Culture, Worldview and Religion: towards a biblical-reformational perspective on development

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Why is a biblical-reformational philosophy needed in Africa? Most Western missionaries taught Africans a “broken” or dualistic worldview. Because reformational philosophy advocates the biblical, holistic approach it is welcomed on our continent. It is a healing and liberating message.

What Africans, however, neither want nor can afford, is an ivory tower philosophy, playing intellectual games; a philosophy which does not do or change anything. The crucial question is how to approach our topic so that it can become more alive, concrete, with direct practical value.

Approach and aims
I start, therefore, with the more visible, viz. culture, and then move to the more invisible phenomena of worldview and religion.

In the second place, I discuss these three concepts in their relation to development. We could regard development, as both one of the greatest obsessions and one of the greatest failures of the latter half of the 20th century. Seldom has so much effort produced so little! Most of the world remains “underdeveloped”.

The way in which I would like to illustrate the practical value of a reformational (i.e. biblically inspired) philosophy can be explained with the image of a tree.

In its fruits we see the results of Western developmental efforts all over the world. As already stated, these fruits are not impressive nor do they serve the well-being of mankind. With the “tools” of a Christian philosophy I intend to query that which lies “beneath” these fruits: (1) the branches (culture) of the tree, (2) its trunk (worldview) and (3) its roots (religion).

I believe that in this way we can achieve two objectives: We can arrive at a penetrating criticism and unmasking of existing models of development, exposing the deepest reasons for their failure. We can also move closer to the alternative of a really biblically inspired idea of what wholesome development should be, instead of simply modifying existing models.

Idea of development: origins, motives, and models

The origin of the idea
The concept “development” is of Western origin—most non-Western languages do not even have such a word. The word is first mentioned in 1944 in one of the sub-committees, which drew up a constitution for the United Nations. The concept acquired official status in the inaugural address of President Harry Truman on 20 January 1949. In the late fifties and early sixties, when decolonisation reached its climax, the word “development” became part of the popular and academic vocabulary.
While up to 19 January 1949 a great variety of countries existed, the very next day all of them were divided into only two types: “developed” and “underdeveloped”. From that day onwards there was only one solution for the “underdeveloped” world: it had to be “developed” according to the Western model.

In spite of the difference between Western capitalism and Eastern Europe’s socialism, their ideas about development were basically the same: the repetition of the European success story of large scale industrialisation. The whole idea was built on Western cultural values. Development, therefore, was not something purely economic or neutral. Those who opted for development, had to accept “superior” Western culture as an inherent part of such a programme.

Furthermore, “development” may mean a lot of different things to different people. “Underdeveloped”, “developing” and “over developed” are relative concepts. One should ask in what respect a people or country is developed or underdeveloped. It may, for example, be economically highly developed, but at the same time poorly developed in terms of human relationships.

In the light of this many authors today emphasise the fact that the West did not develop the rest of the world, but rather retarded its development—the underdeveloped state of the non-Western world today is not the beginning, but the end result!

When we discuss the motives for the West to develop the rest of the world, it will become clear that they cannot be separated from Western imperialism. Development provided a reason for the West to continue involvement in the rest of the world (economically, politically and militarily)—even after decolonisation. However, because it sounded like an open and more promising concept, it was accepted by the non-Western world.

Two reasons explain why the concept of development was socially and culturally more disastrous in Africa than in the Far East: (1) Colonialism was applied more harshly and effectively (compare the slave trade); it had a much deeper impact on the African continent than in the East. (2) The East, like Japan, never regarded Western civilisation as morally superior to theirs. They only desired to master Western science and technique in order to rectify their comparative backwardness in these specific fields.

Motives behind the Western developmental mania
We should not deny that different humanitarian motives played a role in the development of the underdeveloped world. But we should also keep in mind that altruism very seldom has a place in international affairs. Usually so-called “justifying beliefs” validate the real motives, for instance that African countries needed freedom and democratic government.

I mention only a few of the most important motives:
• The belief in the so-called superiority of Western civilisation and the supposed inferiority of Africa, regarded as uncivilised, backward, childish and even barbarian.
• A guilty conscience because of centuries of slave trade and nearly a century of severe colonialism, especially in Africa.
• After decolonisation the existing world order, controlled by the West, was threatened. Development (aid) was chosen as a means for carrying out a strategy to preserve that order.
• While the USA portrayed itself as the champion of liberty and decolonisation, it in actual fact also intended to eliminate the European colonisers in order to obtain the valuable raw materials and markets of the “Third World” for its own benefit.
• During the Cold War between the USSR and the USA, both superpowers tried to win the poorer, Southern countries for their respective ideologies.
• As will become clearer in the course of this paper, all these motives combined are still not sufficient to explain the élan with which the West, not only outside but also in Western countries, has pursued development as a sacred duty. We can only fully understand this zeal when we realise that development acquired a quasi or completely religious character. It has become a secular form of salvation!

Culture, worldview and religion
The purpose of this section is to briefly describe these three concepts. I will not try to define them precisely.
**Culture**

We have many definitions of culture. I only mention the following two: the *segmental* and the *comprehensive*.

The *segmental* includes in the term culture only “spiritual” achievements like intellectual and artistic products (orchestras, performing and other arts, museums etc.). Culture is regarded as something that bestows lustre upon life. It can therefore only be acquired by the wealthier and more leisured members of society.

The *comprehensive* view of culture regards human life in its totality as culture. It includes our ordinary attitudes, customs, behaviour, values, beliefs, institutions, etc. It is not necessarily acquired by (formal) education and reserved for a section of the population. Every human being is a cultural being—prisoners and the poor included! Culture is our “frame of reference” for thought and conduct. We are hardly aware of it. It is like the air we breathe.

**Important distinctions**

I prefer the comprehensive view of culture, but realise that one should distinguish between different facets of a culture. The distinction made by reformational philosophy between different aspects of life can help us indicate which aspect of culture we have in mind: faith, moral or ethical, aesthetic, juridical or political, economic, social, lingual, technical or historical, logical, sensitive, biotic, physical, spatial and arithmetical aspects. Art is an example of the aesthetic aspect of culture and commerce of the economic.

It is important to realise that development is an aspect of culture. We should not speak of development and culture as if they are totally separate. Development is the “product” of a specific culture. We can gain more clarity when every time that we use the word “development”, we ask ourselves: What kind of development (religious, political, economic, etc.)?

**A layered view of culture**

I am aware that, while a diagram oversimplifies and should therefore always be used with great care. However, to reduce the complex phenomenon of culture to comprehensible proportions, I use the following diagram, consisting of five concentric circles:

![Layered View of Culture Diagram](image)

For the sake of simplicity, I distinguish between only five layers. Feel free to add and subtract to the number! My five layers symbolise the following aspects of a culture:

1. The *religious dimension*. We may also call it the directional dimension, because religion is the central directedness of all of human life towards the real or presumed ultimate source of meaning and authority. In the case of the Christian religion this directedness is our response to the true God who reveals himself in creation, in scripture and in Christ. The response should be according to his will summarised in the central commandment of love.

2. The *worldview dimension* provides a perspective on the interrelated character of reality and our place in it. It provides us with eyes, ears, feet, hands and a mind to serve the real God (or a substitute) in this world.

I see the distinction between religion and worldview and their interrelatedness as follows: The difference between the two is that religion is our relationship towards God, while worldview describes our relationship towards the world. But because we believe that this world belongs to God, we can never separate the two. Our service to God manifests itself in this world!

If religion is the direction towards God (or a god) and worldview indicates our place in creation, the remainder of culture indicates our task or calling. Culture is the historical manifestation of our religiously directed response to all God’s mandates for life, indicated by our understanding of creation and of our place in it.
My diagram does not solve two important problems. The first is the distinction between our central religious commitment and the dimension of faith. This is a very important distinction because it prohibits the identification of all-encompassing religion with only one aspect of life—the faith aspect.

The second is whether we regard religion and worldview as part of culture. The whole of human life is religion that is service of God or of a substitute. Religion and worldview are influenced by culture; they have a cultural side. But is it correct to regard them as such as cultural phenomena?

3. The “social” dimension. Because I could not find a more appropriate term, I put “social” in quotation marks. It includes inter alia morals, arts, politics, economics, language, styles of thinking, the way our emotions are expressed as well as the different societal relationships, like marriage, family, the state, business.

4. The material or technical dimension includes food, clothes, tools, machines, buildings etc.

5. The behavioural dimension includes our habits, customs, and behaviour—our lifestyle.

The value of the model

• It is integrated, holistic. I deliberately put light, dotted lines between the five different layers to indicate that we may distinguish them from each other, but can never clearly separate them. The two-way arrows between the different layers emphasise that they are mutually interrelated.

• Visibility and describability. The diagram indicates that not only the more visible aspects of a culture are important, but also its deeper, invisible core facets, like worldview and religion.

• Cultural change. The outer, “softer” layers of a culture usually change more easily. The “harder” core is more resistant to change.

• The determining role of the core. The heart or soul of a culture is its religion and worldview. This directs the outer, more visible cultural layers. Only in the light of a specific religion and worldview can we properly understand the outer cultural manifestations. Real, deep change in culture is stimulated from the core.

Limitations of the model

All these reservations are related to the fact that real life is always much more complicated than our schematic, theoretical models. We should therefore never absolutise any model, but rather be willing to relativise it in the light of the complexities of reality.

• I would like to keep religion and worldview in the centre. As far as layers 3 to 5 are concerned, I have no order of priority in mind—in the sense that 3 is built on 2, 4 on 3 and 5 on 4.

• My model should not encourage the idea that religion, worldview and other aspects of culture are static entities. All cultures change, some slowly, others more rapidly.

• My model should also not create the impression of a homogenous or pure culture. Culture is usually a hybrid or mixture—especially in our contemporary, multi-cultural world.

• We cannot (physically) see a religion or worldview. Therefore we will have to derive their features from their more visible, concrete manifestations in the other aspects of a culture.

• Not only does religion and worldview influence culture, but the rest of culture influences religion and worldview too.

• Such a change caused by the influence of the outer layers of a culture on the centre may result in a complete “power shift” in the core. Thus, the original religious commitment may be destroyed and replaced. More often—at least initially—the result is a dual, split religious and worldview loyalty.

We should therefore reckon with the fact that while older, “closed” cultures had a single religious core, cultures may have more than one religious centre in the contemporary, “open”, multicultural world. It seems however, that one of them gradually becomes dominant. This is noticeable in secularism, which marginalises other religions so that they start functioning “outside” the core.

Cultural diversity

Today, more than in any previous time in history, we are confronted with cultural diversity. How is this great variety to be explained? How should we evaluate different cultures?
In previous publication (Van der Walt, 1997) my conclusion had been that every culture contains something good and beautiful, because it emphasises an important relationship. At the same time every culture has its “valleys” and “blind spots”, because it does not acknowledge the equality of these four basic relationships.

I can therefore not accept ethnocentrism—neither Eurocentrism nor Afrocentrism—which believes that its own culture is the only true and wholesome culture. Neither can I accept present-day relativism that is of the opinion that, because cultures and their cultural traits or features are equally true or good, they should not be judged, criticised or changed.

**Cultural interaction**
Evaluating different cultures becomes even more tricky when they interact with each other. Western development is a clear example of this encounter and interaction of cultures.

The older theories in this regard could be described as theories about “development and culture”. In the oldest ones, non-Western cultures were regarded as a stumbling block in the path of development. In more recent ones, traditional, indigenous cultures are viewed as something positive, which may aid Western development projects. Nevertheless, the basic viewpoint has not changed. Culture and development are still viewed as separate entities. In the first theory they have to be separated and in the second you have to stir them together to get effective development.

Followers of more recent theories have realised that culture is not a facet of development, but rather that development is a facet of culture. I call this the theory of “development as culture”. This realisation that development is a part of culture enables us to be much more critical about different development paradigms. It assists us inter alia to view development as an encounter and interaction between the competing interests of different cultures; as the cultural intervention of one culture in another. It brings home the truth that “development” is a relative concept. It has diverse meanings in different cultures.

**Worldview and ideology**
As mentioned already, a worldview is our perspective on created reality. It is an indication of our place in the world in which we have to fulfil our cultural task. A worldview functions like a map, providing orientation; like a compass, giving direction from a deep religious commitment.

The danger of a worldview—even a Christian one—is that it can degenerate into an ideology. And ideology is an absolutised, hardened, closed, dogmatic orientation about the world, our place and cultural calling. It forces reality into its own preconceived mould and wants to change it accordingly. Basically therefore, a worldview and an ideology have the same structure, but different directions. A worldview is something normal and healthy; an ideology can be very dangerous.

**Worldview components of the development ideal**
Six, interrelated and interdependent elements of a worldview have a decisive influence on the kind of development a culture will achieve: (1) a concept of God/a god (religious orientation); (2) specific norms or values; (3) a view on being human; (4) a notion of community life; (5) a view of nature and (6) a concept of time and history. These six elements in the Western worldview that underlies the development ideal may be briefly described as follows:

1. **The concept of a god**
Different scholars have already revealed the religious character of Western development ideals. Some of these traits are: (1) The promise of a not yet visible, but better future (idea of salvation), (2) towards which the world is guided by the development experts (the “priests”), (3) providing precise prescriptions (norms), (4) which should not be questioned (because it is the only truth, the only way towards life), (5) In order to attain this all-important goal, it is considered a sacred duty to eliminate all “sinful” obstacles (like traditional cultures and religions). Unconditional obedience is required: To question the Western way of development, is to be automatically regarded as a modern-day “atheist”!
Two additional characteristics of this “religion” is that it is (6) a secular religion—the real God of the Bible has no place in it—and (7) a materialistic religion.

2. Normative concepts
Words that occur regularly in Western development language are competition, progress, growth, achievement, production and consumption. Viewed from a reformational perspective, all these words indicate things. They should, therefore, be subjected to norms. This does not only apply to these development slogans, but also to development itself. Development can never be a norm, but has to be subjected to, or evaluated from a normative perspective.

Our most basic critique of the Western worldview is its subjectivistic nature; the fact that it does not clearly distinguish between things and norms, between what is and what ought to be.

“Competition” may serve as an illustration. The concept as such cannot be good. In a normative evaluation we have to distinguish between good and bad competition. Despite some beneficial results, many writers have indicated the bad and even brutal sides of the contemporary competition mania. Finally it boils down to the “law of the jungle”, the “survival of the fittest”—wrongly regarded as the “best”.

3. View on being human
The contemporary Western view of the human person tends to lose the broader view of the human person as a multifaceted, multi-dimensional being. The human person is reduced to: (1) an economic being (economism); (2) the individual aspect of human existence (individualism); (3) a rational scientific being (scientism) and (4) a consumer of things that provide immediate satisfaction (hedonism). This Promethean person appreciates and uncritically accepts everything (e.g. technology) that may contribute towards human power to control, dominate and exploit reality.

4. View on community or society
The West’s individualistic view of human nature leads to an individualistic view of community life. All human activities (education, politics, commerce, etc.) are geared towards the enhancement of the individual. It highly favours the rights of the individual. Individualism, sees a kind of mechanistic, atomistic relationship between individuals and between different societal relationships.

5. View of nature
In the modern Western worldview, nature is viewed more or less as an object, separate from humans, their opponent. Nature should be conquered, used and even exploited for human benefit.

6. View of time and history
The essence of the contemporary Western concept of time can be summarised as follows (for more details, see Van der Walt, 1997. pp. 51-71, as well as 1999, pp. 182-184): Time is a commodity “outside” the human persons “through” which they move. They have to use and fill it. This is evident from expressions like time lost, saved, made up, passed and time wasted. Time is furthermore something abstract, independent of ordinary life, measured and determined by a clock on the wall or a watch on one’s arm.

This view of time is impoverishing because it reduces humans to slaves of time. It results in the well-known rat race, tense human relationships and alienation from one another. On the other hand, it leads to punctuality, thorough planning and tight schedules.

The development outcomes of this worldview
The general conclusion today—after 50 years of development efforts all over the world—is that the expected results have not materialised. Failure is not only a fact in the non-Western world, but even in the West itself. Because the capitalist economy believed in the fairness of the “free” market, it could not alleviate poverty. Because it emphasised
production, it could not value human labour. Because it viewed nature as a commodity to be exploited, it contributed towards ecological damage.

Goudzwaard and De Lange in their book (1994) list six paradoxes we face today: (1) the scarcity paradox: unprecedented abundance, but at the same time greater scarcity; (2) the health paradox: improved medical care, but the simultaneous increase in all diseases; (3) the time paradox: more and more time-saving devices, but less time to get through schedules; (4) the poverty paradox: increasing wealth alongside dire poverty; (5) the labour paradox: a greater need for jobs, but at the same time growing unemployment, and (6) the care paradox: increased possibilities for the care for humans and their environment, but practical decrease and deterioration.

The traditional African worldview
Although traditional African culture and worldview has been suppressed and modified, it has survived. And, in spite of great local variety sub-Saharan Africa has a remarkable number of common cultural characteristics. We may, therefore, speak of a traditional African culture and worldview that remains influential in Africa. Limitations of space prevent a detailed presentation of this, but the table on pages 7 and 8 summarises its main features in comparison with the Western and biblical-reformational views.

A Christian-reformational worldview
Only a reformational, biblically based worldview is capable of providing a framework for development that will liberate us from the distortions of the dominant Western worldview leading to the life in abundance that Jesus Christ came to the world to give us—John 10:10.

Culture is historically determined. Every period in history reveals its own brand. This is also clear from the word of God which reveals that the history of mankind developed through three main phases, namely creation, fall into sin and redemption in Christ. History will culminate in the final consummation, when Christ returns to live with us on a new earth.

We are waiting for his coming to this world, will be completed at his final, second coming when he will completely renew everything. The human direction, place and task were different in each of these three divisions of history.

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<td>The personal God of the Bible, Creator, Sustainer and highest Authority. Christian.</td>
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<td>Norms</td>
<td>Heteronomy: God’s will, revealed in his commandments (both directional and structural) to be positivised in norms for different areas of life.</td>
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<td>Man</td>
<td>A multi-dimensional anthropology: all the different aspects of being human to be developed in a balanced way.</td>
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<td>Community</td>
<td>Individuality and communality are complementary facets of multi-dimensional man; both to be developed to enhance individual and community. Anti-totalitarian.</td>
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<td>Nature</td>
<td>Viewed Biblically: Man distinguished from, but not separated from nature—has to use and protect it in a stewardly way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time and History</td>
<td>Granted by God both to be used and enjoyed in a responsible way. Past, present and future are equally important.</td>
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**Creation**

- The *direction* of human life was towards the true God.
- The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created in the image of God, indicating that they obeyed his commandments.
- The essence of their *humanity* was that they were God’s stewards. Their place was that of trustees—not masters—who had to see to it that creation in its immense richness and diversity should develop, evolve, unfold and reveal its potential.
- Adam and Eve not only served God and acted according to the will of the God they served, they also created a community life (marriage, family etc.) which reflected their concept of being human and also revealed the God they served.
- They were permitted to use *nature* as part of God’s creation entrusted to them. They did not misuse nor exploit it, but used it carefully and respectfully.
- Finally, they knew how to both use and enjoy the *time* God granted them.

The *direction* of their lives was correct. They knew their place in God’s creation. They could, therefore, also fulfill their *calling*, the cultural mandate entrusted to them by God. They could perform their task in a balanced way, enjoying life in its fullness.
Fall
When Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation of the Evil One, everything changed.
• Their hearts were now directed away from God towards themselves. They rejected being the image of God and wanted to be like God!
• They consequently did not want to obey God’s *commandments*. They preferred to be a law unto themselves (autonomous)—not realising that it was a contradiction in terms. By doing so, they lost their *place* in creation, namely that of *stewards*. Instead of *taking care* of God’s creation, they were hiding behind trees! (Genesis 3:8).
• They also lost the real meaning of *being human*.
• They began creating a *community* (see the rest of the Genesis story) not directed by love, but by hatred, a reflection of their own corrupted nature.
• While it was not clear directly after the fall, how reckless and harsh humans would treat nature, it is evident today. The simple fact that God banned them from the Garden of Eden was an indication that they were not regarded fit, capable, responsible caretakers any longer.
• Finally fallen humans had forgotten how to correctly use and enjoy the time God had given them. Because they misused it, their life span was decreased (Genesis 6:3).

Insight into what happened at the fall, enables us to interpret present day development programmes. They are secular, without any *directedness* towards God. They are executed by human beings who have forgotten their proper *place* in creation: stewards entrusted with the task to serve God and their fellow human beings according to his laws. Instead, through development, humans now try to serve and save themselves according to their own norms.

Reformation as a return to the correct norms
We now live between the times. Christ redeemed the world, but the final result will only be fully visible when he returns to earth. We live in a different historical epoch than that of creation or fall. The good seeds and the weeds grow together (Matthew 13:37-43).

The real biblical worldview does not want to return to an idealised past. Neither does it try, like the Western worldview, to create a future utopia. In spite of the fact that it emphasises our human responsibility in the present to reform the world, it believes that only God will finally bring about a new heaven and a new earth.

Each of the six components of a biblical-reformational worldview is important for reformation. If, however, we have to select the most important for our topic, it will be the normative component. Reformation in essence can be described as a return to the correct norms applicable to the different aspects of our lives.

The Western worldview believes in individual human autonomy and the African worldview in communal autonomy. Both imply a subjectivistic view of God’s will. Instead of obeying God’s laws, humans elevate themselves to the status of law.

The character of norms
In the place of both kinds of autonomy, Christians will have to reply with heteronomy: norms do not originate from ourselves, but from a Higher Authority.

We have to (1) obey God’s will which is (2) expressed in different laws, e.g. the Ten Commandments but also revealed in the history of God’s dealing with Israel and in the life of Christ. Because these laws were given to a specific nation in specific historical circumstances, we have to (3) “translate” them as norms relevant to ourselves, living today under quite different circumstances.

*Briefly defined, norms are our human and fallible responses or answers to the real God or an idol whose will we regard as the highest authority.*

Although our norms are time-bound and fallible—they have to be reformed continuously—they play a very important role, providing: (1) direction to our lives, (2) indicating limits to what may be done, as well as (3) what ought to be done. In other words, they teach us how to distinguish between what is bad as a result of the fall, as well as how we should reform life to attain the goodness possible through Christ’s redemption.
Because development is multifaceted, it is not sufficient to apply only one kind of norm. Even when we concentrate on one kind of development, for instance economic development, the rest of life cannot be excluded. Economic development has consequences for the rest of our lives. Therefore, the simultaneous application of all norms is necessary! This multidimensional character of development requires an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach when studied by scholars.

**How to know that we are following the correct norms**

Since the norms of our Christian worldview are fallible responses, influenced by our own culture, how then can we know that they are the correct norms to guide us in our task of reformation?

Our first answer is that we will have to test and retest them continuously against God’s laws or mandates as revealed in the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ.

The second answer to this important question is that God also reveals his will in our everyday lives. We have to watch creation carefully for “green lights” and “red lights”. The green lights are signs that the norms prescribed by our worldview are the correct ones. This happens when people experience joy, physical and spiritual health, peace—in brief: the fullness of life.

The red lights serve as warning signals. They flash in the case of disorientation, a lack of vision, pain (physical, psychological and spiritual), suffering (of different kinds), the death of humans and animals and damage done to the rest of creation. These signs are an indication that the norms provided by our worldview are wrong—in spite of the fact that they may be called “Christian”.

Western inspired development in Africa should be subjected to this kind of normative evaluation from the perspective of the true experience of the African people. A clear direction, hope and genuine, full human well-being are green lights. Disorientation, hopelessness, damage to the environment, suffering, pain and death committed to the animal and human world, are however flashing red signals, warning that development is directed by the wrong norms.

I therefore believe that we should not only “read” creation in the light of Scripture, but that it is as necessary to interpret the Scriptures in the light of God’s creational revelation.

At the same time we should keep in mind that the “voices from creation” are only aids to keep us on the correct normative tract. They cannot provide us with the final yardstick of what is good or bad, right or wrong. We may ignore the flashing red signals and try to explain them as “teething problems” or “necessary sacrifices” if we want to reach the final goal.

**Structural and directional norms**

Important in our normative approach is the distinction between *structure* and *direction*. *Structure* is connected to creation. Creation as it was meant to be, had to answer to God’s creation order. *Direction* indicates obedience to God’s central commandment of love towards him and our fellow-creatures. This direction was changed at the fall. Love towards God and our neighbour changed direction, away from God and from our fellow creatures towards ourselves. Through Christ’s redemptive suffering, however, it became possible for our lives to be redirected.

Both structure and direction, therefore, are subjected to God’s will. The first is subjected to his creation ordinances and the second to his fundamental, directional commandment of love. In the normative evaluation of any cultural product *both* have to be considered.

A book, for instance, has to comply with the following *structural* criteria: understandable language, no spelling mistakes, clear typography, attractive technical workmanship, etcetera. If this is the case, we may still not call it a “good” book in the full sense of the word. This is determined by the *direction* of the contents of the book. If it is God-denying and morally offensive, it cannot be called “good”, because—as Da Costa once said—it is a step in the direction of hell and not heaven.

The same applies to development: it should be both structurally and directionally good to be really beneficial. We may encounter development projects which may be acceptable structurally, but when its direction is considered its wrong religious direction is revealed—it is not motivated by real love. The reverse situation is also possible. The direction may be correct, e.g. it could be inspired by real love towards God and our fellow creatures, but the people involved do not have the slightest idea of the structural requirements for effective development!
“Love” indicates the will of God in its fullness. In his commandments God “dissects” love into various kinds. We should keep in mind that “love” as such is an abstraction. It always acquires different shapes in different areas of life. In marriage it takes on the form of mutual troth; in the family of paternal and maternal love as well as the love of children towards their parents; in the church as brotherly/sisterly love; in the state as public justice and in business as stewardship. In our task of development we should also manifest the central love commandment in a specific manner.

**A biblical-reformational development perspective**

This concluding section unites the lines already drawn, providing the final result of the previous pages. It starts with a preliminary new definition of development from a Christian perspective:

> Development is the (1) balanced unfolding of (2) all the abilities of the human being and (3) the potential of material things, plants and animals (4) according to God’s purpose and (5) his will, to enable the human being (6) within his/her own culture, (7) to fulfil his/her calling (8) as a responsible steward of creation (9) in a free society (10) to the honour and glory of God.

Because the quality of development is dependent on all six components of a reformational worldview (as will become evident in the following exposition) I have included them in this definition.

**Balanced unfolding**

Development may be compared (but cannot be identified) with the *physical* development of a crystal or the *biological* development of a plant, animal or human being. The reason why we should also distinguish it from these kinds of development, is the awesome historical power God granted humans when he gave them the cultural mandate. Such power implies not only physical-biological development. Humans have also the task to develop the emotional, logical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical and religious aspects of reality to reveal its diverse richness.

All these aspects should, however, be developed harmoniously. Not only one aspect, like the economic, should be developed, but all of them simultaneously—even when the emphasis is on economic development. Otherwise the result is a one-sided, distorted development. Development does not mean more (quantity) of one facet, but better (quality) for the whole. Also, development in any one aspect cannot be continued limitlessly in a creation that itself is limited.

Harmonious, balanced development has another implication. Development does not only mean, “to take out of”, but also “to put back into” creation. Development should not exploit and impoverish creation, but rather enrich it. Against the Western idea of restless progress, we should also emphasise that development does not only entail “evolvement” but also “involvement”; not only a “turning out” (of many products), but also a “turning in”—in other words to keep, maintain, protect, save and preserve.

**Of all the abilities of the human being**

The human person is multi-dimensional and not only one- or two-dimensional. Humans are not merely individual or communal beings nor even a combination of them. Human existence reveals a faith, ethical/moral, juridical, aesthetic, economic, lingual, logical, emotional, biological and physical aspect, ability or capacity—all of which have to be developed in a balanced way. To be involved in development from, for example, the perspective of humans as “nothing but economic beings” will result in dangerous, one sided development. Such development will lead to the treating of the human person as an economic “commodity” that has to produce and consume.

**The potential of material things, plants and animals**

This section of the definition of development includes the next element of our worldview, namely our view of nature. We continue to discover the vast potential and immense richness of the material, plant and animal worlds and their value for human life.

A Christian perspective on nature and its development can, however, not be divorced from our view of God. All creation belongs to him—Psalm 24:1. Every creature has an intrinsic value to him. They are not only valuable
because they are useful to humanity. We are therefore not allowed to treat them simply as “objects” or “raw material”. They should not in the first place serve us. We, as stewards of God, should serve them, respecting and protecting them. Using nature is not prohibited, but misusing it is a sin against its Owner and nature itself. Apart from religious sins (against God) and moral sins (against humanity), our ecological sins should also be acknowledged!

**According to God’s purpose**

With this section of my definition I include the time component of our biblical worldview. As in the case of the other elements of a worldview, this one too, cannot be separated from our notion of God: our goal for development should be determined by his design for or aim with creation.

As indicated already, this world was created, fell into sin, was redeemed and is moving towards its consummation in a new earth. Then God’s kingdom will be visible in its full glory: (1) he will be acknowledged as the only King (2) of the entire new creation, (3) where we will fully enjoy the blessings of his kingdom.

This new creation will not be another creation, but a renewed creation (see different sections of Isaiah and Revelation). Because God is not rejecting the present, but will be renewing it in future, the positive results of our cultural task will be welcomed on the new earth—Revelation 21:24,26.

**According to his will**

The fact that the normative is the key element for a reformation of present day developmental ideas, clearly indicates that we will have to think anew about the dominant ideas about development, not merely adapting or modifying them. We will again have to start asking some basic questions: Why is development necessary in the first place? For whom is it intended? What kind of development is planned? With what goal in mind? What will the results be? Who will benefit? And above all: According to what norms?

**To enable human beings within their own culture**

God gave us a cultural mandate. He even looks forward to the purified results of this task on the new earth. He does not expect us to serve him isolated from our own culture. We should do it through and within our own culture because we cannot do otherwise. As indicated above, the fact that God’s Word associates itself with different cultures (relative continuity), implies that he simultaneously liberates and transforms them (radical discontinuity).

What should be emphasised, however, is that every community has the right to develop according to its own cultural criteria, provided that people are not uncritical about their own culture. There is no reason why there should only be one ideal of development, e.g. a Western, African or Japanese.

**To fulfil the human calling**

With his cultural mandate God calls all human beings to fulfil a task. Development, as part of our cultural task, is also a divine calling. We cannot divorce any aspect of development from our relationship to God. We may, therefore, not call it a “secular” duty, next to or separated from our “religious” duties of praying, reading the Bible and attending church on Sundays.

God not only calls ministers and priests or church officers. All of us are called to a calling in which we fulfil our task of developing different aspects of life: the social, political, economic, etc.

**As a responsible steward**

God’s cultural mandate, that is the basis of our development task, does not imply that humans are the owners, proprietors or rulers of creation: they are only God’s deputies, managers, trustees or servants. The word *steward* summarises all of them.

To be a steward does not indicate less responsibility than an owner. God placed a huge responsibility on our shoulders when, at the beginning, he created our ancestors, Eve and Adam, as stewards. Stewards have a double responsibility: towards the Owner of creation as well as towards creation! And as far as creation is concerned, we
have the difficult task of both using and protecting it. As stewards we have to use it for our real needs, but protect it against our own sinful, selfish desires.

**In a free society**
This section of my definition brings into focus another element of our worldview: the communal or societal. We have a calling to serve God in different offices in a great variety of societal relationships. In each one of them we encounter officers and members. The officers need authority and power to fulfil their task. Authority and power as such are not wrong, but their misuse is. When misused, it robs the members of specific societal relationships of the necessary freedom to fulfil their calling of developing themselves and the rest of creation.

Real authority from a biblical perspective does not mean domination for own benefit, but service to others for their benefit, empowering them to be able to fulfil their diverse divine callings. Real authority, therefore, requires
(1) insight into God’s will for the specific societal relationship;
(2) a willingness to obey this norm;
(3) the protection and promotion of the interests of those subjected to one’s authority and
(4) combating evil as it is manifested in the specific societal relationship.

Development, therefore, cannot simply be planned and executed in an authoritarian way from the top down. Leadership has to empower people at grass roots, from where real development has to germinate.

**To the honour and glory of God**
This last section of our definition is not a pious attachment. The six elements of a Christian worldview may be distinguishable, but are inseparable. In the explanation of the previous parts of my definition, it was already clear that not one of them could be detached from our idea of God. We should live before the face or in the presence of God. Life—our entire life—is religion.

At the same time, God did not only call us to live in his presence in everything we do, but that he himself should also be the final goal of everything we do. The highest norm according to which we should measure our development projects is to ask the question: Is it done to the honour and glory of God? If it is merely done for the benefit of the individual or the community, it cannot qualify as genuine development according to biblical standards. It may structurally speaking be fine, but its final direction is wrong.

**Review**
This paper dealt with the influence of culture, worldview and religion on development ideals. At the beginning I explained why I have focused on development. It was not merely because of a theoretical interest, but because of an existential urgency.

The African continent has become more or less irrelevant in the world economy. It is not even any longer considered a cheap source of raw materials. Two thirds of the less developed countries of the world are in Africa. Investment in education has in the last ten years dropped by 25% and health care services by no less than 50%!

About 10,000 children die daily because of malnutrition and/or being underfed. Africa’s foreign debt has increased faster than any other region in the “Third World”: from 6 billion US dollars in 1970 to 300 billion US dollar in 1993. In my own country, South Africa—one of the “rich” countries on the continent—more than 40% of the people live below the poverty line.

This is the reason why as a philosopher I could not but get involved in the issue of this paper. I am no development expert, having but little practical experience in this field. Yet, I wanted to make a contribution from my field of study, however small.

“Rather than shouting against the darkness on our continent, we should light a candle. Because with only one small candle, our continent will not be absolutely dark anymore.” A Christian brother in one of our African countries gave this advice to me long ago when I felt very pessimistic about the future of this vast continent with its huge potential for development. I have tried to follow his advice.
References


