

**THEOLOGY OR "CHRISTIAN IDEOLOGY" -
THE PROBLEM OF HUBRIS**

Dr Gerald J Pillay
Faculty of Theology
University of Durban-Westville
4001 Durban
Rep of South Africa

ABSTRACT

In addressing the question: Is the church in South Africa truly the Church of Christ, and its message truly Gospel?, the author contends that Christianity in South Africa is to a large extent system-bound, and therefore idolatrous. Because theology is a continuous critical quest, and its task not only to clarify and confirm, or evaluate, but also to re-examine the church's teaching, believers should commit themselves to a critical analysis of the fundamental issues of the present system. An ideological breakthrough is needed to change society's consciousness and could be brought about if the churches, as communities of faith, were to present the Gospel to deliver man from dehumanisation within his own systems. When the church is truly Church, the questions that have hitherto caused anxiety, would find their own resolution.

* * *

A writer in **Theology Today** made the following pertinent observation:

It is true that our political and social problems are monumental and need solution,

but it may very well be that at their root is a deep spiritual crisis which makes any cleaning-up operations frustrating illusions. The truth is that we have lost touch with the depth of being and hence have become alienated from ourselves, from each other and from our environment as a whole. Our society, like Humpty Dumpty cannot be put together by all the King's horses and men, no matter how well financed they be. In fact, they may only make matters worse.¹

I was requested by the organizers of this conference to suggest what the role of the church should be in South Africa and especially to make concrete and practical recommendations for a programme of action that the church could adopt vis-à-vis the socio-political and other problems it encounters.

It will be presumptuous for anyone to advocate "easy steps" for solving the dilemma that the Church in our country faces, not only because there are no **easy** steps but also because the church in this country has still to validate its claim to be the community of faith, the alternate society. Such a claim may make sense to several White South Africans, but leaves several others confused. A committed Hindu South African, for example, finds it quite incongruous that Christians, both politicians and church leaders, can string together their political views, God and Christianity in one sentence, yet are not aware of the ambivalence of their position. Hence, while for some the issue is "What course of action should the church embark on?", for several others the problem is more fundamental, namely, "Is the church, as we experience it, is truly the church of Christ or is its message truly Gospel (**euangellion**)?"

May I suggest that unless this question is addressed first, the question of what the church should do cannot be handled. Activity will sadly remain the toil of Sisyphus for it is not as if we have a church above the system seeking to

-
1. **Williams, J G 1971. Other-worldly Christianity: Some positive considerations. Theology Today 27.** This comment was made in connection with a different issue to the one with which this paper is concerned.

transform it through committed service (*ore et labore*). What we have are churches firmly within the system inadvertently bolstering it. Therefore, all its actions, though sincere and undoubtedly well-intentioned, will be the futile exercise of putting Humpty Dumpty together again.

I have, therefore, chosen the above topic in the attempt to address myself to the more fundamental issue of the authenticity of the church of Christ because of the conviction that nothing short of a change of social consciousness will transform the system. This paper contends: that Christianity in South Africa is, in the main, system-bound and as such cannot, as the "community of faith," witness to the freedom of man, that is, man and society free of hubris; that what is required is an ideological breakthrough which is only possible if the church presents the Gospel to deliver man from dehumanization within his own systems; and that when the church is truly church, the questions that have hitherto caused anxiety will find their own resolution.

If the church incorporates in its make-up a rigorous self-reflection that will have implications both for its own structural development and for the society it serves, then the church witnesses to the quest for meaning as an ongoing process.

THE QUEST FOR MEANING AN ONGOING PROCESS

Philosophy may be defined as the conscious reflection of man in his quest for authentic existence and meaning. In each historical moment the quest for meaning manifests itself in an assessment of the predicament of man and in the constitution of a framework in which life may be meaningfully ordered. Yet, at the next historical moment, that very manifestation and its constituted framework of meaning is called into question, for the context (*Sitz-im-Leben*) is constantly changing and each new moment presents a new challenge to man. The carpet, as it were, is constantly moving under his feet whether he is aware of it or not.

Philosophy is in fact a field-transforming field. It assesses critically the various perspectives on man that arise from several fields of enquiry, for example, from sociology,

anthropology, psychology, economics, religious studies or history. It views man in his relation to his fellow-man and his world, seeks out the imperatives that lie behind this relationship and attempts to understand the phenomenon "man" over and above his particular socio-cultural, tribal condition.

Philosophy, as critical reflection, attempts to define the changing circumstances and to clarify man's contingency; to formulate the ever new problems of human existence, and to offer alternatives for making life meaningful and authentic. The absence of this ongoing critical reflection threatens the freedom of man for he becomes a mere object among other objects, not a questioning and thinking subject. This means that the framework of reference within which he lives becomes increasingly hardened and inflexible. A one dimensional relation now obtains between an unthinking subject and a rigid ideology.

IDEOLOGY: THE FIXING OF ONE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since the quest for meaning is always a human act, in history it may easily end in the propagation of one or other historical perspective on truth, as absolute truth. This is the nature of ideology.

The fixing of one perspective leads to historicism, and the ongoing critical quest ends in accommodation to one perspective of truth as valid for all men at all times. In the words of G A Rauche, we have, as it were, "closed shop"; the "contingency of man" and the "empirical limits" of every human construction are ignored.² An ideology is born when any quest for meaning has ceased and when one constitution of meaning is absolutized; ideology thus represents the petrification of philosophy. As such, no matter how meaningful an ideology may be for its adherents, it is static, not dynamic. Change occurs only within its confines. Its constitutive function is an end in itself; a **terminus ad quem** not a **terminus a quo**.

2. Rauche, G A 1970. **The abdication of philosophy - the abdication of man.** The Hague: Nijhoff.

An ideology explains, for a community, the various structures of its being: social, cultural, religious, political, etcetera. It propagates certain non-negotiable fundamentals and attempts to guarantee the wholeness of a community or nation. These non-negotiables include the aspirations and self-image of the group, resolution of its major fears and protection of its interests and privileges. By postulating a rigid theoretical framework within which the "life-world" of the group is organized, it presents a "working hypothesis" for that group.

Nationalistic ideologies affirm in particular the survival instinct of the group, often at the expense of other groups. It addresses their insecurities and builds into its working programme the overcoming of these insecurities or threats. If it is labelled "Christian", or given any religious tag, then the ideology has the potential to be even more absolutist and to have a greater hold on the minds of its adherents because both its understanding of the image of the group and its programme to ensure its survival receive divine sanction. Since it possesses the dimension of *mysterium et tremendum*, questioning one or other aspect of the group's perception of the world is tantamount to heresy or, at worst, blasphemy. We may observe here the indictment that the system, albeit religious, is levelled against Christ himself.

Little wonder that Marx realized that for the dialectic involved in the class struggle to proceed unhindered in order that society may change, religion should be abolished, for it lulls people into a false consciousness and mystifies the revolutionary spirit.³ Instead of dismissing the Marxist critique, we should remember that it arose from a concern for the enslaved man in society, and in rejecting religion, it rejected a caricature of religion, that form of religion that depended on socio-economic circumstances and on the propagation of the *status quo*; Marx believed that religion

3. Cf, for example, Marx, K: Towards a critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Rights. In D McLellan (ed) 1977. *Karl Marx Selected Writings*. London: Oxford University Press, p 64. Religion is described here as the "sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. If it is the opium of the people The criticism of religion is thus in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears whose halo is religion."

required no independent criticism since it was "a secondary phenomenon."⁴

This description of the nature of ideology and the limits of religion is best illustrated by our examination of the situation in South Africa. Whatever "apartheid" may mean to different people, it is a powerful ideology that has absolutized ethnicity. Over and above its political, legal and social implications, according to A Jablensky, for those who have a vested interest in its maintenance, "it simplifies enormously the realities of the world."⁵ It presents things in black and white and leaves out all the greys. Even Marx and Althusser,^{6a}

Footnote 7 - see page 7

7. Lash, N 1982. *A matter of hope. A theologian's reflections on the thought of Karl Marx.* Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 130.

-
4. **McLellan, D** 1970. *Marx before Marxism.* London: Macmillan, 21.
5. **Jablensky, A** Dec 1977. "Racism, apartheid and mental health", *World Health Organization*, p.7.
- 6a We do not, within the scope of this paper, have to deal with the debate between Althusser's and Marx's use of the word "ideology"; whether, as Althusser puts it, "Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life" or whether ideology is a system of representations that mystifies the relation between men and their conditions of existence and is a means by which the ruling class maintains its position "by obscuring the conditions of exploitation and oppression at the heart of society." In Marx, ideology is not always equated with illusion; he lists "judicial, political, religious, artistic or philosophic (as) ideological forms, in which men become conscious of the conflict (in society) and fight it out." Althusser goes so far as to maintain that "the distortion of ideology is socially necessary as a function of the

6b the neo-Marxist, despite their points of disagreement about what constitutes ideology, agree that ideology expresses in practice "a cognitively distorted and impoverished grasp of reality." Within the ideological system a particular perception of the world is entrenched in the psyche of its members which determines *inter alia* the reporting of news and its interpretation, the writing of history,⁸ the emphases in education, the organization of people and even the nature of belief in God. Often, unconsciously, but inadvertently, a hermeneutic is at work which reflects the world-view of its members. It is the result of their consciousness and it in turn determines that consciousness.

This circular hermeneutic is used not only to "read" the world, that is, events, news, criticisms, praises, enemies or friends of the system, but, if it is a religious ideology, it also determines how the primary texts and the traditions of that religion are read. Consider, for example, how differently

6b very nature of the social totality, more precisely, as a function of its determination by its structure, which is made, as all the social, opaque for individuals who occupy a place determined by the structure. The opacity of social structure makes necessarily mythical the representation of the world necessary for social cohesion." Cited in Larrain, T 1980. **The concept of Ideology**. London: Hutchinson, 156ff.

It appears that Althusser, in making ideology indispensable to societies, has overstated the case. He has confused the normal process of socialization and the need for meaning with ideology, which we defined as a crystallized truth perspective in which certain non-negotiables are fixed for all time and in which one or more social, cultural or political aspect of the group is absolutized.

Cf Mepham, J & Ruben, D H 1975. **Issues in Marxist philosophy**, vol 3. London: Methuin; Callinicos, A 1975. **Althusser's Marxism**. London: Pluto Press; and Rohas, J 1978. **Ideology and the social science**. London: Classic Books.

8. Cf Cornevin, M 1980. **Apartheid power and historical falsification**, Paris: UNESCO, 78f, for examples of historical myths that have inadvertently been propagated within the prevailing ideological confines.

Afrikaners and the Black Ethiopian churches read the Old Testament.⁹ Both interpret the concept of the exile and of the covenant quite differently.

It follows that ideology has a closed hermeneutic and all thinking within it is aimed at describing and clarifying its structure and goals. It is necessarily intolerant of criticism, especially if one of its non-negotiables are called into question, for example, the identity or survival of the folk, language, culture or its aspirations. News, information, and even history are heavily censored and easily lapse into propaganda. Truth within these confines ceases to be truth. What, in fact, is contingent, is absolutized and given a timelessness which is not part of its nature.

Therefore, while ideology may undoubtedly provide a meaningful theoretical framework for a community or class, at the same time it represents that which has ossified, chiefly because of the absence of self-criticism.

A "CHRISTIAN" IDEOLOGY?

Some would argue that if an ideology is "baptized" and made "Christian", then it can be redeemed and is therefore acceptable. However, to speak of a "Christian ideology" is a contradiction in terms. It fails to understand the "closedness" and static nature of an ideology and it confuses the need for meaning and freedom with the need for ideology.

At first the contradiction is not apparent because "Christian", like the term "ideology", is often loosely and wrongly used. It has come to mean that which represents the teaching of "the church", or belief in a body of ecclesiastical dogmas. This would mean an acceptance of some or other historical formulation, for example, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession, or the Canons of the Council of Trent, or the Savoy Declaration, or such like.

But this admits a problem: whom do we refer to when we speak of "the church in South Africa"? In asking what the

9 Cf, for example, **Sundkler**, B 1976. **Bantu prophets**. Oxford University Press.

role of "the church" should be, what idea of church do we have in mind? One suspects that there lurks in our minds a certain ephemeral notion of a homogeneous body of like-minded believers (that is, those who believe what "we" believe), who can and should act in unison to change the world. As attractive as such an ideal state of affairs may be, such a church exists only in our imaginations. What we have is a multitude of churches, each convinced that it alone is preserving the truth. Even modern attempts at forming an ecumenical body, in spite of the merits of organic unity, are at present shaky conglomerations rather than radical prophetic bodies. They make grand, albeit praiseworthy resolutions, but simply do not change the consciousness of their members.

Within these denominations, some or other creed forms the theoretical framework for their theology. "Theology" becomes the propagation of one historic position, for example, "Calvinist", "Presbyterian", "Congregationalist", "Pentecostal", or "Roman Catholic". "Christian" thus becomes the equivalent of some or other credal framework which, over and above accepting some basic beliefs, absolutizes certain distinctive doctrines or theological positions. While Protestants criticize the totalitarian stance of the Roman Catholic Church, they, themselves, are equally guilty. A survey of eighteenth and nineteenth century church history confirms this. This divisiveness has also been carried through into contemporary Protestantism. For example, it is a sad commentary on the church that, within the South African Indian Christian community of about eighty thousand, almost every denomination spawned in Europe and America, is found. There are over 150 different churches in the Indian community in Durban alone.¹⁰

The need for creeds is not questioned here, for that would mean the denial of history and the rejection of tradition, without which understanding is impeded. We are arguing against the denial and lack of awareness of the historicity of these creeds, of theology and of man himself. As N Lash states, "The 'problem' of ideology arises, in the first in-

10. Oosthuizen, G C 1975. **Pentecostal penetration into the Indian community in South Africa.** Durban: Human Sciences Research Council, 70f; Pillay, G J A **historico-theological study of Pentecostalism as a phenomenon within a South African community.** Institute of Social and Economic Research: University of Durban-Westville. Forthcoming.

stance, ... not from the fact that our ideas are social products, but from our 'forgetfulness' of this fact. We tend to be forgetful both of the objective limits that 'determine' our perception of our circumstances and of the extent to which the way we think, and perceive, and argue, reflects underlying patterns of social division and dominance.... The symbolic forms in which we express our special relations constitute, at one and the same time, the form of our freedom and a threat to that freedom."¹¹

In so far as credal Christianity absolutized one historical perspective which in turn determines its perception of the world, the society it finds itself in, and social organization; or in so far as credal Christianity remains within any system, either openly supporting the theoretical framework of that system or acquiescing by domesticating itself within it, that credal form becomes itself ideological. This point is emphasized in a definition of theology below, but first let us consider what we mean by "Christian".

When "Christian" ceases to be the description of a living and vital relationship with Christ, a life of faith as daily encounter, Christianity is no different to any other religion which accommodates itself within human constructs: a religion that remains "a secondary phenomenon". It is more than a *lapsus linguae* that we speak of being a Christian. The essence of being Christian can be summed up by the imperative, "If any man comes after me, let him first deny himself, take up his cross and follow me daily." The challenge of the text is to **be Christian**.¹² As such, "Christian" is a description of a dynamic life in faith, an ongoing encounter.¹³ (To grasp the meaning of this text is to clarify the question of this conference, namely, "What should the church do?")

11. Lash, N, loc cit.

12. It is noteworthy here that the English translation of Hans Kung's book *Christ sein*, viz "On being a Christian" was incorrect. Kung intended "Being Christian."

13. Emil Brunner developed this idea of "faith in encounter" in *The Divine-human encounter*, London: SCM, 1944.

"Christian ideology", therefore, would be a combination of essentially different and irreconcilable notions for it will cease to be, in Luther's words, a life **coram Deo**. Affixing "Christian" to any human structure whether religious, political, social or economic, is to violate its inherent dynamic.

However, there is yet another reason why this coupling is a contradiction. If faith is not to be mere belief in historic assertions,¹⁴ but is understood in dynamic, existential encounter, it has as its ultimate concern the source of being in whose image all men already participate.¹⁵

Faith affirms man's freedom in God and redemption from the bondage to lesser gods which alienated man (man in Adam) constantly creates. Even the atheist must have a point of reference by which he can order his life meaningfully. Where some form of personal integration or meaning is absent, man either becomes neurotic or escapes into even greater bondage. All men are believers of some kind. The danger is that he may believe in a god which he unwittingly creates in his own image. Little wonder then that Durkheim and the founders of the functional theory view religion as society's worship of itself.¹⁶ This is what is referred to in this paper as **hubris**.

THE PROBLEM OF HUBRIS

In Greek tragedy, the fate of the hero is always predictable: having become the hero he commits the sin of **hubris** or excess; that is, he transgresses the law determining his mortality and finitude and thereafter must, of necessity, suffer de-

-
14. Paul **Tillich** described faith as "more than trust in even the most sacred authority. It is participation in the subject of one's ultimate concern with one's whole being." Therefore, the term, faith, "should not be used in connection with theoretical knowledge." **Dynamics of Faith**, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957, 32; 4.
 15. *Ibid*, 8. Faith is defined as "a total and centred act of unconditional, infinite and ultimate concern."
 16. Cf **Pillay**, G J *op cit*, i-x, where a brief assessment of the function theory of religion is offered.

feat and die.¹⁷ There is a portion due to a man, (*moira*); but if he claims more than his *moira*, then he commits *hubris* and *dikê* casts him back.¹⁸ Hence, *hubris* means more than man's pride in himself or "insolence in prosperity."¹⁹ It is man's self-worship; man's attempt to be divine.

In the creation stories we have an incisive insight into the Biblical understanding of sin as *hubris*. Adam's sin is in principle his unwillingness to be the bearer of the image of God or to take seriously his humanity. He grasps at divinity, yielding to the temptation "to be like God." The result is the belittling of his own humanity in his awareness of his nakedness. The alternative to being fully human is not to be divine but rather to be less than human. *Hubris* is therefore the flight of man from himself. The way to measure *hubris* is to observe the extent of his alienation and dehumanization, whether he appears in "capitalistic", "nationalistic", "ecclesiastic" or the more illusionary "scientific" dress.

Flight from God is the story of man's flight from himself. Alienation is the mark of original sin. *Hubris* manifests itself in history as the attempts of alienated man to construct a meaningful world wherein his politics, culture, society and religion can be ordered. Nationalism, Fascism, Communism and Capitalism would be extreme examples of this.

-
17. Murray, Gilbert 1964. *Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy*. Oxford, 5.
18. Ibid, 85; also Kitto, H D F 1972. *Form and Meaning in Drama*. London: University Paperbacks, 7; To the Greek "...the essence of piety was humility, the conscious acknowledgement that the gods are greater than man, and man's greatness is held by their sufferance." Vellacott, Philip 1974. *Introduction to Aeschylus: The Oresteian trilogy*. Penguin Books, 26. Agamemnon walking on the purple carpet was in fact claiming to be more than a man. In *Sophocles's Ajax* also, the hero is guilty of *hubris*; "in his glory of consciousness of worth, he forgets the limits imposed on mortal man by his nature." Lucas, D W 1959. *The Greek tragic poets*. Cambridge: Cohen & West, 95; 133.
19. Durant, Will 1939. *The life of Greece*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 186.

In nationalism, for instance, as we find it in South Africa, there are undoubtedly "Christian" elements. But elevated alongside God is also some or other human concern, for example, race, language, culture, preservation or survival of the volk. Elevation of creaturely concerns to the level of ultimate concern, to such an extent that these influence our perception of the world and man, leads to a domestication of God to "worldly", Adamic ends. This is **hubris**. Ideology, as a rigid system, feeds off **hubris**. In every ideology some or other human concern is given absolute value.

Hubris is sin against God and against man. Pharisaic religion in the New Testament is a good example of a religious ideology which projected other national or cultural prejudices alongside God. This so distorted their view of God and their understanding of the human condition, that when the God-man appeared restoring man and calling all to reconciliation with God, they failed to recognize him and sentenced him to death, on the charge of blasphemy. Is the cross then not the judgement on man's ideological slavery?

Pharisaic religion was no doubt sincere and pious. It integrated a religious cultus that gave meaning to its adherents but, like all ideologies, it did so at the exclusion of self-criticism. Its closed hermeneutic excluded the message of Christ which had called the whole system into question. For instance, Christ's, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, who travel land and sea to make one convert and when you have made him you make him twice as fit for hell than yourselves."²⁰ Anything that does not fit into the ideological Procrustean bed is considered to be untruths or rejected as "blasphemy".

Dialogue with such a mind-set is determined only by its pre-understanding of truth. On recognizing this, Christ lamented, "They have eyes and they do not see; they have ears and they do not hear."²¹ Therefore they are "ever learning but they do not come to the truth."²² Pharisaic ideology professed to be in the service of truth, but it was a "truth" where obedience to norms and the performance of rites "led to salvation"; a "truth" that had enslaved its adherents to

20. Mt 23:15.

21. Mt 13:13-15; Mk 4:12; 8:18; Lk 8:10; Jh 9:39-41.

22. 2 Tm 3:7.

the Law. But Christ proclaimed "ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."²³

To live authentically is to be fully human which, as Christ showed, is to live **coram Deo**. To be truly free is, therefore, to live in faith; in reconciliation with God. Freedom is a precondition of man's full humanity and of man's creativity. This is the mark of his being the image of God. Divinity is not opposed to humanity, or the Incarnation would not have occurred.

If freedom is the precondition of humanity which can only be realized in encounter with God, and if alienation is the denial of such an encounter, it follows then that the fact of man's alienation destroys his freedom. He is obliged, therefore, to pay homage to lesser gods whether "nation", "success", "Utopia" or, as in the case of the humanist, "human goodness." Religion within an ideological system necessarily lapses into idolatry, for in Romans 1:18 idolatry is the raising of creatureliness as co-equal with God.

True worship, on the other hand, is biblically defined as loving the Lord with "all one's heart, with all one's soul, with all one's mind, and with all one's strength" because "The Lord our God is **one** Lord" (Mk 10:29,30). As Kierkegaard put it, "Purity of heart is to will one thing."²⁴

THE WAY OUT

How can the ideological breakthrough, necessary to change our society's consciousness, be achieved? How do we draw ourselves out of the system which controls our very minds?

It may well be the case that rapid socio-economic or political change may fracture the theoretical framework, since its traditional answers may no longer satisfy some of its adherents. Two things may arise from such a situation. Firstly, the justifications of the ideological stance will change and its educationists, political thinkers and theologians, among others, will provide a wider frame of reference for that

23. Jh 8:32-36.

24. Kierkegaard, S 1961. **Purity of heart**, tr by D Steere. London: Fontana Books, 47ff.

group. Its previously restricted self-image may be enlarged to include others, or the society will be reorganized to counter the threats to the system. Several changes will be made provided the non-negotiable fundamentals remain.

Secondly, it may well be that, in time, the ideology becomes increasingly less meaningful, societal homogeneity is lost and the hold ideology had on its adherents, dwindles and dies. However, such change normally occurs over a very long period of time, unless it is effected by revolutionary means. In fact, when aspects like race, nation, language and ethnicity are absolutized, such a transformation may never occur.

Within a nationalistic ideology, a substitution of one quantum for another, for example, Black for White, proletariat for bourgeoisie, one race for another, etcetera, will not allow for the transformation of consciousness that is imperative to change society.

To begin with, it is incumbent upon us to ask "first order" questions in order to liberate us from the hermeneutical stranglehold of ideology. For example, not merely ask whether a law is justly administered, or whether justice is properly executed, but to ask whether the law itself is just. The supporters of the system, in their enthusiasm to preserve law and order in this country, fail to see that, in fact, several of the laws are designed to safeguard the prejudices and biases of the system.

Another example is the liberal plea within the system for equal opportunities and equal wages for equal work. However, the capitalistic system within which such parity should be achieved, remains unexamined. "First order" questions would have to enquire into the crudity of the capitalistic ethic which was based on the supposed harmony that the Enlightenment understood to exist in human societies; an ethic that accepts that the selfish seeking of one's own good will leads to the benefit of all.

Failure to consistently ask "first order" questions will always lead us to marry off "Christian" with that which is incompatible with it. The incisive Russian Christian, Berdyaev, saw, for example, how the capitalism in which "we live, and move and have our being" gave rise to the de-personalization and de-spiritualization of man that prepared the way for Commu-

nism, Fascism and Nazism.²⁵ He wrote, "Modern capitalistic civilization is essentially atheistic and hostile to the idea of God. The crime of killing God must be laid at their door.... The useful and practical effective God of capitalism cannot be the true God."²⁶ Its pragmatism and utilitarianism stifles spirituality.

Unless we commit ourselves to a critical analysis of the fundamentals of our system, we pay only lip service to freedom and to God. Hence, even a change of governments or the replacement of White nationalism by Black nationalism will not guarantee the change of consciousness that is needed to transform our society into a just one. To merely admit Blacks into the ranks of the middle class so that greater numbers may wallow in greater opulence, only mystifies true freedom. It leaves the system intact even though the colour of the heads of that system may change. The spiritual crisis remains.

How then shall we achieve the ideological break? This must still be answered. It has already been intimated that only faith in a living encounter with God produces such a breakthrough. Faith, like freedom, can never be a possession; it is a state of being before God which has to be affirmed anew.²⁷ Only as such can faith and freedom be a gift. As we have already stated, when this dynamism is lost, man settles down and puts down roots in some or other system, thus abdicating his freedom. The object of one's belief is an indicator of whether faith is authentic or not, for God, as **ultimate** concern, necessarily stands opposed to all possible "rivals". Therefore, religion which is domesticated in a system

25. Vallon, M 1960. **Apostle of freedom: Life and teaching of Nicholas Berdyaev.** London: Vision Press, 132.

26. Berdyaev, N 1945. **Meaning of history.** London: Geoffrey Bles, 217.

27. As Rudolf Bultmann puts it, "... faith is not a new quality that inheres in the believer, but rather a possibility for men that must constantly be laid hold of anew because man only exists by constantly laying hold of his possibilities. The man of faith does not become an angel, but is **simul peccator, simul justus.**" **Existence and faith,** tr by S M Ogden, London: Fontana, 1973, 112.

that projects as primary a creaturely concern alongside God, is idolatrous.

To avoid this, as shown by the Reformation, the critical dimension which Tillich called the "Protestant principle"²⁸ should be built into theological approach. The task of theology is no longer only clarification and confirmation, but the **testing** of the Church's teaching; hence the Reformational adage **ecclesia reformata semper reformanda**. Yet Protestantism also all too quickly lost this self-critical dimension and became itself institutionalized and dogmatic.

This critical dimension is indispensable to its message at the heart of which is the Cross, which sums up Christ's own life of faith. It symbolizes God's judgement on the whole human system that had put to death the God-man. It stands in judgement of all forms of human slavery, of ideological self-righteousness and arrogance, and of all idolatry. Hence Christ proclaimed, "all who save their lives shall lose it but those who lay down their lives for my sake shall find it."²⁹ While Adam grasped at divinity and became alienated, Christ violently rejected the offer of divinity in the wilderness and willingly laid down his life. So, unless we, and all that we hold dear, stand always under the judgement of the Cross, grace will not be an ever new reality.

Theology is, therefore, an ongoing critical quest. In so far as it constantly proclaims the message of the Cross in each

28. Paul Tillich defined the "Protestant principle" as that which "protests against the identification of our ultimate concern with any creation of the church, including the biblical writings in so far as their witness to what is really ultimate concern is also a conditioned expression of their own spirituality." **Systematic Theology**, vol ii, The University of Chicago Press, 1951, 37.

29. Mt 10:39; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; 17:33; Jh 12:25.

new age and context,³⁰ it can never be merely the explication of a creed or a body of dogmas. While a creed may be believed, it cannot be repeated. The Christ of the Gospel, as it were, must become contemporaneous with us to call us to ever new commitment and to challenge us never to rest in our own system. The Christ that is lodged in the Bible or in a church tradition, cannot otherwise challenge us except through vital proclamation.

The nature of a living theology is again summed up in Christ's challenge in Luke 9:23: And He said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." "**Deny yourself**" rescues it from the sin of hubris; "**take up your cross**" is the invitation to walk the way of faith which is open to judgement and grace; "**follow me**", affirms the only object of faith; "**daily**" confirms the ongoing nature of faith as encounter. These injunctions which lie at the heart of the gospel, rescue us from self-will, from ideology and from idolatry and draw us out of our prejudices to live for God and for others. Only if the church takes this theological task seriously, will it testify to a living Christianity; only then will it be the community of faith; only then can it present a challenge to every hu-

30. Elsewhere we have argued that contextualization is endemic to the very method of theology which must always be relevant or else it becomes "dogmatics" or ideology. Contextualization is part of the process of understanding the Gospel and is the bulwark against theology degenerating into ideology. Each attempt to theologize has itself to be re-evaluated within new contexts or else the Gospel becomes historically ossified. Theology is the critical ongoing hermeneutical process that interprets and re-interprets, seeking the living Word and fostering faith. Pillay, G J Dec 1984. **Contextualization of the Gospel in Southern Africa: the question of relevance.** Potchefstroom: Institute of Reformational Studies, 6;13.

man system which tribalizes God; and only then will the Church have the potential to transform society.³¹

Even Marcuse, the neo-Marxist, realized that one could not rely on the proletariat, as Marx did, to change the system. Only "new men", who, themselves, have escaped the system, can change it.³² However, Marcuse did not tell us how these "new men" come about. Humanism also, with its uncritical faith in human nature, fails to alter the consciousness of society.

Only through spiritual commitment (that is, conversion) will we not conform to "this world", but be "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rm 12:2). As Berdyaev, who suffered the same anxieties as Marcuse and the humanists, concluded, "I became a Christian not because I ceased to believe in man, in his dignity and his higher calling, in his creative freedom, but because I sought a profounder and more stable basis for this faith."³³

Since nothing short of a change in consciousness is required to change society, the churches, to be the communities of faith, must direct all their energies to first developing a **critical distance** from the **status quo**. This may be achieved if the following suggestions are heeded:

-
31. Ebeling maintains, "If discipleship means sharing in the way of Jesus, then understanding his preaching of the will of God means sharing in his freedom and understanding his message of the rule of God means sharing in his joy, his obedience, and his courage in the face of the nearness of God." **Ebeling**, G 1966. **The Nature of Faith**, tr by R G Smith, London: Fontana, 56.
 32. Herbert **Marcuse** argued that "... society will be rational and free to the extent to which it were organised, sustained and reproduced by an essentially new historical subject." **One Dimensional Man**, Boston, 1968, 252. Cf also his **Essay on Liberation**, Boston, 1969.
 33. **Berdyaev**, N 1950. **Dream and Reality**. London: Geoffrey Bles, 191.

- 1 Since **hubris** is sin and none who have accommodated themselves within the system escape bolstering it, the churches should openly confess their sin and declare a Day of Atonement.
- 2 If the church be truly the Church and not a caricature of it, it must be the manifestation of the spiritual community which represents all humanity. The Russian idea of **sobornost** describes what it should be, namely a "communion of the Spirit"³⁴ opposed both to authoritarianism and individualism; a "liberty in love which unites believers"³⁵ where "tradition is a check upon mere individualism, but no check upon original creative activity."³⁶ **Sobornost** does not mean collectivism which is a "means for domination and will-to-power," but is the spiritual quality of men and as such recognizes freedom and the value of the person.³⁷

The church, as the community of faith and of the Spirit, must reject any ideological constraints which threaten to distort its true nature.

- 3 All churches must proclaim their commitment to educate their members about the ideological slavery which binds South African society. Churches must manifest their true nature as **sobornost** in service to the whole community. This means that not only should all races be admitted into its fellowship, but for the sake of the integrity of the church, openness must be championed. A global vision must replace its present tribal one.

-
34. Lowrie, D 1960. **Rebellious Prophet**. London: Victor Gollancz, 216; Berdyaev, N 1952. **The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar**. London: Gollancz, 122ff.
35. Bulgakov, Sergius 1935. **The Orthodox Church**, tr by D A Lowrie, London: Centenary Press, 74.
36. Horton, W M 1938. **Contemporary Continental Theology**. London: S C M, 37.
37. Berdyaev, N 1944. **Freedom and the Spirit**. London: Geoffrey Bles, 20.

- 4 A self-critical dimension that disallows ideology must be built into all our human programmes or theoretical frameworks, whether creeds or theologies, constitutions or statements of intent.
- 5 Theology, in order to make decisions for faith possible, must be living and ecumenical in spirit, that is, it must be done in-community. Every faculty of theology should lead the way in opening its doors to all people in South Africa irrespective of race or denominational affiliation. This, not for socio-political reasons, but out of a serious concern for a living theology. To study theology in racial or denominational isolation absolutizes one context or historical perspective, creates self-righteousness and dogmatism, and fosters a distorted understanding of the message of Christ.
- 6 The church must face the challenge that its relevance for society is not self-evident. That the mere citing of some credal position or the Bible or even the name of Jesus, is not adequate to validate its claim to be the community of the Spirit. Its life and service to the world must bear out its claims. Those within the church, who have achieved the ideological break-through, must take the initiative in leading other Christians into the risk of faith. It is unfortunate, however, that the heads of many of the churches are themselves ideologically bound and, therefore, the synods or headquarters that fall under their control are stumbling-blocks to the liberation from ideology. Therefore it is futile to ask church members, or university students and councillors, to vote on whether these institutions should be open to all, since these people are, themselves, the prisoners of ideology. The truly liberated must be in the vanguard of any attempt to change the consciousness of society.
- 7 The dangerous tendency to simplify (the mark of ideology) the South African problem to a confrontation between Blacks and Whites, must be avoided. A 1980 psychological study on apartheid showed the real complexity of the problem when it rejected the reductionist view that the South African conflict is between four million Whites and eighteen million Blacks. It estimated then that roughly ten million South

Africans of all races are comfortable with apartheid and have a vested interest in its maintenance. The rest are mainly poor rural dwellers who "do not have the energy or psychological motivation to do anything about it being neither too free (sic) nor too repressed."³⁸ Only about two million or so (some Whites, but mostly Blacks) are antagonists of the system and see the need to change it and some of them are already in some or other ideological prison.

It is clear that **ad hoc** socio-political adjustments will not solve the problem of dehumanization. A society can only be changed if the consciousness of individuals within it has been changed and if these form the **avant-garde**. If the true church is the community of the free, it is **ipso facto** the standard by which societies are judged.

38. Lambley, Peter 1980. **The Psychology of Apartheid**. London: Secker & Warburg. Although Lambley indulges in some unwarranted generalising, he provides several insights into the psychological hold that the apartheid ideology has on those who have a vested interest in its maintenance.