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The Multicultural Drama: Religion's Failure and Challenge

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Abstract: *Western civilization is the product of the syncretism and polytheism of Greek and Roman antiquity. In the course of history, Christians moved from a state of relative insignificance to an oppressed minority group until the fourth century when they became oppressors of other minority groups. A more tolerant approach to religious interaction, articulated by Aquinas in the middle ages, was still intent on sacrificing human freedom to the power of the majority. There is yet a fourth approach with a strong pedigree in the Western tradition and contemporary theology: religious freedom in a human rights framework. This is the only truly civilised model of Western civilisation that respects the freedom, equality and reciprocity of both majority and minority religious groups. The question is whether the Christian churches are sufficiently human rights-minded to take this leap towards cultural diversity and religious pluralism?*

Key Words: Western civilization; *Clash of Civilizations*; multiculturalism; tolerance; religious freedom; human rights; syncretism; oppression

In Book IV of 'The Republic' Plato gives a report of the dialogue Socrates has with one of his dialogue partners, Adeimantus, about the question what makes a city a just and good city. Do you know, Socrates asks, what the difference is between Athens, our city, and the barbarian cities? It is this that Athens is united, it is a unity, it is one. The barbarian cities, Socrates says, are "in fact divided into two, one the city of the poor, the other the city of the rich."¹ Our city, Athens, is just and good, Socrates says, the barbarian cities are not just and not good, because they are divided into two.

From this perspective, today all our cities of are barbarian cities, because they are divided into two. With its millions and millions of poor shacks not only is New Delhi a barbarian city, but also Johannesburg with its millions and millions of squatters, and Rio de Janeiro with its millions and millions of peoples in favelas, but also many western cities, like New York with its innumerable black quarters, London with its quarters full of inhabitants from its former colonies, Antwerp with its dangerous sections and Rotterdam with plenty of its no-go areas. Even Athens has become a barbarian city. Europe is full of barbarian cities. Why?

Millions and millions of people from Africa, Asia and the Middle East have immigrated and are immigrating to Europe all the time. Socio-economic research has shown that these migrants are badly off. The majority manifest a fairly high dropout rate at school, unemployment is relatively high, and so are criminality and membership of the social underclass. Religiously, too, they pose a problem. In the foreseeable future Muslims will constitute 10 to 15 percent of the population of a number of European countries. Because of ongoing secularisation among Christians in these countries this could well

¹ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Vintage, 1991), [423], 132-133.

leave us with two equally large religions: Christianity and Islam. The question is: is society in these countries threatening to split into two parts, both socio-economically and socio-culturally as well as religiously? There is a further question: will the social democratic constitutional state prove up to this danger and be able to find a solution? These are not academic questions. Amnesty International's report this year tells us that there is growing racism and intolerance of Arab, Jewish and Muslim communities in Europe, and increasing interethnic violence.²

Why do I call attention to this European problem here, in Australia? This year's Amnesty International report on Australia records that the economic, social and cultural situation of aborigines is causing politicians great concern.³ In that respect their situation seems to be much the same as that of religious minorities in Europe: they too are mainly on the margins of society. Of course, the problems with the aborigines and the European problems with the migrant minorities differ as regards origin, history and context. But they are similar in the sense that there is a divide between majority and minority, each with its own socio-economic, socio-cultural and religious attributes. What concerns us is this: where are we failing and where are we succeeding? That is the question on which I want to reflect with you.

INTERACTION MODELS

In 2002 Samuel Huntington published his international bestseller entitled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. His thesis is that conflicts around the globe can be traced back to clashes between civilisations, and hence between major religions. He mentions five: the Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic and Christian civilisations. He includes the Latin American culture with the Christian civilisation, African cultures in the northern and eastern parts with Islamic civilisation and in the south with Christian civilisation.⁴

Huntington's question is: how should these civilisations interact to avoid conflicts and prevent wars? His answer is: accept multiculturalism at a global level but settle for monoculturalism at a societal level. This applies particularly to Western civilisation, he says, otherwise it will be trodden underfoot and disappear.⁵ My question is this: is Huntington right in advocating a monocultural society? Is the alternative indeed the end of Western civilisation?

To answer the question I want to dip into the history of Western civilisation. I want to see how Western civilisation dealt with various minorities on its territory in the past. In so doing my concern is not so much with history per se as with finding models of the relation between majorities and minorities. The interaction models I identify are obviously not exclusive to one period only but resurface in subsequent eras as well, whether in hybrid form or otherwise. Let me treat these models as ideal types in Max Weber's sense. This entails a search expedition into history, but also abstraction from it so

² <http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/2eu-index-eng>: "Entrenched racism, discrimination and intolerance were seen in attacks on members of Arab, Jewish and Muslim communities, in interethnic violence (...)."

³ <http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/aus-summary-eng>: "In October, the Council of Social Services reported that the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous people in health, education, employment and housing remained a concern."

⁴ Maybe African civilisation in the southern parts will develop into a sub-Saharan Africa with its own, distinct civilisation because of burgeoning tribal identities. But nobody can tell that for sure, says S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Free Press, 2002), 47.

⁵ Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 301-321.

as to use that history for purposes of illustration. I distinguish between four interaction models: (1) syncretism; (2) oppression; (3) tolerance; and (4) finally religious freedom in a human rights framework.

(1) Syncretism

If one undertakes a search of Western civilisation, one must know where to start. Do we start with classical antiquity? With the Renaissance that saw itself, drawing on antiquity, as the humanistic cradle of Europe? With the Enlightenment and its principles of democracy and human rights? With the European Community and the Treaty of Rome in 1957? With the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989? Or does Europe not even exist, considering the rejection of its constitution by the French and Dutch populations a couple of weeks ago? These are awkward questions, in which economics and politics tend to merge ideologically.⁶ Let me take a linguistic starting point. The name 'Europe' was first used in the 7th century BC when the Greeks divided the world into three parts: "the Peloponnese, Europe and the islands whose shores are lapped by the sea", that is the Mediterranean. In the 6th century Hecataeus of Miletos divided the world into two: Asia, which included North Africa, and Europe.⁷ The Mediterranean was seen as a connecting link, its ports serving as intersections in trade routes and networks and between trading blocs and empires. This was known as the circum-Mediterranean.⁸

Greek civilisation first assumed cosmopolitan dimensions in a harbour city – Alexandria, established in the Nile delta by Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Very soon it became the centre of Hellenistic culture. Alexander not only conquered all the city states in Greece, but also the Greek world in Asia Minor and the commercial cities in Egypt, Syria and Babylonia (Iraq), as well as large parts of the Persian empire (Iran). Throughout this enormous territory he sought to introduce the Greek language and culture, but also showed respect for the existing Babylonian, Egyptian, Persian and Syrian heritage, which he permitted to coexist with Greek culture and combine with it. He greatly admired the Zoroastrian culture of Persia with its imaginative battlefield between good and evil, and the Hindu culture of India – its religion, philosophy and cosmology, its applied arts and technology. Alexandria with its *Museion*, which was museum, library and university in one, grew into *the* cosmopolitan centre of the world, the home of great scholars such as the mathematician Euclid, the cosmologist Ptolemy, the physicist Archimedes, and the physician Galen.⁹

When the Roman legions started conquering the circum-Mediterranean from the 2nd century BC onwards Hellenistic civilisation did not disappear but established itself in the Roman empire. The resultant Graeco-Roman culture remained fundamentally open to both extraneous and internal influences. There were no ethnic or religious boundaries within this vast empire. Anyone who chose to be nourished by the culture of the Greek *paideia* could secure any post he liked. The sole condition was that he had to be a Roman citizen, but this prerogative was gradually extended to one city after another until the 3rd century AD, when all free inhabitants of the empire were granted Roman citizenship. Everyone who acquired this citizenship was equal before the law and had – albeit still

⁶ Sami Zemni, "Islam: European Identity and the Limits of Multiculturalism," in *Religious Freedom and the Neutrality of the State: The Position of Islam in the European Union* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 158-173.

⁷ P. Riebergen, *Europe: A Cultural History* (London, New York: 1998), 32.

⁸ H. Driessen, *Mediterrane passages: Een zeevaartse visie op een overgangsgebied* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2002).

⁹ Rietbergen, *Europe*, 34-35.

limited – democratic civil rights, similar to those obtaining in many Greek cities in the past. It made no difference whether one resided in London on the Thames, in Trier on the Rhine, in the environs of Vienna on the Danube, or in a city on the Euphrates. The empire was explicitly tolerant towards the various religions within its borders and in Rome all kinds of cults and liturgies were adopted, such as the Isis and Isis cult from Egypt, the Indo-Persian Mithras cult, the worship of Cybele from Asia Minor and the devotion of the Persian prophet Mani. The clearest symbol of this religious mingling or syncretism was the Pantheon in Rome, a temple which accommodated the Greek and Roman gods, as well as those of conquered peoples.¹⁰

So is Huntington right in asserting that Western civilisation can only be rescued in a monocultural society? The answer is the exact opposite: Western civilisation is a product of the syncretism and polytheism of Greek and Roman antiquity. To be sure, this was followed by Christian monotheism, but that was a familiar figure. After all, scholars accept that, only a few centuries earlier, Jewish monotheism emerged in Jerusalem from the pantheon of the first temple, where Yahweh originally was a higher god, in order to ultimately become the highest god, even the supreme God.¹¹ Polytheism and monotheism can succeed each other and are in no way mutually exclusive, at any rate not if it is acknowledged that polytheism is often founded on belief in a higher or highest deity.¹² Outside Christendom syncretism continued on a grand scale, notably in Hinduism. There it was both cause and effect of the polytheistic pantheon that makes Hinduism – when it does not lapse into radicalism – a tolerant religion. But within Christianity, too, there are syncretist phenomena, especially in Christian folk religiosity, where indigenous religiosity, such as that of traditional African religions, merges with Protestant and Catholic ritualism.¹³ But among (the higher strata of) Christian westerners syncretist phenomena can be observed, also, especially among those who practise various kinds of what is called double belonging and consider themselves ‘hyphenated Christians’, like a Hindu-Christian, a Buddhist-Christian, a Tao-Christian.¹⁴ On the other hand one discerns strong tendencies towards anti-syncretism. These reject syncretism, because the intermingling of elements

¹⁰ Riebergen, *Europe*, 38-62.

¹¹ D.V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Kampen: Pharos, 1995).

¹² J. Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur*, Fischer, Frankfurt 2001, 120.

¹³ R. Bell, “Understanding African Philosophy from a non-African Point of View: An Exercise in Cross-Cultural Philosophy,” in E. Eze (ed.), *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 197-220. Here the various elements can be combined in a single ritual, such as ancestor veneration or healing ceremonies in a Christian church service. But it may also happen that the rituals are kept separate, so that one would go to the eucharist on Sunday morning and in the afternoon visit traditional healers (K. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29; K. Appiah, “Old Gods, New Worlds,” in P. Coetzee & A. Roux (eds.), *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings* (Johannesburg: International Thomson Publishing, 1998), 245-274). This latter form of syncretism could be called dual belonging (see further), to be regarded as a positive development since it entails retaining the old without rejecting the new. But it can also be evaluated negatively, because visiting traditional healers implies maintaining a particular form of ‘superstition’ that prevents autonomous personal development, or because the combination of celebrating the eucharist and visiting traditional healers obstructs integrated personal development, with the result that dual loyalty is in fact a divisive loyalty. For a positive evaluation: W. Valkenberg, “The future of Religion: From Interreligious Dialogue to Multiple Religious Identity?,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 14.1 (2004): 95-107. For a negative evaluation: M. Van Heerden, *What's Happening in Practice? A Comparative Study of Teaching and Learning in Two Desegregated South African Public High Schools* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1998); M. Van Heerden, “My School, your School, our School? Issues of Attitude, Behaviour and Identity among Black and White Pupils in Desegregated South African High Schools,” *South African Journal of Ethnology* 22.2 (1999): 67-80. Masolo 1994; Appiah 1992; 1996; Van Heerden 1998, 111; 1999, 77.

¹⁴ C. Cornille (ed.), *Many Mansions?* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002).

from foreign religions is considered harmful to their own religions.¹⁵ There are those who maintain that the present pope, in his previous position as prefect of the Congregation of Faith, put such emphasis on the uniqueness and absoluteness of Jesus in the document *Dominus Jesus* in 2000 that it completely squashed every form of syncretism, particularly in Africa and Asia.¹⁶

(2) Oppression

To resume the thread of history, one finds that the Christian groups that arose within the Roman empire were initially regarded as 'yet another crazy Jewish sect'. In the syncretist context of the empire they were tolerated, along with Judaism. They did not cause much of a stir, since they were socially insignificant, belonged to the lower strata and practised their religion more or less underground. By the 3rd century, however, they started to become suspect, because they refused to take part in sacrificial rituals to the gods and pay divine homage to the emperor, the religious symbol of political unity. As a result they were gradually subjected to slurs, accusations, intimidation and persecution. Their houses were set alight, they were rounded up, interrogated, enticed to take part in sacrificial rituals, tortured and killed.

Then, early in the 4th century, things changed. In 311 they were accorded the status of an allowed religion (*religio licita*), with the same rights as other religions. In 312 emperor Constantine even granted them financial and judicial privileges, out of political rather than purely religious motives. Christianity was set up as a barricade against the religio-political agitation of the Donatists in North Africa. Finally, in 321, Sunday was proclaimed the official day of rest throughout the empire. But the real turning point was still to come. In 380 emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion in the empire and faith in the triune God – Father, Son and Spirit – became statutory. In 394 he expanded this to the West as well. In other words, what is known as the Constantinian shift was in fact the Theodosian shift.¹⁷ The result was that Christianity, like the erstwhile cultic religions of late antiquity, came to fulfil a political function. It had to ensure the cohesion of the Roman empire, provide an ideological basis for the power of the emperor and the political elite, and promote an ethics conducive to the empire. Thus commitment to God's will turned into commitment to the will of the political elite. In this context Christianity could not resist the temptation to oppress and even exterminate other religions. From being the oppressed Christians turned into oppressors.

The change this effected is evident in the position of Augustine, the most eminent church father at the time. Initially he had emphasised freedom of belief: "Human beings cannot believe unless they themselves want to."¹⁸ But because of the agitation of the Donatists in North Africa, who joined forces against the church's sacramental practice and hierarchy and thus posed a danger to the stability of the empire, he changed his view. After that he not only supported forcible imperial action against dissidents within the church, but also advocated the use of force outside the church for converting non-

¹⁵ A. Droogers, "Syncretism: The problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem," in J. Gort et al. (eds.), *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 7-25; C. Stewart & R. Shaw (eds.), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁶ P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁷ E. Schillbeeckx, *Pleidooi voor mensen in de kerk* (Baarn: Nelissen, 1985), 143.

¹⁸ Augustinus, *In Johannis*, 26.2: "Credere non potest homo nisi volens."

believers, baptising them and making them join the church. As a result religious freedom turned into religious coercion.¹⁹

I am not saying that Huntington is advocating the use of oppression, forced conversion and death threats to establish a monocultural society. Besides, a politics of conversion at gunpoint is no longer found in the West these days. But that does not exclude all sorts of conscious or unconscious manipulations on a smaller scale, in families and religious communities, to entice children and adults to adopt ideas and practices that they previously resisted. Of course, these pale into insignificance when compared with the massive, violently enforced conversions in the latter days of the Roman empire and the Middle Ages, for instance during the politically motivated and militarily coerced adoption of Christianity by the barbarian peoples in the North,²⁰ the crusades in the East²¹ and, later on, the conquest of America in the West.²²

(3) Tolerance

In the Middle Ages, however, there was a theologian who explicitly rejected the model of oppression and forced conversion eventually advocated by Augustine, and reverted to Augustine's earlier insistence on freedom of faith. This was Thomas Aquinas, who roundly asserted that nobody should be coerced into believing. He went further, maintaining that the rites of people of other faiths, specifically Jews and Muslims, had to be tolerated. The principle on which he based this statement was, in positive terms, that an evil sometimes had to be tolerated for the sake of a particular good, or, in negative terms, that one sometimes had to tolerate an evil in order to avoid an even greater evil. The faith of Jews and Muslims was undoubtedly an evil, since one way or another it was a product of unbelief— although Thomas did distinguish between Jews and Muslims: the Jews had prefigured the true faith, whereas the faith of Muslims, he said, contained nothing that was

¹⁹ R. Forst, *Toleranz im Konflikt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 69-82.

²⁰ In the latter days of the Roman empire and the period that followed mass conversion continued wholesale, with the word 'conversion' calling for quotation marks. This was not only because of the military coercion which attended the process, but also because of the *Gefolgschaftsdenken*, which meant that all soldiers, supporters and subjects were expected to follow the lord/leader in his adoption of Christianity. The result was delayed social and mental penetration: Christianity reached the masses later than the elite, and really intensive penetration of the faith among the populace took even longer. Often 'conversion' remained confined to purely external behaviour for a long time, with the result that 'pagan' and Christian notions and practices continued side by side as a kind of dual strategy, prompting some commentators to speak of a double insurance policy (Bredero 2000; Blockmans & Hoppenbrouwers 2002, 89 A. Bredero, *De ontkerstening der middeleeuwen: Een terugblik op de geschiedenis van twaalf eeuwen christendom* (Baarn: Agora, 2000); W. Blockmans & P. Hoppenbrouwers, *Eeuwen des onderscheid: Een geschiedenis van middeleeuws Europa* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2002). The conjunction of secular and spiritual power, evidenced by the 'conversion' of entire nations, sometimes also led to a paralysing power struggle between the two, as a result of which some nations reverted wholly to 'pagandom' for long periods: J. Le Goff, *Le Civilisation de l'Occident Médiéval*, Dutch translation *De cultuur van middeleeuws Europa* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1987), 53.

²¹ Bernhard of Clairvaux's motto in the second crusade was that killing in Christ's name could be undertaken with a clean conscience; cf. R. Forst, *Toleranz im Konflikt*, 89.

²² There, too, indigenous people were slaughtered wholesale in the name of religion, and only a relatively small group of Spanish Dominicans championed natural law based indigenous people's right to freedom from violent missionary activity; cf. K. Hilpert, *Menschenrechte und Theologie, Forschungsbeiträge zur ethischen Dimension der Menschenrechte* (Freiburg: Herder, 2001); R. Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); R. Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); R. Ruston, "Theologians, Humanists and Natural Rights," in M. Hill (ed.), *Religious Liberty and Human Rights* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), 14-44.

either true or useful. But both faiths could be tolerated to achieve a greater good, namely social unity, or to avoid a greater evil, namely social strife.²³

Sometimes one hopes that this minimal injunction of Thomas' would be heeded in our day and age. I certainly don't mean that the faith of Jews and Muslims is basically sinful, nor that Judaism merely prefigured truth and that Islam contains nothing that is either true or useful. But it would be a blessing if the various religions were to tolerate one another, even if only for the sake of social harmony and to prevent societies from sliding into civil, international or continental wars.

Still I call Thomas's advice a minimal injunction. For simply to tolerate other religions, not for their own sake but to further an extraneous good or avert an evil, is to treat these religions purely as instruments, and moreover as instruments that are imperfect, if not, evil in themselves. Besides, such tolerance can be revoked once the greater evil has ceased to exist. So when a religious minority ceases to threaten social harmony anymore, one can placidly resume oppressing them. As late as the 20th century, right up to the discussions of Vatican II between 1962 and 1965, that was the Catholic Church's official doctrine.²⁴ This doctrine reads: when Catholics constitute a majority tolerance of minorities is undesirable; but if they themselves are a minority, tolerance is necessary.²⁵ The principle at issue is that truth has priority over freedom: when truth is at stake, freedom goes by the board. And since the Catholic Church has a monopoly of truth, the freedom of other religions has to be subordinated to it.²⁶

This principle is not obsolete. For the notion of tolerance, albeit in tempered form, is still part of the Catholic Church's dominant thinking. I am not saying that other religions are still regarded as an evil, or even as sinful, but neither are they seen entirely as a good, as good in themselves. Inasmuch as they contain elements corresponding with elements of Catholic doctrine they are considered good. But inasmuch as they contain deviant elements they are simply tolerated, permitted, endured, an evil to be tacitly ignored. That is the axiom of inclusivism one finds in the aforementioned *Dominus Jesus* document of 2000. It is no different from Thomas Aquinas: other religions are tolerated so as not to provoke conflict and jeopardise peace.

That could be the model that Huntington, and many Westerners like him, have in mind. According to this model there is a majority that wields authority, while the minority is tolerated in so far as they adapt to the majority. Or, as right-wing parties in Europe would have it, Western culture is the dominant culture (*Leitkultur*) and minorities have to conform to it. It is like hearing Karl Marx: the ruling culture is that of the ruling class, and the ruling class is the class that rules the economy and politics.²⁷ Permissive tolerance is based on us-them thinking, on thinking in terms of in-group and out-group; it is aimed at inclusion and exclusion. Empirical research in fifteen European countries has revealed a strong correlation between religion, ethno-centrism and prejudice.²⁸ This especially

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Secunda Secundae q. 10 a.1, a.11: "Nihil veritatis aut utilitatis."

²⁴ E.-W. Böckenförde, *Kirche und christlicher Glaube in den Herausforderungen der Zeit* (Münster, 2004), 203.

²⁵ After all, the view underlying all this is that the church does not approve the other religions but merely permits them ("ecclesia non approbat, sed permittit").

²⁶ E.-W. Böckenförde, *Kirche und christlicher Glaube*, 205.

²⁷ K. Marx, *Die Frühschriften* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1971), 373-374

²⁸ M. Gijsberts, P. Scheepers & P. Coenders, "Exclusion of Legal Migrants in Western Europe," in M. Gijsberts, L. Hagendoorn & P. Scheepers (eds.), *Nationalism and Exclusion of Migrants: Cross-National Comparisons* (Hants: Ashgate, 2004), 121-142, here 134-135; P. Scheepers, M. Gijsberts & E. Hello, "Religiosity and Prejudice against Ethnic Minorities in Europe: Cross-National Tests on a Controversial Relationship," *Review of Religious Research* 43.3 (2002): 242-265.

applies to so-called nominal Christians,²⁹ of whom William James already in 1902 said: "Piety is the mask, the inner force is tribal instinct."³⁰ But we also know that among the youth in various countries around the world religious exclusivism ranks low or even very low.³¹ But besides of that, permissive tolerance boils down to disciplining minorities in order to retain and strengthen the majority's power.³² Put differently: the truth the majority claims for itself is a truth of majority power, to which the freedom of minorities has to yield.

(4) Religious Freedom in a Human Rights Framework

Is there a different model – one in which minorities are not just tolerated but respected? Indeed there is: religious freedom in the framework of human rights.³³ It does not offer a cut and dried solution but a framework in which to achieve peace between cultures and religions. Remarkably, at the last moment, right at the end of Vatican II the same Catholic Church that used to avail itself of the models of oppression and tolerance adopted the declaration on religious freedom, starting with the words 'human dignity.'³⁴ Through this act (*in actu exercitu*) the Catholic Church indicated that the infallibility it lays claim to goes hand in hand with fallible, subsequently reviewed or reviewable views, for this was a case of changing from 'notion A' to 'notion non-A', as the lawyer, *staatskirchenrechtler* Böckenförde put it.³⁵ Originally the text on religious freedom was to be inserted in the constitution on the church, *Lumen Gentium* (a constitution being the highest rank of a dogmatic document), then in the decree on ecumenism (a decree ranking below a constitution); in the end it appeared as a separate declaration, that being the lowest ranking document in the dogmatic hierarchy.³⁶ Nonetheless the current president of the pontifical council for ecumenism, Walter Kasper, then still professor of theology at Tübingen, maintained that this was the most important document produced by Vatican II.³⁷

The term 'human dignity', the opening words of the document, does not come from nowhere. It derives from classical antiquity. In political philosophy it referred to the

²⁹ J. Christopher Soper & J. Fetzer, "Religion and Politics in Europe," in T.G. Jelen & C. Wilcox, *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 169-194, here 182.

³⁰ W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York 1902), 331.

³¹ H.-G. Ziebertz, "Religious Pluralism and Religious Education," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 6.2 (1993): 82-99; J.A. van der Ven, "Religious Values in the Interreligious Dialogue," *Religion & Theology* 1.3 (1994): 244-260; P. Vermeer & J.A. van der Ven, "Looking at the Relationship between Religions: An Empirical Study among Secondary School Students," *Journal of Empirical Theology* (2004):1; J.A. van der Ven, J.S. Dreyer, H.J.C. Pieterse, *Is there a God of Human Rights? The Complex Relationship between Human Rights and Religion: A South African Case* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 553; F.-V. Anthony, "Interreligious Conflict and Participation: An Empirical Study among the Youth in Tamil Nadu, India (paper, second conference of the International Society of Empirical Research in Theology (ISERT), Bielefeld, 22-24 April 2004), in which the attitude scale 'commonality-based mutuality' substantively represents pluralism.

³² Forst, *Toleranz im Konflikt*, 86.

³³ P. Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration came to the West* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), considers - to my mind wrongly - the dividing line between tolerance and religious freedom to be fluid.

³⁴ On the very last day of the council, 7 December 1965, with 2308 votes for, 70 against and 8 abstentions.

³⁵ E.-W. Böckenförde, *Kirchlicher Auftrag und politische Entscheidung* (Freiburg, 1973), 201; E.-W. Böckenförde, *Religionsfreiheit: Die Kirche in der modernen Welt* (Freiburg, 1990), 26-27, 55, 69, 108.

³⁶ Y. M.-J. Congar, "Was besagt die Bezeichnung 'Erklärung'?", in J. Hamer & Y. Congar, 53-58; O.H. Pesch, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil* (Würzburg, 1994), 78-81.

³⁷ W. Kasper, "Religionsfreiheit, II. Katholische Kirche," in *Staatslexikon, Recht, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft*, Band 4, (Freiburg, 1988), 825-827.

dignity of political office. In moral philosophy it was broadened to the inherent dignity of all human beings. In the Middle Ages Boethius gave it aesthetic overtones: human dignity is a thing of beauty, a piece of art to be enjoyed. In the Renaissance Pico della Mirandola stressed that human dignity is not just a fact but an injunction, a project: human beings are the creators of their own human dignity. During the Enlightenment, finally, Immanuel Kant defined the concept in a unique fashion. Human dignity, he said, resides in the fact that human beings represent ends in themselves. That means that they can never be used simply as a means. They have intrinsic value, cannot be bought at any price – neither a financial, economic, political or psychological price, nor a religious or an ecclesiastic price. People are not to be regarded as pawns, bondsmen, slaves, prostitutes, numbers; they are not to be deployed, used, traded, bought, hired out, sold, tortured or killed for external interests or even values.³⁸

In the Catholic Church, too, the term ‘human dignity’ has a history. It has played a focal role ever since the so-called social encyclicals, of which Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* of 1891 was the first. That was the first time that, in the context of human dignity, a lance was broken for human rights, especially workers’ rights to property and association. A few decades later Pius IX elaborated on these ideas, extending them to the rights of the human person and democracy. Pius XII further strengthened the link between human dignity, human rights and democracy. But it was only in the pontificate of John XXIII that a Christian doctrine of human rights was worked out, thus laying the foundation for two cardinal documents of Vatican II: the Constitution on Church and World, *Gaudium et Spes*, and the aforementioned Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*.

That does not mean that either document is perfect and needs no augmentation. Thus there is no mention of the notion, for example, that people are free to choose, not only a religious worldview, but also a nonreligious one.³⁹ By the same token they do not say that people are free to change their religion, hence to change from Islam to Christianity or from Christianity to Islam.⁴⁰

But that is not the point I wish to make right now. There is another aspect in connection with the multicultural society that merits attention. Ideally religious freedom should not feature only in the category of individual human rights but also in that of

³⁸ J.A. van der Ven et al., *Is there a God of Human Rights?*, 265-280.

³⁹ This also leaves people free to make propaganda for such a nonreligious worldview, just as religious people are free to make propaganda and do missionary work for their religions; J. Witte, *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment* (Boulder, 2005), 162-163.

⁴⁰ On the contrary. It applies to all people that once they have made a religious choice, they have to adhere it, especially in the case of Catholics (see *Dignitatis humanae* no. 1). This principle forms part of traditional church doctrine, explicitly formulated by Thomas Aquinas, who posits that nobody may be forced to embrace the church’s faith, but having once embraced it, the person is no longer at liberty to leave the church (Thomas Aquinas, *STh II-II* 10, 8; R. Frost, *Toleranz im Konflikt*, 93). Two comments are in order. Firstly, if one universalises the injunction that once a religious choice has been made one has to abide by it to other religions as well, it conflicts with the church’s missionary mandate (cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 17). After all, mission aims at converting nonreligious and non-Christian groups to Christianity, hence at change rather than remaining in the religious community that one had originally chosen. In his lecture to the *Pontifical Mission Societies* in 2000 cardinal Tomko, prefect of the mission congregation, cited the fact that 2 billion people now belong to a Christian church, and a billion to the Catholic Church. This means that mission was and remains a must, he said, especially because the growth of Catholicism at 17.4% lags behind that of non-Christians - this does not apply to Africa but to Asia, where the church reaches a mere 2.9% and in some countries as little as 0.5% of the population. Secondly, the command to remain true to one’s original religious choice also conflicts with human rights law, for article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 says that people are free to choose their religion, but also that a person has the “freedom to change his religion or belief”.

collective rights.⁴¹ Let me clarify this with reference to the first generation of human rights, which regards to liberty rights, political rights and judicial rights. If these rights are interpreted as collective rights as well, Muslims and other religious communities would be entitled, *as collectivities*, to religious freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of association en non-discrimination, such as, especially, impartial treatment in criminal and criminal procedure law. By the same token it can be applied to second generation of human rights, which are mainly socio-economic in nature. Thus Muslims and other religious groups would be entitled, *as collectivities*, to work, income, education, health care and social security. And that would link up perfectly with the third generation of human rights, which are actually known as collective rights and entitle collectivities to enjoy their culture, language and religion.⁴² After all, cultural and religious minorities have a right to be different, as the Unesco Declaration on Race and Prejudice of 1978 (art. 1) puts it.⁴³ By focusing on these rights of cultural and religious minorities as right of *collectivities* one could create a good framework for interaction between cultures and religions. Viewed thus, the neo-liberal policy currently adopted by the European Union, which only takes account of individual members of minorities and no longer of minorities as collectivities, needs to be fundamentally amended.⁴⁴

This advocacy of human rights specifically for the benefit of minorities as collectivities may raise the question whether it does not simply form part of the equipment of a constitutional state, making it redundant to highlight its importance. Those who take the noises made by minorities seriously will know that there are weighty problems in this regard. There are many indications that second and third generation Muslim youths have gloomy prospects, because they are not being helped to reduce the relatively severe poverty, prevent the high educational dropout rate, combat high unemployment and put an end to the high level of criminality. As a result they experience feelings of non-acceptance, mistrust, exclusion, marginalisation and a negative self-image. This in its turn leads to problem behaviour and behavioural disorders,⁴⁵ which create a breeding ground for anti-Western notions. Such notions are traceable to the anti-democratic Dawa in mosques, the informal Dawa of individual itinerant preachers and the virtual Dawa on the internet, inspired by traditions in Salaphism and Wahhabism.⁴⁶

⁴¹ According to M. Galenkamp, *Individualism versus Collectivism: The Concept of Collective Rights* (Rotterdam: Rotterdamse Filosofische Studies, 1993), collective rights may be seen either as the rights of a collectivity of individuals or as relating to the collective dimension of individual rights, or as the rights of a legal person, or as rights of groups or communities as such

⁴² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (art. 27); cf. W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); W. Kymlicka (ed.), *The rights of minority cultures*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995; M. Mutua, *Human rights. A political and cultural critique*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2002.

⁴³ J.A. van der Ven et al., *Is there a God Human Rights?*, 102-105.

⁴⁴ *Nederland als immigratiesamenleving*, Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (Den Haag 2001), 229.

⁴⁵ W. Vollebergh, *Gemiste kansen. Culturele diversiteit en de jeugdzorg*, Inaugural lecture, Radboud University Nijmegen 2002.

⁴⁶ The literature describes various factors, which also occur in combination, to explain the rise of Islamist movements: demographic factors (high fertility, high percentage of young people); economic factors (lack of economic development despite a great increase in oil dollars, resulting in poverty and protest); political factors (protest against the introduction of secular, democratic, Western structures); stratification-related factors (a frustrated, growing intelligentsia with no access to the machinery of state, the middle classes that are prepared to fund Islamism, the huge impoverished class that lets itself be mobilised for political action); and religious factors (protest by the religious elite against the political elite's efforts to subordinate Islam to the state and the use of religio-ideological protest by Islamism). According to this view Islamism is a largely

Although one cannot actually speak of a causal connection, all this could easily contribute to an atmosphere that may give rise to radical, even terrorist ideas and practices.⁴⁷

Or, one might ask, does Islam itself, irrespective of the social underclass to which many second and third generation youths belong, radiates an anti-democratic spirit? Do mosque and parliament simply not tolerate each other? Empirical research into the political culture and structure in 23 so-called Islamic countries reveals that the Shari'a can function under both (more or less) authoritarian and (more or less) democratic leadership structures: it all depends on the political interests the Shari'a is ideologically used for.⁴⁸ In accordance with that, cross-national research shows that there is minimal difference between attitudes among the populations of Muslim and Western countries towards democracy versus authoritarian leadership.⁴⁹ This fits in historical research by various scholars, who actually underline both the particular historical, contextual construction of the Shari'a and the plurality of interpretations in various societies in later times.⁵⁰ In addition a growing number of scholars are reflecting positively, from a systematic point of view, on the compatibility of Islam, religious freedom and human rights.⁵¹ One positive sign could be that since 1981 three documents have been published that show that Islam is perfectly compatible with human rights: the *Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights* of 1981, the *Cairo Declaration* of 1990 and the *Arab Charter on Human Rights* adopted by the council of the League of Arab States in 1994. These documents do, however, contain turns of phrase like 'in so far as they concur with the Shari'a' or 'in so far as they do not conflict with the Shari'a', but the interpretation of these qualifications is left to the discretion of local religious leaders.⁵²

One could ask the same question of Christianity. Are Christianity and democracy compatible? If the answer is affirmative in principle, it begs the question whether Christianity in fact contributes to human rights. In this regard two colleagues, Jaco Dreyer and Hennie Pieterse, and I conducted a twelve-year research project in South Africa on the theme, "Is there a God of human rights?" That is to say, what is the real impact of belief in God and attitudes towards the church on commitment to human rights? Our findings were twofold: the effects are both positive and negative. When God is seen as a personal God, not remote but close to human beings, the effect is positive. Belief in a non-personal, more

secular movement that uses the ideological flag of Islam (cf. W. Wolters & N.-D. de Graaf, *Maatschappelijke problemen: Beschrijvingen en verklaringen* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2005), 282-284).

⁴⁷ G. Kepel, *Fitna, Guerre au Coeur de l'Islam* (Paris, 2004); AIVD, *Van Dawa tot jihad: De diverse dreigingen van de radicale islam tegen de democratische rechtsorde* (Den Haag, 2004); Annual Report AIVD (De Haag, 2005), 33-34.

⁴⁸ D.E. Price, *Islamic Political Culture, Democracy, and Human Rights: A Comparative Study* (Westport: Praeger, 1999). The population comprised 23 Islamic countries (80% being Islamic) and 23 non-Muslim developing countries, the latter randomly selected from the World Bank's list of developing countries (p. 149); cf. O. Roy, *Globalized Islam* (New York, 2004), 148-200.

⁴⁹ P. Norris & R. Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge, 2004).

⁵⁰ M. Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

⁵¹ Some publications: Sultan Hussein Tabandeh, *A Muslim Commentary on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (London, 1970); Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation* (Syracuse, 1990); Ann E. Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights* (Boulder, 1991); Mohammed Hashim Kamali, *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (Cambridge, 1997); Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* (Oxford, 1997); K. Noordam, R. van Oordt, C. Cörüz (eds), *Mensen, rechten en islam* (Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 1998); A. Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, 2003); J. Runzo, N. Martin, A. Sharma (eds.), *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003); Fatima Mernissi et al., *Religie en moderniteit* (Zutphen, 2004).

⁵² A. Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics* (Boulder: Westview, 1991).

pantheistic God likewise has a positive effect. If the church is experienced as a prophetic community, professionally open to society and taking its decisions democratically, the effect is again positive. However, if God is seen as judgmental, punitive and vengeful, it has a negative impact. When the church is perceived as introverted, intent on its own survival, averse to professional knowledge to intervene in society and with a hierarchical, top-down organisational structure, the impact is negative.⁵³

CONCLUSION

Is Huntington right? As noted already, he rightly claims that we are living in a multicultural world. But he mistakenly avers that Western civilisation can only exist in a monocultural society. History tells a different story. Western civilisation in fact originated in multicultural empires: that of Alexander the Great and the Roman empire. Both are noted for a multicultural model of syncretism. The alternative was the monocultural model of oppression and persecution that prevailed from the 4th century to well into the Middle Ages. That was the uncivilised model of monocultural Western civilisation. The third model was that of permissive tolerance characterised by the disciplining of minorities, whose freedom was sacrificed to the truth of the majority's power. The only truly civilised model of Western civilisation that respects the freedom, equality and reciprocity of both majority and minority is that of religious freedom in the framework of human rights. Put differently, in their book, *Occidentalism*, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit ask whether the mosque is human rights-minded enough or can be made so. This compels Christians to do some serious soul-searching: is the church human rights-minded enough or can it be made so?⁵⁴

Lastly let me return to Plato's Republic with which I began this lecture. In Book VII, which consists of a report of Socrates' dialogue with Glaucon, Plato presents the classic allegory of the cave. In the cave there is no light, everything is in the dark, and the people who are in the cave are blindly looking around. Outside of the cave there is light, bright light. When the people in the cave look out of the opening of the cave they see a wall and on that wall they see only the shadows of what happens in the bright light in the outside. They take these shadows for what happens in reality, but they are only shadows.⁵⁵ That is the way our cities and their administrations and their governments and their citizens look: they think that their social programs for individual migrants are fair, but they do not see that these individual programs are only shadows of fairness, only shadows of justice, only shadows of goodness. When they could dispose of the four cardinal virtues and would have the courage and the wisdom and the self-mastery (temperance) to liberate themselves from the prison they live in within the cave and step into the bright light of the sun, the divine sun, that shines for each and everybody under the sun, then they would see that a city that really deserves that name, is a united city, a harmonious city, in short: one city, which is: a just city.

⁵³ J.A. van der Ven et al., *Is there a God of Human Rights?*, 566-582. I confine myself to the effects of belief in God and attitudes towards the church as measured among senior secondary school students at Anglican and Catholic schools in the Johannesburg/Pretoria region in 1996 and 2001. Hence it excludes both the same category of students at public schools within the research project in 1995 and 2000, as well as the four other themes whose effects we researched (Jesus, evil, salvation and interreligious interaction).

⁵⁴ I. Buruma and A. Margalit, *Occidentalism* (New York, 2004).

⁵⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, [514-518], 253-258.

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