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Secularism and Africa

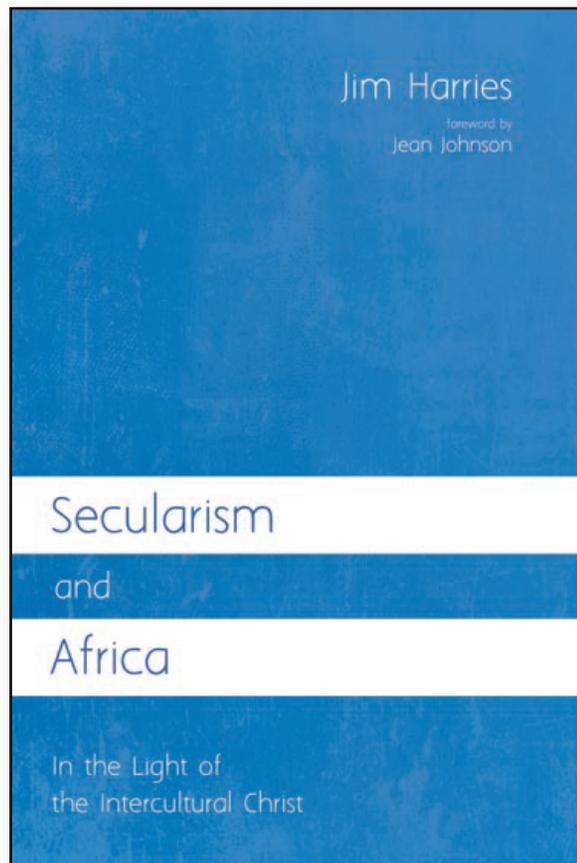
In the Light of the Intercultural Christ

Jim Harries

foreword by Jean Johnson

Secular assumptions underlie much formal communication between the West and Africa, and even intra-Africa. Secularism is dualistic by nature, but thinking in Africa is mostly monistic. This book suggests that it is better to be rooted in faith in Christ than in so-called secularism. The great respect given to the Bible in much of Africa verifies this idea. Communication of and through Christ is a bridge that can enable indigenous sustainable development. The same gospel is the bridge over which the West itself passes. Maintaining supposedly secular presuppositions may be denying sub-Saharan African people the means for self-initiated sustainable progress.

This book draws on anthropology, linguistics, and theology, as well as the author's experience of living in Africa. Harries shares an autobiographical account of personal long-term grass-roots ministry, and proposes a revision of widely held understandings of linguistics pertaining especially to the relationship between the West and Africa. He also looks at bible teaching ministry in light of contemporary African contexts.



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“As a long-term missionary and anthropologically-minded theologian, Jim Harries is a highly original and creative thinker. Here he brings his considerable experience together with sophisticated theoretical reflection to question the secular bases of mission, development, and scholarship. Joining a lively conversation on these questions, Harries book is an excellent contribution for missionaries, development workers, and others seeking to understand how secular assumptions shape global mission, development, and anthropology.”

—BRIAN HOWELL, Professor of Anthropology, Wheaton College

Jim Harries (PhD Theology), a missionary working as a bible teacher in western Kenya, is the author of *Communication in Mission and Development* and other books and articles. Jim works with a variety of indigenous churches using the Luo and Swahili languages. He chairs the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission (vulnerablemission.org). Global University recognizes him as a Professor of Religion. Jim is single and looks after orphaned children in his African village home.

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Secularism and Africa

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SECULARISM AND AFRICA
In the Light of the Intercultural Christ

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Foreword

WHEN I WAS NEARING my departure from America to Cambodia to serve as a missionary, I studied Buddhism to prepare myself for sharing the gospel to Cambodians. Once I arrived in Cambodia and lived life more purposefully, I realized that I wasn't in a Buddhist nation, I was in a Folk Buddhist nation. In other words, Buddhism (high religion) was integrated with Animism/Folk (low religion). This misunderstanding meant that I was trying to drive a car with only two wheels—it doesn't work. Jim Harries' book, *Secularism and Africa: In the light of the Intercultural Christ*, is empowering. In other words, he gives his audience a heads-up as to what is not working in Africa and presents an alternative.

Have you ever discovered something about yourself because you rubbed up against a life crisis, a brand new experience, or a person who thinks differently from you? Most likely that something was so innate and subconscious that you were surprised by the revelation. I really, really don't think western Christians (even those who are naysayers of secularism) realize how much secularism and its cousin dualism are an intrinsic part of their frame of reference and implementations. This oblivion is like having gum on your shoe and you don't know it, so you pick up debris along the way. At the end of the day, you look at the bottom of your shoe and say: "Gross, I didn't know that was there!" Jim Harries is deeply concerned that Westerners who conduct missions in Africa are unaware of what they are bringing with them and passing along.

One characteristic that I appreciate about Jim Harries is that he doesn't deviate from his stance, and he backs it up with action. Some people say he is too dogmatic, but perhaps it is a sign that he has worked through the issues for many years in the heart of the African context. Jim Harries isn't dogmatic because he wants to be right, but because he longs for Africans to have the most authentic relationship with God as possible. The question

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at hand is: Are Westerners really bringing the gospel as much as they think they are?

Jim Harries makes it clear that he is not writing to an African audience, but rather to a western audience. His insights are based on his longevity and immersion-living in an African village. There is no doubt in my mind that a person could interview two missionaries from the same area and receive very different responses. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that one of the cross-cultural communicators uses his own language and serves as a donor. As for the other, he knows the heart language fluently and ministers from a position of vulnerability. The latter allows for a realistic and deeper understanding because there is no reason for pretense. Jim Harries' unique insights stem from a missionary approach that allows for the least amount of pretense, which is absolutely vital for effectiveness.

Lastly, Jim Harries does missions differently than when he first arrived in Africa. I, for one, want to know why and what changed his mind. How about you?

Jean Johnson

Author of *We Are Not The Hero*
Co-Director of World Mission Associates

Acknowledgments

MY DEBTS FOR THE successful completion of this book go to many more people than I could manage to mention in a short space. I appreciate Angela Merridale for doing the initial typing of this document for me. I am very grateful to Marilyn James for doing an excellent job at copyediting. Mark Avery, Stan Nussbaum, and in diverse ways many others have given helpful critical responses that have enabled me to improve the manuscript. I am grateful to all the people with whom I have interacted on issues pertaining to the context of this text. I am grateful to Jean Johnson for writing the Foreword. I appreciate the many African folks in different parts of the continent but especially in Kenya for their insights that have enabled me to write a perspective that is informed from Africa. I am grateful to folks at Wipf and Stock for taking on the publishing! I am grateful to numerous supporters whose self-sacrifice enables me to continue the ministry that I do.

Introduction and Consideration of Some Key Terms

I TAKE THE HELPFUL side of the secularism that has arisen from an “incarnation of the sacred”¹ into the material (physical) world, in turn enabling an escape from superstition, to be dualism. Hence I take dualism as being an essentially desirable quality, liberating people from having to find a spiritual cause for every material effect. Secularism could be praised for its help in this liberation. Dualism is that aspect of western society that has enabled the discovery of nature and of science. I take dualism as having arisen from Christianity, and to some extent Judaism before it. Aspects and degrees of dualism have certainly also emerged from other religions, but in its more extreme modern forms it is Christian in origin.² I take dualism as inherently good because it articulates aspects of the truth of God and can maintain both a proper distance and a proper connection between the material and the spiritual. By contrast, African monism has too little distance and secularism has too little connection. I take secularism as being a deceptive over-application of dualism. I take the impact of Christianity that moves positivists and African monists towards dualism to be a good impact. I take this impact to be inherent in the gospel, and a part of the plan of God regarding the gospel.

Among Westerners who work in Africa or have anything to do with Africa, it is these days widely assumed, even in Christian circles, that secular approaches should provide the framework for their interaction and the common ground for their relationship. Such a view on how to relate to people with different cultural backgrounds has not always been there, either in Africa or in the West. People on both sides were once more strongly

1. Loy, “Spiritual Origins.”
2. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 160.

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identified with what has become known as their “religion.” In this book we ask how well secularism serves in the western investment in Africa. Our point of comparison is Christianity. So we are comparing secularly based development interaction in Africa with the more “traditional” role of the Christian missionary. We will seek to consider three options:

1. being secular in principle and in practice
2. being Christian in principle and practice
3. being Christian in principle but adopting a secular framework to guide one’s operations.

A major blunder identified in Christian mission to Africa is an excessive valuation of and adherence to secularism.

This book does not represent an abstract comparison between Christian and secular approaches written from an ivory tower. It has been written by someone on the ground while on the ground in the heart of East Africa. It is thus a critique of praxis, in theoretical perspective. As well as being a critique, it seeks to advocate appropriate ways for outsiders to work in Africa. Because this book is written by a Westerner who has lived for many years in Africa, it might be different from the kind of book an African would write. The language used in the book, although influenced by East African linguistic practice, is rooted in British English. For this reason implicit or explicit descriptions of African people and culture may not always rhyme entirely with African people’s own view of themselves. Descriptions of Africa in this book are implicit comparisons with the author’s own experience of England. At the same time, there is little doubt that a deep pre-understanding of African ways will give the reader the most profound understanding of the text.

Western scholarship sometimes seems to be desperate to extend the reach of its expertise to where it can legitimately claim to have an understanding of communities beyond the West. One continent often looked at in this respect is Africa. All stops can be pulled out, including those of the provision of finance, to encourage African scholars to write. Still they seem to be few. I suggest that there are good reasons why it is difficult for African scholars to participate in western scholarship. One of those reasons is that it is difficult to write from someone else’s perspective. This is what African scholars participating in western scholarship are obliged to do. Knowing how your own culture or way of life could appear to another is no easy

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task. For these and other reasons it is important for the West to continue to seek to draw on western scholars for their information on what is going on around the world. To be able to write helpfully and accurately a Westerner should have deep and long exposure to the people in the part of the world concerned. This author is an example of a scholar of this ilk.

A distinction that is important to make in this text is that between dualism and secularism. Dualism referred to in this text is that which distinguishes the material from the spiritual world. An absolute dualist sees these as totally distinct. The absolute dualist therefore sees the spiritual world as having no impact on the material world, and the material world as having no impact on the spiritual world. For example, such a dualist would perceive no impact of dreams on someone's material/physical life, and no impact of someone's material life on dreams. In practice, many Westerners have recently focused on the material side of the dualism to the exclusion of the spiritual. Such taken to an extreme is called positivism.

Western dualistic understanding can be religious. When dualism is religious then God can be distant, off on the spiritual side of the dualism. Even if present in the material world, he might not behave as if he is present. He may be all-knowing and all-powerful, but his impact and actions could be relatively occasional and perhaps predictable. This is the kind of understanding held by many Protestant Christians in western nations. This kind of Christianity Hiebert notes, as do others, "can be a secularizing force in the world."³ It can be or at least it can appear to be a secularizing force because it denies many areas of God's activity that other people around the world recognize. These "denied areas" are known by Hiebert as the "excluded middle." This "middle area" that is known by non-western people as an arena for God's activities is known by western dualistic people, including many Christians, to be the arena of science and nature. To them, natural/scientific processes are sufficiently explanatory in this middle area to do away with the need for any explanations that are theological or have to do with spiritual forces. This kind of dualism tends towards positivism. In it the legitimate role for God becomes smaller and smaller. Absolute positivism is no longer dualistic, but is monistic on the side of the material once the spiritual side has gone beyond the vanishing point. Absolute positivism then functions on the basis of just one explanatory pole, the natural/scientific. (In contrast, "spiritual" monism functions only on the side of the spiritual.) For purposes of clarity I use the term positivism for the view that

3. Hiebert, "Flaw," 46.

Introduction and Consideration of Some Key Terms

all causation is material. I will use the term monism primarily for the view that all causation is spiritual.

Monism I take to be the traditional belief in much of Africa. This belief is essentially that all causation is spiritual in nature. As a result, the occurrence of any event is assumed to have a spiritual cause, and by implication a spiritual meaning. The fact that causation is entirely spiritual in African tradition is well illustrated by the widely held belief that death always has a spiritual cause. (For example see Evans-Pritchard.⁴) This is not to say that people are unaware of material processes. It means that an underlying spiritual reason is always sought behind a material process: Yes, a force applied to an object makes it move; but who is applying the force and why? Yes, a mosquito biting a person causes malaria, but who or what caused that mosquito to bite that particular person and on that particular occasion? The radical implications for how someone ought to live that arise from this kind of belief are quite different from those that arise from someone who holds to a positivistic belief.

I take secularism as being the belief that the only relevant spiritual forces are those that occupy the minds of people. Secularists believe scientific explanations to have done away with the need for belief in God. This is where we need a corrective from Harold Berman. Berman tells us that “legal systems [and also I suggest much that characterizes the modern culture] of all Western countries . . . are a secular residue of religious attitudes and assumptions which historically found expression in . . . the church.”⁵ Secularists who think that they have done away with “superstitious” interference with rational thinking fail to realize that secularism itself arose from an “incarnation of the sacred in[to] the political, economic, and social life of the times.”⁶ Such specific incarnation is thought to have occurred in the church especially in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Europe. While some aspects of secularism underlie the economic miracle that has spread outwards from Europe around the world, secularism is an incomplete system. Taken to its natural conclusion, secularism leaves no moral basis for living. Those who claim to be secularists actually run on the momentum of non-secular societies, typically those of their own non-secular history. Milbank articulates this well in saying that there is no “social or economic

4. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft*, 5.

5. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 166.

6. Loy, “Spiritual Origins.”

Introduction and Consideration of Some Key Terms

reality that is permanently more basic than the religious.”⁷ There is an “initial unavoidability of the theological and the metaphysical,”⁸ he adds. “The mythical-religious can never be left behind,” says Milbank.⁹ From this it would appear that secularists’ claims are a deception; secularism taken to its logical conclusion is a denial of truth. Hence Mohr tells us that western legal science “is a secular theology, which often makes no sense because its theological presuppositions are no longer accepted.”¹⁰ Secularism makes little sense to many African people. Hence they are inclined to reject it.¹¹

The name to use for God is another important concern in this book. There are a number of areas in which confusion can arise in English. One is in capitalization. God with a capital G would seem to indicate the one, true, Creator God. A small g could indicate a god amongst other gods. Sometimes this distinction may not be clear, for example the term “god” may need to be capitalized if it comes at the beginning of a sentence. There may be a context in which it is not clear whether god or God is being referred to. I have found in writing this text that some ambiguity must remain in the identification of God (god) because there is no middle “g” that is neither capital nor small that can be used in cases when either God or god may be being referred to.

A common but difficult question in writing such as this regards the appropriate use of labels for categories of people. In this text I use *Europeans* and *Westerners* somewhat as synonyms. Most of my research is centered in East Africa, especially in Kenya and amongst the Luo people. To talk of “Africans” or “African people” may seem an illegitimately broad application of principles learned primarily amongst one people. On the other hand, it seems evident that a lot of what I report about the Luo people of Kenya is also more widely true for other Africans. In many cases it is my view that truths that I articulate here with reference to the Luo would be more widely discovered if the same research approach or intensity of research were applied to non-Luo people. It would be wrong to suggest that the Luo people are somehow peculiar, when in reality what is described would be found amongst many African people who are as thoroughly researched. I have

7. Milbank, *Theology and Social*, 3.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Mohr, “Christian Origins,” 41.

11. The term secularism may be used, but its content be different from the way the same term is used in the secular West.

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Introduction and Consideration of Some Key Terms

therefore attempted to be as accurate as I can and to talk of “Africans” or “African people” when I think a certain quality applies to most of the Black population of sub-Saharan Africa. I refer to Luo or another more ethnically specific label if that seems appropriate. I ask for forgiveness in advance if my reader takes me as either over-generalizing or being too narrow in my choice of use of ethnic terms. I welcome parallel studies among other African peoples showing that my generalizations about African monism do *not* apply in their case, and explaining the principles that would more accurately apply to them.

List of Abbreviations

KIST—Kima International School of Theology

KJV—King James Version

MDP—Millennium Development Project

NIV—New International Version

UEA—University of East Anglia

“Religion” Essential

The default setting for debate in the UK these days is “that there is a rational setting for discussing things and religion is an extra.”¹ The approach taken to Africa is simply one instance of the implications of this far-reaching assumption.

“To social theorists I shall attempt to disclose the possibility of a sceptical demolition of modern, secular social theory from a perspective with which it is at variance: in this case, that of Christianity. I will try to demonstrate that all the most important governing assumptions of such theory are bound up with the modification or the rejection of orthodox Christian positions. These fundamental intellectual shifts are, I shall argue, no more rationally ‘justifiable’ than the Christian positions themselves.”²

Proper Christians

CANNELL SHOWS THAT ANTHROPOLOGY’S view of Christianity is far too simplistic. In this simplistic view, Christianity so turns people’s minds to heavenly things as to make them of little earthly good. “Pie in the sky when you die” comes to mind! Yet, she points out, Christianity, along with Islam and Judaism, anticipate a material/physical bodily resurrection. So, Christianity may not be as world-denying as is widely thought by anthro-

1. Williams, “Tony Blair.”
2. Milbank, *Theology and Social*, 1.

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pologists. Cannell has discovered that “the ambiguity of the Christian message could never be entirely diminished”³ if only because “Christian doctrine is itself paradoxical.”⁴

Cannell’s study of Mormonism throws some important light on the key role of Christianity in the historical development of dualism. Mormons are not proper Christians, Cannell was told respectfully but emphatically.⁵ Even people who were not confessing Christians recognized that there was something “inauthentic” about the Mormon faith,⁶ resulting in “involuntary disgust” on their part when they discovered that Cannell intended to do research on Mormonism.⁷ Cannell asked herself why her supposedly secular friends responded to her research in this way. Finding the above article by Cannell was an enlightening experience for me. Cannell, an anthropologist from the London School of Economics, has unearthed a cover-up by anthropology of its Christian roots. She has found that anthropology, that claims to be secular and religiously impartial, has deep roots in Christian tradition and teaching.

This is only one indication of the shallowness of the veneer over Christianity that is these days called secularism. I want to outline a few others in this opening chapter. Another is revealed in a book by Blommaert and Verschueren.⁸ This book records the true nature of an apparently open-armed welcome of Muslim immigrants into Belgium. Belgian people’s tolerance of such immigrants is shown to be somewhat farcical, as a discourse rooted in what the Belgian people would wish to be rather than in what they are. In 2011/2012 I initiated and participated in a *LinkedIn* discussion arising from this statement: “Anthropology grew out of Christianity. This makes the study of the Christian faith uncomfortable for anthropologists. It’s too much like looking in the mirror.” I will discuss some of the responses to this public discussion. I will look at the work of Mauss on gifts⁹ in combination with more recent writing by Maranz¹⁰ and others, and how these writings can help us to unearth some deep undercurrents of human behavior.

3. Cannell, *Anthropology of Christianity*, 42.

4. *Ibid.*, 48.

5. Cannell, “Christianity of Anthropology,” 339.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 338.

8. Blommaert and Verschueren, *Debating Diversity*.

9. Mauss, *Gift*.

10. Maranz, *African Friends*.

Finally in this chapter, I will look at the implications of secularism on the issue of race in today’s world.

Cannell explains how she sets out to do research among Mormons in Utah. She shares the responses of her colleagues to her expressed intention to do this. To her surprise her colleagues were horrified. Some showed what appeared to be a deep repugnance at the thought that she should be engaging with Mormons. Others perhaps just found her chosen topic boring! Not perturbed by such reactions, Cannell went ahead. Amongst her various research aims, one was to discover why she was meeting such reactions. That is, to use the kind of terminology that I want to focus on here—why should her non-Christian friends and colleagues be so concerned over what they believed to be an aberrant form of Christianity? Why should the distinction between one type of Christianity and another trouble in the slightest those of her colleagues who do not even profess to be Christians? Why should they be concerned at what is “authentic” as against “inauthentic” Christianity?

Cannell’s own answer to her rhetorical question is as intriguing as they come. Cannell’s research amongst the Mormons found that they have a distinctive view of heaven. Conventional Christianity, she explains, perceives a discontinuity between earth and heaven. Not so Mormons: for them “the material” of this world and the “immaterial” of the world to come “are co-existent.”¹¹ Cannell found that Mormons make no sharp distinction between the material and the spiritual. Cannell is concerned about the relationship between religion and anthropology that claims to be secular and scientific in origin. She explains that if the Mormon version instead of the Protestant and Catholic versions of Christianity had been dominant historically, anthropology could not have become what it is today. This is because, to use Cannell’s own words, contrary to what she found amongst Mormons “it has been widely argued that in Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, disdain for the flesh and for the material and the here-and-now [is] radically opposed to the spiritual and to a heaven.”¹² Further adding to the case for it having been essential that Christianity and Mormonism be the foundation in order for “modern life” to develop arises from the concept of time: Mormons’ conception of time is different from that of Catholic and Protestant Christianity, yet “the model of time implicit

11. Cannell, “Christianity of Anthropology,” 337.

12. *Ibid.*, 388.

Secularism and Africa

in the concept of modernity is . . . derived from the Christian [i.e., Catholic/Protestant] theological idea of the transcendent” shares Cannell.¹³

Cannell proposes that distinctions made in historic Christianity have had a formative defining impact on the nature of today’s anthropology. She suggests that Christianity is “anthropology’s theoretical repressed.”¹⁴ She has come to understand that Christianity, especially Protestantism, has been a precursor of secularism. That is—Protestant Christianity’s portraying “the divine [as] belonging to a world transcending, superior to, and radically incommensurable with the world of time and space”¹⁵ has enabled the radical distinction between material and spiritual that characterizes secularism today. Such a dualistic division has been especially astute in other movements associated with secularism, especially that of positivism. Positivists take the material so seriously so as to postulate that it is only material that actually exists. Such a position of extreme doubt regarding the very “existence” of the spiritual realm has recently had a profound effect on human society. This position has of late been challenged by post-modernism.

Outside of anthropology Graeme Smith gives enormous backing to this same thesis. He considers secular people to be those maintaining “the ongoing commitment to do good, understood in traditional Christian terms, without a concern for the technicalities of the teachings of the church.”¹⁶ Richard Mohr questions secularism’s “apparent independence from religion, and specifically from Christianity.”¹⁷ Mohr explains that “if secularist principles derive from Christianity and maintain their connection with Christian theology and paradigms, then they lose their claim to apply to communities adhering to other religious traditions.”¹⁸ Mohr finds that indeed secularism does derive from Christianity, as does the legal system in the West, which is his particular concern. Legal science may, according to Berman,¹⁹ if the theology that supports it is no longer accepted, no longer make sense. Mohr concedes that “secularism having grown from and within Christianity often seems to be blind to it.”²⁰

13. Ibid., 350–51.

14. Ibid., 341.

15. Ibid., 14.

16. Smith, *Short History*.

17. Mohr, “Christian Origins.”

18. Ibid., 35.

19. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 165.

20. Mohr, “Christian Origins,” 51.

The implications of what Cannell and the above scholars are saying are radical and far-reaching. If they are correct in their understanding of historical causation, then secularism owes an historical debt to Christianity. The existence of such a “debt” implies that Christianity could be a necessary stepping-stone for others to follow so as to be able to acquire a true heart-felt grasp of secularism. My use of the phrase “true heart-felt” is an attempt at making a contrast with what I suppose to be the state of many in the non-western world today, in which people pragmatically accept benefits that have accrued and are accruing from the holding of a dualistic or even positivistic view of the world, without realizing its origins. Mohr considers such failure to recognize or acknowledge one’s origins, in the case of secular law, to be perverse: “In denying its religious origins, western secular law is based on a perverse form of myth-making. . . . It is mythical because it invents an origin story which is at variance with its own history. It is perverse because it is a myth aimed at denying its mythological status, while at the same time labelling others as myth-makers and idolaters.”²¹ When not linked to its origins, the secular kind of dualism can, taken outside of the West, be more of a deceptive shallow cover than a penetrating belief.

Before moving on, I want to look at Cannell’s case and claims a little more closely. Her particular focus is on anthropology. She says that for the discipline of anthropology Christian theology “was increasingly backgrounded as time went on” because “anthropology came to believe its own claims to be a secular discipline [when] it had in fact incorporated a version of Augustinian or ascetic thinking within its own theoretical apparatus.”²² Cannell repeatedly picks up the theme of asceticism. “Ascetic ideologies” she tells us “have also powerfully shaped the language and procedures of social science itself.”²³ So then “anthropology is not always so ‘secular’ as it likes to think. Were it to become less ascetic” she adds “it may more often remember its own theological prehistory.”²⁴

Christianity Sidelined by Anthropology

A currently widespread view in which Christianity is seen as somewhat irrelevant to the development of modern secular society has according to

21. *Ibid.*, 37.

22. Cannell, “Christianity of Anthropology,” 341.

23. *Ibid.*, 352.

24. *Ibid.*

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Cannell not always been there. She tells us that “propositions about the difference made by Christianity played a critical role in the broad comparative theories of society that founded sociology and anthropology.”²⁵ Founding figures in the history of sociology, such as Mauss, Weber and Durkheim “took Christianity as having played a key role in the creation of a series of complex but definite one-way changes in social process” says Cannell.²⁶ At the same time all three of these scholars were “sceptical about the advantages of modernity.”²⁷ Hegel considered Christianity as being “positive.” This in the sense of being “contranatural” as Christianity contains “concepts and information transcending understanding and reason and requiring feelings and actions which would not come naturally to men” but “are done to order or from obedience without any spontaneous interest.”²⁸

Latterly however “Christianity [has been] . . . marginalised in the ethnographic account.”²⁹ Anthropologists did not study Christianity, except when “almost against their will . . . rather simplistically . . . [taking the] main distinguishing feature [of Christianity as being] . . . its hostility to local patterns of understanding and behaviour.”³⁰ Beidelman’s damning study of missionary activity comes to mind here.³¹ To him, “Christian missions represent the most naïve and ethnocentric, and therefore the most thorough-going facet of colonial life.”³² Missionaries were “callously ethnocentric and mindlessly romantic, at times poignantly altruistic and confusedly well meaning.”³³ He adds that “The CMS [Church Missionary Society] were unwitting agents of destruction of that which they sought to preserve, a rural society of cohesive, meaningful relations that was unaware of modern secularism . . .”³⁴ This quote does point to a theme that I will pick up later in this book. *It has been the secularism carried by Christianity and not the Christianity itself that missionaries have carried that has often “damaged” African societies.* Beidelman considered himself to be looking

25. Cannell, *Anthropology of Christianity*, 1.

26. *Ibid.*, 2.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Hegel, *On Christianity*, 167.

29. Cannell, *Anthropology of Christianity*, 8.

30. *Ibid.*, 12.

31. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism*.

32. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

33. *Ibid.*, 6.

34. *Ibid.*, 151.

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“Religion” Essential

“out” from anthropology to Christianity, not realizing that his analysis was not only colored but even determined by the fact that his vantage point had itself been profoundly formed by the very thing he was looking-out-at.

Cannell credits the psychological make-up of modern man to formative influences of Christianity. She does this by drawing on Hegel who realized that in Christianity “the divine [was] . . . belonging to a world transcending, superior to, and radically incommensurable with the world of time and space.”³⁵ This was a view of God who can be absent even while present. This resulted in a movement away from monistic views of causation in which everything is imbued with spiritual powers. This in turn contributed to theories of personal interiority, culminating in the “creation of the modern western person under capitalism.”³⁶ Calvinism in particular, explains Cannell “produces the notion of the Christian as necessarily imitating God through a process of the constant exercise of the will in the process of self-fashioning.”³⁷

Asad questions the way religion itself is understood in the modern world. “In much nineteenth-century revolutionary thought, religion was considered to be an early human condition from which modern law, science and politics emerged and became detached” he relates.³⁸ As far as Asad is concerned this is no longer a credible belief, although it has contributed to today’s view in which religion is seen as a “distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other.”³⁹ It is only recently that “our concept of religion as the concept of a trans-historical essence” has been produced as a result of certain “historical shifts” shares Asad.⁴⁰ To Asad, “a trans-historical definition of religion is not viable.”⁴¹ Asad tells us that today’s concept of religious belief and experience “was an idea developed in response to problems specific to Christian theology at a particular historical juncture.”⁴²

Cavanaugh would presumably agree with Asad’s conclusions regarding the recent temporal “invention” of current conceptions of what

35. Cannell, *Anthropology of Christianity*, 14.

36. *Ibid.*, 20.

37. *Ibid.*, 21.

38. Asad, “Construction of Religion,” 115.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, 116.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 122.

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“religion” is, or what it is to be religious. Cavanaugh’s study of the reasons that underlay religion’s contemporary reputation as a source of violence draws to a surprising conclusion. Cavanaugh finds that the term religion “comes to cover virtually anything humans do that gives their lives order and meaning.”⁴³ He ascribes “the invention of the concept of religion in the modern West” to certain historical figures.⁴⁴ To Cavanaugh the problem of blaming religion arises, in part at least, due to the failure to sufficiently precisely define “religion.” Rather than being an absolute historical aspect of human society, he has found that what is known as “religion” is a product of particular, especially Christian, historical forces. This ties in with Asad’s suggestion that what might appear to be a self-evident category “has a specific Christian history.”⁴⁵ The notion that someone’s religion is an “inner” thing that is based on certain doctrines is to Asad a recent and contemporary Christian view. “It is pre-eminently the Christian church that has occupied itself with identifying, cultivating and testing belief as a verbalizable inner condition of true religion,” he claims.⁴⁶

An account by Evans-Pritchard adds fuel to the fire of our suspicion that there has been little less than a conspiracy against Christianity by social science in general, and anthropology in particular. Evans-Pritchard traces the history of anthropology to eighteenth century France. He identifies people like Saint-Simon who, seeing the necessity for a religion but perceiving shortfalls in the Catholic church, founded his own religion.⁴⁷ On similar lines according to Evans-Pritchard, Durkheim’s disparaging of the church had him advocate that there be a “secular church dedicated to the noblest aspirations of mankind.”⁴⁸ English scholars inspired in part at least by Darwin, were even less sparing of religion. Evans-Pritchard concedes that in his day almost all anthropologists, even though often for trivial reasons,⁴⁹ considered “religious faith [to be] total illusion.”⁵⁰ Evans-Pritchard recognizes that a lot of the old debates on religion were really

43. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Asad, “Construction of Religion,” 122.

46. *Ibid.*, 125–26.

47. Evans-Pritchard, “Religion and the Anthropologist,” 156.

48. *Ibid.*, 158.

49. *Ibid.*, 161.

50. *Ibid.*, 162.

groundless.⁵¹ It is amazing that religion should so come under attack, given that “the vitality of societies, even their existence is [invariably] bound up with religion” and “history shows us that the socially most efficient peoples were, and are, the most religious.”⁵²

I want to consider a more contemporary examination of the attitude of European people to religion by drawing on Blommaert and Verschueren.⁵³ This will provide an overlap with the study of language that I want to make later in this book. Blommaert and Verschueren consider Belgian people’s attitude to “migrants.” It so happens that the migrants concerned are predominantly Islamic. Belgian people portray themselves and like to think of themselves, say Blommaert and Verschueren, as very tolerant. Yet that apparent tolerance conceals deeper levels of intolerance. In other words—a widely portrayed view that whether someone is Christian or Islamic is irrelevant to Belgian hospitality conceals a deep antagonism. This demonstrates again the importance of so-called “religion” even to citizens of an apparently secular state like Belgium.

“One of the basic premises of [the] pragmatic approach [to the research taken by Blommaert and Verschueren] is that every utterance relies on a world of implicit background assumptions, supposedly shared or presented as shared, which combines with what is explicitly said in the construction of meaning.”⁵⁴ Blommaert and Verschueren want to go beyond taking people’s words at face value. Instead they take account of the contextual dependence of language, including language that is used in discussion about migrants. Blommaert and Verschueren analyze public discourse about (Islamic) migrants (i.e., immigrants into Belgium) on the part of Belgian people. They are especially concerned to search for the following four categories:

1. Explicit positive reference to migrants.
2. Explicit negative reference to migrants.
3. Implicit positive reference to migrants.
4. Implicit negative reference to migrants.⁵⁵

51. Ibid., 169.

52. Ibid., 167.

53. Blommaert and Verschueren, *Debating Diversity*.

54. Ibid., 32.

55. Ibid., 52–58.

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Explicit positive references to migrants are usually economic; ways in which they are helping the Belgium economy. Sometimes they are references to poorly defined ways in which Belgians could learn from migrants, for example in the ways in which they care for their elderly. Blommaert and Verschueren consider it onerous that implicit positive judgments of migrants are hard to find. The reason explicit negative references to migrants are hard to find, is according to Blommaert and Verschueren due to “the majority . . . self perception, rather than being indicative of a basically positive attitude vis-à-vis the ‘other.’”⁵⁶ When it comes to implicit negative references to migrants, Blommaert and Verschueren say the following: “the sense of superiority which comes along with an unquestioning confidence in ‘western’ life style and values is to be found even in the most magnanimous and benevolent attempts to show tolerance and to educate people for life in a multicultural society.”⁵⁷

I want to draw one main point from Blommaert and Verschueren’s work. This main point is that through careful analysis of what is said, and how they find that an apparently religiously neutral (i.e., secular) and tolerant Western European country, is extremely “anti” a particular religion, typically Islam, and rather intolerant. We could say that amongst the Belgian people secularism can be no more than a thin veneer over deeply held Christian convictions. So, western people’s perceiving of the problems of Islam is rooted in the understanding they have acquired from experiencing the benefits of Christianity. Indications to the contrary are “names for a noble intention and a commendable objective”⁵⁸ that are unfortunately not fulfilled. Secularism is revealed yet again to be a sparse cover for what are actually deep Christian roots, roots the nature of which it seems could only really have been laid by Christianity (as per Cannell above) of a particular doctrinal persuasion. A very-Christian Europe appears for some reason to be bending over backwards in order to perpetuate the myth that its origins are secular, while its perception of the problems of Islam is rooted in the understanding it has acquired from experiencing the benefits of Christianity.

It seemed opportune in December 2011 to take advantage of new opportunities for discussion made available by *LinkedIn*. I had already joined “the anthropology network” on *LinkedIn*. I posted the following question for discussion: “Anthropology grew out of Christianity. This makes the

56. *Ibid.*, 54.

57. *Ibid.*, 57.

58. *Ibid.*, 107.

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study of the Christian faith uncomfortable for anthropologists. It's too much like looking in the mirror.” By October 2012 we had six hundred comments, including participation by at least twenty-two people. These people doubtlessly included some qualified anthropologists, but also as this forum is open to anyone, other participants who might only have had a vague interest in anthropology. The discussion was fascinating. One of the most fascinating aspects of it was the incredulity of participants. Many responses suggested that for some people any notion that a “religion” such as Christianity could have had a founding impact on anthropology was really just incredible. I found myself mocked and belittled by some participants, as I attempted to make a case for a Christian influence on anthropology. For example, one participant accused me of being “paternalistic,” “Eurocentric,” and “provocative” for stating that which I hold now more strongly than ever to be simple historical fact.

It seems clear to me that participants in the above discussion were serious. They were not just saying what they were for nothing. Some, if not most of the participants in the discussion, seriously believed that Christianity had and has nothing serious to contribute to anthropology. Similarly, it was closely implied that Christianity had and has contributed nothing of particular value to modern life as a whole. Although participants in the discussion did not like the label positivist being applied to them for a reason I do not clearly understand, their refusal to allow a place for religion in historical development seems to me to put them into that camp. The claim made repeatedly is that anthropology is rooted in science and functioned on the basis of objectivity. In a parallel discussion that arose out of the above—respondents denied the need for anthropologists to take account of morality in the pursuance of their research. Yet in the course of discussing this it became clear that even the decision to be an anthropologist is morally loaded: perhaps the person who becomes an anthropologist could have contributed much more to human society through becoming an engineer, research scientist, medical doctor, etc., so why be an anthropologist? Many discussants simply preferred to ignore this complication in their chosen profession or subject of interest.

Some anthropologists seem to think that their initiation has come from other than tradition-bound prior generations. In reality, unfortunately or otherwise, anthropologists are as subject to history as is everyone else. As there is no neutral/impartial person, so there is no neutral/impartial language or argument. I suggest that as also with secularism so

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anthropology has “grown from and within Christianity,”⁵⁹ and that the tenets of anthropology are rooted in long Christian tradition. Anthropology’s claims to impartiality are themselves rooted in a tradition! There seemed to be a confusion between method and context. That is—whereas a positivistic pre-suppositional base may be of value in the design of a social science research approach, it does not necessarily follow that it represents the historical foundation of all social processes and interactions. Some anthropologists and sociologists seem to be confusing their method with that which they are researching: because their method is rooted in secularism, they assume that historically human society could only be influenced by secularism.

The above appears to be too incredible a conclusion to be taken seriously by any but the most naïve. Yet it *is* being taken seriously. There are many people in Europe today who do not want to credit Christianity or any other “religion” with having set the foundational building blocks for secular life. Hence they may see *no* value for any belief in the divine in our day. Instead they seriously believe that some kind of secular atheism is a sufficient ideology for the future of the global human family.

The above conclusion made more sense before the undermining of foundationalism.⁶⁰ Up to recent decades it seems that scientists considered themselves to have discovered “absolute truth” that would in due course answer all the questions posed by mankind. Although short-sighted, it was in some ways not surprising that enthusiasts should draw such a conclusion. Science appeared to be answering more and more of the questions that theologians had long struggled and puzzled over. Sometimes theologians ended up with egg on their face, appearing to have backed the wrong horse (such as in their critique of Copernicus whose theory about the structure of the universe turned out to be correct).⁶¹ Of course, questions that science could not and cannot answer are questions of purpose, meaning and “why” things happen. In due course it has been realized that a choice made to believe in science is an arbitrary choice. There is nothing compelling in either humanity or the world that obliges people to believe in science, or that shows science or belief in objectivity or secularism as being somehow

59. Mohr, “Christian Origins,” 51.

60. Plantinga, “Reason and Belief,” 62, and Manzari, “Faith and Rationality,” 3.

61. http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Who_was_Nicolas_Copernicus

prior-to any other belief system. The concept of science itself is really a useful fiction.⁶²

As pointed out by Cavanaugh, religion has become the label for that which gives people’s lives “order and meaning.”⁶³ If science is the opposite of religion, as is often taken to be the case, then we would not expect it to provide “order and meaning.” Order and meaning even in secular and/or altruistic society has all emerged from the category of religion. “Religion” is essential. To try to deny others access to the religious tenets that underlie their own communities (whether historically or contemporarily) can be inconsiderate, unkind, unthinking or even cruel. To do so is in effect to kick away the ladder of social development. Many of the participants in the *LinkedIn* debate did not realize this. It seems, amazingly in some ways, that many authorities in sociological disciplines have not grasped this.

Weaknesses of Secularism

An article I originally wrote in 2007⁶⁴ articulates ways in which the prominence of secularism in Europe *hinders* development in Africa. In it I argue that secularism is really a belief system like any other—so in that sense is a religion. Being a “religion” without its own view of the divine or morality, however, means that it is dependent on other “religions” for its originality, origination, perpetuation, and of course basis of “order and meaning.” Secularism as practiced in Europe (and presumably elsewhere) is an outgrowth of Christianity. Hence its roots are peculiarly Christian. If it is our aim to assist Africa to gain from some of the benefits of secularism, then the case could be made that Africa needs the help of Christianity.⁶⁵

Secularism being a product arising from particular Christian doctrines means that it is itself more like a solid structure than a living organism. A living organism can move, change shape and adapt. Life in an organism can be compared to religion for a human community. A living organism heals its own wounds. Dry solid structures like walls, however, do not self-heal. The cracks in secularism will be more evident as time passes, and especially as the Christianity on which it is founded shifts and moves,

62. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 26.

63. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*.

64. Harries, “European Theology.”

65. As indicated above, what I consider to be a genuine benefit of “secularism” is the dualism that it has inherited from Christianity.

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leaving it contemporarily rootless. So Berman tells us of western legal science, that it “is a secular theology, which often makes no sense because its theological presuppositions are no longer accepted.”⁶⁶

Padgett points out that while technology need not be “anti-religious,” it is in some native-English uses “opposed to religious faith.”⁶⁷ The prominence of the secular has resulted in intervention into Africa from Europe being visibly seen as a kind of *technical process rather than a religious process*. As Cavanaugh tells us that religion really represents “order and meaning,”⁶⁸ omitting “religion” from the equation indicates that development intervention from Europe into Africa can easily lack these qualities. That lack undermines the western development enterprise. The motivation of the local person to adopt a proposed intervention, make it work, and keep it working is assumed to be a purely secular motivation towards material advantage. Yet, such advantage does not provide order and meaning. Secular development assumes that they do, or at least that they should, and it marvels at how slow Africa is to realize this. In fact, it is the outsiders who do not realize how order and meaning work.

Because the languages in which development is planned and implemented are these days usually European, development processes presuppose much that is there in Europe, but is not there in Africa. (See chapter 3 on language.) I argue later in this book that it is Africans who have had exposure to Europe, and not Europeans who have had exposure to Africa who should be leading African development. In order to enable understanding on the part of Africa, the development process should be initiated and guided using African languages and not European languages. The process of closing gaps between divergent communities such as Western as against African frequently involves a means that would fall into the category of “religion.” The latter after all is used to explain the “unknown.” Peculiarities of western behavior are, especially in African mission and Pentecostal churches, given religious interpretations. For example—western clothing styles and languages are in Africa associated with Christianity. Unfortunately, as I point out also in the article already referred to above,⁶⁹ English and other European languages have themselves been appropriated by secularism. That is to say, that many European people nowadays un-

66. Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 165.

67. Padgett, “God versus Technology,” 580.

68. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*.

69. Harries, “European Theology.”

derstand what were once “religious” terms as scientific in origin.⁷⁰ What happens then when a secularized language that is (in Africa) considered to be a “Christian” language, is interpreted monistically? For all the benefits of science in the material realm, it should be becoming clear that applying scientific principles to the interpretation of social and spiritual processes, as can happen when European languages are used in Africa, may be not only a poor fit, but also be having a seriously debilitating impact on certain human communities.

This text does not say that the whole of secularism is necessarily evil as such. The dualism inherent in secularism (arising from its Christian history) is after all, I suggest, at least partly responsible for the kinds of economic development that many nations and people these days aspire to and could benefit from. An important question for Africa is: how to get from where they are to where they want to be, assuming that the latter includes economic productivity which means being able to take advantage of some benefits of dualism? We need to ask: How much of the material benefit of secularism can Africa appropriate without necessarily adopting secularism’s views of order and meaning? How dualistic must Africa become for it to see economic productivity? A key issue that runs like a thread between comparisons of African and western cultures is that of the appropriation of dualism. This is articulated in this book through contrasting the western notion of God as distinct from the world with which he engages, with the African one in which the divine is implicitly found in many *things* in the world.

The question of the source of human prosperity needs to be addressed. It is noted that “more donated money” is not necessarily going to be the solution to Africa’s dilemmas!⁷¹ This paper suggests that “the key to meeting needs of a foreign people (on the part of the West, focusing on Africa) is to do with their heart, and to do with God.”⁷² This seems to be in contradiction to secularism’s efforts at getting Africa to adopt its approach to life. In another paper, I took a different approach to the study of secularism. On that occasion I analyzed non-western people’s understanding of secularism as if it is a “mystical religion.”⁷³ The UN claims the high moral ground for its

70. An example would be a term like “cleanse” in English, that is these days almost invariably used to refer to material rather than spiritual “cleansing.”

71. Harries, “Immorality of Aid.”

72. Harries, “European Theology.”

73. Harries, “Is Secularism.”

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Millennium Development Goals. Indeed it is hard to counter someone who claims to be about to solve global poverty, unless we look at how such is to be achieved. The Millennium Development Project (MDP) uses secular reason in an attempt to resolve issues of poverty. This follows from Sachs' belief that "cultures follow economic change rather than lead it."⁷⁴ The experts planning the implementation of MDPs have apparently not realized that their secular intentions are transformed into mystical processes in the course of cross-cultural transfer.

We need to ask ourselves how the recipients of MDP themselves may understand what is happening to them. Many people in Africa these days "know English." But their English being rooted largely in African traditions and languages (see chapter 3) is very different than western English. If the MDP is intended to bring material prosperity, and African people are accustomed to calling on their ancestors so as to provide them with material prosperity, it would seem likely that to Africans any successes of the MDP would in some important ways be credited to their ancestors. Perhaps those advocating MDP do not realize this. Perhaps also they do not always realize that their favor in Africa arises because they come with resources, and not necessarily because local people believe that they are using their resources in a particularly admirable way.

Secularism arose in Western Europe in interaction with particular Christian doctrines and peculiar events in European history such as the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, *in which others around the world have not shared*. Imagine what happens when Africans try to translate "secularism" into their own languages! What oxymorons they must come up with—"a meaningless system of meaning," "a power structure in which no powers exist," "the White man's '-ism.'" The clash of categories is mind-boggling. The understanding of the term *secularism* in African contexts, in which what in English could be known as mystical forces are prevalent, is bound to be mystical. An African understanding of secularism must be so profoundly different from western understandings that we should really invent a new English term for "secularism as understood in Africa" that is different from "secularism as understood in Europe." If secularism is so understood differently, can the same not be said of other words in use in English in Africa? Indeed so—which is one reason why it is unhelpful, even if pragmatically at times necessary, for people of vastly different "cultures" to overlap in their use of the same languages.

74. Hoksbergen et al., "International Development," 21.

We can ask whether genuine religions (i.e., unlike secularism, those that are overtly rooted in the divine) are as vulnerable as is secularism to chameleon-like behavior, i.e., being appropriated by any and sundry religious system. Clearly not. The nature of Christianity, by way of example, is overtly rooted in an understanding of God and not only of a particular cultural history. By contrast, for European secularism to “make sense” it must be interpreted in a context that includes certain cultural features that are found predominantly in the West and not elsewhere. This means that Westerners who apply principles of secularism in order to guide and govern non-western (e.g., African) people are very likely to be spreading confused rather than graspable enlightened ways of functioning.

Religion and Crossing the Intercultural Divide

Finally also in this chapter, I want to consider the issue of race and racism in relation to people’s blindness to Christian things. There is little doubt that racism is an ongoing issue in today’s world. I have commented elsewhere on ways in which racism can be aggravated by today’s global media and by the widespread use of English outside of its native territories.⁷⁵ I will not go into this again in detail here.

What I would like to build on here, is the way in which religion forms culture, and how ignoring religion can prevent the building of bridges across cultural divides. Simply speaking, if becoming a Christian is a way of bringing relationships to people of disparate cultures, then ignoring or belittling Christianity is a way of countering intercultural integration.

I would not claim that adherence to the Christian faith is a simple or guaranteed way of doing away with racial divisions. On the other hand, I think few would dispute that it is a means of bringing people of disparate races together. In this sense it could be comparable to the game of soccer, or to a love of beer drinking, or the use of a common language, or the use of a racially mixed educational set-up, all of which are potentially ways of building bridges between races.

The historical understanding presupposed in this text, however, takes us beyond this. I have shown, and will continue to show, how religion in general and Christianity in particular are culturally creative. (See also Hegel,⁷⁶ already cited above.) Our present world is one of massively ex-

75. Harries, “Racism in Reverse.”

76. Hegel, *On Christianity*, 167.

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panded opportunities in communication. Amongst other things, this has led to the desire by various people to imitate others. Particularly in Africa there is a lot of imitation of the West. In part this is simply and grossly materially motivated; other people around the world aspire to the material prosperity of Western Europe and North America. Massive efforts being engaged to help them to achieve such prosperity are not always successful. The fact that part of the key to this prosperity may have anything to do with any “religious belief” is quietly ignored by today’s secular bodies. If what we have discussed above indeed holds water, then clearly encouraging Christianization is a means of encouraging “development.”

There is little doubt in my own mind that Christianity provides a means towards the achieving of what is commonly known as socio-economic development. Evans-Pritchard, as quoted earlier, comes out in defense of “religion” in stating that: “the vitality of societies, even their existence, is bound up with religion”⁷⁷ and “history shows that the socially most efficient people were, and are, the most religious.”⁷⁸ One question is “which religion?” I make the case for the link between the Christian faith and socio-economic development in this text, as I have done in many of my other writings. The clearest and perhaps most easily recognizable way in which this occurs is that identified by Cannell as having originated with Hegel above.⁷⁹ According to Cannell, Hegel realized that amongst the distinctive features of Christianity is that it portrays “the divine [as] . . . belonging to a world transcending, superior to, and radically incommensurable with the world of time and space,”⁸⁰ but yet the same divine impacts profoundly on human societies in history. As a result, while God acts in the world, the “kingdom [of God is] no longer of this world.”⁸¹ This depiction of the divine makes possible the recognition of nature as an entity that is distinct from continuous divine intervention. This of course is the basis for dualism and in turn for scientific understanding.

This chapter has considered ways, which are often hidden in contemporary scholarship, in which so-called “religion” has a necessary and

77. Evans-Pritchard, “Religion and the Anthropologist,” 167.

78. *Ibid.*, 67.

79. My suspicion would be that this was identified long before Hegel, and can be attributed to more than one person. I made the same discovery myself and am not sure that I got it from Hegel.

80. Cannell, *Anthropology of Christianity*, 14.

81. *Ibid.*, 16.

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constant profound impact on the functioning of human societies. A contrast drawn between Christianity and Mormonism shows how particular doctrines have underlain the development of modernism in the West; if Mormonism instead of Christianity had dominated Europe, development as we know it today could not have happened. For various reasons, anthropological and other researchers have been rendered blind to the ongoing role of Christian teaching. Despite its having deep roots in Europe, many Europeans no longer perceive a role for the gospel. The recent undermining of the supposed credibility of the alternative “scientific” foundation for life appears to be frequently ignored. The failure to incorporate “religion” and perceive the mystical in intercultural communication is a very serious error that constantly frustrates so-called “development intervention” by the West in Africa and other poor parts of the world.

An Autobiography from Africa

Technology Orientation in Zambia

I WILL ATTEMPT IN this chapter to show how personal experience brought me to realize the key role for Christianity in particular, and “religion” in general, in socio-economic development on the African continent. In doing so I seek not so much to convince African people, but Westerners. I draw on twenty-six years to date of experience of living more closely with African people than has done any other contemporary western scholar that I know of. I am not implying that I have become African, only that I have observed Africa from a different angle than do some other outsiders.

I was born and raised in the UK up to age twenty-four. My only forays beyond the UK were to Western Europe until I left for my first three-year term in Zambia in August 1988. I did not anticipate finding a relationship between Christianity and development. Far from it—I was convinced that it was my agricultural training that was going to help me engage productively in the African milieu. Although I had been a practicing born-again believer since aged twelve, I did not anticipate finding that my Christian faith would be any more relevant in Africa than it had appeared to be in the UK. Following the kind of thinking that I believe to be common in the UK and the West in general these days—while motivated by my Christian faith, I did not think that it was the most important thing that I had to share. What I had that I “knew” would be of value to the Zambian people was my agricultural knowledge and experience.