

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH OUR SYSTEM OF VALUES?

A contextual study in dialogue with Sampie Terreblanche *

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Abstract

In this study, Sampie Terreblanche's article (The Star, 24 February 1991): Rottenness still lurks at SA's core is reviewed to provide part one of an introduction for a South African contextual discussion. Key concepts around which the discussion in the article revolved are identified, namely religion, politics and the economy. The latter concepts are acknowledged in our study as not only functionally interdependent, but also basic to any society. They are accordingly applied to the second part of our study, namely the Judeo-Christian tradition, under the theme: constitution of the monarchy in Israel up till the post exilic period. The struggle for hegemony among the three institutions of religion, politics and the economy becomes a plot around which the Heilsgeschichte drama unfolds.

The third or last part of our study traces the trend of Western Christendom, from the vantage point of the struggle or plot in part two. The discussion theme here is: Western Christendom from the perspective of faith and culture. Relevant concepts like culture, ideology, apartheid, capitalism, communism, etc, are given working definitions or description. The phenomenon of schism which afflicted Western Christendom is employed as a barometer to gauge Western Christendom's intolerance, alternatively the confusion of culture for faith, notwithstanding the necessity for the enculturation of faith in any evangelization process.

The study presupposes that

(a) South Africa is a microcosm of the world macrocosm as far as the distribution of wealth and resources are concerned, and

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(b) that through colonization, most of current problems in South Africa are inherited from the West. This means that a new South Africa must decide where to go from here.

1. Introduction

The values and education for a new generation can better be approached from the lesson of past errors, much as those who choose to ignore the verdict of history are often condemned to repeat its mistakes. We shall be able to work for the future with a reasonable measure of confidence only to the extent that we can appreciate what went wrong in the past, standing as we are (in the present) on the threshold of social change or the dawn of a new South Africa.

We have chosen as our angle of entry into the orbit of contextual discussion, Sampie Terreblanche's article (*The Star*, 24 February 1991): *Rottenness still lurks at SA's core*. What went wrong then, according to Terreblanche?

In a rather candid fashion, Terreblanche bemoans the looming continuity of the state of affairs allegedly responsible for the present social ills that need to be done away with if change is to be meaningful. His discussion virtually revolves round three key sociological institutions of religion, politics and the economy. And yet their functional interdependence is fundamental to any society, whether primitive or modern, forming as they are, the fingerprints of any culture.

Regarding religion, whose over-arching claims should pervade or transcend every aspect of morality, Terreblanche has the following to say: There is a 'conceptual blockage' that prevents the president from understanding 'the fundamental difference between wrong (in the sense of 'mistake') and a rotten state of affairs' (or wrong in the sense of 'immoral policy'). This blockage is apparently responsible for 'obstinacy' or unwillingness to confess the NP's guilt toward the rottenness of the *apartheid* state. This indictment, in our opinion, should be seen in the light of the presupposition that Christian life starts with a confession at a particular moment, followed by conversion entailing a turning away from sinful life, a turning away into a new life of grace. Needless to say, the one (i e, conversion) cannot take place without the other (i e confession).

Under politics or such category, Terreblanche appears to suggest some blockage in terms of which the government is held captive to the Verwoerdian language with its 'ideological strait-jacket and the sectionalistic vested interests that have haunted successive Nationalistic governments'. And yet separate 'development' and separate 'freedoms' were ostensibly intended as a means of 'reaching out to create justice for all and to grant to every national group what it claims for its own' -- 'a whitewash of *apartheid* ... almost too bad to be true'. According to Terreblanche, the president claims that despite 'mistakes' the morality of the NP's intentions was always above contention (a strange description of Christian morality!).

Under the economy or such category, Terreblanche says of the separate 'development' and separate 'freedoms':

It must have been a twisted morality that brought wealth and prosperity for the white minority and terrible poverty and deprivation for the black majority.

Here too, the idea of 'twisted morality' is suggestive of some 'conceptual blockage'.

But Terreblanche's terse comment, that:

It is puzzling why it is so difficult -- or impossible -- for the De Klerk government to do what is so obviously prescribed by Christian morality. Or are the claims of the materialistic ideology stronger than Christian morality?

His comment we say, raises questions not merely of an economic nature, but expressly of an ideological realm. Generally, blacks have also found it difficult -- indeed impossible to reconcile their religious experience within the Western main-line churches, on the one hand, with that of Western capitalism, on the other. But is it merely a question of moral choice between God and Mammon as Terreblanche suggests? Whichever way one may choose to look at this predicament, the ideology of capitalism needs to be examined more closely.

1.1 Conclusion

Despite the brutal frankness with which Terreblanche's article discusses the rottenness at South Africa's core, we must beware of demonising the National Party and the De Klerk government. Without seeking to lessen the gravity of the situation we shall have to appreciate the global context of which South Africa is only a part, or rather a microcosm of the global macrocosm.

But before we examine the vicissitude of history by which Western Christendom and its miseries were brought to our doorstep in Africa, perhaps we should search for any traces of rottenness, or rather the dynamics of religion, politics and the economy within the origins of our faith, namely the Judeo-Christian tradition.

2. The dynamics of religion, politics and the economy within the Judeo-Christian tradition

In this section we shall submit that from the time of the constitution of the monarchy in Israel until the exile and post-exilic period, the institutions of religion, politics and the economy were engaged in the struggle for hegemony, the dynamics of which virtually constituted a plot around which the *Heilsgeschichte* drama unfolds. The modern ascendancy of reason (for example Kant) or the implicit claims of the sciences to reserve the right to legitimate social values, that is to say against the monopoly of the church, all reflect the continuation of the struggle even into our own time, albeit in a different form.

The term economy is here used in a deeper sense of *oikonomia* and its cognates. This will include, for example, the administration of the concerns and resources of a community. If the whole people of Israel can be referred to as 'the house of Jacob' (Lk 1:33 & Ac 7:46), or simply 'the house Israel' (Mt 10:16), then it is possible to think of Israel as the Household of God in which the office of king would entail stewardship (*oikonomos*), accountable to God (Lk 16:2) in terms of the covenant

(Dt 30:15-20). And since the concepts 'house' and 'kingdom' can be associated (Mk 3:24), *oikonomia* meaning can include the office of household administration as well as the discharge of this office (Lk 16:2). But the cognate *oikeo*, when linked with *oikos* and *oikia* can take a form describing inward psychological and spiritual processes: *oikein* so much so, that one can legitimately speak in terms of the economy of salvation (Eph 1:10, 3:9) in the sense of *Christus totus*. What we have before us then, namely in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is a virtual theocracy in which the economic policy of any such government falls squarely within the ambience of moral theology's searchlight, not as a matter of expediency, but principle.

The genesis of Western ethics perhaps begins with a preparatory phase in which Socrates (470 BC) postulated the knowability of goodness, even though he himself did not profess it. Plato (428/7-348/7) who was Socrates' greatest disciple, went further than his mentor to allege that justice consists in harmony between the three elements of the soul, namely the intellect, emotion and desire. But it was Aristotle (384-322), Plato's younger contemporary and only rival in terms of influence on the course of Western philosophy, in whom the notion of justice as a virtue becomes the starting point for almost all Western accounts.

Aristotle distinguishes between distributive justice in terms of which the production and distribution of wealth and resources are regulated, on the one hand, and remedial justice in terms of which compensation for damage incurred is regulated. The so-called affirmative action in the USA is motivated by the same justice of reparation. The key element of justice, according to Aristotle, is treating like cases alike - an idea that set later thinkers (for example, Thomas Aquinas) the task of working out which similarities are pertinent. The following are examples: 'need' as opposed to claims or greed; 'talent' as opposed to racism or sexism; 'desert or deserving' as opposed to nepotism or favoritism.

I have failed to find any conceptual link between the notion of 'unqualified' equality of people in the slogan: Liberty! Equality! & Fraternity! during the French Revolution, a conceptual link between equality and justice. J J Rousseau (1712-78) traced the social inequality of people back to the origins of society covered by his Social Contract theory. This inequality must therefore be distinguished from the 'rotteness' or corruption which in part necessitated the French Revolution. But did this notion of equality perhaps inspire Marx's (1818-83) dream of a classless society as the goal of revolutionary movements? Perhaps the class system should be criticised only to the extent that through some corruption it constitutes an impediment to justice. And yet the gross injustices which coincided with social stratification in the industrial society of Marx's day, came to be remedied naturally by the emerging trade unions.

Aristotle's ethics was passed on to Scholasticism (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) through the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74). Thomas took from Aristotle the idea of the final end or *summum bonum*, alternatively the common good of society, as the goal of moral acts. This goal consisted in happiness or the love of God. Against Thomas, William of Ockham (1285-1349?) denied all standards

of good and evil that are independent of God's will. The latter seemed a denial of the knowability of goodness outside revelation *contra* Romans 1:19 and 20. Ockham's position seemed tenable only if one assumed that some parts of creation can exist outside God's sphere of influence, alternatively a radical separation (within human conceptions) of the categories of the sacred and secular. Luther, it appears, postulated the total corruptness of human nature, *vis-à-vis* the tenet of *sola fidei*. This brought him closer to Ockham. All we need say at this moment is that we find it difficult to reconcile the idea of the total corruptness of human nature, with the theme of salvation history as struggle, between good and evil, from the fall of Adam in Genesis to the catastrophic disaster of cosmic proportions, in the Book of Revelation. Moreover, the Pauline anthropology traces this struggle back to the psychological sphere of the inward struggle: the 'spiritual' self is always at war with the 'fleshy' self (Rm 7:14-25). But once one has capitulated to evil, there is no point in any further struggle.

Lastly, the *lex taliones* (Lv 24:19-21; Dt 19:21) popularly known as 'eye for an eye and tooth for tooth', was originally designed to prevent excessive revenge by laying down punishment equal to the damage (cf justice of reparation). The *Sitz im Leben* of this injunction is radically different from that of the moral 'ideals' to which Jesus is pointing in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:38f), namely the perfect society of the kingdom of God. The morality of the 'chronological urgency' of the impending end of the world (Mt 24:3b & 1 Jn 2:28) is different from that of the 'theological urgency' of the Gospel imperatives (1 Pt 3:8; Ps 90:4).

2.1 Saul and the Constitution of the Monarchy

In accordance with Israel's identity and sense of mission (Is 53), namely as Yahweh's people, the kingship was and could only be a theocracy. Unlike in the rest of the ancient Near East, the Israelic king was a 'constitutional' monarch, as it were (compare 1 Sm 8:10-18 with Dt 17:14-20). Greed had no place in God's law of justice. This means that the anointing of Saul at God's behest (1 Sm 10) was contingent upon his obedience to Yahweh, that is to say, obedience of faith, here characterised by religion, which ought to influence or guide him in the execution of his kingly duties (or politics). Indeed the religious character of Saul's military endeavours falls under the rubric: 'holy' wars, or rather, Yahweh wars (Dt 20:16-18).

The rejection of Saul as king in 1 Samuel 15:10-23 seems to be motivated by his appropriation of the priestly office in 1 Samuel 13:8-15. Curious enough, Saul becomes aware of his sin only in the course of his conversation with Samuel (1 Sm 15:20-24). His disobedience is comparable to the sin of magic and divination (1 Sm 15:23). The latter verse also makes clear what in the eyes of God constitutes true worship, namely the obedience of faith rather than ritual, (Am 5:21-27 & Jr 7:21-26) so that ritual without obedience becomes empty (Is 29:13 & Mt 15: 8 & 9). And yet Saul did not understand! His explanations in 1 Samuel 13:12 show that his thought processes operated on a totally different wave-length, so to speak, consonant with magic in pagan worship. His protestations in 15:20 show that profit or greed (Is

15:19) rather than obedience, influenced his moral choices. Did he have some conceptual blockage?

2.2 The rise of David and the consolidation of the Davidic Dynasty

David was initially made king of Judah at Hebron (1 Sm 2:1-7), south of Jerusalem. It was only natural that he would receive support from his own tribe of Judah in the light of his overtures (30:26-31) or military prowess that could be turned against the Philistines.

After some rivalry between Israel and Judah which had led to civil war (2 Sm 2:8-32), David was anointed king of Israel (2 Sm 5), thus combining in himself the kingdoms of the North and South. However, the two kingdoms did not thereupon coalesce, but remained distinct entities that eventually drew apart after the death of Solomon (1 Ki 12). In fact, the revolt of the people of Ephraim against Rehoboam's economic policy entailing heavy taxation (1 Ki 12), the same initiated by his father Solomon, seems to indicate that greed characterised the 'deviant' behaviour of Israelic Kings, alternatively that later Kings did not follow in the ways of David.

Of particular significance at this juncture is the transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Sm 6:1-23; 1 Chr 13:1-16:43). After having chosen Jerusalem as a neutral zone and site for a new capital for the united kingdoms, David makes an important move that would make Jerusalem the religious centre for the people; the Ark was the symbol of religious unity between North and South. The Ark was moved with pomp and ceremony which included David and all the House of Israel, with dancing and singing to the accompaniment of lyres and harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals before Yahweh (2 Sm 6:5). Although the Masoretic Text is not clear, it would appear that in the peculiar episode of verse 7, Uzzah (the priest?) paid with his life for presuming to touch the Ark, in his attempt to steady it as the oxen (drawing the cart?) were making it tilt. Could the lesson here perhaps be that presumption before God will most certainly lead to disaster? Let us retrace our steps to the presumptuous acts in Saul. In 1 Samuel 13:11, Saul tries to explain why he (presumptuously) usurped the priestly prerogative of offering sacrifice. He starts by blaming Samuel (the priest and prophet) for coming late. This endangered him (Saul) and his men in the face of the approaching enemy. Now, in order to ward off the impending attack and possible defeat at the hands of the enemy, Saul offered sacrifice to Yahweh! Apparently operative here is the principle: *Deus ex machina*, in terms of which human beings can manipulate the deity through ritual or sacrifice. However, as opposed to magic and superstition, faith in Yahweh requires obedience to the will of God, and not *vice versa*. This means that what is at stake in any ritual, sacrament or prayer, is the attitude of the believer (2 Sm 12:12b & Lk 18:14), rather than the mechanical accuracy with which a sacrifice is prepared (1 Ki 18:20-40), or the outward devotion (Mt 6:1) with which we pray.

In 1 Samuel 15:10-23, it is on account of Saul's 'blindness' that to him it seemed to make small difference whether he slaughtered animals under the ban immediately or subsequently in sacrifice. But the theological difference between the ban and the sacrifice lies in the fact that the victims of the ban, by being totally destroyed, were

considered to be given over wholly to God (in holocaust?) whereas in (communion?) sacrifice here implied by Saul's intention, the people shared the sacrificial victim with God. No wonder then that motivated by greed, Saul had apparently given orders that from the booty the best sheep and oxen of what was under the ban be sacrificed to Yahweh. And yet by being disobedient, Saul had made himself ritually unfit for participation in communion sacrifice with Yahweh. Saul was rejected by God and his plea for pardon was in vain. Similarly, Uzzah, by being struck down in death, had his presumptuous attitude rejected by God without a chance for pardon. David was displeased that Yahweh had broken out against Uzzah (2 Sm 6:8).

We may conclude that since 'David went in the fear of Yahweh that day' and asked: 'can the Ark of Yahweh come to me?' (2 Sm 6:8), the whole episode was there for David to see and to learn the fear of God. Eventually, the Ark was moved to the citadel of David only after he had made sure that its presence at Obed-edom of Gath's house for three months, resulted in Yahweh's blessing of Obed-edom's family (2 Sam 6:11). The question at this juncture seems to be: why did Yahweh accept David's plea for pardon (1 Sm 12:13), while he refused Saul's and did not even give Uzzah a chance? According to the psychological evidence from the redactor's characterization, David was neither 'blind', nor 'conceptually blocked' as was Saul. David was a God fearer and Saul was rather insensitive. By fearing God, David made himself pliable to the modeling of the Potter's hand - a quality that won him Yahweh's confirmation of his dynasty for ever (2 Sm 7). The character of David therefore epitomizes the hegemony of faith (or religion) over his decisions as king and ruler (politics), a quality required in a theocracy.

Further, it would appear that God was prepared to forgive sin arising out of human weakness (for example David's adultery with Uriah's wife). Saul's sin, on the other hand, arose from a disposition of greed constituting rebellion couched in arguments, against God, or rather God's messenger. A similar situation resurfaces when in Jesus' day tax-collectors and prostitutes make their way into the kingdom (Mt 21:31). Not that God prefers tax-collectors and prostitutes, but simply because they are capable of true repentance, as compared to the Pharisees and the lawyers who try to thwart what God has in mind for them (Lk 7:29-30).

2.2.1 Conclusion

We shall take the oracle of Nathan (2 Sm 7:1-29; cf 1 Chr 17:1-27) as our basis for concluding this section. In this oracle, it is significant that the role of the Temple in Israel is underplayed by the final redactor. Nathan reverses his first word that the king should build the Temple (2 Sm 7:3). Instead of David building a 'house' or Temple for the Lord, the Lord will build a 'house' (or dynasty - an everlasting dynasty) for David.

If this passage reflects a somewhat hostile attitude (or at least, indifference) toward the Temple, and a corresponding preference for the desert practice or tent tradition, what exactly would the point be, since a favourable attitude toward the Temple resurfaces in 2 Samuel 7:13. Whether or not the latter verse is a later addition, the effect of the story as it now stands is that David, on whom the Lord establishes an

everlasting dynasty which made the notion of royal Messianism conceivable, David, we say, was associated with the desert practice or tent tradition. Solomon (and those after him) on the other hand, was associated with the Temple tradition. It was Solomon and his many foreign wives who were responsible for syncretism and the view of Israel as a whore (Hosea). At the risk of oversimplification, we shall associate the tent tradition with spiritual idealism conjuring up fond memories of Israel's formative period in the desert. Israel then, was the bride of Yahweh (Hs 2:16-21).

The Temple tradition can be associated with syncretism, confusion or mental blockage that will culminate in Yahweh's destruction of the Northern Kingdom:

In my anger I gave you a king, and in my wrath I take him away (Hs 13:11).

The role of this anti-monarchical tradition (1 Sm 8) refers not only to the demand for Saul to be made king, but also to the ineffectual monarchy with frequent dynastic changes culminating in the final sacking of Samaria (1 Sm 14) and deportation. In his attempt to warn, teach and convert the people, Hosea postulated *hesed* as a matter of both mind and heart, and true devotion to the covenant partner. With *hesed*, Hosea demanded knowledge of God. Israel must therefore return to the desert (2:16-17), meaning the need to re-establish contact with Yahweh. This, and only this will lead to a re-marriage between Yahweh and his bride, a betrothal with integrity and justice, a betrothal with tenderness and love (2:21). For the fate of the Southern kingdom, we turn to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel deals with the prophecies against the land and Jerusalem, its rulers, priests and prophets. In Ezekiel, devastation is wrought by false prophets (13:1-23) or prophets of the establishment. While chapter 12, which was a prophecy of the impending doom of the exile, showed the tragedy of true prophecy scorned, no less tragic is the perennial attractiveness of false prophecy to ordinary people who cannot distinguish between the two in the absence of immediate, objective criteria (Jr 28:1-15; 14:13-16; Is 9:14; Mi 3:5; 1 Ki 22). The influence of false prophecy on the masses is comparable to the influence of the media on ordinary citizens, especially the kind of media which is ostensibly free from state control. Power and influence lies not in telling the truth but what people would like to hear, so that they may vote for you.

In chapter 13, Ezekiel presents the prophets of the establishment as claiming to speak the word of Yahweh and to fulfil his purpose; but their words are in effect products of their own wishful thinking (13:2). Their words are spawned by 'their own spirit' (13:3), in the context meaning 'avaricious desires' comparable to the greed of Saul. 13:4-10 depict the lying visions of false prophets as a whitewash.

Ezekiel 19 begins with a lament over the tragic end of the last kings of Judah (19:1-14). In 20:1-44 a sweeping panorama of Israel's history or the whole House of Israel without exception, those worshipping Yahweh on the 'holy mountain ...' This was indeed an unremitting sequence of rebellion, punishment and deliverance. Even the slavery in Egypt (20:9 was a punishment for idolatry (- a strong warning for the oppressed of today to embark on soul searching!). Ezekiel 43:1-27 speaks of the restoration of the temple as if in theological terms. In effect, it is part of the larger

whole (Ez 40-48) dealing with 'the return of the glory of the Lord'. 'Restoration' in the context should be understood not in the sense of the resuscitation of the old Temple, or simply building another on its ruins, as did those who returned from exile. No! The pre-exilic Temple represented the adverse influence of the monarchy on the Temple, alternatively politics over religion (43:8). The new Temple built by Yahweh himself, will be free from such bad influence (43:9) and will symbolise Yahweh's presence among his people, for ever (43:7).

Matthew, rightly in our opinion, interweaves the Temple tradition with the death and resurrection of Jesus (Mt 26:61; cf Jn 2:19). Matthew's aim is apparently to present Jesus as the embodiment of the new temple, in which the glory of the Lord returned. That would be Jesus' reward for refusing to compromise the fundamental value of justice and mercy (Mt 12:7) as the basis for interpreting the law (Mt 7:12; 22:34-40). On the latter issue Jesus had persistently opposed (Ac 6:4) the traditions of the elders (Mt 15:1-9), which were possibly under the influence of politics and greed, among other things. The Temple veil rent in two on the occasion of Jesus' death (27:51) would indicate the absence of the glory of the Lord, namely from that Temple.

With this we shall take leave of the 'divine' economy as seen by Ezekiel, as well as its impact on New Testament thinking. But the tragic story of the human condition will continue even after the exile, during the era of the second Temple. At this time Jesus, the protagonist assumed the role of prophet, while the Pharisees and religious leaders or antagonists assumed the role of false prophets (Mt 7:15).

But, as the story of Jesus unfolds, he meets with fierce opposition that will culminate in his execution, at the instigation of Jewish religious authorities. And yet his name has been used, and will continue to be used, even by those who work for ideologies contrary to 'justice and mercy' as both the substance of conversion and ethos of Christian morals. By now it should not be difficult for us to see why the infancy narratives in the gospels, linked Jesus with the house of David: a king and ruler who through faith, feared God.

The whole section on the constitution of the monarchy can be summarised as follows: in justice God condemned the sinner (i e, Saul and David). In mercy, God forgave the truly repentant sinner (i e, David) and went further to redeem or restore him to everlasting life through the resurrection, much as the everlasting quality of the Davidic dynasty finds realization only in Jesus of Nazareth (Mt 22:41-46). Justice and mercy therefore amounts to the presentation of justice as the distribution of love on the part of God. The same love presented as distribution of different needs which are due to different people, for example, hunger, thirst, *et cetera* (Mt 25:35-37) becomes the criterion of the Last Judgement (Mt 25:31-46) as opposed to the ritual aspect (Mt 9:13 cf Hs 6:6) of Temple worship, or sacrifice. But what happened to Christianity after Jesus?

3. Christendom from the perspective of faith and culture

3.1 Introduction or definition of pertinent concepts

Faith

In our treatment of the constitution of the monarchy in Israel, faith was seen as obedience to the will of Yahweh within the context of the covenant. In the prophetic literature and gospels, faith appears to be the recognition of the things that matter, namely 'justice and mercy'. And if the latter constitutes true worship, then it can also serve as the *raison d'être* of the Church. Faith implies love and hope.

Culture

According to Taylor (Truzzi 1971:66-70), culture or civilization can be described widely and in an ethnographic sense as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and indeed any other capabilities and habits acquired by one as a member of society. And since the concept culture also comprehends belief, it has become the perennial problem of humankind, not only to confuse 'faith' and 'culture', but also to reduce the former (which is transcendent) to the latter (which is merely temporal or human). When this happens alienation is precipitated, while superstition and magic replace faith and worship.

Ideology and Idolatry

For our purposes 'ideology' is defined negatively as leading to 'idolatry' through the process of absolutization. These allegations must be understood from the perspective of the evolution, institutionalization and development of major or positive religions like Judaism, Islam and Christianity, which are characterised by transcendence. According to Baum (1975), to acknowledge divine transcendence is not the assimilation of a special concept about a supreme being called God, but a salvational process by which one is ready again and again to detect the absolutizing trend in oneself and in one's culture and is willing, by a painful step, to abandon one's idolatry. In the case of Abraham - the model of Christian faith - transcendence did not merely take verbal assent. Instead, it was practical, involving progressive disassociation of his person from his fatherland 'beyond the river', his people and their gods, as well as all the security offered by these things (Vorster 1989:65-66). But this was only the beginning of a long journey, namely the so-called ten trials of Abraham. Divine transcendence therefore, cannot be accepted by one once and for all (Baum 1979:237). For Baum (1979:238), only Jesus was totally free of idols. The absolutizing trend in one or otherwise one's idolatry, appears to be the genesis of alienation. Baum (1975:9) outlines Hegel's contention that the inherited religion (e.g. the positive religions of today) was the source of threefold alienation of one from nature, from oneself and from one's fellows.

In Berger, however, the concept of inauthentic existence appears to take the place of alienation. This is a process whereby one is confronted by the social reality which originated from one (or one's ancestry?) but now confronting one as objective facticity to which one succumbs uncritically (Berger 1961:63; Berger & Luckmann 1966) to become a conformist. One simply yields to social values (for example, of capitalism, communism or *apartheid*) to which religion or its surrogate has ascribed absolute quality. During the nineteenth century the church responded to criticisms by assuming a posture of hostility to the modern world and by stressing uniformity of belief and strict obedience to authority. This behaviour on the part of the church silenced many a prophet (or critic), so much so, that people with a sensitive conscience were left with no option but to lapse into the periphery (for example, Merleau-Ponty). Others, out of confusion, swelled the ranks of aristocratic atheism. In due course, we shall attend to economic concepts like capitalism and how communism succeeded in unmasking capitalism's use of religion as an instrument of power, but failed to provide a viable alternative.

3.2 The pre-Constantine Church

The history of the Roman church in the early, pre-Constantinian period is essentially that of a small sect composed of recruits largely from the lower classes of the empire. It depended during these years of its existence on the relatively tolerant attitude of the imperial authorities and, most significantly, it owed its growth to a steady influx of converts attracted by the charity and moral tenor of the church's members.

The third century witnessed an upsurge in Roman authorities' alarm at the spread of the church or rather the church's opposition to the traditional Roman piety, considered unpatriotic atheism of Christians. As a result, Decius, Valerian and Diocletian unleashed systematic persecutions, the severity and scope of which were unprecedented. Previous persecutions had been sporadic and largely local. In matters of doctrine, the scriptural canon was set, as well as the three-fold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, while the See of Rome exercised universal care over other churches.

3.3 The post-Constantine Church

During the reign of Constantine, the Edict of Milan (314) recognized the church as the legal religion. By the end of the fourth century, after the conversion of Constantine, Christianity became the state religion of the empire. A blessing or curse? (The reader should call to mind the fortunes of the Temple tradition in the constitution of the monarchy in Israel.)

On the positive side, the conversion of Constantine meant that the Christian church became the sole religion of the empire, the official religion and all that entails.

On the negative side, the church gained popularity, no longer largely from among the common people, or the needy who found succour in charity, but from among the

elite of the empire, the status seekers and opportunists in search of power and influence, among other things.

On the positive side the missionary aspect of the church experienced a tremendous boost; the empire's effective communication system and good roads were put at the disposal of the church. On the negative side, one should ask how the growth of the imperial church would be classified in terms of the seven churches of Revelation 2. Sardis? (Rv 3:1&2). In other words, are we here thinking of quantity or quality?

On the positive side, the alliance of church and state, the effects of which are still with us today, meant that the state subjected itself to the scrutiny and judgement of the gospel - so that Nathan could again confront David about the injustice of adultery with Uriah's wife. On the negative side it meant that the church had lost its pre-Constantine moral autonomy to pursue its mission in the world, due to the many favours extended to it by the state.

Moreover, the appointment of people to key positions in the government of the church was not immuned from the influence of the state. The interference or lobbying by the state would finally eliminate any healthy tension by which the church could become the conscience of the people or the state itself.

3.4 The medieval church

After the collapse of the Roman empire in the sixth century, the church was centred around abbeys and monasteries. It became the custodian and preserver of the classics. The monasteries also became the nucleus of agricultural settlements, animating farming among the communities surrounding them.

By the time of the feudal age (ninth-thirteenth century) the monasteries had become centres of learning. The first universities emerged at this time (more or less the twelfth century). Among the most outstanding philosophers and theologians were Scotus Erigena (815-877), Anselm (1033-1109), Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus (1193-1280), Bonaventure (1221-1274), Duns Scotus (1265-1280) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). It was through their activities that for the first time in Christian culture, the problems concerning the existence, activity, knowledge, and talk about God were put to human reason. This made of theology a risky enterprise, for it was the first implicit invitation to betrayal. But we have to ask the question whether true growth to maturity can take place without any risk?

The great betrayal occurred many centuries later, when modernity during the rediscovery of the classics chose to divorce faith and reason. In that choice, the modern will to atheism manifested itself. And yet the medieval tradition of reason was considered a tradition of both faith and reason.

3.5 The world of the modern church and the Renaissance

The world of the modern church witnessed the formation of modern Europe under the auspices of nationalism. Like atomic energy, national consciousness could unleash the force required to build nations or to destroy them through wars. The

absolutization of nationality can degenerate into racism. Hence any serious study on modern racism should take the social psychology of modern nationalism into account. We will return to nationalism when we deal with schisms. For the moment, suffice it to say, that modern nationalism had reached idolatrous proportions through the process of absolutization.

We will now turn our attention to the social systems engendered by economic ideas, as well as the intellectual climate which nurtured them. We shall examine capitalism, and demonstrate how communism, under the auspices of modern aristocratic atheism, succeeded in unmasking the spirit of capitalism, which sought to use religion as an instrument of power, but failed to provide a viable alternative to capitalism. How did communism fail? Because the powers of the general-secretary of the communist party steadily evolved into a religion-surrogate, effectively silencing any critic, however mild.

3.5.1 Capitalism

Weber (Truzzi 1971:317-325) describes capitalism, generally, as the rational utilization of capital in a permanent enterprise, and the rational capitalistic organization of labour in the determination of economic activity. In this form, capitalism existed in China, India, Babylon, in the classic world and in the Middle Ages. In each of those cases, capitalism reflected the culture surrounding it.

For example in biblical times, it was considered unethical to charge interest on a loan. Be that as it may, capitalism here did not seem to become an issue of passionate debate, either on a philosophical or moral-theological level. Perhaps this was because capitalism was no more than a means of survival or business astuteness, despite a few greedy individuals.

3.5.2 Modern capitalism

By modern capitalism we understand the spirit of modern capitalism, or the Western European and American capitalism. In order to characterize this spirit, we shall quote extensively from Weber's analysis:

It is Benjamin Franklin who preaches to us in these sentences, the same which Ferdinand Kürnberger satirizes in his clever and malicious *Picture of American Culture* as the supposed confession of faith of the Yankee ... Let us pause a moment to consider this passage, the philosophy of which Kürnberger sums up in the words, 'they make tallow out of cattle and money out of man'. The peculiarity of this philosophy of avarice appears to be the ideal of the honest man of recognized credit, and above all the idea of a duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end in itself (Truzzi 1971:320).

What interests us most, however, is how the West tried to use Christianity to justify modern capitalism. In his essay: 'Why the Church in South Africa matters', Hastings says 'the whole nature of the South African situation as it has been engineered by its

overlords, is such as to provide a paradigm for this scenario: a microcosm almost capable of forcing the macrocosm into its image'. He continues:

Beneath layer upon layer of intellectual junk passed down in the accepted traditions of Western middle class Christianity, agnostic academe and Marxist myth, what is in truth valid at the core of this analysis of the world predicament is little more than the existence of two rival powers (meaning the USA and USSR) (Prior 1982:160).

For Hastings, Christianity is identified with the ideology of capitalism, while atheism is identified with the ideology of communism. The implications are clear: God approves of the ideology of modern capitalism. Correspondingly God disapproves of the ideology of communism. Hence President Reagan, then leader of the 'free world', did not hesitate to brand the USSR an 'evil empire'!

In South Africa, however, communism was initially popular among the white workers, since it helped the mine workers fight for their rights during the labour unrest of 1922. Only when the communist party decided to include Africans in its programme of action, did whites turn away from it. When it eventually joined hands with the ANC it was demonised and branded atheistic. Perhaps we should turn our attention to the atheistic philosophical matrix which inspired communism.

3.5.3 Hegel's dialectical method

Hegel (1770-1831) developed a method reflected in his *Phenomenology of Mind* based on the inadequacy between concept and experience, or rather the presumed concept and experienced concept. To begin with, the presumed concept becomes the thesis, itself the provisional judgement. By way of example, human consciousness can attain to the status of master when, in longing for recognition, it dares or defies even the dread of death. The other self, in response, has no option but to become a slave, for it dreaded death and preferred recognition of the other self. So the master-slave relationship has emerged: the master commands; the slave works, while the master enjoys himself. This concludes the first phase.

In the second phase the experienced concept becomes contrary experience or antithesis. For example the master does not remain master; neither does the slave remain a slave. Why? Because in working, the slave frees himself while the master only profits without labour. Result? The master becomes totally dependent on the working slave. Further, it is the slave who transforms material things and changes nature; eventually the slave becomes conscious of his power or mastering nature. We can conclude that the slave has virtually become master, both of his master and nature. The master, on the other hand, who merely continues to indulge himself has virtually become a slave, of both his slave and his pleasures, i e, a slave of nature and the world. With this scenario, the second phase is concluded (and set for revolution?).

The third phase consists in a synthesis. The synthesis is the judgement arising from the correction of the presumed concept by the experienced concept. The synthesis serves to 'lift' (up) (or *aufheben*) the two other concepts. This means that opposition

between two previous concepts is done away with; the opposition is also denied in the synthesis. Secondly, the contradictory concepts are 'lifted' (up) or elevated to a higher unity and truth. Finally, the new level of truth is itself provisional and thus becomes a new thesis calling for an antithesis ...

Ultimately, however, the final synthesis unites, reconciles and embraces all previous dialectical moments. Both master and slave realize that domination of each other does not work. They therefore attain mastership over themselves which is a stoic attitude (freedom?). For Hegel, the unhappy consciousness of the Jew and Christian tend to become the beautiful soul by escaping from reality and the world.

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1853) who was Hegel's disciple, wrote his main work called *The Essence of Christianity*, in which he dismisses God as 'merely the projected essence of man' (Vansina 1973:51). As God creates man, says Feuerbach, man creates God.

3.5.4 Marx 1818-1883 and Communism

Karl Marx adopted the Hegelian method. His major contribution is in his development of Hegel's themes of alienation, in the process of which he unmasked religion. Along with Nietzsche, Sartre and Freud, he held that faith in God and religion are alienating people from adult freedom and responsibility.

It would appear that the atheism of Marx is related to the 'God' of the so-called Christian state of Prussia. In fact, the Prussian government had induced his father, a liberal Jew, to an opportunistic conversion to Lutheranism. The tyrants of this state claimed 'divine right' for themselves.

The complicity of the church to the appalling conditions of the workers, including the exploitation of women and children during the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century England, only confirmed Marx's worst fears about religion.

It should therefore not be difficult to see why Marx thought religion to be like opium, a sedative and narcotic. Its narcotic effect stems from the fact that the church teaches acquiescence or non-violent acceptance of oppression, or violence from the state. It does this by way of holding out a promise of 'heavenly' happiness. The church then becomes the 'soul of the soulless conditions'. Hence religion takes on an increasingly spiritual and ethereal form. The end-product of such spiritualism is, as it were, drug infused imaginary state of piety completely removed from the real world of suffering, lest the sufferers should see, judge and act to remove the root cause of suffering (in which religion had vested interests).

It may be that Marx was right about the church in the West then, and even the church to-day, for that matter. It may also be true that the idea of God, in the eyes of the world, takes the form projected by the behaviour of those who claim to be believers. Hence it is the fault of the church that the name of God is rejected by atheism (Rm 2:24). We witness, here, the truth of the saying *corruptio-optimi, pessima*, because the better the thing is, the worse is its corruption.

In Russia, however, the alliance between church and state apparently lasted only up till the accession of Peter the Great. Then the struggle for power raged, resulting in the confiscation of church property by the state, and the marginalisation of the clergy, who now received their salaries from the government. In the highly charged atmosphere, seminaries had become a breeding place for revolutionary ideas. During the ensuing Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the communists, with their atheistic philosophy from the West, took over control of the revolution. As a result, after the revolution the churches at the central square in Moscow were closed. Rural churches were allowed to go on, albeit without legal standing, so that the clergy had to take an oath of allegiance to the state. The church was marginalised: it became the church of the poor ...

The pre-Constantinian church in the West, as well as the church in Russia immediately before, during, and after the Bolshevik Revolution, raises a number of questions about the accuracy of Marx's social analysis, namely that of religion as opium of the people.

Secondly, the church, throughout history, has on and off worshipped idols, or false ideas of God. Even here we shall resort to the saying of the sages, namely *abusus non tollit usum*, or that abuse does not abolish the right use. If communism were a better alternative, the lamp would not have been put under the bushel of the Iron Curtain.

3.6 Schism within Western Christendom

Schism is perhaps what happens when culture has become so absolute, as opposed to relative, that religion is used to justify intolerance. Paul had vehemently opposed the Judaizers who absolutized the Jewish culture by demanding that gentile Christians be circumcised in order to become the spiritual heirs of the Sinai Covenant. In reply, Paul pointed out that the Law Covenant referred to was subordinate to the Covenant of Promise initiated by God, and concluded with Abraham as partner. Since Abraham was justified through faith, argued Paul, the many descendants promised him become his children through faith, even in Christ Jesus, who is himself the seed of Abraham. The elevation of Jewish culture (represented by insistence on circumcision) to a measure on a par with faith therefore, not only compromises faith, but reprehensibly satisfies the conditions necessary for idolatry. And the solution?

In Galatians 2:1-10, Paul reached agreement with the 'pillar' apostles in Jerusalem, that he (Paul) and Barnabas should devote their ministry to the gentiles while James, Cephas and John would serve the circumcised. This agreement, or a hand of *koinonia*, meant that the gentile church and the Jewish church were united in one faith, one Lord and one church, while divergent in culture. The early church waited a long time until another biblical author took the matter further by explaining that the unity of believers in Christ, rather than culture, is a sign of the credibility of specifically Christian faith:

Father, may they be one *in us*,
as you are in me and I in you,

so that the world may believe
it was you who sent me.

John 17:21 (my emphasis).

The biblical position about the Christian faith, therefore, meant that it would be witnessed richly, by a multiplicity of cultures: unity in diversity rather than conformism.

When Christianity was introduced to Africa, it was as though the missionaries were the armed colonizers at prayer. For, what Africans received were sealed packages of culture sharing a common Western civilization, with a religious stamp. That is why Africans had to divest themselves of their culture, in order to receive Christ, the New European. The adverse consequences of this moral uprootment manifested itself in cultural schizophrenia of double religion as opposed to enriching cultural cross-pollination. Double religion is an extension of magical practice in which in the event of illness for example, you call a priest to administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction. If it appears to fail, you appeal to the medicine man in bad conscience, for a believer may not commune with a witch doctor. But was there no difference between healers and witches in the simple societies of medieval Europe?

Anyway, the question we should be asking is, how did these cultural religious packages of a divided Christianity originate?

Unfortunately, schisms go back to the roots of our faith in the Bible. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as schismatics (ref Jn 4:9), and forbade them to take part in the re-building of the Temple after the exile: a virtual ex-communication. Why? The Samaritans had intermarried with foreigners so much so, that despite their profession of the Pentateuch, they were considered culturally syncretistic or racially impure. It was to this situation that Jesus reacted by telling the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). The lesson is simple. God uses a different criterion of justice and mercy rather than race, when weighing people. Secondly, it was the Samaritan woman who, with her community, believed in Jesus (Jn 4:39), while the supposedly good Jews rejected him. In Christendom, however, schisms seem to continue to observe cultural lines:

(a) The great break of 1054 AD divided the Eastern churches and their Byzantine culture from the West and its Latin or Roman culture.

(b) The Reformation occurred during the sixteenth century, led by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and many others. The success of the Reformation was due in part to a general demand for a thorough reform throughout the Christian West. Moreover, heresy, conciliarism and corruption had taken their toll on the church. Our point of reference, therefore, is not the 'why' or 'wherefore' of reform, but the 'how' of reform.

The major division was between the Teutonic culture in the north led by Luther and the Latin church in the south under Rome. Since English is Germanic, but also enjoyed some Latin influence (since Claudius?), it went half-way both lines: the Low church and High church of England are representative of the respective continental traditions. But within the Latin tradition, the Gauls exercised a certain cultural

autonomy called Gallicanism. This had played a role in the creation of the Avignon papacy (1309-77) and the Western schism of 1378-1417.

Since the Netherlands is Dutch, it and the German speaking Switzerland opted for Protestantism. In Belgium, however, perhaps the dominant Wallonie culture and its proximity to France ensured that it remained Catholic. Moreover, its geographical position, close to France, Germany, England and the Netherlands, gives it a unique position to stay above ideological battles.

4. Conclusion

In many respects, the church appears to have been less than prophetic in its mission. Its tardiness in committing itself to the cause of social justice, is demonstrated by the fact that long before *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, communism had taken the initiative in championing the rights of the workers. In fact, a number of parallels can be drawn between Judaism and Christianity:

The Jews thought they could bypass the demands of faith (i.e., justice and mercy) by claiming physical Abrahamic descent (Jn 7:39) through circumcision (Gn 17:11 & 12). To this Jesus replied that if the Jews were indeed Abraham's children, they would do as Abraham did, namely, believe (Gn 15:6). From the foregoing, one could extrapolate that physical descent or race affiliation (nationalism) rather than justification through faith, was the Jewish idea of salvation. Similarly, since Constantine, Christians think they can bypass the demands of faith by claiming salvation through baptism into the body of Christ. But here too it can be argued that if we were indeed members of the body of Christ we would be neither divided among ourselves nor with God, as our moral track record in church history indicates.

When religion becomes a blank cheque for national wrongdoing, as was the case in the days of Isaiah, (compare with the silence of the church during the execution of six million Jews during World War II, or even the use of religion as a tool in South Africa, whether to support *apartheid* or to destroy it) then we have an ambiguous situation which calls for God's judgement.

For if the message of the cross is love (Rm 5:8b) and the latter is all-embracing (or ecumenical), then the church should be open toward the rest of God's creation, rather than adopt a sectarian or narrow attitude. Some think that the church should first get its house in order. In his essay 'Faith and Good Faith', Merleau-Ponty (1964:178) writes:

God will not fully have come to the earth until the church feels the same obligation toward other men as it does toward its own ministers, toward the house of Guernica as toward its own temples.

Like Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century, Merleau-Ponty in the twentieth pointed out the gap between the preaching and practice of Christianity, between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, between ritual and true worship. Bosch also discusses the situation

of the contemporary church from the perspective of the wider crises¹. A review of priorities is called for. Only then will our system of values in South Africa be anchored in transcendence through the authority of belief. Only then will the social critics stop saying:

It is puzzling why it is so difficult -- or impossible -- for the De Klerk government to do what is so obviously prescribed by Christian morality. Or are the claims of materialistic ideology stronger than Christian morality?

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1. D J Bosch adds his voice to the contemporary crises in the church under the rubric: mission. He discusses several aspects of the concept mission, from a descriptive rather than value vantage point. This approach tends to confine him to the traditional, geographical paradigm for understanding mission. And though he declares that 'the Christian mission is in the firing-line today' (Bosch 1991:2), and even speaks of the 'dechristianisation of the West' (*ibid*:3), he does not tell us what he understands by the term Christianity as opposed for example to Christendom, or simply Christians. The result is that opposition to the traditional missionary enterprise appears as though it were opposition to God, or the Trinity. Lastly, if the crises under discussion take a form which makes the church irrelevant, one would have thought that secularization as opposed to secularism would help restore meaning in the church.

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