

Faith in Christ the Way Forward in African Development

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Abstract

Christian incarnation of the sacred into human society enabled distinguishing of divine and secular realms in a way often invisible to non-Westerners. Westerners often ignore this history of their contemporary dualism. In overseas interventions, the West prioritizing the secular in the divine / secular duality means that contemporary research on African development ignores religion in general and Christianity in particular. Christianity plays key roles in many African communities. Because key human values originate in faith in god(s), the spiritual underlies and precedes the material. This article proposes the necessity of a Christian/spiritual dimension to development advocacy in Africa and beyond.

Keywords: development; dualism; Christianity; religion; values; Africa.

Introduction

The power of the West globally means that when the West talks, the rest of the world often pays attention. The most widespread language of global discourse (English) is thoroughly Western in origin. Yet, the West that advocates what the rest of the world should do likes to ignore the Christian origins of its own way of life. As a result, outside of specifically ecclesial circles, the history of Western civilization can be presented as if it is an outcome of the thoughts of rational beings who somehow escaped irrational strictures of pre-logical faith. Hang on, say scholars of the history of Western legal systems: Western legal systems, and the science that emerged from them, have not come about as a result of escaping pre-logical faith. Actually, they arose as a result of church and its faith having incarnated into the world.

A re-evaluation is called for. Is the fault of secular models of development their failure to engage the Christian Gospel? This, to some an extraordinary conclusion, could be drawn from a careful reading of this article. This article demonstrates how the anti-Christian bias of recent scholarship has occluded essential ingredients of social change and advance in Africa from public view. Historically and contemporarily this article shows a relationship with God to be not an optional extra for those who desire a 'private religion', but a necessary building block of a thriving human community.

Critiquing African Development

Many scholars, such as William Easterly (2009) and Dambisa Moyo (2009), have built their renown on their criticisms of efforts by the West and by the global community to facilitate

development in Africa. Critics are not always united in what they advocate should replace current practice. Advocates of aid to the majority world, including Africa, seem to operate on the basis that “the option of doing nothing is worse” (Wolf, 2005:2). To Wolf, the alternative to giving aid to Africa is to do ‘nothing’. Because something is better than nothing, until a legitimate alternative course of action is found, he’ll go for aid! So we get the same old, same old reasoning by well meaning Westerners who for various reasons find themselves obligated to intervene in the poor world’s issues. The many great ideas they bring to the table have an uncanny amount in common (see Harries & Lewis, 2012).

Some things are being overlooked. Ironically, their being overlooked is not accidental. Things are being intentionally and determinedly overlooked! Scholars and leaders invested with the responsibility of resolving issues of poverty and development should pay attention to these things. What is being intentionally over-looked is the role of what has come to be known as ‘religion’ in people’s lives. The modern world has intentionally and forcibly attempted to exclude consideration of God’s role in its understanding of human society. Hence even scholars who implicitly hold numerous important principles do not know how to overtly root them in spiritual reality (Marsden, 1997:3). “Christian theism, on the other hand, at least provides grounds for supporting the moral intuitions that many academics share,” says Marsden (1997:87). ‘Forced’¹ intervention into the lives of people in the majority world that ignores religion can, I suggest, do deep and widespread damage.²

¹ Intervention into the majority world is often ‘forced’ in so far as it comes with subsidy and financial spinoffs that are very hard for key power brokers to refuse, even should the project itself not be found desirable.

² Excluding God makes “it difficult to find a point of reference for establishing any certainty in what we claim to know” (Marsden, 1997:88). In practice, the reference point for modern people has become

Wolterstorff, one assumes with the best of intentions but not necessarily the most profound foresight, epitomizes the ‘naïvety’ of the aid and development fraternity with this formula: “If a rich man knows of someone who is starving and has the power to help that person but does not do so, then he violates the starving person’s rights as surely and as reprehensibly as if he had physically assaulted the sufferer” (Wolterstorff, 1983:82). This seems to be the basis for a lot of intervention into the majority world on the part of the wealthier West; a supposed human obligation to fulfill a presumed human right. The crux of the above quote from Wolterstorff is; just what constitutes “the power to help that person”? Wolterstorff seems to want to oblige someone with more material wealth to share that wealth with he who has less. This obligation is given as if it is basic. That is to say, no excuse is to be heard. Wolterstorff does not seem to consider; what if the very process of handing over material goods contributes to the perpetuation of the starvation that it is supposedly trying to resolve? Many examples of how this can happen are cited in various critiques of aid. By way of simple example; a subsidized importation of goods from outside can cause the collapse of local businesses, resulting in abject poverty when the subsidy (aid) is withdrawn, even in a community that originally had a relatively satisfactory functional market system. ‘Obliging’ people to give to the poor in an obscure part of the world of which they have little understanding, as Wolterstorff seems to suggest should be happening (above), can have various destructive side-effects.

I want to look in this article at the enormous gap in scholarship that has arisen from people’s failure to sufficiently perceive the role of ‘religion’ in human communities. I will look at it from different angles, yet through limits of space only in an introductory way. As I write, I seem to find myself, metaphorically speaking, on my knees. That is, not on my knees to God,

‘science’ or ‘objectivity’. Unfortunately, apart from being very imprecise, these reference points are unavailable to monistic people for whom the spiritual is always a part with the material.

although that also. I mean, on my knees to people, especially on my knees imploring Western people to turn me their ears. That is, on my knees pleading to Westerners and peoples of European origin, especially of the powerful native-English speaking world, and to some extent the German-speaking world. Taylor asks (2007:25) “why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say 1500 in Western society while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy but even inescapable?” It seems that it is because men can be easily deceived. The deceptions of recent centuries and decades are proving to be a crude bludgeon when used by the ‘secular’ West to beat on the rest of the world.

The Global Village of Rampant Inequality

The kinds and degrees of effort that used to go into sharing the good news of Jesus seem now to have been deflected into a sharing of the supposed benefits of secularism. This transfer of effort has been incredible. Perhaps most incredible – is that it has happened so smoothly that although surely people have noticed, the change seems by many simply to have been almost effortlessly accommodated. While such a transformation has occurred, there has been insufficient consideration of its wider ramifications. Instead, many seem to be in favor of accelerating the process of global secularization.³ Origins in Christ of current global circumstances are increasingly ignored, even as communities around the world creak and groan through failing to acquire helpful spiritual roots and foundations.

³ Churches themselves are actively promoting secularism, according to Bishop Nazi-Ali, as reported by Damian Thompson. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/damianthompson/100219138/leading-anglican-bishop-british-churches-have-capitulated-to-secularism-and-politically-correct-lessons-that-whitewash-islam/>

The failure of development in the majority world, at least Africa as a case in point, is widely acknowledged. “The consensus that aid has failed is nearly universal among those who look at the data” according to Shleifer (2009:380). Sometimes cries of ‘failure’ seem to be being shouted and constantly into one’s ears. Yet certain interpretations of such shouting into one’s ears have in Western academia and society been declared no-access, out of bounds, taboo! Recent transformations in people’s outlook are almost unbelievable. From giving Christianity the credit for what is good in the Western world (for example see Morris, 2007 (1864))⁴ whereby nations proudly declared themselves Christian, we have now turned to a position in which the Christian faith is forcibly ignored by dominant secular powers. (Taking secularism as being: “a means of organising political, legal and constitutional matters so as to exclude religious considerations and institutions from public affairs” (Mohr, 2011:34).) How has this change come about? How can within a space of a few generations, such a major part of life as people’s Christian belief be labeled irrelevant? Can a key area of human life that constitutes the origins of its peculiar ‘distinction’ from other members of the animal kingdom⁵ be ignored with no further impact on contemporary society? There is “no place for unproblematic breaks with a past which is simply left behind us” says Taylor (2007:772). I agree with Taylor; ‘religion’ that has been important to human life in the past is going to be important for it in the future. Pretending otherwise is acting out of dangerous naïve ignorance.

The role of faith in human existence continues to be central to it even while it is ignored. Failing to account for faith, especially faith in God as it has long been known, has rendered analysts and protagonists blind. Other parts of the world are confused and disoriented by the so-

⁴ See also: <http://crossandquill.com/journey/the-influence-of-christianity-on-western-civilization/>

⁵ Assuming that in the animal kingdom only human beings ‘have religion’, which undoubtedly some would dispute.

called First World's or Western World's continuing its merry way with minimum (if any) reference to their implicit understandings of the divine. Particularly sharp as an issue in this respect is the difference between dualism and so-called holism (sometimes written wholism) or monism. Many people's view of the world has for many years, one could say 'forever', been holistic or monistic. Africa is certainly a case in point. Monistic views are widely maintained in Africa up to today. In the monistic view, the sacred is not held separate from the secular. On the contrary, the Western world, as a result of peculiar circumstances apparently originating in the late 11th Century, (Berman, 1983:531 and 544) set up and has maintained a very distinct difference in understanding between sacred and secular. The rest of the world did not share in these 'peculiar circumstances'.⁶ Christian Europe in the Middle Ages "consist[ed] of two distinct groups of functionaries: the sacerdotium, or ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the imperium, or secular leaders" (Britannica, n.d.). Instead of passing on or communicating that difference in a way that might enable others to benefit from the same, the West has chosen to share outcomes of the above dualism with those who cannot comprehend and so cannot imitate it.

I will say more with respect to the above later in this article. Before doing so, however, I would like to point out ways in which mounting evidence that points to the centrality of Christ in numerous human affairs, is very non-academically ignored in scholarly and as well as popular circles.

Ignoring of the Evidence

An example of ignoring the evidence of the relevance of Christ to African communities a century ago can be found in a certain Mrs. Hoernle. Deborah Gaitskell, in her account focusing

⁶ See also <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/leithart/2007/02/15/papal-revolution/>

on the ministry of Christian missionary Dora Earthy, tells us a little about the female anthropologist Mrs. Hoernle (Gaitskell, 2012). Gaitskell investigated Hoernle's apparently ambiguous relationship to Earthy.

Gaitskell tells us that Hoernle repeatedly portrayed Christian missions as inherently antipathetic to anthropological concerns. "Missionaries erased pure Narna (name of an ethnic group in South Africa) culture and were therefore to be deplored," wrote Hoernle (Gaitskell, 2012:202). "Dreadful to think how dull religion can make a people," Hoernle wrote, with reference to African people who had become Christians. Yet the same Hoernle also confessed that "there is no doubt that the life of those people [South Africans] centres around their church" (cited by Gaitskell, 2012:202). Incredibly, and perhaps not so incredibly, we find Hoernle deciding on African people's behalf that Christianity was not good for them. Was this something akin to *schadenfreude*; did Hoernle not like to see African people benefiting from what she could apparently not stomach herself; the Lordship of Christ? Yet Hoernle, surprisingly according to Gaitskell, later gave Dora Earthy a great deal of assistance in publishing a book which contained a lot of overtly evangelistic material (Gaitskell, 2012:202).

Born in 1885, a ground breaking female anthropologist, Hoernle clearly had an issue with missionary involvement with South African native people. Hoernle was clearly against the church. At the same time, she was also aware of the powerful positive effect that the church had on the communities of South Africans amongst whom she worked. The South African people's voting with their feet to support churches contradicted Hoernle's own understanding. To her, the message of the missionaries might have been dull (Gaitskell, 2012:202). To the South Africans, it became the center of their lives (2012:202). Later, in her support of Earthy's own overtly Christian publishing, Hoernle herself seems to have repented of her earlier abrupt condemnations.

Meagher epitomizes contemporary researchers on social economic issues in Africa who in their analyses set out to ignore people's religious affiliations. Meagher researched "three enterprise clusters" in Nigeria (2009:406). She wanted to find out more about "the economic dynamism and apparently ethnic basis of organisation of a weaving cluster ... and two clusters producing shoes and garments" (2009:406). When she began her research she had not at all anticipated "the role of religion in their development and contemporary expansion" (2009:406). She "discovered", in the course of her research, something that she had not been looking for; the key role that the people's religious beliefs played in their economic and social activities. One wonders, given the antipathy that researchers such as Meagher sometimes have towards religions in general and Christianity in particular, just what they might be reporting if they weren't loaded with such heavy anti-religious bias?

Ben Jones explored the impact of NGOs on Ugandan communities. "I expected NGOs (Non Government Organizations) to be something that mattered and had effects" shared Jones (2013:90). In reality "I found there was little to show for their [NGOs] work" adds Jones (2013:90). People had little to say about the NGO projects, Jones discovered, except that they had ended. He found a vast contrast with this position when he began to explore the impact of a newly established Pentecostal church: "I was struck by the volume of words that flowed from discussions of a newly established Pentecostal church," he recalls (2013:90). He would probably not have considered, from within the brick walls of Western academia, the point that he made in his article as a result of fieldwork that: "juxtapose[d] ... two kinds of conversations as a way of understanding" which two ways of understanding were: "the growth of the Pentecostal church and the decline of development projects" (2013:90).

Jones discovered, it seems to me, African people's interest in monism. An NGO project that ignored people's spiritual concerns was, as a result, of limited interest. The coming of the church was a totally different ball game. Jones did not like to acknowledge this. Instead he credits the local relevance of the church to a particular 'history of violence' in Anguria: "I agree that Anguria's church became an integral physical part of the village because its work signified a particular sort of break relating to a recent history of violence" (2013:76). Did he not realize just how widely and deeply the church has taken root in the global south, including Africa as a whole (Jenkins, 2002:2)? Jones does not want to concede the obvious. 'How can a church seem so important to Ugandan people after all that we have been told in the UK about its irrelevance,' he seems to be asking himself? His coming up with a particular circumstantial reason as to why a church should become "an integral part of the village" ignores the integral role that Christianity is playing in numerous, if not endless African villages. Jones asked whether "institutions do or do not make sense of people's experiences and preoccupations" (2013:76). He conceded that, unlike the church, "the work of NGOs remained extrinsic to village life, on the margins of what people did and how they talked about things." He was able to "show the specific or parochial ways in which *a Pentecostal church was meaningful and development projects meaningless*" (my emphasis, Jones, 2013:76). One gets the impression that Jones might have said a lot more positive things about the church had he not felt himself bound by academic convention that has in recent decades forced scholars to despise or ignore people's Christian belief.

The above examples are limited. Yet, I think they are incredible – given all the implicit bias that anthropologists and other social-researchers often have against Christianity (Evans-Pritchard, 1964:155-157). That they have any positives for the church at all shows how incredible and singular an institution it is. One reason I cite the above examples as authoritative is

because they match with my own experience of living in an African village from 1988 to date. Despite being a believer, my secular UK upbringing had told me that the most important thing I had to share with African people was my agricultural training. A year or two into my time in Zambia I realized something similar to that which Jones discovered above; the church engages deeply with people's hearts in ways that secular development projects do not touch. Similar things became clear to me often. My home village, (in Western Kenya) is within a Millennium Development area.⁷ The Millennium project had to pay dearly just to get people to gather in meetings.⁸ By contrast – churches are constantly arranging all sorts of meetings without outside assistance, that people attend willingly using their own resources. Churches will raise funds for their own functioning from their own numbers, whereas development projects such as the Millennium often have to draw on foreign donors and work with wealthy and powerful government bodies.⁹

I am in danger of painting the picture of the Christian church in too rosy a way. Certainly there are endless faults and weaknesses in churches in Africa. There is an enormous problem of dependency and of the prosperity Gospel in Africa, related to its relationship to generous Western Christian donors. Nevertheless, the above comparison with NGOs is basic and very fundamentally true.

Man Abolished?

⁷ <http://mp.thinkfa.com/the-villages/sauri-kenya> (accessed January 18, 2014)

⁸ I have been told by word of mouth on frequent occasions that in order to get people to attend meetings regarding the progress of the Millennium project, they have to be given generous sitting allowances. Church meetings, on the other hand, are attended voluntarily.

⁹ blogs.worldbank.org/africacan/evaluating-the-millennium-villages

I want to draw on no less of an authority than C. S. Lewis for this section, especially on his book entitled *The Abolition of Man* (Lewis, 1955). Lewis challenges efforts made to convince schoolchildren that “all emotions aroused by local associations are in themselves contrary to reason and contemptible” (1955:19). He does so by critiquing a book which supposedly taught English, but in the process attempted to undermine what was to Lewis a very innate and essential link between the ‘mind’ and the ‘stomach’! Lewis called the people the authors were trying to form “men without chests” (1955:34). He points out that value does not and cannot arise from mere facts: “you cannot reach [values] as conclusions” says Lewis “[because] they are premises” (1955:53). Lewis refers to that in which the premises are based as the *Tao*. He considers this *Tao* to be basic to contemporary human civilization. So basic is the *Tao*, according to Lewis, that “the rebellion of new ideologies against the Tao is a rebellion of the branches against the tree” (1955:56).

Lewis points to a gross fallacy behind the thinking of those who consider that the contemporary advance of secularism in parts of the world should or could lead to life without religion (i.e. to Lewis the *Tao*). This Tao is a set of beliefs that are foundational to human existence, but that cannot be derived from any factual origins. Instead, to use Lewis’s terminology “a dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery” (1955:84). Mohr makes a very similar point (citing Agamben); that paradigmatic ontologies have neither a beginning nor an original form but are archaic (Mohr, 2011:48).

It would have been interesting to have asked Lewis for his view on Africa. We can ask ourselves, in the light of Lewis’s statement above, what the position was in sub-Saharan Africa,

before the coming of the Gospel? That is, were African people, before the advent of the missionaries, in possession of Lewis's *Tao* or not?

According to Lewis "tyranny" and "slavery" occur where the *Tao* is absent (see Lewis, 1955:84 above). Those are strong terms. They resemble terms that are at times used to describe Africa. See for example Ayittey, 1999:5-8. Arabs and Westerners are often considered guilty of the worst atrocities of slavery. Yet, it may be pointed out, the latter could hardly have done what they did if African people had not been happy to sell fellow Africans to outsiders.¹⁰ Surely many of the practices that went on in indigenous slavery would today be considered barbaric. Slavery has been a big issue in many parts of the African continent and often still is up to today (see for example Duthiers, 2014). Time and time again one hears about tyrannical dictators in Africa. African leadership is often said to be dictatorial and ruthless. Hence the ICC (International Criminal Court) finds itself constantly tripping up African 'dictators', resulting according to Koigi in: "African Leaders fighting [the] ICC want[ing] to restore dictatorship" and tyranny (2013).¹¹

One is forced to ask whether sub-Saharan Africa was or was not, prior to the modern era, in possession of Lewis's *Tao*? My own thought would be – possibly not, or only in part. That explains the great enthusiasm often expressed in African efforts at apprehending the Gospel. The impact of Christianity in many parts of the Continent has been phenomenal. This, as mentioned above, even Hoernle discovered, causing her to say; "there is no doubt that the life of these

¹⁰ "In Africa there were a number of societies and kingdoms which kept slaves, before there was any regular commercial contact with Europeans, including the Asanti, the Kings of Bonny and Dahomey" according to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter1.shtml> . African languages with which I am familiar have a term for 'slave' that is distinct from 'servant', this suggesting that the practice of having slaves was at one time widespread on the continent. See, for example, Mboya (1997:194).

¹¹ This quote is taken from the title of Koigi's article. For more on this see also: http://open.salon.com/blog/almariam/2013/10/06/saving_african_dictators_from_the_icc

people centres around their church” (cited by Gaitskell, 2012:202 already given above). In many parts of Africa, church is not a building in the middle of town which one attends once in a blue moon on a formal occasion. Instead – the church is everywhere and seems to be in everything. Certainly in my home village and in other African villages known to me, African people’s preoccupation with the church can be constant, endless, and everywhere. Could it not be that, as many of them have only recently (in recent generations) discovered the church, i.e. to use Lewis’s terminology, the *Tao*, they are so loving it that they just cannot get enough of it! The memory of what it is like to live without the *Tao* for them is all too recent and powerful.

The same state of *Tao*-lessness seems to be incipiently threatening to re-emerge; hence the post-election violence in Kenya (2007-8), and the current carnage in South Sudan as I write in January 2014 (Standard, 2014). Hence the apparent ongoing presence of slavery in Africa (Duthiers, 2014). Africa, it seems, is desperate for the *Tao*, i.e. for the Gospel of Jesus. The great irony of our era is that at the same time as Africa is so desirous of it, powerful currents of thought in the West no longer even acknowledge the *Tao*’s existence never mind its central importance! Instead, what the West promotes is development projects, described by Jones as “meaningless” (2013:76). Hence we find African people like “Isaac ... [who] having grown up in the Tonga [Zimbabwean] culture ... knew intimately what drove people to do what they did. Now he had found a better way than what he grew up with. He had to tell them the hard truth that the way of Christ is so far superior to traditional African religion that he could never water it down to suit them” (Reese, 2014:148).

This *Tao*, including its expression as the Gospel of Christ, has been rendered invisible to parts of the modern world. In the West it is these days being presupposed rather than being pursued. Presupposing of something no longer visible or even recognized is bringing many

problems. Hence I would say that it is high time again for the Western world to recognize and actively promote the *Tao*. This same *Tao* cannot be found in science or in objectivity. It must be taken and practiced as it is, as “only those practising the *Tao* will understand it” according to Lewis (1955:61). It is not derived either from purely human intelligence or from natural theology or the nature of “things” (Williams, 2013).¹² The *Tao* comes from God.

Some readers may be asking – what about other religions? Am I claiming that the *Tao* resides primarily in the Christian Gospel, or am I saying that all religions lead equally to God? I appreciate that in the modern, and so far even the post modern West, this is a difficult and entrenched question. One way of helping ourselves to better understand this question is to look at the term ‘religion’ itself. Asad, renowned Islamic anthropologist, could help us here. “The concept of ‘religion’ has Christian roots ... in an important sense it is ... a translation of Christianity ... or ... an abstraction and generalisation of elements regarded as basic to Christianity” shares Asad (2009:397). Following Asad then, labeling other religions as ‘religions’ is giving them Christian clothes. This very quickly gets very confusing. What are the implications of other religions always being evaluated, as a result of being given the label ‘religion’, through a Christian framework? To what extent are scholars of religion imputing content from their own Christian background onto other ‘religions’, that may not actually be there? I do not consider a comparison with ‘other religions’ to be as simple as some scholars sometimes imply. Hence I do not endeavor to engage it here, except a little tangentially in the paragraph below.

Generations of Westerners have grown up believing that ‘religion’ is a private affair that is essentially inconsequential for matters of society, academia and governorship. Many people are very happy to discuss the pros and cons of different forms of democracy or Marxism. They may

¹² Williams argues that nature alone without inspired Scripture is an insufficient basis for useful theology.

be very reluctant to concede advantages of any one 'religion' over another. Ironically: "If a professor talks about something from a Marxist point of view, others might disagree but not dismiss the notion. If a professor proposed to study something from a Catholic or Protestant point of view it would be treated like proposing something from a Martian point of view," explains Green of contemporary America (cited by Marsden, (1997:7)). Partly this is because of the confusion that I mention in the above paragraph. Partly, the above demonstrates shallow thought. In answer to my rhetorical question above: yes, I do believe that the Gospel of Jesus is the greatest articulation of the *Tao* that we have available to us today, and that it is the only way to a genuine knowledge of the true God. To deny that 'religions', as they have come to be known in modern parlance, differ in either their ultimate value or their temporal impact, is to me a brand of popular contemporary self-inflicted scholarly rigor mortis.

Russell Kirk identifies human cultures as arising from 'cults'. He considers a 'cult' to be an "attempt of people to commune with a transcendent power" (Kirk, 1992). He states that "the enormous material achievements of our civilisation have resulted, if remotely, from the spiritual insights of prophets and seers" (1992). Kirk asks; what happens to a culture once the cult that brought it about has withered? He answers: "when belief in the cult has been wretchedly enfeebled the culture will decay swiftly. The material order rests upon the spiritual order" (Kirk, 1992).¹³ Kirk sees modern man as perceiving that "culture ... [has] no connection with the love of God." He asks how the relationship for modern man between religion and culture can be restored. Kirk goes so far as to suggest that "democratic freedom" may be "servitude to ... illusions which attack religious belief" (1992)!

¹³ Kirk cites Robert Graves as his authority.

Neither Kirk nor Lewis directly address a question that I want to consider in this article. Both are writing from within the West, and their primary concern is with the West. What then of non-Westerners, such as many Africans? How is Africa ever going to follow in the footsteps of the West, other than by taking the Christian ‘cult’ very seriously? If contemporary Western scholars are right to see no need to believe in ‘Christian cults’ in order for Africa to achieve development, we can ask whether Africans are misled in their efforts at seeking to be true Christians? Is Christ relative – non-existent for Westerners but existent and important for Africans? It seems to me that this logical puzzle has one likely answer – Jesus is Lord. This should be taken seriously by everyone. Those who do not take it seriously are practicing a dangerous, but these days in the West widespread, self-deception.

The Case of Law

Some members of the legal discipline have tried to determine the vagaries of its origins. There is no doubt in the minds of many historians of Western legal systems that contemporary rule of law is rooted in ecclesiastical history. This runs in the face of a popular view that the rational rule of law was enabled by a pushing of the church onto the periphery (Berman, 1983:158).

Harold Berman has perhaps gone the furthest and into most detail in exploring the history of the Western legal system (1983). Berman’s historical account reads almost like a textbook in theology and ecclesiology. Berman looks at the origins of science itself; “What gave rise to scientific values was not the carving out of a sphere of life – the secular, the temporal, the material – which could be investigated without risk to religious beliefs, but rather a new attitude to the sacred itself,” Berman tells us (1983:158). This attitude arose, according to Berman, when

the traditional understanding of “sacredness [as] otherworldliness” shifted into being “incarnation of the sacred ... in the political, economic and social life of the times” (1983:158). Berman attributes this incarnation of the sacred almost entirely to Christianity: “there seem to have been virtually no direct contemporary Jewish or Islamic influences on the development of Western legal systems in their formative era” (1983:160).

Berman goes on to explain that “basic institutions, concepts and values of Western legal systems have their sources in religious rituals, liturgies and doctrines of the 11th and 12th centuries, reflecting new attitudes toward death, sin, punishment, forgiveness and salvation” (1983:165). He emphasizes that “the legal systems of all Western countries, and of non-Western countries that have come under the influence of Western law, are a secular residue of religious attitudes and assumptions which historically found expression in ... the church” (1983:166).

Berman answers the question of what happens if the religion on which a legal system is based goes into decline, or changes: “Western legal science is a secular theology which often makes no sense because its theological presuppositions are no longer accepted,” he writes (1983:166).

“When these historical roots are not understood, many parts of the law appear to lack any underlying source of validity,” he adds (1983:166). He gives an example of how the validity of a law can be questioned in the absence of the concomitant religious belief: A sane man who is given the death sentence but then becomes insane must, according to Western law, not be killed until he regains his sanity. Why? Through fear that if he be killed while insane he may not have opportunity to confess his sins before God and be forgiven.

Loy identifies the concordant of Worms of 1122AD as being a key historical event leading to the rise of Western law. This concordant “agreed to distinguish the two spheres of power ... the allegiance owed to spiritual authorities ... [from that owed] to temporal authorities”

(Loy, 2000). (This position seemed to have been anticipated in Matthew 22:21 by Christ himself: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”. I suggest that this dualism is more widely found in the Christian scriptures, especially the New Testament.) Such institutionalized dualism still in many ways defines the West. At the same time Anselm’s belief that “theology can be studied apart from revelation” led to “a conception of reason functioning by itself” (Loy, 2000). This belief apparently became very dominant around 1045, around the time that Pope Urban II became incredibly powerful. Pope Urban II arranged the Crusades that freed Jerusalem from Muslim hands. When the Popes’ powers subsequently declined, temporal authorities had already learned from them that a legal system could be devised on the basis of theological foundations yet implemented using ‘secular’ (i.e. temporal) reasoning. Thus was instituted a widespread practice of Western governance based on laws that can be interpreted without immediate reference to the theological foundations from which they emerged. This feature characterizes Western legal systems up to the present day and, one could argue, has set Western legal systems apart from others both that preceded them historically and that continue contemporarily.

Mohr points us to Huntington’s famous effort at defining the post cold-war clash of civilizations. Huntington puts great weight on the division that arose “between Western and Eastern Christianity” (Mohr, 2011:39). While many societies want to be modern but not necessarily Western – it will not necessarily be very easy for them to separate these two, according to Huntington (Krifko, 2011). Those wanting to imitate Western secular law are not always told that it is rooted in a “perverse form of myth making ... aimed at denying its mythological status, while at the same time labelling others as myth makers and idolaters” (Mohr, 2011:37). In reality it is clear to Mohr that Western secular law is rooted in the “social and

political history of the churches of Europe” (Mohr, 2011:37) and is a “secular theology, which often makes no sense [if] ... its theological presuppositions are no longer accepted” (Mohr, 2011:41). Mohr’s concern is that “secularism having grown from and within Christianity often seems to be blind to it” having “a certain tunnel vision” (2011:51).

Taylor’s *A Secular Age* seems to strongly support Mohr’s convictions above. According to Taylor, secularism claims to have divested itself of a Christian identity that actually remains integral to its nature and certainly history (2007). Smith describes secularism as “the ongoing commitment to do good, understood in traditional Christian terms, without a concern for the technicalities of the teachings of the church” (2008). Smith points out that large numbers of people in secular Europe consider themselves to be Christian. He asks “if secularism is not Christian belief then there should be some sense of what this Christian belief is that is no longer believed” (Smith, 2008). It can prove very difficult to define just what Christian belief is, a point which Smith himself makes, especially because the nature of Christian faith will change according to Smith “when [the] local cultural framework changes” (Smith, 2008).

‘Holistic’ Gospel

We have learned that socio-economic development in Africa is not progressing as many hoped it might. Then we have learned that, contrary to popular modern belief, insights that can only be required spiritually (known by C. S. Lewis as the *Tao*) are essential for human flourishing. We have found that Christian (and even non-Christian) sects engage African communities with a peculiar solidarity and depth that secular NGOs cannot match. Then we have found that secularism’s historical roots have arisen from very Christian soil. Given the above, it might seem very evident that the great and primary need in much of sub-Saharan Africa is for the

Tao, i.e. in other words we could say for knowledge of God. Lastly, I want to address the question – if this is indeed Africa’s great need, then why does material aid for Africa often seem much more prominent than does ‘spiritual assistance’? Closely related to this; why is it that spiritual assistance that is offered can be so deeply rooted in Western cultural ways that it struggles to connect at depth with African ways of life?

Factors working towards intervention of a material nature being given priority over the spiritual are many, although often interrelated. They are very much related to differences between dualistic and monistic peoples.

Many people in the Western world are very aware of the need for spiritual intervention in Africa. (As many people in Africa are aware of the need for spiritual intervention in the West.) Westerners’ ambitions, however, tend to be frustrated at the point of implementation. A person coming from a dualistic background (Western Europe or North America) can be horrified by material conditions they find in many parts of Africa. According to the Western materialist way of thinking, what is going on in Africa can appear to be ridiculously foolish. They can perceive “waste and failure” to be a norm in Africa (Maranz, 2001:104). Their determination to put such ‘waste and failure’ right has them engage materially – e.g. through the provision of outside aid. Being dualists who keep the spiritual separate from the material in their own lives, they do not see ways in which the spiritual could be responsible for such dire material circumstances. They interpret African culture in that sense as if it is secular. They fail to clearly see the Africans almost total lack of distinction between the spiritual and the secular. They want to put the material right either while having shelved the spiritual, or while at least having put it onto a lower level of priority.

Many Westerners who set out with the objective of sharing a spiritual message, therefore get caught up in involvement that seeks to improve people's material well-being through materialist means. Their lack of awareness of the peculiarities of their own dualistic philosophy hinders them from responding in more appropriate ways to the material deprivation that they find. At the same time, voluntarily sharing in poverty that appears to be self-imposed by African people as a result of their own ignorance, seems to be sheer folly. It appears much more advantageous, instead of sharing in people's poverty, to concentrate on helping them to find a way out of their poverty. Unfortunately, not being sufficiently aware of the spiritual roots to people's poverty often prevents means designed to lift them from poverty from being truly sustainable. The standoff that results from outsiders' conviction that they had better stand aloof from poverty so as to show people a way out of it, can prevent them from drawing sufficiently close to the people, so as to understand the spiritual roots to their issues in adequate depth that could enable them to contribute to bringing effective and lasting solutions.

In addition to its preventing a penetration of the true cause of people's material poverty, the above failure to comprehend has various 'side-effects'. One clear such side-effect is promotion of the prosperity gospel. It should be, but is not always clear, that proffering the gospel from a position of material superiority results in the gospel being associated with material wealth. Even when this is realized, it is not easy to avoid. Recipients of material assistance quickly become dependent on it. Harsh economic and physical realities sometimes necessitate local people's actively countering any suggestion that the spiritual should take priority over the material, or that the spiritual should be supported by indigenous people's own more limited material resources. Meanwhile, those from the West with access to material resources like to feel wanted and needed by their hosting communities. Merely proffering a message on the spiritual

plane does not always result in popularity, as the apostle Paul and many other advocates of Christianity have discovered in bygone years. Having material goods available, and arguing that they are the prime means towards helping a people, is a convenient way of ensuring one's being appreciated and popular even when far away from home. Unfortunately this same approach does have its problems – typically it results in the partial or total rejection of the foreigner intervening who can seem to be acquiring power without understanding, and may be in due course be accused of being imperialistic.

The above issues have at various times been debated at international Christian gatherings. Misunderstandings related to the nature of dualism as against monism have often come to the fore in such debates. Monists by their very nature often do not appreciate the intricacies of issues raised by dualistic thinkers (– as dualists frequently fail to perceive intricacies of monist thought). Seeing the spiritual and the material as one thing, monists cannot understand why dualists should want to keep the two separate. Hence they advocate holistic mission. They may not see why material rewards should not be attached to gospel preaching. Perceiving that the material and spiritual are one prevents them from appreciating how the incredibly powerful economic machine of contemporary Western society thrives on the back of a certain rejection of spiritual authenticity. When monists form the majority in debates on mission, aid, and development, they will follow their understanding that mission be supported by and come in hand with outside material assistance, for the above and other reasons. It seems that this is what happened in the Lausanne Congress, 1974, that was attended by 2,300 evangelical leaders from 150 countries.¹⁴

¹⁴ <http://www.lausanne.org/en/gatherings/event/10-lausanne-i-the-international-congress-on-world-evangelization.html>

The Lausanne covenant that resulted from this Congress affirms “that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty.”¹⁵ Effectively, it meant that from thereon, missionaries from wealthy to poor parts of the world should hand out wealth to those with whom they work in the Gospel. This was heralded as a victory for the poor (Padilla, 2005:13). There are many reasons why non-Western Christians may have to continue to be in favor of this even if the outcome is destructive, for example in terms of the promotion of the prosperity gospel or the creation of unhealthy dependency. I suggest that Westerners should be held responsible for ways in which they use the massive wealth that their communities produce. Giving the non-Western community or a non-Western church free access to vast resources for which they have not worked, and the origins of which they do not clearly understand, can be to give an enormous liability that will in the long run be far from helpful.

Conclusion

Secular critics of aid seem to have been ignoring a key necessary component to developmental processes that they are endeavoring to analyze. Research cited in this article shows faith in Christ to be central to the historical development of Western legal systems. Could it be that what applies to Western legal systems applies more widely to Western civilization as a whole? Could it be then that ‘civilization’ as we know it arose from within the Christian church? Could it be that the same might happen again outside of the West, or even that it must happen in this way?

A widespread assumption held by those studying the history of modern civilization is that its rise to prominence was enabled by a pushing aside of the mythical and the theological. This

¹⁵ <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html>

article considers the implications of an alternative actually much more credible view: that Western civilization emerged from within the church. According to the latter view, tenets of modernism are a product of a particular incarnation of theological thought into complex social and material contexts. Such incarnation is said to have reached its height in the 11th Century AD; could it be then that a critical requirement for development in Africa today is for there to be an in some ways similar incarnation of Christian teaching?

A certain dualism that characterizes Western ways of life is the perceived separation of the secular and the spiritual realms. When taken too far, this is destructive. The roots of this dualism, this article argues, are in Christianity. Without dualism, the material inputs of development aid all too easily come to be understood holistically, i.e. as arising from spiritual beings. An ongoing prosperity is therefore perceived to arise from the ongoing pleasing of deities. The solution to this dilemma must include the imparting of a renewed theology that can, as it did in the 11th Century, point towards a separation of the two kingdoms. It seems that such encouragement of a degree of dualism (spiritual versus material) is implicit to true Christian faith.

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