



**Religion and Development
What's in Two Names**

**Symposium on the 10th Anniversary of the Chair of Religion and
Development, 11 June 2009**

Gerrie ter Haar

The Hague - The Netherlands

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Foreword – 10 Years Chair on Religion and Development

As an important force in most societies, religion can and does have a huge impact on questions of development - What is the relevance of religion in development? How does religion influence the decisions we make in relation to development? And what effect does faith have on how individuals experience development? It was to look at these relationships that the Chair for Religion and Development was established 10 years ago. For ISS it was an important addition to our research activities, filling a void in our academic work.

But a Chair is only as good as the people who work on it. We have been very lucky that Professor Gerrie ter Haar has occupied the Chair for the past 10 years. She has not only published a vast amount of literature on the importance of religion to development, she has also built an important global network of scholars and practitioners who move research and practice in this field forward. She has looked, both alone and with others, at the relevance of religion on conflict, on migration – both forced and voluntary – on identity and how these relate to development.

This compilation brings together in one booklet some of Professor Ter Haar's most important essays and papers on the theme of religion and development - a 'taster' of the work she has produced over the past 10 years. It introduces the novice to Professor Ter Haar's work and reminds the more experienced scholar of some of the important work she has produced over the past decade.

On behalf of the ISS Community I congratulate Professor Ter Haar with this success. The Board of the Foundation, chaired by WCRP, and the Advisory Council of the Chair are to be complimented on their foresight and their support. ISS thanks Cordaid and ICCO for their intellectual and financial underpinning of the Chair.

Louk Box

Rector ISS

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Rats, Cockroaches and People Like Us

*Rector,
Members of the Board of Trustees,
Trustees of the External Chair 'Religion, Human Rights and Social Change'
Excellencies, distinguished colleagues and students of the ISS, ladies and
gentlemen,
People like me:*

Many people appear to believe that there are a growing number of religious conflicts in the world, particularly since the end of the Cold War. On closer examination, however, it seems that the number of conflicts of the type which are today often labelled 'ethnic' or 'religious' has in fact been growing since the 1950s'. Many such conflicts were already detectable in the period of the Cold War, but at that time, they were usually interpreted within a framework of East-West relations.

There has, without doubt, been a change in the patterns of violent conflict in the world since the end of the Cold War, but above all there has been a massive shift in perceptions. Among the world's recent conflicts which are now seen as primarily religious in nature are, for example, Bosnia, Algeria, Kashmir, Chechnya, Indonesia

and others. This development is one reason for a growing interest in religion in relation to human rights, a subject which, it may even be argued, has been one of the main features of the human rights debate in recent years.² Many people in the West, where secular politics are considered the norm, seem to have come to the conclusion that religion is all too often a negative aspect of human culture, that it divides people rather than unites them. As a result, there exists a widely-held belief today that religion is responsible for abuses of human rights more often than it is a factor in their protection.

This contrasts rather sharply with the period before the 1990s, when academics as well as policymakers often failed to appreciate the significance of religion in the political realm because of an indiscriminating belief in the inevitability of secularization. We may now see that secular pressures often in fact strengthen religious belief.³ The emergence of a worldwide vibrant political Islam may be considered as one telling example; similar tendencies towards a return to the fundamentals of faith can also be discerned within other major religious traditions.⁴

Some views of human rights

Until the last years of the twentieth century, secularism appeared to political elites throughout the world to be an unstoppable force, and human rights to be very largely a matter of legislation. Hence, in the academic field, the debate on human rights, including in matters concerning religion, has been dominated by experts on international law and other jurists. On occasion, theologians and scholars of religion have also added their voices, but without developing any systematic analysis of the relationship between religion and human rights. Systematic thought has been more forthcoming from ethical philosophers, both in the Western and non-Western world.⁵ A contribution from this quarter is hardly surprising considering that the moral dimension of human activity is of central concern to the human rights debate.

Nowhere do these remarks apply with greater pertinence than in discussion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. This is now often interpreted primarily as a legal document, which no doubt for this reason has received most attention from scholars working within the field of law. In retrospect, more than fifty years after the Declaration, it is becoming clear that legal instruments are not enough if human rights are to be firmly grounded in different cultures, as people's understanding of human rights is informed by their own world views and cosmologies. It is plain that in many countries human rights ideology finds its theoretical justification in religion. Yet, the human rights concept as expressed in the Universal Declaration is at root a secular idea. For it seems that of all the cultural factors which affect views of humanity and human rights in different parts of the world, none is more important than religion. It is as a consequence of such different viewpoints that today a number of other human rights declarations exist which reflect the particular world view of their designers.⁶ Although the emergence of alternative declarations has often been politically inspired, the fact that the Universal Declaration conceives human rights in a purely secular mode is nevertheless a matter of genuine concern for many otherwise sympathetic observers, notably outside the Western world.⁷

Clearly, if we wish for a successful inculturation of human rights, we must give serious thought to the role played by religion.⁸ For most people in the world, religion is an integral part of their existence, inseparable from the social and moral order, and it defines their relations with other human beings. If relations between human beings are central to the concept of human rights, it becomes important to consider whether, in any given society, these relations have been informed by a religious world view or whether the philosophical basis is a secular one. In the case of the former, believers often feel that the way in which they perceive the world does not find sufficient recognition in the Universal Declaration. We may say, with hindsight, that the Universal Declaration is itself a product of the secular developments that I referred to earlier on. The phrase 'human rights', after all, implies two separate concepts: the existence of human beings, and the assertion that they have

inalienable rights. Scholarly debate on the Universal Declaration invariably turns upon the nature of these rights and ways of applying them, without questioning the notion of a human being. That is, in addressing the fundamental question of a human's rights and the universal application of these, the Declaration takes it for granted that we all agree upon what precisely *is* a human being. The question regarding the actual nature of a human being is in many cases deemed to be a metaphysical one, and is therefore often expressed in religion. To avoid any misunderstanding, I am not arguing that there is anything fundamentally flawed in the Universal Declaration; what I am saying is that in view of what we know now, one may consider that perhaps it is simply not explicit enough in certain areas. In the view of many, it lacks a profound view of what a human being is.

Interestingly, the same point has recently been made by Vaclav Havel, when he asks why human beings have the prerogative to enjoy human rights. The answer he has advanced resembles that of many non-Western critics. 'I am convinced', he states, 'that the deepest roots of what we now call human rights lie somewhere beyond us, and above us; somewhere deeper than the world of human covenants - a realm that I would, for simplicity's sake, describe as metaphysical'.⁹ One viable course, in his view, out of the problems that may arise from a difference in world view over the interpretation of human rights, is placing emphasis on their spiritual source. We should make an effort, he argues, to highlight the spiritual dimension and spiritual origin of the values guarded by the United Nations and translate this into the Organization's practical activities.¹⁰ Whatever our personal views on this may be, it seems evident that present circumstances require a rethinking of the relationship between religion and human rights. This is necessary in order to address some of the changes that have taken place in recent decades and which have shed new light on the role of religion in human rights matters.

Consideration of the place of religion in the social and political circumstances of today's world raises a number of important questions, not all of which can be discussed here and now. I will

limit myself to discussing only those points which I believe need our most urgent scholarly attention. I will mention three in this address, which I will discuss in a particular order. I will begin with the most widely recognized of the debates raised by notions of globalization in regard to human rights, namely the issue of cultural relativism. Second, I will review the relationship between religion and culture, which, in my view, takes the inquiry further. Finally, I will conclude with what seems to me to lie at the heart of the matter, namely the way in which many of the world's people conceive of a human being in partly spiritual terms. The third and last of these points is particularly important since the question of human rights is bound up with a given society's fundamental view of what one author refers to as 'what sort of thing a human being is'¹¹. This really is a consideration of the elements which separate human beings from other categories and by virtue of which they may enjoy certain rights.

Cultural relativism

The task of providing a common moral language for all humanity is fraught with difficulties. The central paradox here is that achieving such a goal requires a prior development of an indigenous human rights language within the various moral traditions of the world.¹² Given the state of affairs in the world today, there is increasing doubt as to whether a worldwide consensus on human rights can ever be achieved. In a controversial essay published in 1993 Samuel Huntington suggested that certain differences between peoples and populations can never be bridged.¹³ His argument is that there is a fundamental incompatibility between different types of civilization, whose traditions have been shaped over centuries. The most important source of conflict in the world today, in his view, is not ideological or economic but cultural. According to Huntington, we are experiencing a clash of civilizations in the world, in which religion plays a major role. Since there is no prospect of unity being created out of the world's cultural diversity, he proposes that the Western world should accept that these cultural 'fault lines' exist. Western countries should therefore rather strive for unity within

their own cultural field, and cooperate primarily with those whose cultures are closest to their own.

Huntington's line of thought, which has been influential though much-criticized,¹⁴ is at odds with the vision of the Universal Declaration, which maintains that there are certain values which are shared by all peoples.¹⁵ Huntington's outlook, however, stands in a long tradition. I may cite, for example, the precedent offered by the American Anthropological Society which in 1947 opposed the adoption of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the grounds that individual cultures had their own standards and values, and later accused the drafters of ethnocentrism.¹⁶ American anthropologists of fifty years ago, like Samuel Huntington today, found it hard to believe that human beings may find ways to transcend their cultural divides. Rather than the cultural fault lines identified by Huntington, the vision embodied in the Universal Declaration acknowledges the existence of a cultural weave underlying a common human pattern. If we accept this to be so, it means that in human rights thinking the human is the fundamental category, and not culture.¹⁷ Such matters are ultimately a matter of faith, which is why belief in the universality of human rights is sometimes referred to as a secular religion.

In view of this type of culturalist critique, it is important to remind ourselves that the Universal Declaration was the work of a team of both Western and non-Western drafters, standing in different religious traditions. The core group of eight drafters comprised representatives from Australia, Chile, China, France, Lebanon, the former Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States.¹⁸ In the final phase, only eight of the 58 states involved in the process decided to abstain from voting on adoption of the Declaration, including South Africa, the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia.¹⁹ It is significant that none of the dissenters voted against the Declaration.

The drafters of this document clearly considered how to make a universal appeal to people of different cultures, for their aim was to communicate a vision to ordinary people, men and women from all walks of life in all parts of the world. Such a vision has great mobilizing power, which is precisely what governments and others

wielding political power often fear in the Universal Declaration. Its claim to universality, I would argue, lies much more in its conviction that it can be shared by all people, whoever and wherever they are, than in the likelihood that its principles will actually be respected by political elites. The principal aim of the Declaration was thus an educational one: every person was to be aware of certain fundamental values in order to prevent a repeat of the horrors which had occurred during the Second World War with its 50 million dead, only months before the Declaration was drafted.

In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust* the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has argued that the atrocities of the Second World War were made possible by the systematic repression of the moral dimension of people's acts in modern industrial society.²⁰ If this is so, it is all the more disturbing because 'modernity', as it is often referred to,²¹ has today made inroads in all societies worldwide. The globalization of life which has accompanied modernity has given a new impulse to the debate on universalism versus particularism in human rights. The argument in favour of universality may be strengthened by the observation that in a globalized world, norms and values are likely to be influenced by the process of globalization. On the other hand, it is increasingly argued outside the Western world, by politicians especially, that globalization threatens the specific identity of individual societies. Every country therefore (or so it is argued) should be allowed to develop its own particular philosophy of human rights, based on its own cultural values. In many cases this is explicitly related to the religious morality of a particular culture or society. The Islamic Declaration on Human Rights is one example. Another is the Bangkok Declaration, drafted in the early 1990s by some forty states from the Asian and Pacific region, which made a plea to consider 'the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds' in interpreting and applying human rights.²² Culture-related values, however, as feminist writers especially have pointed out, can be very oppressive for social and religious minorities inasmuch as they tend to deny cultural and religious diversity within a given society.²³

It is notable that a related debate has arisen in Western societies, such as Europe and North America, in the form of the heated issue of multiculturalism. The argument here turns upon the degree to which our societies should encourage minority groups to nurture specific cultural and religious identities. Inherent in this is a perception similar to that of the Islamic and Asian activists whom I have just mentioned: namely, that certain groups of people are so different from us as to require different treatment, in conformity with those norms and values which are deemed to be their own. Some influential analysts, including Kwame Anthony Appiah and Michael Ignatieff, have labelled this view the 'narcissism of minor difference'.²⁴ Labelling people as 'not like us' always concerns matters of identity – who are we and who are they? The merits of the argument must be examined case by case. For example, I have argued elsewhere in regard to African immigrants in Europe that it is often Europeans, and not Africans themselves, who insist on the need for Africans to develop their own (meaning African) identity. In effect such an argument becomes a mechanism of exclusion, a discourse which contributes to the defence of Fortress Europe.²⁵

Perceptions of human difference are inseparable from perceptions of identity. Whether we are discussing human rights in the international arena or group rights within multicultural societies, it is of crucial importance to establish who is the agent in defining people's identities. Who precisely is advocating a position of exception, and for whom? Often, it is not the victims but the violators of human rights who use a relativist argument against the principle of universality.²⁶ One instance is that of the late President Mobutu of Zaire, who argued that his country should be exempt from international norms on the grounds that Zaireans had their own authentic way of doing things. Conversely, relatively powerless indigenous groups may seek to protect their communal rights by invoking universal values and associating themselves with global movements.²⁷

Any claim to exception of the sort I have described carries a risk of political manipulation. This includes claims made on religious grounds. The political manipulation of religion has been evident, for example, in the last Balkan wars, notably in forging a link

between religion and nationalism. Religious identities there gained an overriding importance in recent years as a result of the extreme violence of the conflict. It has been argued that it is not religion, but a 'politics of identity' which turned minor differences into major divides and set different believers against each other.²⁸ This may equally prove true of situations of conflict between religious groups in other parts of the world where people previously lived in relative harmony.

Conflict is often exacerbated when religion becomes a tool in the hands of politicians or political interest groups and is thus used to create, maintain or strengthen a factional position. It is the political manipulation of religion which causes secularists to mistrust religiously inspired arguments about human rights. Indeed, there can be no doubt that religion may easily be associated with the violation of human rights. But this observation is not sufficient to disqualify religious belief as an instrument for the propagation and protection of human rights. In some countries it is argued that the secular ideology of the state is itself a root cause of, and not the solution to, religious violence, because it fails to take account of the religious values of citizens. This is the case in India, for example, where some thoughtful scholars advocate the creation of a state based on the original Hindu tradition of religious tolerance.²⁹ The fact is that in any society where a substantial number of people profess religious belief, religion has a role to play in protecting human rights, just as it can have a role in violating them.

In other words, we should not deny the legitimacy of various societies developing their own methods for solving problems of human rights.³⁰ In fact, sensitivity to cultural diversity is, in my view, a precondition for the successful inculturation of human rights. But cultural sensitivity – an open-mindedness about the potentials of unfamiliar cultures – is not the same as cultural relativism. Whereas the former makes possible a process of dialogue which can be mutually enriching, the latter leads to a separate development of human rights.

Religion and culture

The tendency to emphasize differences between cultures rather than to focus on what may bind them leads to some important philosophical questions. The most pressing of these is perhaps, in view of our subject, the question whether cultural particularism breeds moral particularism. In other words, if we adhere to the primacy of cultural diversity, on the grounds that there exists a range of specific cultural identities, can we at the same time uphold the existence of moral standards which override a particular cultural tradition, such as those embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? If not, the only logical alternative is to believe that each culturally defined entity should adopt its own separate human rights standards. This, we may note, is the logical corollary of both Huntington's argument about cultural difference and of the more extreme advocates of multiculturalism within Western societies. This is an unappealing prospect in my view. Rather, we should aim to develop global moral connections, asking ourselves what moral relationships a global culture creates. This has also been suggested by Michael Ignatieff, who calls for a type of involvement which will be 'a crucial new feature of the modern moral imagination'.³¹ Since religion is the idiom in which many people express their views about the world, it will need to be part of such a moral imagination.

I should say at this juncture that the conventional Western idea of what religion is, and the way we apply this to the issue of human rights, has been much influenced by the so-called world religions.³² The concept of world religions is normally applied to religions based on a written authority, notably Christianity and Islam. Scholars and others often contrast these with so-called ethnic religions, usually meaning in effect religions which have no sacred book but which are based on oral traditions. In such a classification, 'ethnic religions' are connected to a specific ethnic group or 'tribe' and its culture. Such notions were coined during colonial times by the West in regard to people not like us, and are intrinsically connected to concepts of race. In our time, the concept of ethnicity has come to replace the nineteenth-century concept of race

in the definition of perceived differences between human populations.³³ The main attraction of using the term 'ethnic' appears to lie in its usefulness in the process of 'othering', that is in distinguishing systematically between 'us' and 'them'.³⁴ In the same vein, ethnic religions tend to be regarded as innate, closed and static in character, and thus different from world religions, which are deemed open to all peoples and conscious of a universal vocation.³⁵

This view, although conventional, is today in dire need of revision, not only because it is not congruent with observable facts, but also because it gives comfort to cultural relativists. 'World' or 'universal' religions have developed firm roots in local cultures around the world as a consequence of modern processes of globalization. An unprecedented diversity has arisen within these religions, which is evidenced by popular forms of religious expression. In such cases, interpretation of scripture is increasingly adapted to the local context of the believers. At the same time, a movement has taken place in the opposite sense, as so-called 'ethnic' or 'tribal' religions are increasingly taking on universal characteristics. This is so, for example, with African traditional religions, which can be found in various parts of the world.³⁶ Formerly this was a consequence of the transatlantic slave trade; today African religious traditions have travelled overseas through the international migration that is a hallmark of modern globalization. Yoruba religion is now more flourishing in New York than in Lagos. Muslim brotherhoods are making converts in Chicago and are firmly established in southern Europe. There are churches founded by Africans which have now become international, and which have branches a few kilometres from where we are now sitting.³⁷ Processes of inculturation and contextualization have caused so-called world religions and ethnic religions to resemble each other more closely in structure. Both have become grounded in the particular culture where they are being practiced, all over the world.

These dynamics of change need to be considered in any up-to-date analysis of the relationship between religion and human rights. Only then can we aim to make the global moral connections that are needed if basic human rights are to be upheld worldwide.

Being human

If anything can be said about the great diversity of religions in the world, it is that they all perceive good and evil to be part of the human condition. They concern themselves with exploring the nature of these qualities, the relationship between them, and methods of keeping these two forces under control. 'The wise man', states the Moroccan sociologist Muhammad Guessous, commenting on what his fellow-countrymen believe to be the essence of a human being, 'is the man who does not expect good things in this life but who takes precautions to minimize the evil.'³⁸

To minimize evil, Guessous observes, Moroccans believe that a person needs to do two things: to work hard and to worship. *Ora et labora*, others might say. Most religious traditions recognize the need to worship in order to minimize evil, meaning everything which is seen as reducing the quality of human life, including illness, poverty and death. Religious believers are ultimately aware that successful living is dependent on their relationship with an invisible world, which they believe to be inhabited by spiritual forces that can make their presence felt in the visible world. Religious practice, therefore, consists to a large extent in a skillful manipulation of these unseen forces in order to manage the good and evil humans experience in their lives.

All societies have some concept of evil, and of the way in which human beings are implicated. In many societies such ideas are expressed through discourses of religion. Accusations of witchcraft, for example, are one way in which people may express the notion that evil can take on a human form.³⁹ The belief in witchcraft is a popular one, in the sense that it is widely held, notably but not only in Africa. It expresses an essentially religious idea about human nature, which may find a different expression in other cultures. For, even where religion has been abandoned as an explanatory model, secular ideologies have emerged which deal with the same question of how to manage and ward off manifestations of evil.

Both religious and secular ideologies tend to ascribe evil notably to those who are not considered people 'like us'. Both types of ideology have shown a capacity to destroy the lives of others by placing them outside the category of humans. The way in which this happens may differ, but in all cases it implies some form of disqualification as a person. In 1914, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace observed in relation to a war between Greece and Bulgaria that 'Day after day the Bulgarians were represented in the Greek press as a race of monsters, and public feeling was roused to a pitch of chauvinism which made it inevitable that war, when it should come, should be ruthless.... Deny that your enemies are men and you will treat them as vermin'.⁴⁰ Something similar happened during the Second World War, when whole groups were described as not fully human, not 'people like us'. Anti-Arab pogroms in 1950s Algeria were known to French settlers as '*ratonnades*' or 'rat-hunts'. In preparation for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the organs of state and mass communication consistently conveyed the message that part of the population were actually 'cockroaches'.⁴¹ Examples from all parts of the world indicate how effective and how lethal dehumanising is as a mechanism of exclusion. It denies humanity to a person or a group. It is one extreme of the process of 'othering', or the constitution of a primal opposition between 'us' and 'them'. Nevertheless, it is necessary to recall, this is a process which takes place permanently in less radical forms in all societies. It is for that reason that minority groups are everywhere in a vulnerable position. When their otherness becomes justified by an ideology either religious or secular, they risk different treatment on the grounds that they *are*, after all, different. Hence, they may be deemed to have fewer rights than people like us, or even no rights at all.

This clearly has major implications for human rights, which are claims that individuals are entitled to make simply by virtue of their status as human beings. It raises a question not so much about the nature of rights, as about the nature of humanity. In any particular culture or society, what do people think constitutes a human being? And who is therefore qualified to claim human rights? In most cases, the answer is to be found in the belief system of people. These questions are fundamental for understanding the

relationship between religion and human rights. In many cultures, people attach overwhelming importance to the spiritual dimension of a person, believing that it is this which defines him or her as possessing a truly human identity.⁴² In other cases, human identity is not considered a fixed category, but something fluid. In some forest countries of West Africa, for example, it is widely believed that people closely resemble certain animals, including leopards and chimpanzees, and may even take on some of their characteristics.⁴³ Similar examples can be found all over the world. New Zealand, for example, recently became the first country to recognise in law the status of the great apes, as man's closest relatives. This step was taken on the basis of scientific evidence that the great apes share not only our genes but also basic human traits such as self-awareness and intelligence.⁴⁴

Societies, moreover, hold different views about the precise point at which true human life may be identified, and when it ceases. In some cultures, very young children may be lawfully killed on the grounds that they are not, or not yet, really human. A similar debate on the definition of humanity takes place in Western societies today, in relation to such questions as abortion, euthanasia, and gene technology. In many places, theologians or other religious specialists decide upon such matters. In Western society, questions such as these are now largely referred to experts in medical ethics. By replacing the theologians, they have become the secular moralists of our time.

Conclusion

Let me summarize my argument at this point.

Present circumstances, I have argued, require a reconsideration of the relationship between religion and human rights. Religion, or religious belief, I suggest, while often seen as a root cause of violent conflict, is in fact a particular expression of human sentiments and ideas which are also present in secular cultures. In most cases the outbreak of violence cannot be ascribed to the nature of religious

belief as such since, like all human institutions, religion can be used for either constructive or destructive purposes. Its resources can be applied both for the protection of human rights and for their violation. The challenge is to try and exploit the positive resources which are present in virtually all religions.

So far, little use has been made by human rights promoters of the world's religious and spiritual resources.⁴⁵ An intelligent use of religious resources requires and presupposes a serious consideration of religion as an important factor in people's lives. In this one respect, we can agree with Huntington, when he concluded his sombre analysis with a call to develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying what he describes as 'other civilizations'.⁴⁶

I have further argued that globalization contains, almost inevitably, a tendency towards the globalization of moral ideas in connection with human rights, whether these ideas are based on a religious or secular ideology. Consequently, cultural relativism, which demands a position of exception, is becoming an increasingly untenable stance. At the same time, it must be clear that universalizing human rights is not the same as Westernizing human rights. For the inculturation of human rights must be a two-way process, in which Western proponents of human rights learn and accept that certain values derived from a culture which is originally not theirs may actually be of use to them too. These may include religious values.

Finally, given the fact that human rights are claims that people are entitled to make simply because of being human, I have emphasized the importance for all of us, in and outside the Western world, of considering the fundamental question which underlies all human rights thought: what is a human being? This is necessary if we are to develop a proper understanding of the process which begins with labelling people as different from us, and which can lead, through excesses of language, to the grossest violation of human rights. The same question draws us towards ideas about good and evil which are prominent in many religions in the world

and which to a greater or lesser extent guide people's actions towards others and thus have a bearing on human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The profound changes that the world is experiencing today impel us to examine religion anew, as one of the agents of social change. The Chair which is being inaugurated today may be seen as a recognition of the importance of such an approach, notably in regard to human rights.

In the years to come I hope to investigate further some of the ideas which I have sketched in the last hour, notably in view of the role of religion in situations of conflict. In implementing such a programme, it is particularly important in my view to examine the views of ordinary believers in matters of human rights, and not limit ourselves to the views of religious and political elites. This implies focusing less on scriptural traditions than on ideas which are expressed in other forms. At the same time, any analysis of religion and human rights requires empirical study of the actual situations in which these ideas are expressed. For, as the British anthropologist Richard Wilson has noted, human rights are founded not in the eternal moral categories of social philosophy, but are the result of concrete social struggles.⁴⁷

The debate on religion, human rights and social change is not an academic debate only. Its subject matter is of equal importance to all who are concerned about human rights in the world, or take an interest in understanding processes of change. I consider it my task to share academic insights with interested parties outside the academic world. As incumbent of the Chair I will therefore try and stimulate debate on relevant matters within a wider public circle. It is in this light that I would like to draw your attention to a forthcoming series of Open Seminars about 'Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change', organised at the ISS under the auspices of the Chair, which will start at the end of this month and will continue in May.

The Chair on Religion, Human Rights and Social Change is an Extraordinary Chair in more than one sense. As far as I am aware it has no equivalent in the world. We can all be grateful to the founders of the Chair – the organizations Cordaid, ICCO, and the World Conference for Religion and Peace – for having taken this unique initiative. It is a great privilege for me to be the first person to occupy this position. I would like to thank both the members of the Board and the Curatorium of the Foundation established in connection with the Chair for their active interest in the Chair and their support to its incumbent. I greatly appreciate that, and I hope you will find that this new Chair will also benefit the work of the founding organizations.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Board of the Institute of Social Studies, which has welcomed this new Chair as part of its body. I strongly believe that the study of religion has an important contribution to make to the life of the Institute, not only in matters concerning human rights and social change, but also in fostering broader thought about development issues. I hope that any contribution I am able to make under the auspices of the Chair will help with the constant new thinking which is taking place in this field, both in this Institute and in the wider world.

I want to thank the ISS staff, both academic and administrative, for the way they have made me feel welcome in their midst. With your helpfulness you have made my arrival in this new environment a most pleasant one, and your forthcoming attitude has soon provided me with a sense of belonging. I feel among ‘people like us’. I owe a special thanks to my colleagues in Staff Group 2 who, each in their own way, have contributed to my immediate job satisfaction. It is my greatest wish to be able to collaborate with you in the years to come in a mutually beneficial way. You can rest assured that I will do all that I can to further that aim.

To the ISS students I wish to say that I hope that you too will experience the new Chair and its activities as an asset to your work and your stay at the Institute. For me, your presence is a great challenge as it presents me with a unique opportunity to learn from your

knowledge and experience, acquired in the various countries from which you have come.

As one should never forget where one comes from, I want to include in my thanks my colleagues and friends in the mundane business of the study of religion in various universities and departments. I thank you all for your continuing friendship and support. Since I am not planning to leave you, I am sure we will continue to cooperate.

Finally, life would not be worth living if one were not sustained by personal networks of affection. I therefore thank all of you who know you are dear to me for being with me today, as I know you will continue to be in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all for your attention.

Rats, Cockroaches and People Like Us: Views of Humanity and Human Rights. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 2000 (Inaugural Address).

Notes

1. Tim Allen & Jean Seaton (eds.), *The media of conflict: War reporting and representations of ethnic violence.* London and New York: Zed Books, 1999, pp. 11-42, and esp. p.22.
2. A wealth of literature has been produced during the last ten years, which in various ways introduces religion as a critical factor in human rights matters, not only in relation to conflict. Cf. David Little, 'Rethinking human rights: a review essay on religion, relativism and other matters', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 27 , no. 1, 1999, pp. 151-177.
3. *Ib.*: 55. Cf. also Jeff Haynes, *Religion in global politics.* London and New York: Longman, 1998.
4. For a recent analysis of political Islam, see John L. Esposito (ed.), *Political Islam: Revolution, radicalism, or reform?* Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1997. For a general overview and analysis of fundamentalism in different religious traditions in the world, see the five volumes which have emerged from the Fundamentalism Project carried out by the University of Chicago under the leadership of Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. See notably

- volume one: *Accounting for fundamentalisms: The dynamic character of movements*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
5. One leading example is the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, published in the United States. See notably the special issue on human rights, vol. 26, no. 2, 1998.
 6. Notably the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam of 1993, which has been adopted by some fifty member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Earlier, in 1981, a Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UIDHR) was drafted under the auspices of the Islamic Council, a London-based organization affiliated with the Muslim World League. Apart from these, there are various documents concerning Islamic human rights policy. More recently, a debate has emerged on Asian values in human rights, which resulted in the so-called Bangkok Declaration. This Declaration was drafted at a regional preparatory meeting in Bangkok prior to the Second World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993.
 7. This became clear, for example, during the meeting of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town in December 1999, which contained a number of panels on religion and human rights.
 8. Many observers have commented on the need for the inculturation of human rights. Some examples are: Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (ed.), *Human rights in cross-cultural perspective* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); David Little, John Kelsay & Abulaziz Sachedina, *Human rights and the conflict of cultures* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); and Wolfgang Schmale (ed.), *Human rights and cultural diversity: Europe, Arabic-Islamic world, Africa, China* (Goldbach: Keip, 1993). More specifically on the role of religion, see for example: Irene Bloom, J. Paul Martin & Wayne L. Proudfoot (eds.), *Religious diversity and human rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); John Kelsay & Sumner B. Twiss (eds.), *Religion and human rights* (New York: The Project on Religion and Human Rights, 1995); John Witte & John van de Vyver (eds.), *Religious human rights in global perspective. Vol. I: Religious perspectives* (Den Haag: Kluwer, 1996). For a historical and comparative perspective, see also Yael Danieli, Elsa Stamatopoulos & Clarence J. Dias (eds.), *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Fifty years and beyond* (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, 1999).
 9. Vaclav Havel, in Danieli et al., *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, p. 332.
 10. *Ib.*, p. 333-4.
 11. Thurman, in Bloom et al., *Religious diversity and human rights*, p. 90.
 12. James Turner Johnson, 'Human rights and violence in contemporary context', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1998, p. 326.
 13. Samuel P. Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, pp. 22-49. The argument was further elaborated in his book *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
 14. See later issues of *Foreign Affairs*, notably vol. 72, no 4.
 15. Many of these, incidentally, are considered to be present in most, if not all, religions. This is a view commonly held, in any case, by religious believers themselves, as well as by those who have been writing specifically on the subject of religion and human rights.

16. See Johannes Morsink's 'Introduction: The Declaration at fifty', in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, drafting and intent*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
17. Cf. Irene Bloom, 'Religious diversity and human rights: an introduction', in Bloom et al, *Religious diversity and human rights*, pp. 1-11, notably pp. 2-3.
18. When we look at the composition of the General Assembly, we see that of the 58 national representatives 37, i.e. a majority, stood in the Judeo-Christian tradition, 11 in the Islamic, 6 in the Marxist and 4 in the Buddhist tradition. There was, however, a notable under-representation from Asia and Africa. For a detailed record, see Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Ch. 1: 'The drafting process explained'.
19. *Ib.*, p. (21-27). We should mention here the significant influence of some Muslim drafters, and also the strong influence of notably Latin American socialists, to whom we owe the inclusion of social, economic and cultural rights in the Declaration.
20. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.
21. Theorists of globalization make a distinction between the first and the second modernity. Whereas in the first modernity there was an equation of state, society and identity, in the second modernity this equation is undermined by new developments inherent in the processes of globalization. The most important dimensions of globalization are considered to be communications technology, ecology, economics, work organization, culture and civil society. See Ulrich Beck, *What is globalization?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, notably p. 19.
22. Quoted in Little, 'Rethinking human rights', p. 153.
23. See e.g. Harriet Samuel's discussion of this in her article, 'Hong Kong on women, Asian values, and the law', *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1999, pp. 707-734.
24. See Michael Ignatieff, *The warrior's honor: Ethnic war and the modern conscience*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1997, p. 54. See also Kwame Anthony Appiah in an interview with *de Volkskrant* on 23 October 1999 commenting on his essay 'Color conscious: the political morality of race'.
25. Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to paradise: African Christians in Europe*. Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998.
26. As Jackie Selebi, then Director-General of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, pointed out at a ceremony in Geneva on 12 August 1998 when he received a human rights award.
27. One interesting example has been recorded by Sally Engle Merry, 'Legal pluralism and transnational culture: the *Ka Ho'okolokolonui Kanaka Maoli* tribunal, Hawai'i, 1993', in Richard A. Wilson (ed.),

- Human rights, culture and context: Anthropological perspectives*. London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997, pp. 28-48.
28. Ger Duyzings, *Religion and the politics of identity in Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co., 1999.
 29. Cf. Dick Kooijman, 'Religieuze tolerantie en seculiere staat in India', *Wereld en Zending*, 1999, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 97-106. One leading intellectual advocating this point of view is the social psychologist Ashis Nandy; see notably his essay 'The politics of secularism and the recovery of religious tolerance' in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of violence: Communities, riots and survivors in South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.
 30. We may quote in this connection Richard A. Wilson, who states that 'It is possible to have contextualization without relativization, since one can keep open the possibility, and in the dying embers of the twentieth century, the likelihood, that contexts are interlinked through a variety of processes.' Just because a cultural form is global, he argues, it does not mean that everyone relates to it in the same way ('Human rights, culture and context: an introduction', in Wilson, *Human rights, culture and context*, p. 12).
 31. Michael Ignatieff, *The warrior's honor*, pp. 5 and 98.
 32. For a scholarly and critical analysis of the term 'religion' in different historical and social contexts, see Jan G. Platvoet & Arie L. Molendijk (eds.), *The pragmatics of defining religion: Contexts, concepts and contests*. Leiden: Brill, 1999; notably the Epilogue by Platvoet, 'Contexts, concepts and contests: towards a pragmatics of defining religion', pp. 463-516.
 33. In his book *Race and ethnicity in modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), the sociologist David Mason provides analytical insight into the mechanisms involved in this process, drawing attention to the important distinction between difference and diversity.
 34. See, for example, the critical comments made by Teresia Hinga in a short essay, 'Inculturation and the otherness of Africans: some reflections', in a volume about the perceived otherness of Africa, *Inculturation: Abide by the otherness of Africa and Africans*, edited by Peter Turkson & Frans Wijzen, Kampen: Kok, 1994, pp. 10-18.
 35. In some cases, world religions have proven to be a colonial invention. This is the case with Hinduism, which was constructed by the British in the 19th century as a unitary national religion, a process which some have described as the 'semitification' of Hinduism in the modern era. There are also scholars who argue that being Hindu has no religious connotation whatsoever. See Richard King,

- ‘Orientalism and the modern myth of “Hinduism”’, *Numen*, vol. XLVI, no. 2, 1999, pp. 146-185.
36. Universalization is only one remarkable tendency in the current process of revitalization of African traditional religions. See Rosalind Hackett, ‘Revitalization in African Traditional Religion’, in Jacob K. Olupona (ed.), *African traditional religions in contemporary society*. New York: Paragon House, 1991, pp. 135-149.
 37. Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to paradise*.
 38. Quoted in Kevin Dwyer, *Arab voices: The human rights debate in the Middle East*. London: Routledge, 1991, p. 119.
 39. A point in case is present-day South Africa, where in certain parts of the country witchcraft accusations have become so frequent that the national government has set up various organs to try and tackle what has become a grave social problem which has led in recent years to the violent death of hundreds of people. Under the umbrella of SANPAD, the South Africa-Netherlands Programme on Alternatives in Development sponsored by the Dutch government, a research programme has been developed with the title ‘Crossing witchcraft barriers in South Africa’.
 40. Quoted in Allen & Seaton, *The media of conflict*, p. 46.
 41. See Alison Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story: Genocide in Rwanda*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999.
 42. Among the Akan in Ghana or the Yoruba in Nigeria, for example, the spiritual dimension of a person is deemed an essential part of the human condition. We find similar ideas in all parts of the world, where the human world and the spirit world are believed to be interrelated in a way which has become uncommon in the West.
 43. Paul Richards, ‘Local understandings of primates and evolution: some Mende beliefs concerning chimpanzees’, in R. Corbey & B. Theunissen (eds.), *Ape, man, apeman: Changing views since 1600*. Leiden: Dept. of Prehistory, Leiden University, 1995, pp. 265-273. See also Stephen Ellis, *The mask of anarchy: The destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*. London: Hurst & Co., 1999: esp. pp. 220-280.
 44. ‘New Zealand gives human rights to great apes’, *Nosweek*, Dec. 1999/Jan. 2000, no. 28, p. 12.
 45. One notable exception is the Parliament of the World’s Religions, which gathers men and women from religious and spiritual traditions all over the world to discuss issues of common concern.
 46. Huntington, ‘The clash of civilizations?’, p. 49.
 47. Wilson, *Human rights, culture and context*, p. 23.

Chosen People: The Concept of Diaspora in the Modern World

Introduction

People from all over Africa have settled in all parts of Western Europe in substantial numbers over the past thirty years.¹ In many cases, it is the political and economic situation in Africa which forces people to move outside their country to look for work and security. From the little we know it is clear that the circumstances of migration are a vital factor in shaping the religious life of those concerned.²

Many African migrants in Europe belong to one of the two major religious traditions, Islam or Christianity. In both cases we lack substantial information on the religious dimension of their life in Europe. We may feel reasonably well informed about Muslims in Europe more generally (for example Shadid and van Koningsveld eds, 1996), including those from North Africa, but we have little specific information on the religious life of Muslim communities in

Europe which originate in sub-Saharan Africa. One may think of the large Somali communities in various countries of Europe, including the Netherlands; of the Malian and Senegalese communities in France, or East African Muslim communities in Greece. The same is true for African Christian communities in Europe, including the Ethiopian community representing the ancient Coptic tradition, or the Kimbanguist Church representing the independent church tradition in sub-Saharan Africa. The most striking developments are presently found in the large number of pentecostal and evangelical congregations which have recently been established mostly by West Africans. In the United Kingdom such developments have a longer history than in most of continental Europe. In Britain, Nigerians in particular have been founding new and independent churches since the mid-1960s (Killingray 1994, p. 19), while on the European continent the foundation of new congregations has been a development of only the last few years which can be largely ascribed to Christian believers from Ghana (ter Haar 1995b).

The growth of African Christian communities on the European continent is one of the most striking developments in the recent religious life of Western Europe. Examples are Germany, Italy, Belgium and Holland, to mention some front-runners. This is certainly true of the Netherlands, where African-initiated churches now exist in many cities. The majority are in Amsterdam, where there are almost forty such churches, mostly in one particular district, the Bijlmermeer, which is known as a home of migrant communities (ter Haar 1996). Many of these new churches have been established in the empty spaces under the multi-storey car parks that are situated under the tower blocks in the district. While previously invisible and unheard of, the world came to know about them after a tragic accident one Sunday in October 1992 when a cargo plane crashed into some of these towerblocks.

Any analysis of these new religious developments should be seen in the light of the global process of migration, which defines the lives of many Africans in Europe. International migration provokes strong political response in most countries of Europe today. One of the most disturbing aspects of European immigration policy is its

tendency towards the exclusion of black people. This has already led to the European Union being described as 'fortress Europe' (Dunkwu 1993), a stronghold for whites to defend against the 'surging' crowd from Africa.³ The religious response of Africans to this situation is often ignored or minimised by Western observers, if not dismissed altogether. Alternatively, the role of religion in the life of African migrants is reduced to an exotic aspect of life that may seem colourful against the background of Western secular life. Or again, their religious expression is simply related to a 'traditional' background in Africa. None of these approaches take as its starting-point the religious life of Africans in Europe, which to many migrants is a central feature of their existence.

It is against this background that I want to look at the concept of diaspora as it is often used today in either a popular sense or among academics with regard to religious minority groups. In doing so I will focus on the African diaspora communities, notably the Christian ones, taking the Netherlands as my example. Terminology is important. All writers, to some extent, use a vocabulary which reflects their own cultural attributes and ideology, and it is important to be aware of this (ter Haar 1995c). It is interesting, for example, to see that the common notion of 'scattering' which is connected to the diaspora concept refers to members of a religious community who are living among a different faith community, such as in the case of Muslims or Hindus living in a European country shaped by Christian tradition and culture. The application of that same idea to Christians coming from Africa, as is happening today, has serious consequences for their situation in the West. It obscures the fact that African Christians living in Europe are not adherents of some strange unknown religion, but are Christians. The general connotation is for people described as being 'in diaspora' to be basically unhappy and pitiful, because they find themselves in a place where they neither belong nor desire to be. As a minority group, they are commonly believed to link up with their 'own' people at home, that is in their original homelands, and thus retain what is believed to be their 'own' identity, than to link up with the majority in their new homelands. This appears to be also the case even if in the migrants' own opinion they share at least a

common faith, as African Christians do. For ideological and sociological reasons, therefore, it is important to look into the meanings of the diaspora concept as we use it to refer to religious minority groups (see also Baumann 1995).

The Concept of Diaspora

The concept of diaspora has been marked by the indelible experience of exile as part of Jewish history. It originally referred to Jews living outside Judea, as they had been doing since the sixth century BCE after the city of Jerusalem had been conquered by the armies of the Babylonian empire.⁴ The word 'diaspora' was subsequently coined by the makers of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the so-called Septuagint, to designate a specific group of people who find themselves in a state of being scattered. It appears, however, that some connotations which have become attached to the word 'diaspora' are modern. Tromp (1995, pp. 2-3) has pointed out that it is often taken for granted that the Jews who lived outside Judea experienced their migrant status as undesirable, and that Jerusalem became the symbol of their happiness and their longing to live in the land of their God. These Jews, he argues, are generally understood to have felt homeless and uprooted in antiquity. Their environment, believed to be fundamentally hostile to the Jewish way of life, would on the one hand have allured them because of the social and economic advantages assimilation seemed to offer, but on the other hand repelled them because of the threat to their proper, traditional identity represented by cultural assimilation.

According to Tromp, this is a very misleading picture, which is also incompatible with the self-perception of the Jews living outside Judea. He shows how in the Old Testament the word 'diaspora' is used in such a way as to bring out the omnipotence, righteousness and mercy of God, as the one who graciously gathers the dispersed. All emphasis is on the acts of God, and the term, therefore, tells us very little about the dispersed themselves and how they experienced their situation (ibid, p. 11). The term 'diaspora' is primarily used to praise God who has the power to gather the scattered,

and not to describe the pitiful situation of people living abroad. Moreover, the ancient Jews in the diaspora were not at all in a deplorable situation, as Tromp shows on the basis of some historical examples. The life of Jewish minorities in some of the main urban centres in the Hellenistic and Roman empires demonstrates not only how Jews living outside Judea were firmly settled in the lands and cities where they lived, but also how, in spite of being Jews, they were socially and legally accepted by the non-Jewish inhabitants. Tromp's conclusion is that these Jews had no particular longing for Jerusalem, which was to them a foreign city, in the same way as Judea was to them a foreign country, but that they regarded the very places where they were living as their home.

This, of course, has some consequence for the question of identity. What constituted a Jewish identity in these circumstances? One important aspect is that Jews in the so-called diaspora were not easily recognisable as such. An outsider could not distinguish a Jew from a non-Jew unless the Jew made himself known as such. As Tromp points out, they were not racially distinct, they did not wear special clothes, they often had quite ordinary names and they all spoke ordinary Greek (ibid, p. 18). In other words, Jews living outside Judea could only be designated as Jews on the basis of their self-definition. A problem enters where others - in this case, non-Jews - come to define Jewish identity, such as was the case in ancient Alexandria. When the Romans conquered the city in 30 BCE the position of the Jewish minority changed drastically. The Roman administration introduced a poll-tax, from which the Greek citizens of Alexandria were exempt. This, in turn, required the inhabitants of the city to prove their Greek descent, which set in motion a process of ethnic labelling with political implications. The Jews, who before had had no reason to hide their Jewishness, felt suddenly degraded to second-class citizens. They therefore resisted the new measure and demanded ~ as Jews - to be acknowledged as legitimate citizens of the city, equal to the original Greeks. From then there is a development in Jewish writings which insists on keeping the Jewish law, in contrast to a number of non-Jewish writings attacking the Jewish way of life. In short, as Tromp concludes, the new Roman polity created an ethnic strife which caused Jews

to stress their otherness, now that they had been confronted with their distinction from the non-Jews which had formerly been taken for granted (ibid, p. 19). Due to new policy, it was no longer possible to be Greek and Jew at the same time. As a result, the Jews began to defend an exclusive collective Jewish identity which had, in fact, been forced upon them; a process which initiated an increasing estrangement between Jews and non-Jews and led to violence (ibid, p. 20).

The African Diaspora

The Jewish example is very instructive because of its bearing on the situation of Africans today living outside the African continent. The use of the term 'diaspora' in reference to peoples of African origin clearly draws on the Jewish experience, tailoring it specifically to the situation of Africans scattered outside the African continent. Its use in this context is rather new. Although its origins may be traced to the nineteenth century,⁵ it came into fashion around the 1960s, notably among African-American scholars or referring to the African American population, and is also referred to at times as the 'black' diaspora. Historical research in the United States has shown that there is a relationship between the use and development of the term 'African diaspora', the dismantling of the European colonial empires and the emergence of independent nations in Africa. Before that era, the idea may be traced to the works of some nineteenth-century historians and other writers who applied the Biblical concept of the diaspora. It is often argued that the concept of the African diaspora can be traced to the Bible, notably to the text of Psalms 68:31 which speaks of Ethiopia stretching out her hands unto God which - we may note in passing - is also the text underlying the emergence of the first independent churches in Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, in South Africa, known as 'Ethiopian churches' (Sundkler 1961). Another relevant Biblical reference in this context is the story in the Acts of the Apostles (Ch. 8: 26-39) which relates the encounter between the Ethiopian eunuch and Queen Candace.

In the 1950s and 1960s the African diaspora emerged as an explicit concept in the English-speaking world; it found a counterpart in the French-speaking world around the same time in the development of the concept of *negritude*, advanced by the former President of Senegal, Leopold Sédar Senghor. From the 1960s onwards the term 'African diaspora' has become a well-known concept, although often used in an unscholarly manner. George Shepperson, for example, a British expert on the African diaspora, points to the fact that the historical distinction between diaspora and exile in the Jewish tradition is often overlooked. 'Exile' always implies forced or involuntary dispersion, whereas 'diaspora' includes some element of voluntary migration. To overlook that difference, in his view, would connect the study of the 'African diaspora' exclusively to the study of enforced dispersal, that is to slavery (Shepperson 1993). But the term 'African diaspora', as it is often used today, is problematic for a number of reasons, mostly because the concept has been shaped by the American context and since it is not clear what precisely we mean by it in the context of Europe. In the United States, the term is commonly used to refer to all citizens of African descent, that is black Americans, many of whom today consciously refer to themselves as African-Americans. They share a collective memory of the transatlantic slave trade which forcibly expelled millions of Africans from the continent of their birth.⁶ The intrinsic connection of the African diaspora with the history of the slave trade constitutes the essential characteristic of the diaspora concept in both North and South America. African diaspora studies are a standard feature of the academic syllabus in North America and are generally considered in the light of this specific history. In 1979, Howard University in Washington established the First African Diaspora Studies Institute (FADSI), bringing together for the first time scholars from Africa, the Americas, and Europe to discuss various aspects of researching and teaching African diaspora studies (Harris 1982, p. 4).

Discussion of the applicability of the term diaspora, therefore, has been taking place in the United States for some considerable time. Although there seems to be a broad consensus regarding the use of the term, there is also a clear awareness that this may encourage

irrelevant comparisons with the Jewish diaspora of the modern era. Therefore, the suggestion to use the term in a purely descriptive manner to describe 'the historical phenomenon of the dispersion and settlement of Africans abroad' (Harris 1982, pp. 4-5) not only suits the scholar of religion but also does justice to the original event that gave rise to the phenomenon, that is the slave trade. What is required, however, is to analyse the phenomenon and try to explain its meaning. Within the broadly defined framework of the dispersion and settlement of Africans abroad it remains important to consider the specific features of the African diaspora in America and distinguish them from the situation pertaining to Europe. If we follow the definition provided by FADSI, the African diaspora embodies:

the voluntary and forced dispersion of Africans at different periods in history and in several directions; the emergence of a cultural identity abroad without losing the African base, whether spiritually or physically; the psychological or physical return to the homeland, Africa'. (Harris 1982, p. 5)

We see that the term 'African diaspora' here contains three key elements: *dispersion*, *identity*, and *return*. It may be useful to see how far these elements are relevant to the specific conditions of Africans in Europe. I propose to examine this more closely by taking the Netherlands as my example.⁷

Dispersion

The dispersion of Africans on a more or less large scale has taken place since medieval times when large numbers of Africans were captured and taken to the Middle East and Asia for forced labour by intruding people. The dispersion to the Americas started after the voyages of Columbus, as a result of the ensuing spread of knowledge about the Americas to a European public. This led to a form of globalisation - an encounter of two worlds - of which the African diaspora was an important by-product (Conniff and Davis

1994, p. 306). It became a central aspect during the slave trade of later centuries when the 'African diaspora' proved vital in the shaping of the Americas. Since then the African diaspora has expanded in all directions and recently also made its impact on the European continent. The migration of Africans to Europe is generally a modern phenomenon which - although not totally unrelated - does not arise directly from the history of the slave trade, but is born of circumstances inherent in the conditions of a globalised world. Labour migration is one important aspect of that, as a result of which Africans can be found everywhere in the industrialised world.

Today, we find Africans scattered over most countries of the European Union, while in some countries, notably the United-Kingdom and France, one may speak of a tradition of African or, in a wider sense, black presence (Killingray 1994). The question whether their dispersion has been forced or voluntary goes beyond the descriptive level and depends to a large extent on the individual's subjective view in defining the matter. In present circumstances subjective views risk being influenced by the public debate on migration which has taken a new turn since the emergence of the European Union as a political entity. As a result, European governments have introduced refined categories designed to distinguish one type of migrant from another and to separate what they consider legitimate immigrants from those they see as illegitimate ones. An inflated vocabulary is one of the clearest expressions of this. In the Netherlands, a whole new vocabulary has been invented to distinguish between various types of refugees with a view to reducing the number of legal immigrants.

Definitions are rarely static, but it is nevertheless striking how rapidly the content of terms related to the process of migration is changing and adapted to the political needs of the day. What these labels have in common is the fact that they all refer to people who for one reason or another have felt obliged to leave their country and settle elsewhere. That is, they are all migrants, people on the move, in many cases individual travellers who have effectively removed the distinction between forced or voluntary dispersion

which proved so significant in the American context. The reasons for the presence of Africans in Europe today are largely dictated by the state of affairs in the home countries. With the exception of Britain and France, the major former colonial powers in Africa, the great majority of Africans in Europe today have migrated because of some form of upheaval in their own country, of a nature which often makes it difficult to separate economic from political causes.

The circumstances of dispersion in Europe, therefore, are quite different from the conditions in America. The history of forced dispersion through the slave trade has marked the common psyche of African-Americans in a way which is not unlike the holocaust experience of Jewish history. The slave owners tried to erase all aspects of African culture, including religion, and to undermine every aspect of African identity. The slave experience which has been so vital to the development of a specific African identity in the Americas is virtually absent among African communities in Europe (although in the case of the Netherlands it is an irony that it is mostly Ghanaians who have settled there, thus by their very presence confronting the Netherlands with its own disreputable role in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century slave trade in the former Gold Coast: Postma 1990). An exception has to be made, to some extent, for Britain, where the awareness of the slave past continues to live among African-American descendents.

Identity

The element of *identity* invariably proves the most important one in the diaspora context, whether for internal or external reasons. In anthropological terms, identity is a social concept about groups of people who think of themselves, or are thought of by others, as alike in some significant way (Moore 1994, p. 130). More generally, identity is taken as indicating a distinguishing character of a person or a group of persons, in this case suggesting a specific set of characteristics which may be ascribed to Africans in the diaspora and which can be seen as differentiating them from the society in which they live. Here, the emphasis is on cultural identity in which

religion has an obvious part, and it is on the religious aspect that I will concentrate.

In the American context the development of an African identity has become highly important for descendants of the African diaspora due to the concerted efforts mentioned before to disrupt the African person. Since culture is an important aspect of identity, cultural issues figure high on the agenda of the African diaspora in America. This is also demonstrated by the new forms of religion which have emerged in the Americas as the result of a conscious interaction between belief systems of the past and present. One may think of religions such as umbanda and candomblé, which are very popular in Brazil, the voodoo religion of Haiti, or the winti religion of Surinam which also exists today in the Netherlands. Further examples include the many adherents of Yoruba religion in the United States, as well as many other cults which have their roots in the religious traditions of West Africa particularly. The link with the slave past is central to the emergence and development of the great variety of African-American religions and to the content of religious beliefs and practices of many African-Americans. An interesting example in this respect is the umbanda religion in Brazil, whose deities reflect the different cultural influences in the history of the country.

In contrast to the Americas, the presence of significant numbers of Africans in Europe is a relative novelty. It is because of these growing numbers that in the last decade so many African congregations have been formed in continental Europe, a trend which we saw has been noticeable in Britain for much longer. Due to the specific background of this latest diaspora trend, and unlike the situation in the Americas at the time of the slave trade, most Africans in Europe did not bring their African traditional religions with them (which is not to deny the existence of cultural links with African traditions), but rather, as a belief system, they brought with them their 'new' religions, Islam or Christianity. We are rather ill-informed about African Islam in Europe but it seems that African Muslims have not formed their own congregations in the same way as African Christian congregations have done. In France and Italy,

for example, Muslims from Senegal have formed networks through the Mouride brotherhood, but these, in spite of their religious functions, seem more comparable to, for example, Ghanaians' cultural associations (Schmidt di Friedberg 1996). In the Netherlands, on the other hand, African Muslims tend to pray at one of the mosques which are frequented by Muslims from Turkey and Morocco or from Surinam, or practise their religion in private.

In the case of the African-initiated churches in Europe, it is not the history of the slave trade which exerts a pervasive influence on the lives of their members but rather the history of the colonial past. The history of Christian mission and church formation in Africa is inextricably bound up with the history of colonial domination and, among other factors, is the root cause of the emergence of independent churches in Africa.⁸ From the very beginning African churches have struggled to escape from Western domination, particularly in the form of the so-called African independent churches, but increasingly also within the framework of the so-called main-line churches. The latter's concern with 'inculturation' - that is, finding ways of making the gospel relevant to a specific cultural context and thus allowing for the expression of an 'African identity' in religion - is a significant sign in this respect.⁹

The question thus emerges of how relevant the issue of African identity is to African Christians in Europe. With specific reference to the situation in the Netherlands, I have argued before that the discussion regarding the need for African Christians in Europe to develop their own identity as African Christians is being led by their European counterparts and serves European rather than African interests in at least some cases (ter Haar 1995a). African Christians in the Netherlands, for example, identify themselves first as Christians and only secondly as Africans or African Christians. That is, in their own view, their public adherence to Christianity constitutes the most important element of their identity. Yet, there is a general tendency in the Netherlands to separate African Christians from their Dutch counterparts by insisting on their perceived African identity, while ignoring their shared Christian identity. It is a pattern which fits in well with the Dutch social sys-

tem of developing specific group identities and which, in the past, provided some of the intellectual basis for the system of apartheid. It would be interesting to compare the Dutch attitude with the situation in other parts of Europe, where different social mechanisms exist for the integration of foreigners.

Britain provides an interesting example in this regard. Gerd Baumann (1996), who has done research among South Asian migrants in Southall in London, has remarked on the interest of the state in negotiating identity. He demonstrates, with particular reference to the case of the Sikhs, how the British state uses a religious definition of identity for purely secular, administrative purposes. Although the people thus categorised may not have been consulted in regard to their own collective labelling, they can turn their new official identity to advantage by using it as a basis to negotiate their own interests with the state. One obvious example is the allocation of money for community welfare. When this happens, an originally religious identity becomes a political one as well, and the political component may in due time surpass the religious aspect in importance. This 'ethnicization' of religious diversity, Baumann shows, has the opposite effect of what is intended, namely integration and incorporation into the existing political system. The end result is likely to be the marginalisation of religious minority groups as specific ethnic communities within the boundaries of the secular state (G. Baumann 1995).

With similar effect intellectuals of all sorts tend to ascribe an ethnic identity to African Christians in Europe (M. Baumann 1995, p. 1). Academic specialists tend to emphasise migrants' African roots, thus contributing to segregation of Africans and non-Africans in this part of the world. In a different way, this is also furthered by the public insistence on Africans' right to develop their own meaning 'African' - identity. This is not to say that Africans do not have such a right, but that the necessity to promote this should not be imposed by others. One result is, in the Dutch case, that while African Christians are trying to enter the mainstream of Western Christian culture by identifying themselves primarily as Christians, non-Africans ensure that they stay 'beyond the pale' by imposing

on them a requirement to develop what they perceive to be central to their identity, namely their 'Africanness', as this is believed to express itself traditionally. One may wonder how much this is also symptomatic of a fundamental racial prejudice in the form of a belief on the part of some Europeans in the incompatibility of being genuinely Christian and genuinely African at the same time.¹⁰ A symptom of the same line of thought can be found in the common reference to African-initiated congregations in Europe as 'African churches', implying some form of Christianity which is only suitable for African Christians. A logical next step would be to suggest that African Christianity is a different religion altogether.

African Christians in the Netherlands are well aware that the emphasis on their perceived otherness will work against them in that it will contribute to their isolation in society rather than allowing them to link up with mainstream - that is Western - Christianity. For the same reason they are opposed to the label 'African churches' which is generally bestowed on them (for example Himmans-Arday 1996, p. 2). Instead, they refer to themselves as 'international churches', thereby expressing their wish to be open to all Christian believers, irrespective of race and colour. The insistence of many non-Africans on the existence of a specific 'African identity', whether this is inspired by religious orthodoxy or by intellectual liberalism, is in effect a continuation of the old colonial and early missionary discourse and praxis regarding the perceived 'otherness' of Africans (Hinga 1994). It also reminds one of the experiences of the Jews in Alexandria who - due to outside pressure - were forced to develop a specific identity of their own which up to then they had not felt a need to do as they were content simply to be Jews among non-Jews. Similarly, I would like to argue that Africans in the Netherlands are happy to be Africans among non-Africans, that is the Dutch without turning their African-ness into a major issue. For African migrants in Europe, their African identity is in principle as much a matter of course as a Jewish identity was for the Jews in the Hellenistic cities (Tromp 1995, p.20 in both cases this originally had nothing to do with a deliberate choice. I would want to draw the parallel even further. Just as the ancient Jews felt no reason to assert their identity outside Judea as long as

they were socially and politically accepted, but also had no reason to renounce their identity, since non-Jews accepted their way of life, in the same way African believers in Europe would have no reason to either emphasise or hide their identity if they were simply accepted as fellow-citizens of Europe, who to some extent have their own way of life.

Not only should the definition of one's identity result from a process of negotiation in which at least the people concerned participate, but also I believe that the development of a collective identity can take place only if one's personal identity, that is, the integrity of the individual, has been secured. Obviously, the mechanisms for that are influenced by size of a particular minority group vis-à-vis the majority population, which marks another difference between the American and European diaspora situation. Africans in Europe are in a minority position, with little or no power as a group. For many of them, their religion helps them to achieve a type of security and inner strength which may well encourage them in future to reconsider their self-identity specifically in terms of being African Christians or Muslims. Alternatively, the experience of exclusion, inspired by racism or other excluding mechanisms, may have a similar effect. This is the case for example, in Britain where, due to the circumstances of an entirely different context, African and Afro-Caribbean church leaders tend to insist on their African identity in the experience of faith.¹¹

Return

The element of return is the last key element in defining the concept of the African diaspora. The question here is to determine whether a longing to return to the 'homeland' pertains to the situation of Africans in Europe. In this case, too, I would argue that we are dealing with a fundamentally different situation, resulting from the different historical context in which the diasporas has been constituted. The post-war history of migration in Europe has taught us not only that physical return on a permanent basis frequently does not take place, not even among first-generation

migrants, but that in the second and third generation also the psychological importance of return largely disappears. The belief that Africans will return to their homelands as soon as they can possibly do so is contradicted by the realities of today. Of course, cases of individual returns are known, for example in situations where stability returns to the home country' and a new future seems possible. In most cases, however, and in spite of the difficulties facing them, the future for Africans in Europe looks less dim than if they were to return to their home countries, particularly if they have succeeded in finding employment, and since many of them have started to raise families and are able to provide their children with better prospects. Although the link with the homeland is not likely to disappear, this has little to do with the longing for the country of the past as might be seen in America, where all existing links with homeland Africa were cut off by the slave trade.

If we examine the African congregations in Europe, to judge from my research in the Netherlands the element of return in the earlier defined sense is absent. Members of congregations are using their religious imagination to designate a legitimate space for themselves in the West by comparing their own experiences to those of the Israelites. They refer to Biblical examples which show that God does not respect borders and that his children today are as free as the children of Israel. Biblical models instil in them the faith that, with the help of God, borders will only prove temporary obstacles. In a different way, stories such as that of Ruth and Naomi, who left the land of Moab to find work and shelter in Bethlehem, inspire further faith among the believers. Throughout history, the imagery of the Bible has been a major inspiration for Africans in the diaspora, not least because of its perceived references to Africa.¹² The importance of the Bible in the lives of African Christian congregations, in Europe as in Africa itself, cannot easily be overestimated. While outside observers often tend to consider their attachment to the literal text of the Bible simply as a sign of 'fundamentalism' - another highly ideologised concept which seems to have almost completely lost its descriptive meaning - for African Christians themselves this constitutes a constant source of inspiration which helps them succeed in their struggle for life. Conversely, however,

the idea of return to the homeland which is implicit in the diaspora concept is helpful in strengthening the belief among Europeans that one day these people will 'go home' – a politically convenient thought.

African Christians in Europe, as far as I can see, do not look back to the African past while spiritually and physically preparing for their return. On the contrary they strike me as forward-looking people who use all their material and spiritual resources to secure for themselves a better future in Europe. They have lived in Africa, many in parts of the continent other than their place of origin due to the situation in their home country. It is relevant to recall, in this context, that Africa is the continent which not only contains more refugees than any other continent, but also has a long tradition of migrant labour within the continent.¹³ Since Western Europe is one of the most stable parts of the world politically and economically, Africans, like migrants from other parts of the world, will continue to come looking for work, and their religious belief helps them greatly in their endeavour. In other words, at the present time, their promised land is not Africa, but Europe, and - similar to my suggestions on the concept of identity as a key factor in the diaspora complex the belief in a return of African migrants to Africa appears to exist chiefly on the part of non-Africans.

Conclusion

If, then, as I have argued, at least two of the three major elements of what constitutes the 'African diaspora' in the light of the American experience (namely identity and return) are of doubtful application, can we still apply the term 'diaspora' in the context of Europe? In discussing the ancient Jewish diaspora, Tromp comes to the final conclusion that we had better abandon the term altogether as inappropriate, both on moral and empirical grounds. As he demonstrates, the popular connotations of the diaspora concept are not conducive to human dignity, while there is no empirical indication that these 'diaspora' Jews were intrinsically unhappy. The same applies to African Christians in Europe for whom the

exclusive orientation towards Africa which is implied in the concept of 'African diaspora' would make their life in Europe by definition imperfect, in the same way as this was believed to be true for Jews living outside Judea because they should be, or at least long to be, in Judea (Tromp 1995, p. 21). Ancient Jews and modern Africans, in both cases, ought to have a feeling of alienation and to look at themselves as strangers in their actual place of living.

Yet, in spite of the problems involved, I think we can use the concept of diaspora in our work, quite apart from the fact that it would virtually be impossible to get rid of the term now that we have lived with it for so long. We can use it in an academically acceptable and responsible way as long as we are aware of the metaphorical meaning of the term, and if we are prepared to use it in a descriptive manner as a dynamic concept subject to historical change. We will then be able to approach the subject in a scholarly and broadly comparative manner in a way suggested by Shepperson (1993, p. 47). First of all we can identify and investigate the specific areas to which dispersed Africans have gone and in which their descendants are living. In the present case, this means taking the European context - and not the African one - as our starting point. Secondly, we can study the interaction between the centres and the peripheries of the African diaspora in Europe at all possible levels, introducing the link with the home country only as a secondary consideration. Finally, we can stop the 'ghettoizing' of African history (Curtin 1995), and attempt to integrate these studies into the overall history of humanity, which is at the same time a plea for taking African history, including African religious history seriously.

These three successive steps can also be taken in studying specifically the religious aspects of the African diaspora in Europe, in conformity with the two pillars of the empirical study of religion: objective description and analysis. If this were to happen, a scholarly contribution would be made which - in the process - would rid the concept of diaspora of certain connotations and make it suitable for application in the broader comparative study of religion (M. Baumann 1995). The importance of the religious dimension in the study of so-called diaspora communities is easily overlooked by

scholars from a more secular background in favour of ethnicity and ethnic adherence, which can easily lead to the political construction of ethnic religions.

In the case of African religious communities in Europe the tendency towards the 'ethnicisation' of religion poses a number of other questions to do with race relations which cannot be discussed here. But the observation that the preservation and perpetuation of religious identity can become a core issue in the diaspora can be fully shared for African Christians in Europe, whose independent churches single them out as 'chosen people'. In their own view, they have been chosen by God for a new purpose in Europe. Ironically, Europe does indeed regard them as 'different'.

'Chosen people: the concept of diaspora in the modern world', in S.J. Sutcliffe (ed.), *Religion: Empirical Studies. A Collection to mark the 50th anniversary of the British Association for the Study of Religions*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, pp. 91-106.

Notes

- 1 Throughout this chapter 'Africa' is read as 'sub-Saharan Africa', i.e. excluding Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. According to the last available statistics, in 1993 the total number of African migrants is registered in the then fifteen member states of the European Union was 831,547 (Eurostat, Migration Statistics 1995). This does not include an unknown number of undocumented migrants.
- 2 For the UK this becomes clear from the works, amongst others, of Gerloff (1992) and Kalilombe (1995); examples from the Netherlands are Amoako-Adusei (1991) and ter Haar (1995a).
- 3 Muus (1995, p. 121 .125) has drawn attention to the problematic way in which migration processes are often described, invoking a specific image drawn from metaphors of water rather than giving an accurate description of migration.
- 4 The following argument is taken from Tromp (1995).
- 5 Some historical precedents are Edward Blyden, William Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey.
- 6 According to Postma's (1990) authoritative account, a total of some ten million Africans were carried as slaves of the 'new world'.
- 7 I am aware of the differences in situation in the various countries of Europe as defined by the differences in history and culture and therefore limit

- myself in this case to the Netherlands. For more specific information on the African diaspora situation in the Netherlands, see ter Haar (1994).
- 8 There is a large academic literature on the history of African independent churches, particularly with regard to southern Africa. Among the most prolific writers in this field are G.C. Oosthuizen and M.L. Daneel.
- 9 The subject of inculturation has been very popular, particularly in Roman Catholic circles: for example, the discussions on the issue at the African Synod in Rome in April 1994.
- 10 This is a point which has often been made by the former Archbishop of Lusaka, Mgr. Emmanuel Milingo, who was removed from office after a dispute concerning his healing ministry: see ter Haar (1992).
- 11 See for example Building bridges between African independent churches and the historic mission churches, a report of the proceedings of a consultation organised by the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership (Birmingham, UK) and the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (Nairobi, Kenya) at Nairobi in November 1995.
- 12 Cf. Shepperson (1993, pp. 46–47) who stresses the importance of scholarly work on the Bible and Africa for the study of the African diaspora.
- 13 Although we lack reliable statistics on migration trends in sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that some 35 million Africans, or 8 per cent of the total population, live outside their own country (Muus 1995, p. 36).

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The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa

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The resilience of religion in developing countries is now plain to see. In Africa, religion shows no sign of disappearing or diminishing in public importance, as development theorists have generally supposed. The European Union has normally excluded consideration of the religious dimension in formulating development policies towards Africa. This article explores the possible role of religion in Africa's development. It looks at a number of specific fields that are widely debated in the literature on development to consider ways in which religious ideas may be relevant to development thinking. It concludes with some general considerations on how policymakers might be able to encompass religion as a factor in their strategic outlook. *L'impact de la religion dans les pays en développement est maintenant évident. En Afrique, la religion ne*

montre aucun signe de disparition ou de déclin, comme les théoriciens du développement l'ont généralement présumé. L'Union européenne a, en principe, exclu la prise en compte de la dimension religieuse dans la formulation de politique de développement envers l'Afrique. Cet article étudie le rôle potentiel de la religion dans le développement de l'Afrique. Il s'intéresse à un certain nombre de thèmes largement débattus dans la littérature sur le développement afin de considérer les voies au travers desquelles les idées religieuses pourraient être pertinentes pour la pensée sur le développement. Il conclut avec des considérations générales sur la façon dont les hommes politiques pourraient prendre en compte la religion dans la conception de leurs stratégies.

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest surprises of recent decades has been the resilience of religion. Many classic works of social science considered the 'disenchantment' of the world – to use Weber's phrase – as an inevitable accompaniment of the rise of modern states and modern economies; classic theories of development (Leys, 1996) paid no attention to religion, simply because it seemed irrelevant to the processes they were analysing other than, perhaps, as an obstacle to modernisation. The European Union – and its predecessor, the European Community – has habitually based its development policies on this assumption. The present article argues in favour of giving attention to the role of religion in development, marking a new type of relationship between the European Union and Africa.

The need to rethink some earlier assumptions concerning the relation between religion and development in the broadest sense has been apparent for some time, most notably since the Iranian revolution of 1979. The latter event made clear that, at the very least, religion cannot be regarded as a force destined to retreat from public space in any society that aspires to a high degree of technological achievement or of sophistication. Since then it has been increasingly easy to find evidence of the dynamic role of religion in the public sphere in many parts of the world, and not only in

what used to be known as the Third World. Examples of momentous political change in which religious forces and institutions have played a significant role include Poland, South Africa and the Philippines. They have also marked indelibly the history of the United States. Since the events of 9/11, the political role of religion has been the subject of worldwide debate. In regard to sub-Saharan Africa, religion played a role in deadly political and social conflicts even before 9/11, most obviously in Sudan and Nigeria. Since then, the sub-continent has sometimes been viewed as a new theatre of the 'war on terror' proclaimed by the US government.

Violent conflict, whether or not connected to religion, is generally recognised as an impediment to development. However, the role of religion in political conflict should not obscure its possible role as a significant factor in the development process (Ter Haar, 2005a), as we will discuss in the remainder of the present article. In sub-Saharan Africa, religion now forms arguably the most important connection with the rest of the world (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004; cf. Bayart, 2000). The potential role of religion as an agent of development in this vast area has not escaped some leading European donor institutions. The Commission for Africa convened by the government of the United Kingdom gave substantial attention to the role of religion in its 2005 report entitled *Our Common Interest* (Commission for Africa, 2005: 127–9). The UK government's own development arm, the Department for International Development (DFID), realising the importance of doing further research on this subject, has initiated a project called *Faiths in Development*, a multi-million pound research consortium. Similarly, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has instituted a *Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development Policy*, and other European donor institutions, including some non-governmental organisations, are also known to have undertaken initiatives intended to explore the possible role of religion in the development process.² The potential role of religion in regard to development has been discussed for some years now even by the main international financial institutions concerned with development, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Marshall and Keough, 2004; Marshall, 1998; Tyndale, 2001a, 2001b).

All of these initiatives can be understood as part of a wider shift away from a narrowly economic paradigm of development. The concept of human development is now widely accepted. Human development, according to the United Nations Development Programme, 'is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests' (UNDP website). It thus refers to people's resources beyond any purely material and technocratic aspect. Most policymakers today accept that sustainable development can be achieved only if people build on their own resources. Logically, these assets should be considered to include not only intellectual and social resources, but also spiritual ones, if and when these are available. It is a fact that large numbers of people, particularly in developing countries, have a religious outlook on the world, in a sense that we briefly discuss below.

Moreover, it has become common in development cooperation to emphasise the importance of true partnerships in fostering a cooperation whose binding forces are said to be 'solidarity and mutual respect' (Commission for Africa, 2005: 89). If this is indeed so, it implies taking seriously people's world-views and considering their potential for the development process as a whole. There are in any case eminently practical reasons for including religion within a broad concept of development, since religion provides a powerful motivation for many people to act in the ways they do. It equips many of the world's people with the moral guidance and the will to improve their lives. Whether one regards religious belief as itself 'true' or 'untrue' is hardly the point here. We wish simply to argue that religion, whatever form it takes, constitutes a social and political reality.

The question, then, is whether religious and spiritual resources produce a type of knowledge that is, or could be, relevant to development. One does not need to profess any religious belief, or to be religious in any sense, in order to explore this matter, as we intend to do in the present article. Our approach is broadly secular and sociological inasmuch as it does not imply that either the authors

or readers of this article are required to share the religious world-views that we describe.

In the following paragraphs we will first consider how the concept of development may be viewed through the prism of religion and we will discuss what actually constitutes religion for most people in the developing world, including Africa. We will then move on to examine the role religion could play in specific areas of policy, including some that are specified by the Millennium Development Goals. It is particularly appropriate to debate such matters with regard to Africa, not only because it is the continent considered in greatest need of development, but also because it contains an enormous diversity of religious and spiritual traditions, whose potential for development has hardly been considered.

RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT

A major obstacle to investigating the role of religion in development is a widespread misunderstanding about what religion actually is (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: ch. 1). For most people in the world, including in Africa, 'religion' refers to a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, which is home to spiritual beings that are deemed to have effective powers over the material world (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: 14). For people who hold this point of view, the invisible world is an integral part of the world, which can not be reduced to its visible or material form only. For them, the material world is linked to the spirit world, through the human spirit that is believed to be inherent in every person; hence, a regular traffic is believed to take place between the human and the spirit worlds. In such a holistic perception of the world, it follows that people's social relations extend into the invisible sphere. In the same way as they try and maintain good relations with their relatives, neighbours and friends for their own benefit, individuals and communities invest in their relations with spiritual entities so as to enhance the quality of their lives. Thus, people all over the world enter into various forms of active communication with a spirit world in such a way as to derive infor-

mation or other resources from it with a view to furthering their material welfare or interests.

The above definition of religion fits Africa particularly well. Nevertheless, other definitions of religion exist, derived from different contexts. In modern Western societies, including in the European Union, religion is generally conceived rather differently. Religion is often equated exclusively with its institutional expression, which arises from the history of the Christian churches in Europe. Presumably for this reason, standard works on Africa's modern history generally consider religion – if at all – in the form of organised religion, focussing for example on the role of the church in state politics. Moreover, definitions of religion in the West tend to frame religion in terms of the ultimate meaning that it is deemed to provide to human existence. (This is a definition particularly associated with the German-American theologian Paul Tillich, 1959). Definitions couched in such terms do not necessarily require a belief in invisible beings, such as gods, deities or spirits.

It is ironic in this regard that religion can be considered to be the historical point of departure for the modern concept of development. The Indian economist Deepak Lal considers all social science models to be 'actually part of a culture-specific, proselytizing ethic of what remains at heart western Christendom' (Lal, 2001: 3; Lal, 1998). Development, too, may be placed in this category inasmuch as it has incorporated a vision that is specifically Christian in origin, and that still bears the traces of its genealogy. Briefly, Christians traditionally believe in the prospect of a new and perfect world that will come into existence with the return of Christ to Earth. Over several centuries, politics and states in Europe assimilated these originally Christian ideas of perfection (Burleigh, 2005). The cooptation of religious ideals by states and by political movements led in the twentieth century to a variety of political projects that have been helpfully described as 'coercive utopias', secular ideologies that aspire to create a model society (Brzezinski, 1993: 17). With hindsight, we may consider 'development' to have been one of the many coercive utopias of the twentieth century imposed

by modern states that have adopted some of the character and techniques of religion.

The modern idea of development may be seen, then, as the secular translation of a millenarian belief, once general in Europe, concerning the construction of a perfect world. Inherent in this thinking are an aspiration to eliminate evil in all its forms from the earth and the belief that human beings will, eventually, be able to achieve this goal. Typical of modern secular thought – and inherent in the modern idea of development – is a related belief in progress. This, too, ultimately reflects a Christian idea of humankind as pilgrims on the road in their final destination, where life will be as originally intended by its creator. In Europe, this religious notion of progress has become secularised in recent centuries and, more recently still, it has become limited to a view of material progress only.

In western Europe in particular, the secularisation of society has caused many people to overlook the original connection between religion and the notion of development. People who are religious, however, are more likely to make this connection. From a religious perspective, orthodox interpretations of development have notable shortcomings. Development experts, one commentator observed already a quarter of a century ago, seem to religious believers as ‘one-eyed giants’, who ‘analyse, prescribe and act as if man could live by bread alone, as if human destiny could be stripped to its material dimensions alone’ (Goulet, 1980: 481). A Dutch development economist has noted that development workers pay too much attention to the final goals rather than to the actual path by which these are achieved. In similar vein, he has identified a number of other contrasts between secular and religious approaches to development (Goudzwaard, 2004). For present purposes, we do not wish to endorse, or even analyse, the criticisms most often heard from religious people in regard to development. We wish only to establish that such criticisms exist and have a bearing on the theory and practice of development.

Historically speaking, people in all parts of the world have assimilated and adapted notions of development that were originally

conceived in Europe and that were exported largely through colonial rule. Various societies have brought, and still bring, their own ideas to notions of development and progress. These ideas are often articulated in a religious idiom, not least because the notions of development and religion have so much in common. They both contain a vision of an ideal world and of the place of humans therein. It is not difficult to find examples of the ways in which people's religious understanding of the world may have a bearing on development. The traditional Hindu idea of humankind, for example, emphasises harmony with the living environment. This easily translates into a view that economic growth should be integral to the well-being of the environment as a whole. Similarly, Muslims believe that the ultimate aim of life is to return humanity to its creator in its original state of purity. In African traditional religions, the pursuit of balance and harmony in relations with the spirit world is paramount. Charismatic Christians (of which there are large numbers in Africa and in developing countries more generally) believe that personal transformation – inner change – is the key to the transformation of society. All of these ideas help to shape people's views of development. They stem from intellectual traditions associated with particular religions that have been formed by local histories.

In Africa, local histories include recent experiences of colonialism and nationalism, and often of authoritarianism and single-party rule as well. These were the historic vehicles for policies of development that, in the case of Africa, have almost invariably been conceived by their architects in a secular mode. In other words, actual development practices have generally not conformed to ideas that are central to the continent's various religious traditions. We are not arguing that conforming to religious notions will automatically lead to better outcomes or better practices in matters of development. All we are arguing is that, for effective development cooperation, it is necessary to take people's own understanding of the world as a point of departure. The potential of religious ideas in the relationship between the European Union and Africa has hardly been explored by secular actors, either in regard to development or any other matter. While development agencies have certainly

worked with religious institutions and their leaders in many situations, notably in the fields of education and public health, they have devoted far less attention to the religious ideas that underlie the behaviour of religious believers and communities.

For analytical purposes, religious resources may be divided into four major categories, which can be applied to all the religious traditions in the world, in different constellations of importance. Religious ideas (what people actually believe) are one such category. Others are religious practices (ritual behaviour), religious organisation (how religious communities are formed and function), and religious – or spiritual – experiences (such as the subjective experience of inner change or transformation) (Ter Haar, 2005a: 22–7). All of these elements produce knowledge that, in principle, could be beneficial to a community for development purposes. Many communities in Africa make spontaneous use of their religious resources in a variety of ways, a few of which we will briefly consider.

EXPLORING RELIGION FOR DEVELOPMENT

In the following paragraphs, we briefly discuss a number of topics that are widely debated in the literature on development, and which are also evoked in the Millennium Development Goals. In each case, we give some brief examples from Africa of how religious ideas are relevant to development.

Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

There is general agreement that the large number of armed conflicts in Africa is a serious obstacle to development. Insofar as conventional international approaches to conflict prevention and resolution take religion into account, they tend to focus on the institutional aspects of religion. This particularly privileges the former mission churches, which, apart from having efficient bureaucracies, articulate a vision of the world in a language familiar to secular development experts, due to these churches' continuing close relations with Europe.

The fact remains, however, that for many Africans, religion is perceived primarily in terms of interaction with a spirit world. This aspect of religion is hardly considered by international organisations engaged in peacebuilding. Yet ideas concerning a spirit world play a major role in both legitimising and discouraging violence. In many of Africa's wars, fighters seek traditional medicines or other objects or substances that are believed to be channels of spiritual power. These are presumed to make the people who possess them effective in battle or to protect them from injury (Ellis, 2001). The persons who dispense such medicines exercise influence over the fighters, and in some cases this can take on a clear institutional form.

In Sierra Leone, for example, a militia was formed during the civil war of the 1990s that played a crucial role in subsequent events. This armed force, composed of fighters known as kamajors, was organised along the lines of the country's traditional initiation societies, popularly known as 'secret societies'. These secret societies initiate young people into adulthood, a process whereby they are considered to 'die' as children and to be reborn in a new form, as adults with new responsibilities. This process is associated with the acquisition of esoteric knowledge that is not to be divulged to non-initiates. Initiation involves direct interaction with a spirit world by ritual means. During the war, senior officials of the country's most influential traditional secret society, Poro, acted as initiators of young men as fighters in the kamajor militia. This is not an isolated case, as similar uses of religious initiation for military purposes have been widespread in recent wars in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Nigeria, Congo and elsewhere. The spiritual aspects of such military movements are essential to their very nature, and therefore have to be addressed if these movements themselves are to be understood (cf. Lan, 1985).

There are many African countries today in which state security forces have lost any realistic claim to a national monopoly of violence, and where locally organised vigilantes or similar groups proliferate and sometimes receive a degree of official sanction. The kamajors, for example, were part of an officially-recognised Civil Defence

Force instituted by the Sierra Leonean government in 1997, and indeed the recognition of this new force was one of the factors that led to a coup by sections of the armed forces in May of that year. Some people saw the kamajors as heroes in fighting against an atrocious enemy, while others consider them to have been perpetrators of major human rights violations themselves. Whatever the case, it is clear that they enjoyed a real popularity in some communities and had ties to local stakeholders. These relationships were largely expressed in traditional religious form.

By the same token, the end of armed conflict in Africa is often accompanied by religious rituals designed to cleanse fighters from the pollution of bloodshed. This is not always done through traditional means, but may also take an Islamic or Christian form. In Liberia, charismatic churches often provide a forum where former childsoldiers can confess their crimes and, in a religious idiom that recalls the symbolism of traditional initiation, can be reintegrated into society. One 11-year old former fighter, for example, having been 'born again' in Christ, said he had 'taken an oath never to kill again. I'm now a complete born-again Christian and a child of God' (Osagie-Usman, 1994). It is interesting to note that the same idiom of being born again is central to both traditional initiation societies and charismatic Christianity. A rather different example of the use of religion in resolving conflict concerns South Africa, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was led by an Anglican archbishop and was closely associated with the country's faith communities. The work of the TRC was based on the idea that long-term reconciliation depends crucially on religious notions of reconciliation and healing, even in the absence of formal justice. Although the TRC has been criticised in South Africa itself, its ultimate success or failure will only become apparent with the passage of time. In the meantime, however, the TRC model has been widely imitated. Truth commissions have subsequently been created in Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone, where they have had a mixed record, and have been mooted in many other countries.

Almost invariably, traditional peacemakers in Africa base whatever authority they have on some form of spiritual legitimacy. There

have been attempts to identify traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and harness them to international diplomatic initiatives (Zartman, 2000). Nevertheless, international efforts at peacemaking and peacebuilding in Africa have rarely involved such authorities for purposes of peace and reconciliation to any significant degree. Still less attention has been given to the fact that traditional peacemakers may at the same time be organisers of war, such as the officials who initiate young men into a sodality like the kamajors and give them medicine believed to make them strong in battle by providing them with spiritual power.

Throughout Africa, the power attributed to religious experts is considered morally ambivalent, in the sense that their supposed spiritual power can be used both to harm and to heal. People who are believed to possess spiritual power can be organisers of violence as well as potentially helping to resolve conflict. This is one reason why traditional peacemaking techniques cannot be regarded by diplomats or international conflict resolution activists simply as an adjunct to a peace process that is conducted primarily through conventional diplomatic and political channels. It is commendable for diplomats, whether from the European Union or any other putative peacemaker, to include the most prominent religious figures in their programmes. However, they need to communicate with a far wider range of religious authorities, including both traditional spiritual authorities and leaders of the new religious movements that are flourishing in Africa (Netherlands Institute for International Relations, 2005). These have to be included in a regular programme of consultation and discussion with a view to preventing and understanding conflicts as much as resolving them.

Governance

Religion is part of the social fabric for most of the world's people. Many voluntarily associate themselves with religious networks, which they use for a variety of purposes – social, political and economic – that go beyond the strictly religious. Interestingly, many religious networks in Africa survive largely or entirely from tithes or other monies donated by their members: in effect, their ability to tax their own members or supporters is testimony to the success

of many religious organisations in developing a close bond with their adherents, and shows a degree of accountability to them. This stands in sharp contrast to the problems of revenue collection that are faced by states in Africa, often heavily reliant for their revenue on dues levied on import-export trade, or on external sources of funding, including aid. Most African states have a poor record in the collection of taxes from their own populations, making them unhealthily dependent on foreign sources of finance rather than on their own populations. The relationship between a state and its domestic tax-payers is an important element of real citizenship, so often observed to be lacking in African states, and so often felt to be an important ingredient in improved governance.

The question arises, then, whether religious networks are not assuming some of the functions normally attributed to government, and whether this tendency may not increase in future. This is most relevant to the considerable number of African countries where the state exercises little real authority outside the main cities or a handful of nodal points, and where states have very little ability to tax their nominal citizens. Something of the sort is clearly happening in the fields of health and education especially, where religious organisations have taken over responsibilities for welfare services that failing states can no longer fulfil. Many of the best-rooted non-state organisations have an explicit religious basis, whether it is in the form of educational establishments run by churches or by Muslim networks or, as mentioned, in vigilante movements underpinned by traditional initiation societies.

On closer inspection it is also apparent that many Africans in fact debate key political questions, including the fundamental legitimacy of their own governments, in religious or spiritual terms. It is important to note in this respect that a leader who is believed to have harnessed the power of the spirit world is widely seen as legitimate (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: ch. 5). 'Spiritual' legitimacy, however, does not necessarily coincide with democratic legitimacy. This insight concerning the nature of the spirit world can not readily be gleaned from the academic literature on development, generally unfamiliar with the symbolic language of political legitimacy in

Africa. Such language is far more easily visible in the popular literature, videos and other published material that circulate all over the continent and that are widely consumed and discussed (e.g. Haynes, 2006). Many publications of this sort discuss what in more conventional language are considered problems of governance, crime and morality (Ellis and Ter Haar, 1998). In popular discourses, these problems are typically viewed as manifestations of evil, and debated not in the jargon of development, but in what might be termed a 'spirit idiom'. The latter, like any unfamiliar language, has to be learned if it is to be understood.

Hence, in the considerable number of African countries in which government through efficient, centrally-controlled bureaucracies is clearly inadequate to ensure the country's security, or to raise sufficient resources through taxation to fund the reproduction of the state itself, or to ensure a minimum level of welfare for the country's people, non-state organisations are destined to play a much greater role in future. This is almost certain to involve institutions of a religious nature and may be expressed in an idiom that is unfamiliar to many secular development agents.

Wealth Creation and Production

It is widely acknowledged that religious ideas played an important part in the development of capitalism in the history of Europe (Weber, 1992; cf. Tawney, 1964; Buchan, 1997). This was not primarily as a result of direct action by religious institutions, but through the influence of religious ideas on people's thinking concerning the legitimacy of wealth and the moral value of lending, saving or investing money, for example. It is by no means inevitable that other continents will develop along the same lines as Europe did, but recalling Europe's history does have the merit of helping to illustrate the significance of current religious ideas in developing countries in forming people's ideas about wealth. A good example is the emergence of the so-called 'prosperity gospel' in African charismatic churches. The label 'prosperity gospel' has been applied by Western analysts to a strain of theology that considers financial success and material wealth as a gift of God to believers, and that these can be achieved by faith and prayer. This is a controversial

subject, since some authors consider the prosperity gospel primarily as a form of wishful thinking or a distraction from more urgent business (Gifford, 2004). For an example from the Muslim world of religious networks that have become closely associated with economic entrepreneurship, the Mourides of Senegal constitute a case that has been well documented (Cruise O'Brien, 1971).

Any talk of economic production in Africa has to take account of the central importance of land. At present, some two-thirds of people south of the Sahara live in rural areas, and many of these derive their living in part from agriculture, directly or indirectly. Although it is risky to generalise about a sub-continent as large and diverse as sub-Saharan Africa, it is clear that many countries will not emerge as industrial producers or with internationally competitive service sectors in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it remains as important as ever that agriculture be encouraged, notwithstanding the formidable obstacles ranged against it. These include desertification and climate change, the agricultural policies of governments in the European Union and the USA, and the tendency of many African governments, for political reasons, to favour urban sectors at the expense of rural dwellers.³

People's ideas about the proper use and ownership of land, too, are often expressed in terms of religion. This may take the form of a belief that land is made fertile by the spirits of ancestors. Religious beliefs of this sort are often seen as obstacles to development, such as in those places where traditional forms of landholding preclude women from ownership of land or even place taboos on the ownership of agricultural implements by women, despite the key role they often play in cultivation. There are also many examples of traditional chiefs having the authority to grant land while retaining the right to recall its use, powers that are evidently open to abuse. In some cases, particular ethnic groups may traditionally be forbidden from owning land but may enjoy usufruct rights only. This principle has in fact played a role in violent conflicts in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.⁴

All of these are examples of traditional concepts concerning landholding that may offend against current ideas concerning universal

human rights. They may also be in contradiction to Western-style systems of individual land tenure guaranteed by law. It is thus no solution to argue for the preponderance of traditional forms of landholding over modern ones inspired by Western models. Rather, what is required is to consider what elements of traditional thought, characteristically expressed in a religious or spiritual idiom, might usefully be adapted for development purposes. This reflection must consider contemporary ideas of justice and human rights as well as modern demands of agricultural efficiency. Much more research is necessary on the religious aspects of this matter.

Health and Education

Throughout Africa, there is a widespread supposition that people in need of healing include not only those with obvious physical ailments, but also those who are suffering from vaguer problems that in clinical medicine might be diagnosed as psychological problems, including stress or depression. In Africa, both illness and healing are generally viewed as holistic in nature, requiring attention to the spiritual as well as physical aspects of a person. For this reason, religion plays an important role in health care in Africa generally. This strongly suggests the need to integrate spiritual ideas into health-care policies.

Analysis of people's ideas about health may also reveal a great deal about popular perceptions of relations between donor countries and Africa. For example, although the means by which HIV/AIDS is transmitted are widely understood, Africans often suggest that the disease may have been deliberately exported to the continent by Western countries intent on depopulating Africa, or that 'aid' and 'AIDS' are related phenomena. Such ideas are clearly misguided, but they do reveal a great deal about how many Africans perceive their relationship with the West (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: 45-7). Whatever one's opinions of these views, development policy needs to take account of them. Differences in perceptions of illness and healing sometimes lead to outcomes that surprise Western analysts, such as the occasionally progressive role played by traditional imams, in Mali and elsewhere, where even conservative clerics have been prominent in the fight against AIDS.

Generally speaking, health and education constitute an area in which the role of religious institutions has already been widely noted by development experts, notably in the field of service delivery. The scope of religious institutions in welfare provision is currently further expanding through the rapidly-growing activity of Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The total number of Islamic NGOs operating south of the Sahara, according to one leading source, increased from 138 out of a total of 1,854 NGOs in 1980, to 891 out of 5,896 20 years later (Salih, 2002: 11). Many of the most dynamic Muslim NGOs nowadays combine proselytisation with the provision of welfare services and even a high standard of technical education, rather as Christian missionary organisations have traditionally done. Some modern Islamic schools in West Africa offer business studies and computer courses as part of their curriculum (LeBlanc, 1999: 493–4), as do some modern Christian institutions, particularly in charismatic circles (Larbi, 2001: 347–8).

The rise of Islamic NGOs often causes nervousness among Western governments due to the suspicion that any form of Islamic activism could be tainted by association with terrorism. Development officials need to discriminate clearly between Islamic NGOs or other organisations that can play a constructive role in development and the small number that are inclined towards violence. A sensible way for the European Union to do this would be to work with Islamic NGOs wherever this is feasible, learning what they do, and gaining an ability to distinguish those that are relevant for development purposes from those that are not. This is particularly important in view of the vast numbers of Muslims in Africa.

These four sketches, drawing on African examples, are intended to illustrate the potential for religion in promoting development in key policy areas. As we have noted, it is widely accepted in policy circles that any effective and lasting development should build on people's own resources. These include, we argue, not only material and intellectual resources, but also people's religious or spiritual resources.

NEW DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

If poor countries are to develop, it is not so much new policy instruments that are needed, but rather a new vision of what development means, and how it should be implemented. People's full range of resources should provide the foundation for any development strategy. Among these, we have argued, are people's religious and spiritual resources. They play a role in each of the four areas examined in the previous section – the need for peace and security, the quality of governance, economic growth, and health and education – widely considered as key to development.

This is not only a matter of intellectual interest, but also of practical value. In many of Africa's poorest countries, effective, centralised bureaucracies hardly exist. Some of the countries in this condition are commonly referred to as 'failed states' or 'poor governance countries', recently defined by the US National Intelligence Council (2005) as 'those where basic government institutions have decayed to the point where they cannot make governance decisions'. In countries of this type, power is, literally, disintegrated. It becomes a matter of necessity rather than choice to consider how development could be enhanced by using the resources in society at large. Many of the communities or social networks that carry the burden of development have a religious form or convey religious ideas in some sense. In any event, some theorists of globalisation argue that communities throughout the world are now becoming 'network societies', ceasing to be organised along characteristically modernist lines (Castells, 1998). Moreover, some observers with experience of African politics believe that restoring peace and order to conflict-torn regions will require networks of governance that transcend the boundaries of sovereign states (Sawyer, 2004). In Africa, the continent with the greatest number of 'failed states', the lack of effective bureaucracies has a particularly deep historical resonance. Sub-Saharan Africa is a region where religion traditionally played a central role in governance, prior to the imposition of colonial government modelled on European ideas concerning the separation of religion and politics. Africa's traditional forms of government were associated with relationships between individuals

and social groups, usually expressed in what we refer to above as a 'spirit idiom'. Authority over the spirit world thus translated into authority over people, making religion an outstanding means of instrumentalising political power by dominating webs of relations over a wide area. Hence, political power was traditionally exercised through essentially religious techniques which enabled rulers to command material aspects of power, such as armed force and rights of taxation. These older traditions of governance continue to have an effect on African politics today (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: 24).

In view of this historical background, the question arises how, in practical terms, religious networks or institutions could contribute to development. It is important to emphasise that religious networks cannot be considered as a simple substitute for an effective bureaucracy. Regarding such networks primarily as implementers of development plans may be useful at times, but does not itself amount to the fundamental rethinking of development policy that we are advocating. New strategies in development cooperation should take the spiritual dimension of a community into account, for example by supporting faith-based organisations at the grass-roots level, not regarding them as service-deliverers only, but also affirming them in positive aspects of their spiritual vision (Cordaid et al., 2006).

As with civil society more generally, religious networks or institutions do not constitute a 'magic bullet', the missing element that can make policy successful in the absence of an efficient state or other bureaucracy. If religious networks are to make a positive contribution, it can only be in the context of a different strategy on the part of development organisations themselves. This also applies to the European Union, whose Economic Partnership Agreements are based on conventional strategies that take little account of Africans' world-views. The key to using the human resources vested in social networks for purposes of development is the establishment of long-term partnerships between external development agents and social networks in Africa. Given the importance of religion in Africa, this must include religious networks. It is encourag-

ing to note in this regard that the formation of long-term partnerships is one of the stated goals of the Commission for Africa (2005: 370–71).

However, there are at least two major characteristics of international development bureaucracies that militate against long-term approaches of the sort advocated. First, international development officials, like other functionaries, tend to derive prestige from the size of the budgets they administer. A senior official of a development agency typically has a budget of millions of dollars at his or her disposal, and an administrator with a smaller budget is likely to derive correspondingly less prestige. But in many African situations quite small amounts of money are often preferable to large amounts, as African societies have only a limited capacity to absorb capital (cf. Rimmer, 2003). Second, desk officers or unit directors based in Western capitals (or even in the African capital cities) may have little time and inclination to spend long periods becoming acquainted with key members of religious networks and establishing the mutual trust that is necessary to develop ideas together. In other words, if the development of Africa is to be taken seriously, it will require at least some categories of Western officials to change their mode of operation quite fundamentally.

If development were to be based on long-term partnerships with a strong social component, this would have implications not only for Africa, but also for donor countries in the European Union. European governments and other donor bodies that, we are suggesting, will need to explore the role of religion in development, are all, to a greater or lesser extent, secular bodies that respect a formal separation between the spheres of religion and politics. Institutions such as DFID and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that have recently launched research projects on religion and development risk causing offence to some people in their own countries (and even some of their own employees) by their initiatives, since public opinion in Europe generally considers the rigorous separation of church and state as a matter of principle. Hence, both DFID and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs specifically point out that their wish to investigate the potential role of religion in develop-

ment should not be taken to imply that they have themselves abandoned their secular nature and outlook.

Even with such a disclaimer, however, any sustained attention to the role of religion in development is bound to change the nature of donor institutions in time. This matter is all the more delicate in that – uncomfortably for European donor countries – development problems are clearly related to questions of international migration. These days substantial numbers of people from the developing world live in Europe, where religious ideas and networks that are conspicuously global in outlook help to sustain African diasporas. Through remittances, African migrants in Europe make a major contribution to the economies of their countries of origin (Manuh, 2005; Ter Haar, 2005b). Part of these remittances find their way through religious networks that link Africa and Europe, providing an infrastructure that could be used for development purposes. Traditional mainline churches are the most obvious example of this, having solid historical connections in Africa as a result of their missionary past. Furthermore, many churches created in Africa itself nowadays have missionary branches in Europe (Ter Haar, 1998). Muslim networks show similar features, especially with the rise of Islamic NGOs funded from Arabia and the Gulf states. At the same time, some Africa-based Muslim groups have shown themselves equally adept at creating new religious networks in Europe. There are even African traditional religious believers that have created networks overseas. The development potential of African religious networks in Europe has hardly been explored.

There is thus a strong link between the development of Africa, the position of African migrants in Europe, and the ease of communication and movement between the two continents. Diasporas play a substantial part in the politics of many African countries, and contribute to their economies through the provision of remittances. As has become painfully evident, religious networks among diaspora communities in Europe can also pose problems of a political and social nature. This is particularly the case because politics and public administration in Europe have evolved over a long period on the basis of a separation of the spheres of religion and politics. This is

a further reason why involving religious networks in development will have an effect on donor countries themselves, since it will bring European governments into a new relationship with religious networks among African migrant communities.

CONCLUSION

We have argued in this article that religion, widely acknowledged as an emerging force in world affairs, has the potential to play a positive role in the development process, as some European policymakers are beginning to perceive. We have briefly described the role that religion could play in regard to four sectors acknowledged to be of importance in development policy.

We have emphasised that this is not a plea for adding religious institutions or networks to the list of existing instruments by which development policies are implemented. Rather, the core of the argument here presented is that European development policy needs to be rethought in terms of the world-views of those most immediately concerned, the very people whom development policies seek to assist. In Africa, religion is central to people's world-views. The growing role of religion in public space in Africa represents a form of historical continuity with the continent's deeper past (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: ch. 9). Should policymakers and development agents pursue a path of greater cooperation with religious networks, it will mean lending serious attention to religious world-views, with which they may be unfamiliar or even feel uncomfortable. This last point needs to be considered in the light of the observation made by one analyst that many of the major flaws in the development process arise from a failure to consider the metaphysical questions concerning human life (Tyndale, 2001b: 3). In effect, these should provide the framework for any serious debate about the aims of development, about how to measure progress, and how to understand the 'good life'.

Taking the development potential of religion seriously would have major consequences not only for the terms in which development

is considered, but also for forms of government in Europe itself. We are not suggesting that European governments renounce the principle of separation of church and state, so hard-won in European history; we propose only that they consider anew how to shape the relationship between politics and religion. The fundamental reason for this is the continuing importance in Africa of religion, in the sense that we have defined it.

‘The role of religion in development: Towards a new relationship between the European Union and Africa’, *The European Journal of Development Research*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2006, pp. 351-67 (with S. Ellis) [Winner of the EJDR Prize 2006].

NOTES

1. Gerrie ter Haar is professor of Religion, Human Rights and Social Change at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. Stephen Ellis is a senior researcher at the African Studies Centre, Leiden. Some aspects of this paper are a development of ideas first sketched in a paper entitled ‘Religion and Development in Africa’ that was commissioned by the secretariat of the Commission for Africa and published on its website, <www.commissionforafrica.org>, although as at 13 February 2006 it could no longer be found there (see Commission for Africa, 2005: 405).
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DOI: 10.1080/09578810600893403 q 2006 European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes
2. One example is the new Knowledge Centre on Religion and Development initiated by a number of non-governmental organisations and academic institutions in the Netherlands: see www.stichtingoikos.nl and www.religion-and-development.nl.
3. We view the latter primarily as a political issue. However, the phenomenon of ‘urban bias’ has been discussed largely by economists (see notably Byres, 1979). The notion of urban bias is particularly associated with Lipton, 1977. For the relevance of this discussion for Africa, see esp. Karshenas, 2001.
4. It is remarkable that in a special issue of the European Journal of Development Research on ‘Securing Land Rights in Africa’ (2002), there is no consideration of the role of religion other than a passing mention in one paper, on Zimbabwe.

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ENCHANTMENT AND IDENTITY: AFRICAN CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Introduction

The notion that disenchantment is an inevitable by-product of modernisation has occupied a central place in the thinking not only of European social scientists, but also of policy-makers and large parts of the general public. It is therefore with some surprise that Europeans have noted evidence of what appears to be a partial re-enchantment of their societies. This process is most closely associated with the adoption of religious rhetoric, religious practice and displays of religious affiliation in public space by groups of immigrant origin, especially Muslims. European countries have responded in distinctive ways to this trend, according to their specific traditions of separating church and state, or the realms of religion and politics. The rapid politicisation of Islam in every part of Europe has highlighted the continuing importance of religion for many people in the world, adding new complexities to the considerations of government policy-makers and academic analysts.

The present article deals with the dynamism of religious belief and practice not among Muslims, but among Christian immigrants, in this case of African origin.¹ In brief, I will argue that the religious dynamism has nothing to do with a process of re-enchantment among the people concerned, since they were never disenchanting in the first place. Any analysis in those terms diverts attention from the pivotal role that religion has always played, and continues to play, in Africa. In the case of those particular communities that I studied in some detail over ten years ago – namely Africans living in the Netherlands, especially Amsterdam – I further argue that the salience of their Christian commitment is not related to an attempt to preserve their African identities. On the contrary, I argue, the notion that African Christians represent a specifically ethnic form of religious community is, in the case of the Netherlands, more accurately seen as an attempt of Dutch society to preserve its own original identity. The argument may be extended to other countries in Europe with substantial numbers of African immigrant Christians, as part of a more widespread negotiation concerning the inclusion or exclusion of groups of immigrant origin.

Why Africa is Not Re-enchanting

The people who most readily perceive large areas of the world to be undergoing a process of re-enchantment appear to be observers who are themselves from societies that have become secularised, notably in Western Europe. This provides them with a very particular perspective from which to view the world, but not one that is generally representative. In regard to Africa, a more fruitful approach to matters of religion should start with considering Africa's religious dynamics in the context of the continent's own history. I have argued elsewhere (Ellis, Ter Haar, 2004)² that the historically entrenched relationship between politics, society and religion in Africa was marked by colonial rule. At that time, European administrators adopted a secular approach to matters of public policy that they thought to be an appropriate means of governing societies in Africa, as well as in other parts of the world, neglecting the fact that religion played traditionally a role in the

governance of these societies. In retrospect, the separation of religion and politics that was characteristic of the colonial approach to governance may be seen never to have been much more than superficial. Recent manifestations of apparent religious revival in Africa are therefore not to be interpreted as evidence that Africa is re-enchanting (never having been disenchanting in the first place), but rather that it is re-connecting with its pre-colonial past. The perceived revival of religion may also reflect a reaction to modernisation and development as these were experienced in Africa in the decades after 1945 — an observation that is quite often made regarding Islamic movements in the Middle East. The processes of modernisation and development that dominated government policy from the late colonial period through the first years of independence effected enormous changes in people's lives in the space of just one or two generations, including as a result of huge demographic growth, migration from the country to the city, the decline of agrarian economies and the disruption of agrarian patterns of life and religious culture. Yet, the changes subsumed under the terms 'modernisation' and 'development' did not bring the type of progress and prosperity that many people in Africa had expected. Ironically, this is one of the main reasons why so many Africans have left their country in recent years to try their economic luck in Europe, bringing their religion with them. It is mostly migrants of this sort, overwhelmingly young, that are responsible for the large number of new Christian congregations that have sprung up in all the countries where they have settled.

Hence, the idea of re-enchantment does not provide a suitable analytical tool for understanding the religious dynamics in Africa as well as the new religious dynamics in Europe associated with African immigrants. The concept of re-enchantment has been propagated notably by anthropologists lacking a historical approach to the concept of religion itself. In the following paragraphs, therefore, I will first discuss the concept of religion, both in a general sense and with specific reference to (sub-Saharan) Africa. I will then continue to discuss the dynamics of religious change in Africa, and how these affect other parts of the world, notably Europe. In doing so, I will make extensive use of my earlier research concern-

ing the so-called African religious diaspora,³ as notably recorded in my book *Halfway to Paradise*. I will argue that reference to African religion(s), as a separate category, is increasingly losing significance in a globalising world and may serve political aims. This is clearly manifested in the case of African Christians in contemporary Europe, who tend to identify themselves first and foremost as *global* Christians.

What Is Religion?

Our common understanding of religion is largely defined by a Western perception of the world and coloured by the intellectual traditions of Europe and North America. Hence, a modern interpretation of religion that has become popular in the West is religion as 'ultimate concern'. This is a term coined in the 1960s by the German-American theologian Paul Tillich - and also elaborated by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz - by which religion is explained and defined in terms of an ultimate system of meaning. Through religion, it is suggested, human beings create a cosmos, a universe that is not a chaos but an orderly system that gives meaning and direction to people's lives. Such a view represents the latest trend in the academic endeavour of defining religion that started with the nineteenth-century British anthropologist E.B. Tylor, who defined religion simply and succinctly as a 'belief in spiritual beings'. Central to Tylor's definition is the communicative relationship between believers and the invisible beings in whose existence they believe. 'Beings' are like persons: they are approachable and they can be addressed. Communication and interaction with them is presupposed not only in Tylor's definition, but also those of the many scholars who have defined religion in similar terms, namely with the emphasis on the relationship between human beings and spiritual beings (Platvoet, 1999)⁴. It is this type of definition - rather than the historically more recent Tillich/Geertz type - that speaks to the reality of religion in Africa (as well as many other parts of the world, for that matter).

Religion, thus, is a concept open to different interpretations that are dependent on local context and specific history. In the case of Africa, religion refers to a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, that is home to spirit(ual) beings with effective powers over the material world. It implies that active communication is possible between the human and the spirit worlds, in a form of dialogical exchange. Other than in most Western-Christian ideas of religion, there is no perceived relation of dependency between the human and the spirit worlds. Human beings can influence the attitude of spirit beings through their own behaviour, in such a way as to further their material interests. This is important because the spirit world is the locus of power. Spiritual power is real and effective power for those who believe in it. For many Africans, power in the material world cannot be separated from its source in the spiritual world. This provides a major reason, for example, for African politicians to meddle in the spirit world, an observation that is not relevant to Africa only, but appears of much wider application. Religion and politics are both ways of thinking about, organising, and accessing power. Both are always in competition to some extent, since they have rather similar functions in the deployment of power, itself an invisible and elusive entity.

Religion - in the defined sense - has ever been absent from Africa. It may be considered to be undergoing a 'revival' only in the sense that religion is occupying public space in Africa in a manner that is historically unprecedented, but that does show some interesting continuities with pre-colonial times. Africa's formal institutions of government were almost without exception originally colonial creations. In colonial times, they corresponded to Western ideas about how institutions of government should function, about the need for secular states and the separation of politics and religion in national government. Such a view was continued by the first generation of African nationalists. What we now see, basically since the end of the cold war in 1989, is religion re-entering public space as people search for new sources of legitimacy and power, including politicians themselves.

The democratisation movement of the 1990s has been very important in projecting religion in the public realm. It was associated with the collapse of political ideologies that had previously been dominant and had divided Africa basically into two ideological power blocks, associated with either the liberal Western world or the Communist world. The loss of these secular ideologies created space for the emergence of religious ideologies and the emergence of spiritual movements into political space, as people sought alternative sources of authority and at the same time were freed from the institutional constraints that were previously imposed on them by single-party governments. The important point in this regard is that many forms of what is often seen from the outside as religious revival challenge the very basis of legitimacy of states that operate through institutions and norms of governance originally created in colonial times. Not only do these colonial institutions lack legitimacy because they have become increasingly ineffective, but also because in the view of those concerned they are seen as having little or no spiritual basis. Today this has become notably visible in the various Islamic movements that contest the authority of the secular state.

Hence, the perceived 're-enchantment of the world' may be better described as a reconfiguration of available resources - both material and spiritual - for a successful life today. The enhanced public and political importance of religion should not be confused with a return to the past, nor considered as an anachronism, not even when it takes forms that have historical roots extending to pre-colonial times. Contemporary religious revivals mark a re-ordering of religion and politics, sometimes -or even quite often - recalling older indigenous patterns. It is therefore important not to look at religion in Africa in isolation, but to insist instead on paying due regard to religious ideologies in relation to political practice in Africa today.

Religious Change in Africa

The concept of re-enchantment also obscures the fact that the religious traditions of Africa have always been characterised by dynamics of change that have allowed them throughout the ages to incorporate and absorb new ideas and practices, and new human and spirit beings. This can be seen not only in the ways in which Islam and Christianity have become part of the religious heritage of Africa, but also in the creative acceptance and re-creation of new religious movements, such as Oriental ones. In particular, this creative dynamic has led to the continuing strength of what is generally known - academically and in popular speech - as African traditional religions, a term that has contributed strongly to the perception of African religions as basically static - or at the best of times open to micro-change - and a-historical, and for the bearers of these religions to be seen as passive recipients of any 'modern' impulses that happen to come their way. Conventional academic speech regarding Africa helps to maintain the myth that Africa is a continent that has been left virtually untouched by meaningful historical change of the sort acknowledged in respect of most other parts of the world. Hence, in conformity with general images of traditional society, African indigenous religions - or, community religions as I prefer to call them, following others in my discipline - have long been seen as more or less self-contained units, which can be studied in isolation. This frequently creates the impression that historical influence on such societies and their religions has occurred only in modern times and as a result of contact with the Western world. Among many other things, this denies what is often referred to today as Africans' own 'agency'.

The developments described and discussed below provide a telling example of the point I am trying to make. On the basis of extensive research conducted in Nigeria, Rosalind Hackett speaks of a process of revitalisation of traditional religion in twentieth-century Africa. She identifies the following five key tendencies in the process: a tendency to universalisation, to modernisation, to commercialisation, to politicisation, and to individualisation. The tendency towards universalisation is tantamount to an effort to enhance

the attractiveness of African community religions and to increase their reach outside the particular group where a specific religion first came into existence. The tendency to modernisation takes various forms, for example that of a reform movement that propagates elements such as peace, stability and justice. The tendency to politicisation can often be encountered among government and political leaders in search of means of buttressing their power and authority. The tendency to commercialisation is apparent as part of a process whereby particular elements of traditional religions are, as it were, manufactured — developed into products and offered on the market for sale. The tendency to individualisation marks a shift from a public-oriented approach to a more person-centred one.

One might also see these tendencies, as I would be inclined to do, as various expressions of what others have called ‘modernity’. We may even consider such tendencies as ‘instances of secularisation’ within the sphere of African traditional religions, provided we are prepared to use the term ‘secularisation’ as a concept of family resemblance only and bearing in mind that the term can only be used meaningfully if one accepts that a clear distinction can be made between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’, which is questionable in many cases concerning Africa. Yet, if with this in mind we compare Hackett’s five tendencies with the five conceptions of secularisation distinguished by the American philosopher Larry Shiner, we can see that at least two of the five tendencies fit the model. In short, secularisation, in Shiner’s view, is conceived as (i) the decline of religion, (ii) ‘conformity with the world’ (that is, a preoccupation with the material world), (iii) the desacralisation of the world, (iv) the disengagement of society from religion, and (v) the transposition of beliefs and patterns of behaviour from the ‘religious’ to the ‘secular’ sphere. If we apply this to the specific context of Africa, we may find some analytical meaning in the distinction between the religious and the secular, which is otherwise of little importance. Conformity with the world (ii) and the transposition of beliefs and patterns of behaviour from the religious to the secular sphere (v) are both implied in the tendencies to commercialisation and politicisation especially. Thus we see once again the inappropriateness

of the term re-enchantment in regard to Africa, where there is no historical divide between the religious and the secular.

Religious change in Africa has taken on yet another dimension in recent years with the emergence of African-initiated churches worldwide, including in Europe. This may be seen as another expression of the tendency to universalisation that was described above regarding Africa's indigenous religions. This time it is related to one of the most remarkable trends of our time, the scope and size of international migration. This includes migration from sub-Saharan Africa.

African Christians in Europe: Religion and Identity

In the last two decades, African immigrants have spread over virtually all industrialised countries of Western and northern Europe. One unexpected result of Africans' migration to Europe has been the foundation of new Christian congregations in all the places where they have settled, thus adding a new (and unexpected) dimension to Europe's multicultural society. In view of contemporary discussions on multiculturalism and the recognition of religion, the question emerges of how relevant the issue of African identity is to African Christians in Europe and how this relates to their religious – that is, Christian - identity.

Today, churches founded by Africans - or: African-initiated churches - exist all over Europe. Many - if not most - of these have been founded as independent congregations, that is, independent from the mainline churches in the host country. The commonest way for outsiders to refer to these new churches in Europe is as 'African churches', a label often rejected by the churches themselves on the grounds that it marks a restriction of their task and mission in Europe since, as far as they are concerned, they aim to minister to both Africans and non-Africans, to black and white people. Most churches in fact label themselves as 'international churches', expressing their aspiration to be part of the international world in which they believe themselves to have a universal task.⁵ Just as

European missionaries once believed in their divine task of bringing the gospel to Africa, African church leaders in Europe are today convinced of their mission to bring the gospel back to those who originally provided them with it. For many African Christians, therefore, migration to Europe is not just an economic necessity, but also seen as a God-given opportunity to evangelise among those whom they believe to have gone astray. To them, Europe is as the 'valley of dry bones' described in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel,⁶ and will be dependent on Africa for its renewed vitality.

The emergence of African congregations in Europe marks a new phase in the history of African independent churches, commonly known in the literature as AIC's. Since their emergence on the African continent, the term 'African Independent Churches' has been widely used to describe a type of churches whose main characteristic is that they are founded and led by black Africans. Their origin dates from the late nineteenth century and is related to the conditions of that time. They range in size from some tens of people in small local congregations to thousands or even millions of members in large well-established institutions such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in South Africa and neighbouring countries, or the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the prophet Simon Kimbangu, commonly known as the Kimbanguist Church, that has also spread to Europe. The same is true, for example, of some Nigerian churches, such as the Church of the Lord (Aladura), commonly known as the Aladura Church, and the Celestial Church of Christ.

However, the name 'African Independent Churches' is not a self-chosen name but a label originally imposed by outsiders, namely representatives of the historic mainline churches. These are the former European mission churches that, until a century or so ago, held a monopoly in the field of church development in Africa. The 'I' for 'independent' originally reflected the viewpoint of these traditional mainline churches, who considered the independent churches as having broken away from the mother churches. In more recent times, a shift in influence from the traditional mainline churches to the so-called independent churches expressed

itself in the new, self-chosen name of African indigenous churches. This is not just a question of words. The change of name reflects a change of emphasis from the outsider's position to that of the insider. From the insider's point of view, the aspect of separation from a mother church is not relevant. What counts is establishing a self-image, in this case as an indigenous church, creating one's own identity in the process.

In the course of time new appellations have emerged from within the AICs themselves, that altered the meaning of the letter 'I'. Thus AIC's have also become known as African-instituted churches, and as African-initiated churches, representing different historical angles from which the phenomenon can be viewed, while in all cases retaining the same acronym of AIC. This shows to the outside world that in effect most, if not all, churches in Africa are today under the leadership of Africans, including the former mission churches in Africa. By using the same acronym but interpreting the letter 'I' with different words, one may see how the status of these churches has changed throughout the century. The changes of name are an eloquent statement of the dynamics of this particular history.⁷ The new African-initiated churches in Europe, I have suggested in my book *Halfway to Paradise*, represent a new type of AIC's in this history. To do justice to the historic change implied in the worldwide spread of African-initiated churches, I have proposed to invest the initials 'AIC' with a new meaning, namely that of African International Churches. To refer to them this way takes account of their African origin while at the same time recognising the continuity of these churches with the universal Christian tradition. In any event, this outlook accords with that of members of the churches themselves, who are conscious of having entered the international field.

It remains striking that the conventional way of writing about African-initiated churches outside Africa is to refer to them in ethnic terms, even though ethnic labels are commonly not indicated in the names of the churches concerned. The interesting question is why this is so. With specific reference to the situation in the Netherlands, I have argued that the discussion regarding the need

for African Christians in Europe to develop their 'own' identity as African Christians is being led by their European counterparts and serves European rather than African interests. African Christians in the Netherlands identify themselves first and foremost as Christians and only in the second instance as Africans or African Christians. In their own view, their adherence to Christianity constitutes the most important element of their public identity. Yet, there is a general tendency in the Netherlands to separate African Christians from their Dutch counterparts by insisting on their perceived African identity, while ignoring their shared Christian identity. In effect, this tendency leads to the segregation of Africans in Dutch society and as such is in striking contrast to the general demand for the integration of foreigners.

In the Netherlands, this practice conforms to a long tradition in Dutch society where the development of specific group identities has been the mainstay of the country's social and political system. This system has served the Netherlands well in the past in providing political stability and a high degree of legal tolerance, but it is also worth noting that it provided some of the intellectual basis for the South African system of apartheid. In the latter case – and unlike the Netherlands - a specific identity was imposed on, and not defined by, the people concerned. It takes us back to the vital question of whether an identity is self-imposed or imposed by others, and whose interests are served in respective cases. In other words, my research findings concerning African Christians in the Netherlands support the thesis proposed by Charles Taylor that identity is often shaped by the misrecognition of others. It would be interesting to compare the Dutch attitude in response to the challenge posed by Africans' religious initiatives with the situation in other countries of Europe, where different social mechanisms exist for the integration of foreigners, due to differences of context. France, with its unique tradition of *laïcité*, is a case in point.

The difference between the ascribed ethnic identity of African Christians, on the one hand, and their religious self-definition, on the other, is too important to ignore and leads one to suspect underlying motives, of either a religious or a political nature. The

insistence by many non-Africans on the existence of a specific African identity may be inspired by a concern for religious orthodoxy, or it may respond to a need of white Christian communities to distinguish themselves from black Christian communities in their midst, whom they believe to be different. Politically, the concept of African identity appears to be employed mainly as a way of emphasising the perceived existence of 'alterity', or the difference between self and the other, by ascribing to Africans in Europe a 'unique' ethnic identity. One of the most striking features of European politics today is the attempt to erect walls - even literally⁸ - between Europe and Africa, and between Europeans and Africans, with the objective of preventing the latter from settling permanently in the West. Even more striking is the emergence of a Europe-wide official policy based on a consensus that the proper place for Africans is in Africa, and not in Europe. To legitimise such a view, it is essential to have a theory which justifies the fundamental difference between the European 'Self' and the African 'Other'. Such a theory is advanced, mostly unintentionally, by the tendency of intellectuals of various sorts to ascribe a special identity to African Christians in Europe derived from their ethnic background, due to a long intellectual attachment to the notion of multiculturalism. Hence, academic specialists tend to emphasise migrants' African roots, in preference to seeking the meaning of their lives in Europe, where they now live. This contributes to the segregation of Africans and non-Africans in this part of the world, and also ignores the religious element in their current identity. In a different way, this has been furthered by a wide-spread public insistence that Africans in Europe should develop their 'own' - meaning 'African' - identity.⁹ This is not to deny that Africans in Europe have such a right; my argument is simply that the necessity to promote this should not be imposed on them.

The insistence of many non-Africans on the existence of a specific African identity, whether inspired by religious orthodoxy or by intellectual liberalism, is in effect a continuation of the old colonial and early missionary discourse and praxis regarding the perceived 'otherness' of Africans. I would like to argue not only that the definition of identity should result from a process of negotiation in

which the people concerned participate (as Taylor also argues), but also that the development of an ethnic identity can take place only if one's personal identity, that is the integrity of the individual, has been secured. Obviously, the mechanisms for that are influenced by the size of a particular minority group vis-à-vis the majority population. Africans in Europe are a relatively small minority and have little or no power as a group. For many of them, their (Christian) religion helps them to achieve a degree of security and inner strength which may well encourage them in future to reconsider their self-identity specifically in terms of being 'African' Christians. Or, alternatively, the experience of exclusion, inspired by racism or other mechanisms, may have a similar effect. This is the case, for example, in the United Kingdom where, due to the circumstances of an entirely different context, African and Afro-Caribbean church leaders tend to insist on their African identity in the experience of their faith.

Concepts of otherness, like all ideas, have a history, and in the case of Europe it is one which not only includes the experiences of colonialism and nineteenth-century missionary enterprise, but also ideas generated by media reports of more recent events, including famines and wars. All of this provides part of the ideological baggage which many Europeans carry with them and which they may deploy when they read a description of somebody or something as 'African'. This baggage is a legacy of the past, which cannot simply be wished away. But in applying labels and descriptions today it seems important to be aware of the great speed with which Africa itself is changing and with which its links with other parts of the world are being re-forged, sometimes in surprising ways.

Race and Ethnicity: Spot the Difference

In studying African communities, whether in or outside Africa, the scholarly focus is often on ethnicity and ethnic adherence, and often at the expense of the religious factor. Why is this so? Or, in our case, why is it that Western scholars prefer to single out ethnicity in their efforts to understand the development of the African

diaspora in Europe? The focus on ethnicity rather than on religion is no doubt partly due to the fact that analysts who themselves view the world in secular terms tend to regard religion either as a form of false consciousness or at best as a symbol of some other force, such as an expression of ethnicity. In a broader sense, it may also be a consequence of the fact that African communities, wherever they manifest themselves, are seen as belonging largely to the domain of anthropology. So prevalent is the study of ethnicity in modern anthropology that a leading American anthropologist, Sally Falk Moore, has wondered if, in terms of anthropological theory, ethnicity has become the avatar of tribe. Anthropologists, like other Western observers, were until quite recent times accustomed to think of Africans as forming political and social groups called 'tribes', and to consider that such groups were a phenomenon characteristic of Africa and other parts of what would later be called the developing world. The idea, prevalent until the mid-twentieth century, that Africans lived in 'tribes' which were the vehicle of their ethnic identity, was also a racial one, combined with notions of hierarchy and evolution. While the concept of race is no longer scientifically respectable, and that of 'tribe' is also avoided by many social scientists, the concept of ethnicity has come to enjoy wide currency.

The concept of ethnicity, in other words, has tended to replace the concept of race in the study of African communities in modern times, while the content has remained substantially the same. Ethnicity, like race, is an elusive concept. Both are essentially modern notions generated by the global expansion of European societies since the late fifteenth century when the gradual shrinking of the world brought Europeans into contact with human societies that seemed strikingly different, and whose difference was most obviously noticeable in the colour of their skin (Mason, 1995:5).¹⁰ In its modern form, the concept of race developed in the eighteenth century as one of the products of the Enlightenment and further developed into a science of race during the nineteenth century when scientific theories came to replace religious beliefs in some respects. Thereafter, the process has been well described by the British historian Mark Mazower in his book about twentieth-centu-

ry Europe. The attack on scientific racism, Mazower shows, was particularly strong in Britain, where some researchers recommended already in the 1930s to use the term 'ethnic group' rather than 'race' to avoid the latter's misleading biological associations.

Given the scientific discrediting of the concept of race, the concept of ethnicity provides in principle an alternative way of thinking about human diversity as it introduces other categories for defining differences between human populations. There appears to be no consensus as to how to define ethnicity, but most commentators tend to stress the cultural element. In other words, they tend to refer to some sort of cultural distinctiveness as the mark of an ethnic group. As always, there are different schools of thought in this matter, but an important one seems to adhere to the idea that ethnicity is most of all a matter of the processes by which boundaries are created and maintained between different groups. That makes it an interesting and relevant question as to by whom and how these boundaries are delineated. In modern Europe, when the identity of certain social groups thought to be ethnically distinct is brought into debate, the delineation is usually ascribed to the wish of a particular ethnic or religious minority to preserve or define its specific identity. This is usually considered in terms of a specific cultural identity, of which religion forms a part. The argument I have advanced in the case of African Christian communities in the Netherlands suggests the opposite, namely that the drawing of boundaries is a conscious or unconscious act on the part of the host society and as such the social and intellectual concomitant of the current political process of segregating human societies.

The term 'ethnic' is often used as synonymous with people who are thought of as culturally different, almost as if 'naturally' culturally different. This is conceived in the absence of clear standards, and either ignores or underestimates the importance of non-biological elements or mechanisms which are central to defining humans' ability to create culture.¹¹ Its main attraction lies in its usefulness in distinguishing between 'us' and 'them', thus furthering the process of 'othering'. In practice, as the British sociologist David Mason has pointed out, the essential characteristic for membership

of a so-called ethnic minority often appears to be the possession of a skin which is not 'white'. In this way, the equation of cultural difference and ethnicity may become an instrument of social and political power, as with the designation of race. Or, in sociological terms, the attribution of ethnicity to others can thus become part of a process of denying the legitimacy of claims on resources by those concerned. This, it seems to me, is eminently the case in present-day Europe whose main occupation today is the exclusion of all who try to come and share in its wealth.

An Unforeseen Future

Few people would have foreseen the religious changes that are taking place in Europe as a result of worldwide immigration. While secularisation has become a hallmark of modern Western society, there has been at the same time an influx of non-Western people for whom religion remains a major factor in private and public life. This includes Christians from all parts of the world, among whom African Christians are the most numerous and visible ones. It also includes African Muslims and African adherents of other so-called 'world religions', as well as adherents of so-called African traditional religions. In view of the modern developments described above, the distinction between 'world' religions and 'traditional' religions has become increasingly irrelevant.¹² Any objective analysis of the religious situation today points to the fact that they should be considered as belonging to one and the same category, namely that of the world's religions. Rather than becoming weaker or otherwise declining in importance the religious traditions of Africa have emerged strong and vital in the encounter with the outside world. They may, in fact contribute to the 're-enchantment' of Europe, where secularisation has been a hallmark of many societies for the last few decades.

It may be useful in this respect to recall some Durkheimian insights regarding religion. Durkheim, as is well-known, regards religion - as an element of culture - as a social fact, which he believes to share the three same basic characteristics with all social facts.¹³ Thus,

religion, as other social facts, is general, that is, common to many individuals; it is transmissible, that is, it can be transmitted both vertically - from one generation to the other - and horizontally - from one contemporary group to the other; and it is compulsory, that is, human beings have to take account of religion, whether they like it or not: religion is a fact that cannot be ignored. In view of this Durkheimian perspective, the idea of disenchantment of the world that many observers believed to take place in the second half of the twentieth century becomes less plausible. Disenchantment has often been seen as a natural process, an inevitable outcome of historical evolution. As suggested above, in the case of Africa (as well as other parts of the non-Western world) this appears to be a wrong assumption, entirely based on an analysis of processes as they have unfolded in European history. It is increasingly apparent that in Africa (and elsewhere) the separation of religion from other spheres of life was never more than superficial. Not only is Africa reconnecting with its pre-colonial past as regards the role of religion in public life, but it is also extending its religious influence throughout the world. As a result of the scattering of Africans around the globe, its spirit-oriented religious traditions can today be found everywhere and in all their spiritual diversity. In Europe, they manifest themselves primarily in the form of Christianity and Islam, both proselytising religions, but also in the transformation of African 'traditional' religions into aspiring 'world' religions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me restate my argument in a nutshell. Many European scholars of Africa have tended to apply Eurocentric analyses of Africa that have obscured the vitality of religion as a constitutive element of African societies in past and present. Africa is not in any way re-enchanting, in my view, nor are most other parts of the non-Western world. Any semblance of 'disenchantment' in those parts of the world appears now to have been a temporary phenomenon connected with colonial rule. It is increasingly apparent, for example, that the separation of religion and politics was never more than superficial. As a result, non-Western countries,

including African ones, are not only reconnecting with their pre-colonial past as regards the role of religion in public life, but also extending their religious influence throughout the world. This is, among others, demonstrated in the internationalisation of African-initiated churches, many of which have been founded in Europe in the last few decades. It seems too soon to say what lasting influence they may have, but surely they will somehow contribute to what, from an African perspective, may be called the re-enchantment of Europe.

‘Enchantment and identity: African Christians in Europe’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, vol. 143, juillet-septembre 2008, pp. 31-48.

Notes

1. Christian migrant communities have so far been largely overlooked in the debates concerning the public role of religion.
2. Notably chap. 9. See Ter Haar (2007: 19-27).
3. I am critical of the use of the word “diaspora” in connection with Africans in Europe. I have discussed this at length in Ter Haar (1996, 2004).
4. Platvoet stresses the communication aspect of “religion”. The importance of relationships as an analytical concept is also emphasised by the British historian Terence O. Ranger in a short article entitled “African traditional religion” (1991: 106-14).
5. Ter Haar (1998) provides various examples. In recent years, some well-known churches with headquarters in Africa have truly internationalised, with branches containing thousands of members in all parts of the world, including in Europe. One pertinent example of such “mega-churches” is the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which is represented in many European countries.
6. Book of Ezekiel, chap. 37, vs. 1-15.
7. These are discussed at length in Ter Haar (1995: 159-70).
8. This notably concerns the Spanish enclaves on the North African coast, Ceuta and Melilla, which are both considered weak spots in the defence of Fortress Europe. In Ceuta a barbed wire wall was erected around the enclave financed by the European Union (Carr, 1997: 61-6). Since then, new and higher walls have been erected to try and put a halt to migration from Africa

- to Europe. Similar solutions to “illegal” immigration can now be observed all over the world.
9. Although due to recent political developments the public outlook on this has changed in most European countries, it seems not to have altered the public perception that Africa has basically a “unique” identity associated with ethnicity.
 10. The whole argument of this author concerning race and ethnicity is based on the assumption that these are relational concepts.
 11. Note that “culture” is also a much-debated concept and that there is no overall consensus as to its precise meaning. Today it is often taken among anthropologists to refer to “a class of phenomena, conceptualised for the purpose of serving their methodological and scientific needs”. On the basis of that, culture is seen as “composed of patterned
 12. The uncritical use of the term “world religions” has been historically examined in a recent study by Masuzawa (2005).
 13. Or, in the original French: *des choses*.

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