than bread-winning, is the privilege of white men and the danger and delusion of black.[243]

The bigger problem for the liberation movements was to wrestle with what could be an expected outcome of such an inferior education for the lives of black people. The young and rather militant Nelson R. Mandela wrote in his presidential address entitled "No Easy walk to Freedom", that defiance is one of the tools that the masses had against the strong-armed tactics of the government. "It inspired and aroused our people from a conquered and servile community of yes-men to a militant and uncompromising band of comrades-in-arms. The entire country was transformed into battle zones where the forces of liberation were locked up in immortal conflict against those of reaction and evil."[244] In this speech Mandela dedicates a vociferous attack on Dr. Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs against what Verwoerd set out in the objects of the Bantu Education Bill, which was to teach young children that Africans are inferior to Europeans. "African

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[243] Du Bois, W.E.B. *The souls of black folk* (New York: Signet Classic, 1995), 126.
[244] Mandela, Nelson R. *"No easy walk to freedom,"* Presidential Address, ANC (Transvaal) September 21, 1953 in *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary history of African Politics in South Africa 1882 – 1962 Volume 3: Challenge and Violence 1953-1964,* ed. T. Kari and G.M. Carter (USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 107.

education would be taken out of the hands of those who taught equality between black and white."[245]

> You must defend African parents to decide the kind of education that shall be given their children. Teach the children that Africans are not one iota inferior to Europeans. Establish your own community schools where the right kind of education will be given to our children. If it becomes dangerous or impossible to have these alternative schools, then again you must make every home, every shack or rickety structure a centre of learning for our children. Never surrender to the in-human and barbaric theories of Verwoerd.[246]

Interestingly enough, the scriptural language of one whose roots are deeply Christian never once passes the lips of this young congressman. When he concludes his speech, he again appeals to this Christian ethos: "You can see that 'there is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow (of death) again and again before we reach the mountain tops of our desires."[247]

The idea of a revolutionary armed struggle began to grow and also meant that Church leaders and their message of passive resistance began to stand in the way of progress. The Church also began to be seen as a hindrance rather than an enabler of the struggle with Christian-raised people questioning the Church's involvement with the oppressors and even how the Church had been a tool of the oppressor. The rift continued to develop between the Church and the liberation movements.

A leap into democratic South Africa

In the period between the rise of the founding members and the current democratic dispensation, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 led to a drop in the standard of education for African people. There was also a ban of many liberation movements, including the African National Congress, and many of the liberation leaders were imprisoned. This left the African people in a void in terms of the political acumen and prowess that these leaders possessed. Many of them were released back into society after a great many years of

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[245]   Mandela, Nelson R. *"No easy walk to freedom" 110.*
[246]   Mandela, Nelson R. *"No easy walk to freedom" 113.*
[247]   Mandela, Nelson R. *"No easy walk to freedom" 115.*

isolation and, if truth be told, had not been exposed to the kind of progress that had happened in the world whilst they were away. The Apartheid system had ensured that little information of the atrocities of the country escaped into the outside world.

A harsh reality today is that the democratic South Africa leapt from President Mandela – who reflected some of the founding peacemaking values of the ANC in a way that left many African people in a whirlwind, uncertain of what had just happened – to President Mbeki with a bag of 'fix-it' solutions for Africa. Mr. Mbeki proved too much for a nation that had forgotten the importance of an education that freed the whole person. Mr. Mbeki then came of age when the country was still too young to understand the changes he sought to bring. The country had systematically been kept from developing by an oppressive regime that thwarted the growth of an African person through under-resourcing African education. We are now in limbo, a period where there is no better person to lead than one who might unify the nation by sheer charisma, and with no reference to the founding fathers or the ideals that education, albeit minimal, could afford for so transitional a period.

Surely one would argue that none of these able men have worked alone in the leadership of this country. Indeed, the base from which they operated has been erased almost to a point of extinction. It seems that most South Africans have forgotten that the liberation movement in our country was born out of the Church benches or pews that were used as the school furniture for the founders of our liberation movement. We have forgotten that the schools they were taught at were formed out of the communities' sweaty brows and chaffed praying knees so that they could, one day, bring about change in the world of the oppressor and oppressed. A contention in this regard is that most of those in government today have chosen to forget that the people who started this journey did so under no pretence or delusions but with sober minds that this movement was to espouse Christian values of neighbourliness and 'brotherhood.' Is it not the foundation upon which the Freedom Charter was founded and fought for even through the schisms it caused; "that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white"[248]?

How then, in this transition, does one move towards the realisation of some of these ideals? This moving forward must not be a nostalgic yearning for the past but a constructive way of understanding that we are where we stand because of the hard labour of those who have gone before us. Whilst

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[248] African National Congress; *The Freedom Charter,* Adopted in Kliptown, South Africa on 26 June 1955.

this may all sound too clichéd for some, the truth happens to lie in precisely the clichéd past we cherish or shun.

Possibilities for reconstruction

Many have attempted to propose a way in which the Church and the State can function together in the reconstruction of a community where all of God's people live together. I have argued that this reconstruction needs to happen in the area of education, so that a future generation of the same calibre as the past one may once again be raised. The greater question that needs to be asked, however is, "Is the Church truly the community that needs to assist the State in creating a better society for the citizens?" Many might agree – along with the founding fathers of the ruling party: "Yes, indeed!" I would, however, want to qualify this assertion.

The Church's hands have not been as clean as they ought to have been in creating the kind of society the world needs for the betterment of the lives of individuals. The Church's hands have been made unclean by wanting to do that which she had not been called to. She has yielded to the loud voices of those in society, knowing the temptation to harness politics for personal gain. Many cases in history can be cited, but a case in point for the South African context would be the continued support of the Apartheid policy by the Dutch Reformed Church. Archbishop Emiritus Desmond Tutu recalls it this way: "Until fairly recently the white Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk) had been steadfast in its support of Apartheid. It had provided the theological rationale for Apartheid and had even preceded the politicians by proposing certain legislation to effect the God-sanctioned separation of the races."[249]

In his monumental work, *A community of character,* Stanley Hauerwas advocates this point best:

> Thus many who write as Christian social ethicists do so as if the nature and existence of the church as a separated community is irrelevant to the "real" issues of social change involved in trying to make a society more just. But if, as I contend, the church is a truthful polity, the most important social task of Christians is to be nothing less than a community capable of forming people with virtues sufficient to witness to God's truth in the world. Put as directly as I can, it is not the task of the

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[249] Desmond Tutu, *No Future without forgiveness* (USA: Doubleday, 1999), 184.

> church to try develop social theories or strategies to make America work; rather the task of the church in this country is to become a polity that has the character necessary to survive as a truthful society. That task carried out would represent a distinctive contribution to the body politic we call America.[250]

More than any other person perhaps, Hauerwas traces how character is formed by the traditions of the community to which people belong. It is out of this community that the right practice and right belief is inculcated into an individual. In South Africa such an understanding will not be difficult to comprehend because it resonates so well with a proper definition of Ubuntu; *Umuntu umuntu ngabantu (a person is a person through other people).*

Albert Nolan agrees with Hauerwas on the kind of community that the church is when he writes:

> Problems arise when the Church as an institution begins to offer its own solutions to political problems. To formulate one's own political policies and to mobilise people around them: this is to play the role of a political organisation. The role of the Church is to comment on political policies, to name the sin and the salvation, to criticise what is wrong, to praise what is right, to pray for salvation, to praise God for what is good, to support, to protest and even to propose new ways of acting, but not to formulate political or economic policies.[251]

It is again Hauerwas and Willimon who, in using John Howard Yoder's distinction between an *activist* church, the *conversionist* church and the *confessing* church, arrive at a place that they offer the *confessing church* as the model that could be workable in these scenarios.

The confessing church… seeks to influence the world by being church that is by being something the world is not and can never be, lacking the gift of faith and vision, which is ours in Christ. The confessing church seeks the visible church, a place, clearly visible to the world, in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honour the poor, suffer for righteousness, and thereby testify to the amazing community-creating power of God. The confessing church has no interest in withdrawing from the

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[250] Stanley. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a constructive Christian Social Ethic* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 3.

[251] Albert. Nolan, *God in South Africa: The challenge of the gospel* (Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Phillip, 1988), 217.

world, but it is not surprised when its witness evokes hostility from the world.[252]How though, does one become part of this community and become effective in the world? It is through witnessing in the power of the cross of Christ Jesus by declaring the power that is contrary to the power that the world seeks to endorse for its entire people. This kind of community is displayed by Nelson Mandela, of whom Desmond Tutu recalls "…when we asked why he was so dedicated to reconciliation and to being willing to make concessions to his opponents, he did not hesitate to say it had all been due to the influence and witness of the Christian churches. Clearly the church had made a contribution to what was happening in our land, even though its witness and ministry had been something of a mixed bag."[253] Nelson Mandela is the product of the mission schools and one of the surviving starlwats of the transformative leadership that led the country. It is for the production of people with the character found in such leaders that the relationship between Church and State must be forged.

Perhaps the greatest impact for this relationship can be achieved in the rejoining of forces between the State and Church to aid in education. This is only feasible if the State would accede that the education of the children of this country, for those purposes which are mutually beneficial to all the citizens of the country, is worthy of State funding. This process is in full recognition of the almost century long oppressive regime and injustice towards the education of the African people. The current reality is that Church schools still exist, but have become so elitist in nature that only the children of the previously privileged whites or the new black elite can attend. This form of partnership would, for the Church, be a legitimate proclamatory tool for the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world.

The loss of a proper definition of the task of education has been pinpointed by Rowan Williams as being one of the problems that would be a challenge for the Church and State partnership. "I think we've suffered from an educational philosophy that has become more and more functionalist, and that more and more assumes that education's single task is to transfer "skills" from the possessor to the nonpossessor".[254] A critical point for our current debate is that a redefinition of our education philosophy is of paramount importance so that the kind of people our system produces are more equipped to

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[252]   Stanley. Hauerwas and W.H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 46.

[253]   Desmond Tutu, *No Future without forgiveness* (USA: Doubleday, 1999), 43.

[254]   Rowan. Williams, "The theological imagination of Rowan Williams*,"* in *The Christian Century* dated 24/04 – 01/05, 2002, 22.

deal with the various situations they may have to respond to in their life-journeys; Christian or otherwise. However, unlike the mission-school of old, it is not the responsibility of the Church to formulate a curriculum for the school. This is the work that the State, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, must embark. The Church is to aid in inculcating value systems and moral character that enables one to live harmoniously with all of creation.

An objection may be raised along the lines of 'whoever pays the piper, calls the tune'. The limited gift of democracy in this regard ensures that all partners come to the table with a clear understanding that the government is a resource in the hands of the community that seeks to form itself in accordance with viably discerned processes. Along with this restructuring of education is the Church's own integrity, which will mean she needs to own up to the bad teachings of the past. One of the criticisms that is constantly levelled against the Church in conversations one has with young black South Africans, is the sense that the Church has systematically destroyed everything that is African and repackaged it with Western constructs as though Westernism is the only useful system of worship. This is the sense of what we expressed above as the discontent of the many African leaders. The Church, through its missionary agents, had instilled the sense in the African that African systems were not good and to be a civilised human being you needed to live as Europeans lived. Walshe puts it this way: "Christianity therefore functioned as both an integrating and a disintegrating force. The old tribal society was weakened; converts were taught that loyalty to their new faith took precedence over allegiance to the chief. On the other hand, a new cohesive force had appeared, transcending tribe – 'the concept of the spiritual brotherhood of all Christian believers'."[255] The way in which this European education influenced the Africans' perception of themselves, needs to be unlearned by African people and the Church must be in the forefront of such undoing as she had been in its creation.

I would like to briefly look at some indigenous knowledge systems that were embedded in the African learning, some of which was lost due to Christian undermining of these indigenous knowledge systems. Unfortunately, the rise of this 'Christian Civilisation' came with the undermining of African governance systems and the undermining or even demonising all that is African. The institutions of kingship and chieftaincy were made to seem outdated and heathen. It is only in this new dispensation that chiefs and kings are being recognised fully by government and also accorded a place in the way the State deals with the polity. The Church has to recognise this and

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[255] Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 9.*

begin a serious dialogue with the members of such institutions and assist in creating a theology of kingship that will be both scriptural and contextual in nature. Along with this is a need for the Church to accede to the many accusations surrounding the nature through which she dealt with African culture and custom. Within the African culture lies the essence of inter-connectedness and interdependence between the Supreme Being and all of creation.

The level of hierarchy that exists within an African community leads all things to the Supreme Being and these features make the governance of any institution within the African context a religious matter. The Church has not dealt well with this interconnectivity and that is why I suggest, Africa is constantly faced with challenges of leadership regardless of how 'seemingly civilised' the people appear. There is something intrinsic in an African person's world-view that struggles with the democratic process as it currently stands. I will be the first to concede that there has not been sufficient study of these phenomena in Africa to warrant proper conclusions. This is also by no means a way of me suggesting perhaps that Africa has a governance system that is inferior to democracy. I am arguing that Africa has not been given a chance to develop the systems that she has used and therefore has not been given an opportunity to contribute into any of the tools of governance that are currently in existence, such as democracy or even, the more akin, socialism.

The right kind of education needed for all these engagements is, unfortunately, what is currently lacking in African scholarship and politics. There must not be a sense that again I am suggesting that it is lacking because no one has had the courage or intellect to develop such theories, but that the people who had all the acumen to deal with these questions were too embroiled in the emancipation of all African people to focus on this vitally important transformational work. Today the paradigm has shifted and Africans stand upon the marred shoulders of these giants to freely engage the world at whatever necessary level. The pride of young South Africans will be seen in what they do with the gift of freedom that has been attained for them.

Another tragedy of the past remains the Church's trivialising of African history and heritage and is found in the loss of traditions like story-telling to the young people. Many young South Africans do not know, nor are they truly bothered, by how we have come to this point as a nation. The Church needs to be instrumental in reteaching the ability for one to narrate a story and create within the audience the sense of appreciation that was best done in the models of Christ's teaching. This has been evident in the South African context when government changed street names in many of our towns. The names they used meant very little to many younger generations

simply because they were never told about these struggle heroes in the past. While the intention in the exercise was noble, it had very little meaning because the people whose names have been used are non-existent in the minds of those who enjoy the very freedom which these 'names' died fighting for. This calls indeed for a rewriting of the history books to include such people and can only be done in partnership between the State and the Church. It is interesting that the Church still holds in her archives a lot of this region's history.

The ultimate hope in this journey is that Africans are equipped through an education that will do away with this self-hate and instil within them the pride that was preached by movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement. A voice of wisdom that we would have to heed with regard to aiding the previously oppressed groupings in society as they seek to identify themselves is that of the Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams. One of the things Williams (influenced by Ann Dummett) picks out as common in the oppression of those unlike the dominant group is "…the oppressor makes the claim to '*tell you who you are',* irrespective of your intention, will, preference, performance. Only certain people have the right to construct an identity for themselves; others have their roles scripted for them."[256] He then argues that, for the sake of redress, it is sometimes permissible for such oppressed groups to form themselves into groups that can seek to redefine themselves in a manner that is most appropriate for them. This self-definition should not be achieved at the expense of anybody else. It is this naming of self that was taken away from the masses of Africans and that mission-education, in some way, inadvertently restored for many African people.

When Steve Biko, the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, spoke at a conference of young South African students in the seventies, it is interesting to note how he viewed education and its role. "Through the work of missionaries and the style of education adopted, the blacks were made to feel that the white man was some kind of god whose word could not be doubted."[257] Biko in the same address, notes that the education is not only white-orientated but also goes on to highlight the fact that even the history is told through the eyes of the 'white' victors. "We have to rewrite our history and describe in it the heroes that formed the core of resistance to the white invaders. More has to be revealed and stress has to be laid on the successful nation-building attempts by people like Chaka, Moshoeshoe and Hinsta(sic)."

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[256] Rowan. Williams, *On Christian Theology* (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 280.

[257] Steve, Biko, *I write what I like* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1978).

This Black Consciousness will also have to guard against evolving into the new oppressor during the period of emancipation. The (then) Bishop, Peter Storey, testifying before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa about charges brought against Mrs Winnie Mandela and the group of young men who had formed the soccer team under her wing, said: "One of the tragedies of life, sir, is that it is possible to become like that which we hate most."[258] Any forums that seek the regeneration of self-love for the African people will have to be careful never to fall into this trap.

This dream, however, is still a long way off if the Church – which has Christ as the one enabler of such transformation – continues to be bled dry by institutions such as government departments or political party leadership. The rate at which promising Church clergy are leaving the Church for positions in government and the private sector in South Africa is great cause for concern. The reality of history is that some of the best qualified people for some of these positions were clergy who had had a certain amount of freedom in terms of developing their academic skills and exposure to the world. However, does this not stand in opposition to the kind of community that they were initially called to, the Church? Is this interest in politics as fresh as that of the founding members, which was fuelled by the belief that liberation is a gospel call, or is there a different motivation behind this clergy exodus? One may even ask; is there still faith in the Church's ability to bring about transformation or do they now believe party politics can do it better? Unfortunately no attempt was made, in writing this essay, to ask a number of these clerics to clarify how they believe they are still exercising their calling when outside the community into which they were called.

A point has been argued that the majority of the South African liberation movement leaders were born out of the Church benches and therefore it only made sense for these leaders to move in and take up such positions using the instruction they received. This would hold true if, in this world, we were attempting to form a Christendom of some sort. This has, however, been shown to be unfeasible in this age of enlightenment by Nazi Germany and Apartheid South Africa's failures. There remains an almost unsettling feeling that these leaders who leave the Church for political leadership are perhaps passing a vote of no confidence in the transforming power of the gospel which they proclaimed for so many years.

The other great struggle that the Church will need to find a way around, is the uncontrolled nature of clerical vocation. It is unfortunate that there is no tool to measure the vocational integrity of those who claim to be

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[258]   Desmond. Tutu, *No Future without forgiveness* (USA: Doubleday, 1999), 137.

called by God. There seems to be a trend towards unthinkable practices, such as giving people honorary clerical titles. The most dangerous part of this free-for-all, clerical-collar by the corner café, is that South Africa has experienced a growing trend of homogeneous church communities. These are communities that classify their membership according to social class, race and more to our point, political partisanship. These instances are tragic because the truthfulness and integrity of the gospel of Christ is often judged on the basis of these so-called progressive movements, whose claims to the gospel can be equated to fortune-cookie pseudo-psychology clothed in loud shouts of 'hallelujah' and 'Jesus'. There is a crisis in Christian theology and the irony is that, at this rate, God may need to raise another Constantine to redirect the Church and her mission. A disfragmented body of Christ will not be able to offer the State guidance in the formation of a transformative education system.

A model that can be proposed is that of Church leaders like Archbishop Tutu, who has chosen to stay away from party politics as a member of the clergy. Notable in this man is the fact that he fully belongs to the old order of ruling party founders who were trained by the missionaries, yet by vocation chose to fight the very struggle from the pulpit. When Tutu criticised the current ruling party for the terrible conditions under which the people of South Africa continued to live, President Mbeki lashed out: 'It would be good if those that present themselves as the greatest defenders of the poor should also demonstrate decent respect for the truth'.[259] Needless to say, such disrespectful retort to an elder in Africa, no matter how justified Mbeki may have felt, will never earn one any accolades. Mbeki suffered greatly in his already waning leadership. Tutu's response, more than being sarcastic, showed the depth of where the Church ought to stand at all times:

> Thank you, Mr. President, for telling me what you think of me. That I am a liar with scant regard for the truth, and a charlatan posing with his concern for the poor, the hungry, the oppressed and the voiceless. I will continue to pray for you and your government by name daily, as I have done and as I did even for the Apartheid government. God bless you.[260]

Whilst the likes of the new leadership may be excused for their lack of education and wisdom, Mbeki had been the glory-boy of the ruling party and mentored into position too well to have committed such a cardinal error. It

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[259] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/dec/05/southafrica.rorycarroll
[260] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/dec/05/southafrica.rorycarroll

was such maverick stances that further alienated the Church and State and defined the fracture lines in their relationship. There have been many attempts to restructure this relationship but they too are not yielding the desired results.

Sadly, the searing that is happening between Church and State reminds one of the words of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, as the old oppressive dispensation is replaced by the new 'democratic' dispensation. There yet exists what was alluded to above, of the oppressed becoming the new oppressor. The education and grooming that had been given to Mbeki unfortunately made him forget the cardinal virtue of ubuntu intrinsic to the African, and the concept of respect was lost. In Orwell's rounding up of the *Animal Farm* story, Napoleon, the head pig who now rules the farm; makes a toast as the pigs sit and celebrate their newly found friendship with neighbouring farmers:

> Hirtherto the animals on the farm had had a rather foolish custom of addressing one another as 'Comrade'. This was to be suppressed. There had also been a very strange custom, whose origin was unknown, of marching every Sunday morning past a boar's skull which was nailed to a post in the garden. This too would be suppressed, and the skull had already been buried.[261]

In this dispensation nothing seems sacred and the roles of both Church and State are so blurred that you never know with whom you are dealing. So we educate our children, as the animals in the farm were educated on the virtues of equality, tragically though, we miseducate our children on values that make our humanness so imperative.

The lack of clarity on this relationship has seen the State's fall into the trap of wanting to be Church to the world. Two instances that Tinyiko Maluleke quotes in this regard are the formation of the Moral Regeneration Campaign and the establishment of the National Religious Leadership Forum (NRLF). Speaking of the NRLF, Maluleke says: "This is an organisation composed of members of all the major religions, which was formed at the invitation of government…Interestingly, I have since learned that this organisation meets only when government summons it…This organisation also

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[261]   George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 80.

assists government in relativising and 'policing' the various religions."[262] While this accusation may be true of the NRLF at all levels of government where it has been attempted, our understanding of the kind of community the Church wishes to form in this country, needs agreement that restructuring of the NRLF for meaningful participation is created for the Church as for all other Religions. I have avoided the use of words like 'permitted' or 'enabled' intentionally because the proclamation of the gospel rests not upon the permission given to the Church by any State power. This would also hold true for the Moral Regeneration Campaign which proved an embarrassment for government. However, again it is the prerogative of any government to attempt establishing a set of moral standards that it so wishes for its citizens to follow; these not being based on any one part of the many religions of the country.

The Moral Regeneration Campaign remains a thorn in the side of government that will rest well forgotten rather than being brought to the public eye again. It does, however, raise the point that government is aware that there exists a dilemma in the kind of community we are raising. One of the problems is that dialogue between Church and State is not being handled well. The conflating of responsibilities leaves one uncertain whether the Church is now the African National Congress in prayer or whether the ANC is itself not one of the mushrooming charismatic movements whose pastorates are based on one's charisma and ability to manipulate the masses into parting with their blood-earned votes.

These religious forums and Moral Regeneration Campaigns will do well to redefine that which is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, in a community that is forging a transformation in the lives of its people. Alongside this will be a serious reconsideration by the Church of how it defines the concept of sin within an African perspective. The Western world with its Graeco-Roman law influence, has tended to stress the issue of personal guilt and the innocence of the individual unless proven otherwise. This definition of sin has unfortunately, in many ways, crept into the Church in a way that forgets about the conscience of the individual. Africa has a definition of sin that rests upon the shame that one's failure to act or action brings upon oneself or the tradition from which one comes. A redefinition of the concepts of guilt and shame to allow for an engagement between the Western and African influences will lead to a value system that looks not only at the individual's verdict but at the facts that are the actions worthy of

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[262] T.S. Maluleke, "A Postcolonial South African Church: problems and promises," in *African Theology on the way: Current conversations,* ed. D.B. Stinton (Great Britain: SPCK, 2010), 154.

one to be in a certain position of influence. A lot of dubious leaders have come into leadership at a time when they have used the Western world yard-stick, even though they are fully aware that by African standards, what they have done is shameful and unacceptable. We often want to appeal to beauti-ful value concepts like Ubuntu in our dealings, however, many of us choose to forget that Ubuntu has an antonym: *Intswelaboya*. *Intswelaboya* is a person whose actions display no traces of humanness; the word literally means 'one lacking fur'. In other words, all that is needed for one to be an animal is fur, otherwise the actions are that of an animal. There has been plenty of such behaviour in our community and because of the use of an inappropriate yardstick, such behaviour has been allowed to continue even though we have all been fully aware that it is not befitting a human being, let alone one considered a leader amongst such species.

I trust I have argued sufficiently for the fact that a transformative process will take into account a deeper relationship between Church and State but more so the people placed in the leadership of these structures. The way we educate our young people needs to seriously take into consideration some of the Indigenous Knowledge Systems and how these are applied in society for its transformation.

Conclusion

A serious appeal to both Church and State would be made for an earnest engagement within education for all our people. I have intentionally avoided reviewing the current educational system because I believe it is in a flux and there is no solid track that can be followed. This is unfortunate seeing that we already have a second group of young people already halfway through their initial years of schooling, under failing experimental systems. I have also resisted the great temptation to make proposals for government on the matter of education because my main argument is that this is a partnership and as such everyone must come to the table with some ideas to be workshopped. This partnership is the only means to ensure an education that not only looks at the history of where we come from, the values that formed us as a people, but also one that aids us in realising that the great Goliaths that face our nation can only be fought by the joining of hands. The kind of community that the Church seeks to establish is indeed a step further in challenging its members to the gift that is Christ Jesus; it is this gift however that would help them in aiding the rest of society to the ideals the gospel deems best for all of God's creation. This ideal is not to be forced upon anyone, but by our sheer witness to the saving grace of the gospel, let those who look upon it wonder

and seek the power with which such marvels are achieved. Then they will discover Christ Jesus, the Son of God.

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Essay 8

***The Christian formation of South African believers for
engagement with State and Society***

Louise Kretzschmar[263]

At the start of the 21st century, many challenges face the people of South
Africa – as with people elsewhere. South Africans were recently buoyed up
as a result of having successfully hosted the first World Cup football tourna-
ment held in Africa. How did we do it? It was by putting aside our dif-
ferences, pooling our skills and resources and working together to achieve a
common purpose. Even though the tournament is past, its influence remains
in a sense of national pride and accomplishment. Visitors and television
spectators were presented with a positive picture of our continent and its
people. For a short period, the successes and defeats of the participating
teams and our competence and hospitality eclipsed problems such as unem-
ployment, poverty, lack of service delivery and, even, crime.

Now that the visitors have gone, we need to ask where we are going as
a nation. In connection with the country's governance, for example, what is
the reality of the South African situation compared to what the leaders
proclaim it to be? How can the focus shift to governing the country well and
wisely rather than perpetuating political power struggles? How can the State
make it possible for citizens to sleep safely in their beds at night without
being plagued by homelessness, brutal attacks, rape, hunger and despair?
Why do so many live in dirt and want, freezing or frying in inadequate
shelters while others live in luxury and squander the resources of the coun-
try? How can the Christian churches engage with the State and civil society
by giving witness to the call of God as provided, for example, in Micah 6.8?:

> He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the
> LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness,
> and to walk humbly with your God?[264]

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[263] Prof. Louise Kretzschmar is Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of South
Africa.

[264] Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard
Version.

In this essay, I will not provide a detailed analysis or historical survey of Church-State relations in Africa nor present an extensive global analysis. Rather, the aim of the essay is to discuss the kind of discipleship, or formation, that is required for Christian believers to engage appropriately with the State and society in South Africa.[265]

A brief historical sketch of Church-State relations in Africa

Although space does not permit a detailed analysis, it is necessary to place the discussion within a broad historical context. For this purpose, African history can be thought of in terms of *four* periods, *beginning* with a centuries-long period of African governance. The *second* period was the colonial period that began on the coast with the arrival of the Portuguese in the late 15th century, and continued with the 'scramble for Africa' during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the *third* period, many African countries gained independence from colonial and/or white rule, beginning with Ghana in 1957, and ending with South Africa in 1994. South Africans can learn from what occurred in terms of Church-State relations in Africa during the last five decades. Currently, we are in a *fourth*, pivotal period of African history. Since 1994, not only in South Africa, but also in other African countries, the inhabitants have become more vocal about issues like political governance, economic policy, culture and ethnicity, the position of women and children, and many other issues of importance for our future. Many voices are asking questions and/or proposing solutions to Africa's problems (see 4.1 below).

For instance, during the third period of independent African rule, friction arose between the Church and African governments over a number of issues. These included control of schools, what constituted democratic rule, rights within a one-party State system, press freedom, and the glorification of leaders by certain followers, who often employed some form of religious mystique to achieve legitimacy.[266] As the economic and other problems faced by African governments multiplied, several countries experienced civil unrest, military coups or civil wars. The 'Cold' War between the United States of America, the Soviets and China also played a role in political and military conflicts in countries such as Zaire, Angola and Mozambique. In many African countries, there was limited economic growth but rapid

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[265]   I have provided a range of supporting biblical references for readers who may not have access to the other books quoted.

[266]   Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity*, 1950–1975 (Cambridge: University Press, 1979), 151.

population growth and this led to excessive economic inequalities and wide-spread disillusion with government. Thousands of partly educated young people could find no work, but witnessed their leaders living in luxury, protected by military and security forces. There was a severe shortage of technical staff, money and equipment to build and repair infrastructure such as roads, ports, schools and hospitals. Salaries for skilled personnel dropped and many millions left the continent. As dissatisfaction increased, many rulers paid more attention to clinging on to power by favouring members of their own tribe or inner circle and less to governing their countries for the benefit of their citizens. For example, from 1978–2002, in Kenya under Daniel Arap Moi, and since 2000, in Zimbabwe, there was a trend towards totalitarianism and the elimination or marginalisation of any opposition, whether from the Church or other quarters.[267]

How did the churches respond to these and other issues? The situations across the continent were too diverse to give rise to a single model of interaction. Often, the relationship between the Church and new African leaders was ambiguous, influenced by the experience such leaders had had of the Church and its missionary leadership. Some leaders had been trained at mission schools, or had members of their family within the leadership of the Church. In Zambia, for example, where the head of State, Kenneth Kaunda, was a convinced Christian, there was a significant measure of co-operation. Also, in the early years many countries needed the Churches to help run existing schools, hospitals and development projects.[268] By way of contrast, in Equatorial Guinea, where the population was predominantly Catholic, President Nguema outlawed the Church. He "... expelled the bishops and the missionaries and tortured or massacred the country's more prominent citizens with an almost unparalleled impartiality" and he sentenced to death two thirds of the National Assembly that had been set up in 1968.[269] No wonder a quarter of the population fled the country. In short, Church-State relations differed depending on the diverse situations experienced by the churches.

Below I discuss three general approaches to Church-State relations: 'collaboration', 'neutrality', and 'critical engagement'. Collaboration means that the necessary critical distance between the Church and the State is not maintained, resulting either in the Church dominating the State or, more often, a Church that is subservient to the State. A Church that seeks to remain 'neutral' often lapses into disengagement or escapism, leaving the State free

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[267] See Hastings, *History of African Christianity*, 185–187 for other examples.
[268] Hastings, *History of African Christianity*, 187–189.
[269] Hastings, *History of African Christianity*, 193–194, see also 95, 140–141.

to pursue its own policies, the practical effect of which is often similar to that of collaboration. Finally, the approach of 'critical engagement' seeks to interact actively with the State (and society), but not in a subservient manner. It is this third model that is commended in this essay as the most appropriate response from a Christian perspective.

The trap of collaboration

We learn from history that in 313 AD, the Emperor Constantine reversed the earlier policies of the Roman emperors according to which Christians were persecuted by the State. Later, Christianity became a 'State religion' and in Europe, up until the end of the medieval period in the 15th century, there was a close association between the Church and the State. Following the Reformation of the 16th century, the subsequent religious wars and the growth of the modern State in Europe, the 'Constantinian' model was slowly replaced with the model of the separation between the Church and State that is more commonly followed today.[270] This is a very different model to that of most Muslim countries, where the State usually takes on the responsibility of furthering the interests of Islam, hence the ongoing religious conflicts in northern Nigeria and the recently established South Sudan.

Collaboration can take many forms, but it is used here in the sense of uncritical support for the governing authorities. One example of this is the support of the Catholic Church for Portuguese colonial rule in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique up until the fall in1974 of the anti-Communist government of Antonio Salazar in Lisbon. Because of this close association, when independence was finally gained, many new leaders were antagonistic towards Christianity, and particularly towards the Catholic Church. Tragically, independence was followed by bitter civil wars which only ended in 1992 (Mozambique) and 2002 (Angola).

The collaboration between several Reformed churches, particularly the Dutch Reformed Church, and the South African Nationalist government is well attested. Especially from 1948 onwards, many Christians in South Africa supported the policies of this government despite limited, but fierce, critiques from within the Afrikaans-speaking churches, the firm or muted responses of the English-speaking churches, and resistance from within the ranks of black Christians.[271] As in Angola and Mozambique, some leaders

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[270] See Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church and State* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1986).

[271] See John de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1979) and Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988).

within the post-1994 South African government have expressed ambivalence or antagonism to the public role of the Christian faith. However, the new government also welcomed into its ranks leaders of the struggle from within the churches, such as Frank Chikane and Smangaliso Mkhatshwa. How did the churches react to the 'new' South Africa? In the initial post-1994 euphoria, many black Christians, including certain leaders, thought Church-State problems were a thing of the past. However, in recent years, criticism of the State from within Church circles has increased due to the failure of the government to improve the situation of its citizens and increased corruption within all levels of government.

Why is collaboration a trap for the Church? First, when the Church's spiritual leaders align themselves with the political and business elite, they forget that they are servants of God. Unlike Jesus (Luke 4.5–8), they may fail to detect or resist the temptations of idolatrous glory and authority. Second, because of their close association with government, church leaders fail to expose and resist the abuse of power, that is, the unjust, coercive and domineering use of power. Thus, millions of Africans have suffered as a result of the dictatorships of General Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire), Field Marshall Idi Dada Amin (Uganda), Emperor Bokassa (Central African Republic) and President Nguema (Equatorial Guinea). Significantly, Archbishop Tutu once said, "... our task as Church [leaders] is to remind our leaders ... that they are not God".[272] Third, spiritual leaders who are uncritically obedient to any particular political leader, party or ideology, place the Church in danger. For instance, by aligning the purposes of God with Apartheid, it's architects and supporters did the Church extensive harm. The fourth trap is that the Church is no longer free to champion the interests of those who are oppressed, marginalised or excluded by the policies and programmes of the State.

The escapism of 'neutrality'

Throughout Africa, during times of difficulty and persecution, some Christians have avoided criticising or confronting unjust rulers because they feared attack, imprisonment and death.[273] As those who have confessed their complicity with Apartheid within South Africa have acknowledged[274], there are

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[272] Francis Cull, "Desmond Tutu: Man of Prayer," in *Archbishop Tutu: Prophetic Witness in South Africa*, ed. L.D. Hulley et al. (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1996), 40.

[273] See Hastings, *A History of African Christianity*, 193, 195.

[274] These include oral or written confessions to other individuals, Church groups, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Rustenburg Declaration of 1990, accessed 21 September 2010,

many reasons why the Church lapses into neutrality. These include indifference to the suffering of others, deliberate ignorance, fear of imprisonment, torture and death, fear of ridicule or exclusion from one's social group, and sinful self-interest. Yet, as the testimony of the Church throughout the ages shows, neutrality as a model of Church-State relations avoids the responsibility of courageous witness (see 4.4 below). Often, it is precisely the faithful action of 'standing for the truth' by Christians, even to the point of martyrdom, that convinces others of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Another reason why many churches adopt a stance of neutrality is due to a limited or privatised understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the Christian faith is thought to be purely personal, its social content and implications are denied or ignored. This is a serious misunderstanding since the views, relationships and actions of individuals can never be purely personal. Nor can the extensive biblical witness be reduced to a "me and Jesus" focus.

The Kairos Document[275] condemned the false "Church theology" that preached reconciliation without repentance, failed to critique structural injustice and violence, and preached an otherworldly spirituality. As one of the clauses of the *Rustenburg Declaration* (1990) put it:

> 2.5.2 Some of us ignored Apartheid's evil, spiritualising the Gospel by preaching the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation. We adopted an allegedly neutral stance which in fact resulted in complicity with Apartheid. We were often silent when our sisters and brothers were suffering persecution.

More recently, the well-known evangelist Michael Cassidy[276] has said,

> ... in spite of large numbers of Christians in Africa and strong leadership in many parts of the Church, the largely successful evangelisation of Africa has yet to produce a reformation of the continent.

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http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid/dokumente/amptelikkestukke/Rustenburg%20Declaration%201990.pdf.

[275] *The Kairos Document* (1985), 8–14.

[276] Michael Cassidy, "Evangelism in Africa," in *Looking Back, Moving Forward: Reflections by South African Evangelicals*, ed. L. Kretzschmar and Moss Ntlha. (Johannesburg: The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, 2005), 96.

He argues that by focussing only on the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven, and failing to preach a 'Kingdom' theology in which obedience to Christ extends to every part of one's life, the 400 million Christians in Africa have not effected the transformation of their continent.

God's Kingdom has come into being in history in the Person of Christ, even though it has not yet been fully revealed or established on earth. Even creation longs for its deliverance from bondage (Romans 8:18–25). In the interim, the Church continues to pray "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). When Christians individually and corporately live as examples of this Kingdom, this personal and corporate transformation will have a constructive, transformative impact on our continent. This is infinitely preferable to escapist neutrality.

Clauses 9 and 15 of the Constitution of South Africa (1996)[277] protect the freedom of religion, yet, South Africa is a secular State. Much confusion surrounds this term. The adoption of a secular State does not mean that all forms of religious commitment are to be abandoned within society as a whole, nor does it mean that religious individuals or groups should be denied a public role. What it does mean is that no one religion, for example Christianity, Islam or African Traditional Religion, should be afforded special privileges or position by the State; there is a separation between the Church and the State. As we have seen, both a collaborationist model (in which the State uses the Church to propagate its own ideology and policies) and an escapist, supposedly 'neutral' model (in which the Church disengages from society and the State), damages the credibility of the Church and prevents it from fulfilling its mission.

An acceptance of the secular nature of the State, as defined above, does not mean that Christians ought to allow the worldviews of either secularisation or secularism to go unchallenged. In his book, *Christ and Counter-Christ*, Carl Braaten[278] notes these six signs of secularisation:

1   Religious institutions, symbols and doctrines have lost much of their influence.

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[277]   Constitution of South Africa (1996), accessed 21 September 2010, http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/a108-96.pdf.

[278]   Carl E. Braaten, *Christ and Counter-Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992), 69, quoted in James M. Childs, Jr, *Ethics in Business: Faith at Work* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 28.

2   Religious institutions have become sufficiently secular that their members are hard to distinguish from those who do not practise religion.

3   The autonomy of the public sector has been almost completely secured from religious interference.

4   History has no divinely ordained goal, and humanity is the measure of all that is happening in the world.

5   The natural world has been de-secularised and given over to technology.

6   Loss of religion leads to loss of moral authority.

The threat of secularisation for Church-State relations is that the Church is increasingly pushed to the margins of society, resulting in a 'disengagement' of Church and State. Thus, religious institutions (such as the Church) and doctrines (such as God as the source of moral authority) are deemed to be important only for Church members and not also for social well-being. Symbols (such as the cross) are trivialised; they hang from the necks of those who have no allegiance to the Christ who hung on a Roman cross to overcome sin and death on behalf of the world. Consequently, the social sector is regarded as being 'autonomous', and located outside the sphere of faith. Thereby, the corruption of State officials and the mismanagement of government are wrongly regarded as behaviour that cannot be critiqued by Christians on behalf of the citizens of the country.

As secularisation often leads to secularism (the world-view that individuals, society and the world itself have no need of God – and that God probably does not exist), humanity alone becomes 'the measure of all'. Creation is de-secularised (i.e. stripped of spiritual or transcendent meaning) and the world regarded as purely material and 'natural'. Creation and human existence no longer have an overall sense of an end, goal or destiny (*telos*); a consciousness of a transcendent, God-given purpose that extends beyond humanity and physical reality is lost.

Within this fundamental change of understanding or consciousness concerning God, ourselves and our world, Braaten's second point, that "... religious institutions have become sufficiently secular that their members are hard to distinguish from those who do not practise religion" is both a cause and a consequence of secularism. It is a cause since the failure of the people of God to be demonstratively different in character and conduct, causes the Church as a recognisable institution to lose much of its credibility. It is a consequence in that the increasing loss of identity and purpose on the part of the Church hastens the process of secularism. Often, the Church is first pushed to the periphery of 'real' life, and then it is ignored.

In Europe, agents of secularisation during the 19th century were Marxist ideas, working-class atheism, anticlericalism, critiques of a Christian world-view from intellectuals such as philosophers, scientists and historians, and the separation of morality from its theological basis.[279] In Africa, the media and education have become the primary agents through which a secular worldview is propagated. Therefore, unless the minds of the growing numbers of Christian converts are discipled, formed or trained to resist this dominant secular world-view, the engagement of the Church with the State and society will be superficial in the extreme.[280] Similarly, unless the issue of the moral credibility of the members of the Church in terms of their character (see 4.2 below), relationships (4.3) and conduct (4.4) is effectively addressed, anticlericalism will increase and the personal and social effect or 'fruit' of the many conversions that have occurred in Africa will be meagre. In short, neutrality leads to disengagement that, in turn, results in exclusion.

The importance of 'critical engagement'

What is meant by this term? In essence, it means that Churches in South Africa need to engage with the representatives of the State (and society as a whole), without losing their independence of mind or action. As noted above, they must not become co-opted by the State as uncritical collaborators. A similar understanding is reflected in the saying that the Church is "...to be in the world but not of the world". In 1995, the member churches of the South African Council of Churches adopted the phrase 'critical solidarity' to describe their relationship with the State. Significantly, in 2001, they amended this relationship to one of 'critical engagement' with the State.[281]

As we have seen, to maintain this delicate balance is no easy task. Hence, it is not enough simply to state that the Church *ought* to engage with the State without being captivated by it, without assisting believers to understand *how* such a difficult balancing act is to be achieved. Therefore,

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[279] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[280] These are further discussed in Louise Kretzschmar, "What can Theological Educators in Africa learn from the Contemporary Upsurge of Interest in Christian Ethics and Spirituality?" *Theologia Viatorum* 29, no 1, (2005): 31–57 and by Moss Ntlha, "Ethics and the Church in Africa" in L. Kretzschmar, W. Bentley; and A. van Niekerk, eds., *What is a Good Life? An Introduction to Christian Ethics in 21ˢᵗ Century Africa* (Kempton Park: AcadSA, 2009), 287-297.

[281] South African Council of Churches, accessed 24 August 2010, http://www.sacc-ct.org.za/about.html.

this discussion now turns to the ways in which Christian believers need to be discipled, or shaped, so that they can appropriately engage with the State and society. Below a four-fold Christian way of life is outlined that focuses on the following: intellectual formation and engagement (knowing); the formation of Christian identity and character (being); the formation of right relationships (relating); and the formation of the ability to perform right actions (doing). These four areas (or aspects) of our lives are not steps in a one-way process. Each ought to be part of an ongoing, mutual interaction aimed at the deepening and maturing of the faith, character, relationships and actions of individual believers and communities of believers.

A Christian way of life

KNOWING: "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind"

DOING: "You shall love ... your neighbour as yourself"

BEING: "... those who have clean hands and a pure heart"
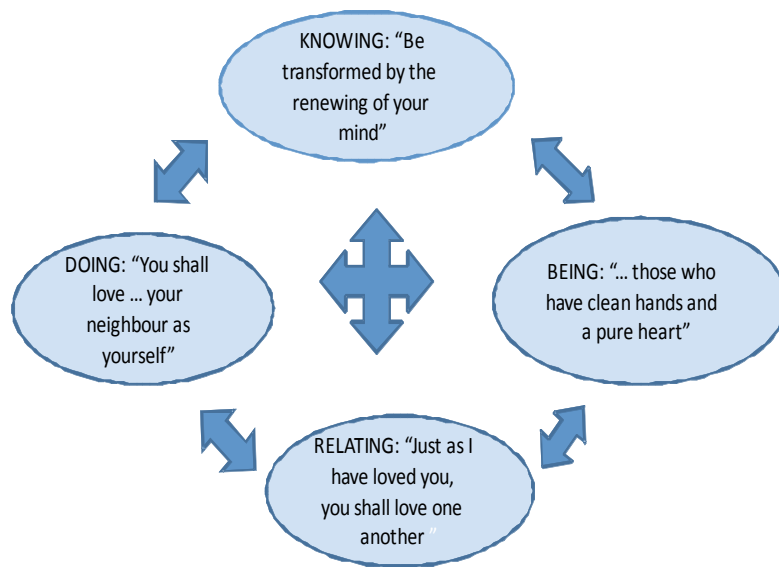
RELATING: "Just as I have loved you, you shall love one another"

By the formation of Christian believers is meant their discipleship that is aimed at producing mature believers. A disciple is a follower and a learner, someone who sits at the feet of Jesus to learn (Lk 10:39) and who then seeks to live according to Jesus' teaching (Jms 1:22-27). Whereas evangelical writers such as Watson[282] use the term 'discipleship' for this process of attaining "...to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13), many Catholic writers prefer to speak of formation. Willard speaks of Christians as "Christ-followers" and "apprentices".[283] Elsewhere,[284] I have argued that both spiritual formation (becoming like Christ) and moral formation (becoming a person of good character who is able act in ways that are good and loving) are essential elements of Christian discipleship.

KNOWING (Intellectual formation and engagement, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind")

> "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

Paul appealed to the believers in the Church in Rome to open themselves to a transformation of consciousness. Thus, a mental or intellectual change of mind (*metanoia)* is an essential part of Christian discipleship (see also Acts 10:1–48). A growing knowledge of God and our own selves leads to a new orientation to life; a redeemed mind can begin to discern the will of God, and to have insight into what is right and good in our lives. Whereas the world-view of secularism regards the idea of God as outdated and unnecessary (cf Col 2:6–10), for a Christian, the constituent element of all knowledge is the knowledge of God. As we read in the book of the Proverbs, "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* under-standing" (Prov 9:10 (KJV); see also Ps 111:10; 2 Cor 10:4–5; Eph 1:16–23; Col 2:1–3). As these and other verses stress, both knowledge and wisdom are essential in the life of the Church, and they begin in relationship with God.

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[282] D. Watson, *Discipleship*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981), 20–34.

[283] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 300. In this discussion of the sermon on the 'mount' (or 'plain'), Willard explains how believers can acquire the habits of goodness and become Christ-like.

[284] Louise Kretzschmar, "The Importance of Moral and Spiritual Formation in 21st Century Africa," in *African Christian Theologies in Transformation,* ed. E. Conradie (Stellenbosch: EFSA Ecumenical Foundation of South Africa, 2004), 86–110.

(Below we focus on the knowledge of God and the world. Knowledge of the self and others is discussed in 4.2 and 4.3).

The foundational element of a growing knowledge of God does not mean that the Church can fully comprehend the mystery of God. Thus, Christian theology has developed both the *kataphatic* tradition (that stresses God's self-revelation to us) and the *apophatic* tradition (that stresses the mystery of God).[285] But, as noted by McGrath,[286] to know *about* or *of* God, is inadequate and needs to be replaced with knowing God in a relationship of growing intimacy. This developing relationship transforms previously distorted conceptions of God's nature.

> What we are praying for is not merely an intellectual knowledge, but a felt knowledge which affects our whole being and therefore affects the way we see ourselves, other people and the world around us. This felt knowledge of God changes the patterns of our thinking and therefore of acting, breaks open the cocoon of our minds and hearts and liberates us from the constrictions which our upbringing and present environment are imposing on us.[287]

For the health of the Church, a view of reality which begins with a response to God's self-revelation and encompasses knowledge of the world, the self and others, is vital.

If knowing begins with the knowledge of God (Gal 4:8–9; Col 1:10; 1 Pet 1:3–11), what is knowledge itself? Knowing can mean familiarity with a person; a relational knowing. One instance of knowing is that of sexual intercourse (Gen 4:1, 25). From a biblical perspective, knowledge ought not to be regarded as purely abstract and disconnected from life and relationships. Knowledge can also take the form of having understanding about the world, a body of knowledge, a field of study, a skill, or expertise in a particular field. In philosophical terms, epistemology is the combination of knowledge (*episteme*) and reason (*logos*). It is the investigation of what we can know, of how we can know it, and whether we can validate what we know.

Both the ancient Greeks and the Bible (Prov 2:1–15; Jms 3:13-18) made much of wisdom (*sophia*). Wisdom is a deeper form of personal knowledge that gives one insight into people and situations. One does not need to

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[285] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 118–119.

[286] McGrath, *Christian Spirituality,* 4-5.

[287] Gerard Hughes, *God of Surprises* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 33–36.

be an intellectual to possess it – an intellectual may possess only information and lack the wisdom that an illiterate person has. A person who is wise has a perception that penetrates beneath the surface. Such a person has the insight and ability to act so as to achieve outcomes that are desirable and beneficial, rather than simply provoking reactions that may be counter-productive. Wisdom is closely associated with prudence (wise judgement) as it orientates one towards God and a life of goodness.[288] Prudence is more than the acquisition of information, it is a practical wisdom that perceives what is real and of value. Believers who are wise and prudent are able to contribute to the growth of goodness in both individual persons and society.[289]

For hundreds of years in Europe, the Church, whether Catholic or Reformed, stressed the importance of knowledge as a part of the discipleship of believers. This resulted, for example, in the preservation of knowledge during the 'Dark Ages' and the founding of the great universities of Italy, France, and England. However, despite the fact that many of the great scientists of the early modern period, such as Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Isaac Newton (1642–1727) were Christian believers, the secular intellectual movements that developed after the late 17th century, increasingly critiqued belief in God. They sought to replace the rich perception of knowledge as discussed above with an emphasis on the knowledge of only what can been seen and measured. This narrow perception of knowledge was stripped of faith in God, relationships, wisdom, prudence and goodness. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the emphasis on the knowledge of technology (from *technē,* meaning skill or art) has further restricted the perception of what constitutes knowledge, and its link to moral growth, social relationships and beauty.

Thus, the split in much of Western thinking between scientific and technical knowledge (regarded as the world of facts), and values (regarded as commitments or preferences) is a false one. Gill[290] quotes Robert N Bellah,

> The radical split between knowledge and commitment that
> exists in our culture and in our universities is not ultimately

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[288]   Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III 33, 2, 5, quoted in L.J. Munoz, *Virtues: An Enquiry into Moral Values for Our Times* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Sefer Books, 1996), 33.

[289]   Louise Kretzschmar, "The Formation of Moral Leaders in South Africa: A Christian-ethical Analysis of Some Essential Elements," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 128 (2007): 18–36.

[290]   Robin Gill, *Christian Ethics in Secular Worlds* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 34 quoted by Robert N Bellah, *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 257. See also Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 1–20, 65–94.

tenable. Differentiation has gone about as far as it can go. It is
time for a new integration.

The Christian faith holds that human beings are whole people living in rela-
tion to both God and the world, thus knowledge of reality cannot be restricted
to 'scientific' knowledge, still less to a narrow view of science. Furthermore,
without a deep knowledge of God, the world, and a framework of wisdom
and moral character, the untrammelled use of technology can be dangerous
and damaging.

In the same way that earlier Christian thinkers such as Aquinas,
Luther and Calvin had a profound effect on the world in which they lived,
Christian leaders and informed lay members of churches in South Africa can
engage (rather than disengage as the secularists would propose) with issues
of our day. These include debates on various world-views about the nature of
reality and the purpose of existence and practical matters related to politics,
poverty, and the family. Neither false pessimism nor optimism about Africa
can help us, but only a realistic appraisal of the positives and negatives of our
situation. Only once our problems are recognised, can we begin to solve
them.

For example, is the analysis contained in the book *Why Africa is
poor*[291] about what Africans (and particularly African leaders) can do
significantly to improve the continent's future validity? Some other key
ethical issues relate to moving beyond power struggles to good governance,
tackling business and medical issues, and respecting and managing our
environment.[292] How can the education and health[293] of the population be
radically improved? How can both land redistribution and food security be
achieved, these and many others are some of the key issues we face.

Encompassed within the above debate lie moral convictions about
who we are and how we ought to relate to one another. Thus, many theolo-
gians have added their voices to the debate, seeking to link pressing social
problems with theological convictions, and the conduct that ought to issue
from these convictions. Thus, the authors in the volume *Her-Stories: Hidden
Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* address many of the challenges related

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[291] Greg Mills, *Why Africa is Poor* (Johannesburg: Penguin, 2010).
[292] Munyaradzi M. Murove, ed., *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied
Ethics* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu/Natal Press, 2009).
[293] On HIV/AIDS see Philippe Denis, "Sexuality and AIDS in South Africa," *Journal of
Theology for Southern Africa* 115 (2003): 63–77 and Beverley Haddad, "Surviving the
HIV and AIDS Epidemic in South Africa: Women Living and Dying, Theologising and
Being Theologised," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 131 (2008): 47–57.

to gender, society, culture and the Church.[294] Ron Nicolson and his co-authors outline many implications of what it means to be a person-in-community. Other books discuss the post-colonial situation in Africa, development, HIV/AIDS, land, leadership, the environment and the dire situation of women and children.[295] The philosopher Augustine Shutte discusses what the ethic of *ubuntu* can mean for 21st century South Africa and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu and his daughter, Mpho, argue that as human beings are created by God, we are *Made for Goodness.*[296] Thus, if we perpetrate injustice, violence and hatred, we are not only destroying what God has made, but are also living contrary to our very identity and purpose as human beings.

In addition to counteracting an overly-narrow understanding of knowledge, and contributing to finding solutions to the problems faced by our continent, intellectual formation must include a critique of the distorted notions we have about both God and ourselves.[297] It is significant that spiritual writers such as Catherine of Siena say that knowledge of God and knowledge of self grow in relation to each other; the one enlightens the other. The recognition of our own sinfulness, disorder, weakness and poverty draws us to God, in whom we find who we truly can be. The "gentle mirror of God" reveals us to ourselves.[298] Genuine humility is to be grounded in what is true, to know God, and to know oneself as one truly is. This is the first step towards becoming a person of integrity and it is part of the journey towards the freedom won for believers by Christ (Rom 6:1–23; 7:14–25).

In conclusion, a full and rich experience of all the aspects of knowing as discussed above is not simply about acquiring information. It is the forma-

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[294]   Isabel A. Phiri, D.B. Govinden and S. Nadar, eds, *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002).

[295]   R. Nicolson, ed., *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture.* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008); see J.N.K. Mugambi, and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, eds., *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton, 1999) and L. Kretzschmar, W. Bentley; and A. van Niekerk, eds., *What is a Good Life? An Introduction to Christian Ethics in 21st Century Africa* (Kempton Park: AcadSA, 2009).

[296]   A. Shutte, "African Ethics in a Globalising World," in *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture,* ed. R. Nicolson. (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 15–34; A. Shutte, "*Ubuntu* as the African Ethical Vision," in *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics,* ed. M.F. Murove. (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 85–99; and Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness* (London: Rider, 2010).

[297]   Gerard Hughes, *God of Surprises*, 33–36.

[298]   Catherine of Siena, *Passion for the Truth, Compassion for Humanity: Selected Spiritual Writings,* ed. Mary O'Driscoll (New York: New City Press, 1993), dialogue 13, 98–99.

tion of a people with an orientation that opens their lives up to the love and wisdom of God, the insights of others, and in which they engage in a comprehensive investigation of what life is all about. A profound knowledge and wisdom is essential if the Church is to engage with others on an intellectual and practical level. The renewal of the mind, then, means that the various elements of knowing, including relational knowing, knowledge of our world, wisdom, prudence, skill and art are key elements of Christian formation.

BEING (the formation of Christian identity and character, "those who have clean hands and pure hearts")

> "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully" (Ps 24:3–4).

The question "who am I"? raises the issue of personal identity and character. Western cultural distortions of individual*ism* should not result in the abandoning of the importance of the being, identity and character of individual persons. Given the above focus on knowing God, this question ought rather to be phrased "whose am I?", or, "whose are we?" because when being and belonging are separated, loss of identity and relationships is the result. Furthermore, our characters have been formed by our responses to the many influences we have been exposed to, and these responses are usually determined by our value system. Therefore, personal identity cannot be separated from our understanding of God, reality, and our deepest convictions (as discussed under "knowing" above), and our relationships and actions (discussed in sections 4.3 and 4.4 below). These connections are borne out by the reflections of a Kenyan theologian. The late Hannah Kinoti wrote poignantly of the loss of identity and belonging of many in contemporary African society. Many young people, she says, are uncertain and disillusioned; they disregard authority, are immoral and act in ways that are disrespectful, and lack a sense of direction and accountability.[299]

As noted earlier, character cannot be discussed in isolation from what is of ultimate concern to us; the values we hold dear (Matt 6:19–21). In other words, who or what do we love? Those who forget their first love (Rev 2:4–

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[299]   Hannah Kinoti, "African Morality: Past and Present," in *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity,* ed. J.N.K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike (Nairobi: Acton, 1999), 73, 76.

5) may replace devotion to God and service to others with an unquenchable desire for wealth, power or destructive pleasures. Hence, there is a need for the formation of moral character. The goal is that of perfection (or whole-ness) and holiness of life (Matt 5:48, 1 Pet 1:13–16). A life of integrity is one in which the person is honest and whole, rather than fragmented, or twisted. An honest person is one in whom there is no guile or deceit, his/her word can be trusted (Matt 5:33–37). The necessity for Christians to live exemplary lives of integrity is clearly seen when considered against the backdrop of the numerous "cover-ups" of immoral acts perpetrated in families, churches and society. Only if wholeness and goodness are significantly present in the inner being and lives of members of the Church, can the Church have the moral credibility to call Government members to order when they acts in ways that are immoral, negligent or unjust.

In this subsection, I briefly discuss the virtues that counteract three of the prevalent moral temptations of our time, namely *greed*, the *abuse of power* and *destructive pleasure*.[300]

To begin with, *greed* (or avarice) is at the root of materialism. Greed is the unrestrained desire for things. Previously considered a vice, now within our consumerist culture, it is almost regarded as a virtue. This leads to an obsession with material goods, as Norvene Vest says "…we are shamelessly exhorted to believe that our spiritual hunger for fulfilment can be satisfied if only we have 'the right things'".[301] Because greed is in essence a spiritual problem, the promulgation of legal prescriptions (e.g. in business ethics), cannot eliminate it. In a person's driven, yet fruitless, attempts to fill their inner emptiness, all considerations of justice are abandoned. The 'lost-ness' of a person driven by greed becomes obvious in the effects of his/her actions. Like a snail moving across a rock, such a person leaves behind a slimy trail of conflict, lies, manipulation, injustice, corruption, and self-enrichment. Rather than treating people fairly, greedy people exploit others (Amos 5:16, 21–24; Isa 58:6–7).

In contrast to greed, a Christian ought to be motivated by compassion, the ability to 'feel with' others, which was a characteristic of Jesus' ministry (Mk 6:34; 8.2; Lk 7:13). True compassion is rooted in love and extends far beyond mere sympathy; it is seen in caring action (see point 4.4). Instead of

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[300] For a discussion of morality and virtue, see: J. Ahlers, B. Allaire, and C. Koch, *Growing in Christian Morality* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1995), 45.

[301] Norvene Vest, *Desiring Life: Benedict on Wisdom and the Good Life* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 2000), 73.

being greedy, Christians should be able to live lives of generosity towards others.

The *abuse of power* is motivated by self-aggrandisement and pride. The former can be defined as excessive self-praise and undue self-promotion that has no basis in reality. Pride, says Vest, is "...the pervasive habit of our culture … to think and act *as if* there were no God".[302] As we saw above, the adoption of a secular world-view implies that we ignore the fact that we are contingent (dependant) beings and the world is not self-created. We seek to construct our own reality. We display contempt for the God to whom we are accountable and owe our existence. Self-aggrandisement and pride, based as they are on a false consciousness, are fuelled by anger and conflict. Their results are the abuse of other people and creation.

In contrast to pride and the abuse of power, the virtue of reverence for human life is displayed in an appreciation of the sanctity and preciousness of all life. It rejects any form of harm to life and to the human body or person. Thus, Christians are exhorted to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and to abandon lives of anger, adultery, untruthfulness and retaliation because they perpetuate conflict. As God loves us, so we are to love others (Matt 5:13–48).

Thirdly, we come to the pursuit of *harmful pleasure.* Lust and gluttony stoke the fires of infidelity and the abuse of the God-given pleasures of the body such as taste, smell, hearing, sight and touch. Infidelity is a sin against one's own body as well as against the bodies of others. The obsessive pursuit of false pleasures leads, for example, to faithlessness in marriage, human-trafficking and grossly overweight (or underweight) bodies. It is seen in addictions of all kinds, such as to drugs, alcohol, pornography and gambling. The conspicuous consumption reflected in ostentatious homes, expensive vehicles, designer clothes, gourmet food and costly alcoholic beverages, is founded on selfishness, personal insecurity and lack of love. Like the rich man of Luke 16:19–31, such persons do not see the poor and sick at their gates, and have no respect for other people or creation as a whole, often treating them with contempt.

Instead of the pursuit of harmful pleasure, wholeness (or temperance) means a life of balance, self-mastery and harmony. It requires acting in a way that will lead to dignity and integrity of life for oneself and others. Christians ought *not* to be driven or joyless, but rather deeply grateful for the liberation Christ can bring into their lives. Increasingly, they are able to avoid falling prey to temptation, enabled to appreciate others and act with justice and love toward them.

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[302]   Vest, *Desiring Life*, 81.

But, in order for formation to take place in the inner being of a person, there needs to be a sense of personal guilt and responsibility on the one hand and a consciousness of oneself as separate from others and the world. However, speaking of traditional Africa, Nürnberger[303] argues:

> In fact, there are no clearly defined boundaries between self, the other and the whole ... Reality is one vast system of relationships. In this sense the whole of reality is "personalised". When a calamity strikes, the first question is always, "Who did it?"

What is required from a Christian perspective is the development of mature persons who experience the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and can increasingly relate with both freedom and responsibility to others and the world.[304] As the Anglican prayer book puts it, "Almighty God, our heavenly Father in penitence we confess that we have sinned against you through our own fault in thought, word and deed and in what we have left undone".[305] This capacity to accept personal guilt for our own actions (or, our failure to act) is essential in the development of moral character and personal responsibility. The development of moral capacity enables a person to be an actor in the world, rather than a spectator or victim. It is in knowing the love of God that an individual is able to value him or herself, and have the courage to embark on the journey of becoming all that God has made them to be.

According to Vest, spiritual and moral formation involves not the elimination but the *training* of desire. She says,

> If wisdom is centred in the desire for life, then virtue is the training of desire, the ongoing shaping of our hunger for life towards the good ... Virtue is the capacity to live and act in accord with our deep human desire for wholeness.[306]

When wisdom and goodness are combined, our hunger for life can be trained towards love for God and others, thereby moral identity and character are shaped. But, in what practical ways can this discipleship be nurtured? Let us

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[303]   Klaus Nürnberger, *The Living Dead and the Living God* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2007), 31.

[304]   Nürnberger, *Living Dead and Living God*, 186.

[305]   *An Anglican Prayer Book*, (Jeppestown: Collins/Church of the Province of Southern Africa, 1989), 45.

[306]   Vest, *Desiring Life,* 59.

look at the example of Methodism in the time of John Wesley. There are similarities between the context within which John Wesley lived and our own. Life in England between the 17th and 18th centuries was characterised by violence, social unrest, poverty, child abuse, huge disparities between the rich and poor, and the decline of Christian faith and spirituality. Influenced by William Law, John Wesley realised that one cannot be half a Christian; one's entire self needed to be dedicated to God's service. Wesley said that, as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, a Christian is

> ... 'renewed after the image of God; in righteousness and true holiness;' when the love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy and malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind. In a word, it is that change whereby the early, sensual, the devilish mind is turned into the 'mind that was in Christ Jesus'.[307]

Methodism, as its name implies, was greatly concerned with practical, methodical moral and spiritual formation.[308] Wesley was concerned to see the lives of believers change as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit through the practice of key disciplines. These included Bible study, prayer (both private and communal), church attendance, participation in the Lord's Supper, fasting and active participation in 'classes' (cell groups). These 'classes' served as means of encouragement, teaching and mutual accountability. Another important source of Christian experience and formation was music. In Wesleyan spirituality, the use of hymnody deepened the understanding of Christian teaching and believers could experience their faith at a profoundly emotional level.

In our day, Foster speaks of the 'inward' spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting and study,[309] confirming the need for the formation of disciples in the areas of "knowing" and "being". For instance, the disciple of Christ is taught self-discipline by fasting and it unites love for God with love for neighbour. Instead of either gluttony (over-eating) or anorexia (under-eating), disciples learn that God's gift of food is to be

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[307] John Wesley [as quoted in] *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol., Sermon XLV, *The New Birth,* II, 5. New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1885. Accessed 26 September 2010. http://books.google.co.za/.

[308] See Wessel Bentley, "The formation of Christian leaders: A Wesleyan approach", *Koers* 75, no 3 (2010):551–565.

[309] Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), 13–66.

appreciated (neither over- nor under-emphasised) and generously shared with others.

RELATE (the formation of right relationships, "Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another")

> "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:34–35).

In many senses, the Christian faith can be described as a relational faith. It is in loving and being loved that the formation of character and good relationships takes place. For, if we do not experience God's love, how can we love others, especially our enemies? It is true that the minds of Christians need to be renewed and their characters formed in order to develop good relationships with others and to act in ways that are right and loving. Conversely, it is also true that we are formed by being in relationships with others. Good character and relationships with others are an essential aspect of Christian engagement with society and State (Acts 6:3; Rom 12:3–21; 1 Tim 3:1–7). In this section, we discuss the Church, family and community, and in the following section, we discuss Christian engagement with society and the environment.

Jesus chose twelve disciples (Mk 1:16–20; 2:13–14; 3:13–19; Acts 1:12–26) to form the nucleus of what was to become the Church. Later, it was the combination of the work of the Holy Spirit and the comprehensive witness of the followers of "the Way" that drew thousands into the Church (Acts 2:37–47; 5:12–16). Still later, Paul spoke of the Church as a body in which each part was valuable and important (1 Cor 12:12–31). It is in the 'school' of the Church community that both character and relationships are formed.[310] In this process, individual believers need to grow in love, develop character and have caring relationships. They need to be mentored by more mature disciples and to be accountable to the Christian community, especially at a local level (1 Tim 5:1–2; 2 Tim 2:22–26). Hence, the host of "one another" passages in the New Testament (e.g. John 15:12; Col 3:9–17; 1 Pet 4:8–10; 1 John 4:7–12). In the history of the Church, where close relationships, mutual love, support, and accountability were a prominent feature of

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[310] Susanna Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

Christian experience, mature believers were formed, enabling them to exercise a profound impact on society.[311]

This means that relationships within small groups, the local church and between Christians at regional, national and international levels are vital elements of Christian formation. Within such groups, accountability, commitment and joint celebration are central elements. According to Foster, the spiritual disciplines of confession, guidance, worship and celebration nurture the 'corporate' element of the Church by bringing together God's grace, personal effort and communal support.[312] Elsewhere, Foster[313] speaks of his own experience of a small formation community and the penetrating questions concerning prayer, meditation, temptation, movements of the Holy Spirit, opportunities to serve others and encounters with Christ in the study of the Bible that enable genuine fellowship to form. In answering these questions, only honesty will suffice, hence mutual love and accountability deepen.

If believers do not grow in terms of character, love for God and others, churches will subside into conflict, anger, jealousy, malice, slander, abusive language, quarrels, factions, lack of love, false teachings, fornication and lukewarm apathy (Col 3:8–9; Gal 5:19–21; Rev 1:9–3.22). Further, if the Church simply replicates the power struggles evident within the government and in society, what witness can it have? Rather, what is required is love, honesty, interdependence and mutual respect.

What then of the role of the family and community? Undoubtedly, believers are profoundly shaped by their families and local communities, for both good and ill. Unless one's experience of family has been very negative or toxic, it is key arena of personal formation and socialisation. Members of the family are introduced to what is considered acceptable behaviour within their relevant cultures, local communities and, for many in South Africa, the community of the Church. It is in the family that many practical and life skills are learnt and children can be loved and protected. Children ought, for instance, to be taught honesty and self-discipline, to be cared for and to care, to share and relate, to be supported and to be responsible.[314] A realisation of the importance of the family ought to spur the churches on to facilitate better parenting and to care for the many, many orphans and abused or neglected

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[311]   Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for our Time* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997).

[312]   Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 125-171.

[313]   Richard Foster, *Prayer*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 270–271.

[314]   See André van Niekerk, "How are Good People Formed? In Conversation with Johannes A. van der Ven," in *What is a Good Life? An Introduction to Christian Ethics in 21st Century Afric*a, ed. L. Kretzschmar et al. (Kempton Park: AcadSA, 2009), 101–129 and Johannes A. Van der Ven, *Formation of the Moral Self.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

children in South Africa. Friendships within and beyond the family are also important ways in which individuals and groups are formed. Consider, for instance, the close relationships between Paul, Barnabas, Luke, Silas and Timothy, as revealed in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

Family relationships can be complex, difficult and even damaging, as we see in the many stories about Abraham and his descendents (Genesis 12–50). One's family relationships are important, and no Christian ought to abandon their family responsibilities (1 Tim 5:3–8). Jesus, for example, stayed with his widowed mother until he was about 30 years old, valued the friendship of the small family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Lk 10:38–42; Jn 11:1–44; 12:1–3) and, even on the cross, ensured that his mother would be cared for by John (Jn 19:26–29).

Important though the family and loyalties to one's ethnic or social group are, however, the believer's *ultimate* loyalty is to God and God's Kingdom, not to his/her family, clan or social group. It is in connection with this primary loyalty that some of the 'hard' sayings of Jesus in relation to family are to be understood. In Luke 9:59–62, he tells a would-be follower who has just lost his father, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." In Matthew 12.46 he says, "... whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus himself placed the work of his Father higher than that of his loyalty or obedience to Mary and Joseph (Lk 2:41–53). The point is that in relation to Christ, and in serving Christ by doing what is pleasing to God, other loyalties are not primary (Phil 3:4–8). One implication of this is that the corruption, lack of delivery and nepotism (favouring family members in terms of business transactions and government posts or contracts) so common in Africa is contrary to loyalty to Christ. This is because in terms of their job descriptions and the fact that they are paid out of public funds, civil servants are responsible to the citizens of the country to perform their duties diligently. If State officials who are also members of churches are uncaring, lazy or incompetent, or if they lie, steal, cheat and commit fraud, how can they claim to be followers of Christ?

What then of the community to which people belong? The importance of community life in an African context has often been stressed, and rightly so. I personally deeply value the way in which the appreciation of community within African culture contributes to the understanding and experience of fellowship within the Church. However, in terms of the formation of believers and Church-State relations, blind loyalty to one's social group or

community, whether on the part of Afrikaners, Africans, or any other group, has severely negative consequences.[315]

Communitarian cultures are characterised by strong in-groups that display concern for others. Some key orientations are, "people's fears of isolation, and abandonment ... [they are] are motivated to maintain relationships. Specific relationship-orientated motives would include familiar ones, like the need for affirmation, as well as those less common in the West, like the need for deference and the need to avoid blame.[316] When individuals from communitarian cultures become Christ followers, they need to become orientated towards God. This change of loyalties brings a new freedom,

> First generation converts have often emphasised that a change of loyalty to Christ brought them liberation from fear of stigmatisation, taboos, impurity, 'heat', witchcraft, sorcery, curses, the consequences of one's own words, wishes and failures, the exploitation of diviners, the authority and power of the ancestors, the domination of living superiors, the constraints of one's place in the social system and the abuse of power by males over females.[317]

As shown in this essay, all individual members of the Christian community are encouraged to develop as persons, relate to a wide range of people within the Church and also have a ministry within society. But, with this freedom comes the responsibility to act as a disciple of Christ (Rom 8:1–14; Eph 4:1–31): "Responsibility presupposes freedom, but freedom without responsibility degenerates into selfishness and arbitrariness".[318] Loyalty to Christ and a commitment to be a witness of his Kingdom may also require believers to exercise responsibility to speak out against certain wrong actions on the part of the group, community or leaders because of a primary loyalty to Christ (Acts 5:26–32; Gal 2:1–21). But, because of the pervasive influence of the group, fear of exclusion from the group, and fear of powerful leaders, the development of a prophetic witness in post-independent Africa has been

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[315] See Louise Kretzschmar, "Christian Spirituality in Dialogue with Secular and African Spiritualities with Reference to Moral Formation and Agency," *Theologia Viatorum* 32, no 1, (2008): 63–96, and Louise Kretzschmar, "Cultural Pathways and Pitfalls in South Africa: A Reflection on Moral Agency and Leadership from a Christian Perspective," *Koers* 75, no 3 (2010):567–588.

[316] Martin M. Chemers, *An Integrative Theory of Leadership* (New Jersey: Mahwah, 1997), 123, 126.

[317] Nürnberger, *The Living Dead and the Living God*, 171.

[318] Nürnberger, *The Living Dead and the Living God*, 238.

limited. This partly explains why the African continent is plagued by so many dictators.

An example of relational formation can be seen in the ministry of Dietrich Bonhoeffer during the Second World War. Prior to his arrest, he sought to create a community life for the young pastors in training to form them to lead the Confessing Church in its resistance to the systemic evil of Nazism. What formative practices were required to move away from the conformist or collaborationist stance of the majority of the German Christians? The first was a recognition that they were in communion with Jesus Christ where self-centred love that is "calculating, manipulative and domineering" would be replaced by spiritual love that is "submissive to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit and God's Word".[319] Second, large parts of the day were spent together and included study, manual work, prayer, singing and discussion. Third, certain times were set aside to enable seminarians to be alone with God. Kelly and Nelson quote John Selby,

> The most lonely, frustrated people I have worked with have not been the loners but the people who are addicted to social interaction. Afraid to encounter themselves in solitude, they fill their lives with shallow interactions that keep them from ever coming face to face with their own solitary spirit.[320]

The fourth aspect of the community life at Finkenwalde was that of service. Three elements were especially stressed, listening to others, active, practical helpfulness, and forbearance with each other.[321] Finally, Bonhoeffer stressed confession to each other and the Lord's Supper. Confession, he felt, exposes sin and self-deception to the light, brings the community closer together, draws all to the cross of Christ where forgiveness and new life are found, and brings assurance of forgiveness. Both individuals and the community as a whole benefit from this uncomfortable, but healing, process and all are enabled to prepare for the Lord's Supper that is then celebrated in true newness of life.[322] Churches in South Africa can learn much from this approach to relational formation, not only in terms of the training of Christian leaders, but also in promoting genuine fellowship within the churches.

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[319] G.B. Kelly and F.B. Nelson, *The Cost of Moral Leadership: The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 161.

[320] John Selby, *Solitude*, cited by Kostya Kennedy in *Attaché* (February 2001): 50, quoted in Kelly and Nelson, *The Cost of Moral Leadership*, 166.

[321] Kelly and Nelson, *The Cost of Moral Leadership*, 167–170.

[322] Kelly and Nelson, *The Cost of Moral Leadership*, 170–172.

Louise Kretzschmar

DOING (the formation of the ability to perform right action, "You shall love ... your neighbour as yourself")

> "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 19:27).

To do what is right, even at some cost to oneself, requires courage. According to Martin Luther King (1929-1968),[323]

> Courage and cowardice are antithetical [opposites]. Courage is an inner resolution to go forward in spite of obstacles and frightening situations; cowardice is a submissive surrender to circumstance. Courage faces fear and thereby masters it; cowardice represses fear and is thereby mastered by it.

But, courageous action is only possible once the formation of believers in the areas of knowing, being and relating, as discussed above, has occurred to some extent. Thus, formation is in a sense a deductive process. What we do follows from knowing God, understanding reality, growing in integrity, and deepening good relationships. However, as already noted, Christian formation is also an inductive process; it takes place when believers act on the basis of their faith. In other words, it is often through *action* that the transformation of consciousness, character and relationships occurs. This inductive process is seen, for instance, in the actions of the woman who touched Jesus' cloak (Mk 5:25–34), the man who took up his bed and walked (Lk 5:17–26), and Zacchaeus' act of restitution (Lk 19:1–10). In many South African churches, Christians are called *bazalwane* (believers). But faith is not belief in the sense of mere intellectual agreement. Faith is action on the basis of trust in God, as revealed in Hebrews 11:6–40 and Jms 2:14–26.

One form of Christian action is that of resistance to tyranny, whether it occurs in the home, Church, or other spheres of life. In terms of Church-State relations, Christians need consciously to avoid the trap of uncritical support for members of the State. Thus, resistance to attempts of the State to act unjustly towards its citizens and to muzzle the Church is a key form that this critical engagement needs to take. Thus, in Zaire, following the declaration of 'cultural liberation' by Mobutu Sese Seko in 1971, Archbishop Malula resisted the attempts of the President to enforce total obedience to

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[323] From his book entitled *A Testament of Hope*, 512–513, quoted in Ahlers, Allaire and Koch, *Growing*, 142.

himself and the attempts of the government to nationalise the Catholic University of Lovanium, and close down Church-run schools, youth organisations, newspapers and radio stations.[324] In Uganda, under Idi Amin, many people were assassinated, including the priest Father Clement Kiggundu in 1973. In 1977, the hardworking Bishop Janani Luwum was arrested, refused to sign a false confession and, after praying for his fellow prisoners, was killed by Amin's soldiers.[325] In other African countries, many others were imprisoned, punished, martyred or went into exile.

Some months after the end of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, I remember listening to the heart-rending stories of both Hutu and Tutsi Christians who testified to the love and courage of many fellow Christians who hid neighbours threatened with death. Many other Christians could not tell their stories; they had been slaughtered for protecting neighbours from a different ethnic group and refusing to participate in brutal attacks.

Another form of resistance to tyranny is to speak out and act in support of those who are abused, treated with injustice, exploited or marginalised. In 1959, when the University College of Fort Hare in South Africa was "taken over and radically altered" by the Nationalist government, Prof Z.K. Matthews and Dr M'timkhulu resigned, and the former forfeited his entire pension.[326] Another example was that of Beyers Naudé, an Afrikaner who had "clean hands and a pure heart". He refused to promote Afrikaner interests at the cost of the well-being of other South Africans. Many others were beaten, imprisoned, or exiled and others lie in unknown graves because of their courageous actions in support of a non-racial, just South Africa.

In Kenya, Wangari Maathai[327] resisted those who sought to degrade and destroy the environment, particularly the country's natural forests. After the fall of Daniel Arap Moi, she worked from 2003 to 2005 within the new government. Later, frustrated with its corruption and lack of commitment, she started a mainly women's 'Green Belt' movement that planted over 40 million trees in Kenya. In 2004, she became the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Her love for God, for the people and for God's creation is one of a piece.

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[324] Hastings, *History*, 191–193.
[325] Frederick Quinn, *African Saints: Saints, Martyrs and Holy People from the Continent of Africa* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 133.
[326] Hastings, *History*, 104.
[327] Glenn Stavridis, "Environmental ethics for the earth," in *What is a good life? An introduction to Christian Ethics in 21st century Africa,* ed. L. Kretzschmar, W. Bentley, and A van Niekerk (Kempton Park: AcadSA, 2009), 243–260.

Another form of critical engagement on the part of the churches is to resist what Botha[328] has termed the contemporary 'take-over' of spirituality by political and economic forces and the ideologies of consumerism and corporate capitalism. This 'take-over', he argues, has silenced certain other important traditions, for example, "a concern for community, social justice and the extension of an ethical ideal of selfless love and compassion towards others".[329] If the Church replaces love for God with the false god of consumerism, its members will be unable to practise a lifestyle characterised by simplicity and generosity. Nor will it act as a prophetic voice in relation to the State by insisting that wise, sustainable and fair programmes of economic justice be implemented.

Another way in which Christians can express God's love for the world and enact their faith is through compassionate caring. This is how Hudson puts it,

> Any spiritual experience – whether it be one of solitude or silence, prayer and fasting, oral worship and celebration – which does not result in a deeper concern for our suffering neighbour can hardly be called Christian.[330]

In practising compassionate caring, the focus of the Church is placed on serving the needs of all people, rather than serving the interests of the powerful. In the process of caring, both the carer and the one who receives mercy are transformed. In caring for others in a practical way, the Church becomes an example of the love of God rather than degenerating into a self-engrossed and selfish social club. Even though what the Church itself can do in this area is limited, and it is not the task of the Church to do all that the government ought to be doing for its citizens, it remains an important area of witness. The Church can also insist by its example, votes and voice that the resources of government are used wisely, justly, and well.

Churches can also engage in discerning and strategic service. A wise combination of spiritual discernment and strategic planning are required if churches are not to become paralysed, or exhausted, by the often overwhelming need of many people for protection, support, intervention, service

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[328] Pieter Botha, "Secular Spirituality as Virtue Ethics: Actualising the Judeo-Christian Tradition Today," in *Secular Spirituality as a Contextual Critique of Religion*, ed. C. Du Toit (Pretoria: Unisa Research Institute for Theology and Religion, 2006), 96.

[329] Botha, "Secular Spirituality," 99.

[330] Trevor Hudson, *Compassionate Caring: A Daily Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope* (Surrey: Guilford, 1999), 75.

and love. No one individual or local church can meet the needs of all. Discernment is a process of listening to the voice of God so that each believer can first discover their own ministry, then develop and exercise it, within the overall ministry of the Christian community. Equally, each local church needs prayerfully to identify and develop only a few focussed ministries, as indicated by the callings of their members and the locality in which the Church resides. In this way, Church members can serve not only those they come across in daily life, but all of South African society.

In order for this to happen, members of churches need to practise the 'outer' spiritual disciplines of simplicity, solitude, [mutual] submission and service.[331] Believers need to be nurtured and trained to engage in those ministries that are linked to their own callings, experience and abilities. It is the task of the leaders and ministers of the Church (Eph 4:11–16) to equip the saints (committed followers of Christ) to serve God in the work of ministry in their homes, communities, factories, schools, government departments, hospitals, lawyers' offices and businesses.

This essay has already pointed to many areas of need in South Africa and the rest of the continent. Yet, potentially, South Africa could be peaceful and prosperous. This potential needs to be unlocked, and many of the people sitting in the pews of the churches are in a position to do so. Many of them are decision-makers and workers in government, business and civil society. But are these laypeople inspired by a vision of the Kingdom of God and trained to perform 'good works' in their workplaces (Eph 2:8–10)? Are all Christians striving to make our country a better place in which to live, or are they trapped in the pitfalls of collaboration, neutrality or selfish consumerism?

Christian leaders themselves need consciously to embark on the journey of formation, some elements of which have been discussed in this essay, so that they can lead by example. The vision that can inspire them to act morally in the here and now is the hope of the New Jerusalem, "... God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:3b–4).

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[331]   Foster, *Celebration*, 69–122.

Conclusion

Disciples within South African churches need to rise to the challenges of our times, as did many millions before us within the pages of the Bible and Church history. This is not the first time that the Church has been weighed down by unscrupulous or poorly trained leaders, or confronted with a nation in which many are decadent, cruel and indifferent to God. It is not the first time that the Church has faced the problem of a widening gap between the rich and the poor or inept political leadership. There are solutions to the problems faced by our country and our churches. Again God calls the Church to be itself, the body of Christ to whom a ministry in the world has been given. By drawing on their ongoing encounter with the living God, who transforms them through the renewing of their minds, Christians can see the realities of the world as God sees them. As their moral character matures, their ability to relate with love and act with courage is shaped. In all of these ways, they communicate the truth of the gospel and God's invitation to embark on a God-centred life. There is a price to be paid, of course, that of a radical change in our consciousness, characters, relationships and conduct. But it is a price worth paying as it leads to true, full and abundant life.

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