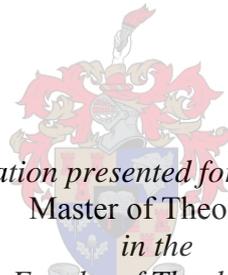


SECULAR HUMANISM IN MALAWI: A HISTORICAL-THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

By

MICHAEL JOHN JONIFANI PHIRI



*Dissertation presented for the degree of
Master of Theology
in the
Faculty of Theology at
Stellenbosch University*

Supervisor: Prof. Robert Vosloo

Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology

April 2014

DECLARATION

I declare that the entirety of this work is original and my own and that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to present a historical-theological inquiry regarding secular humanism in Malawi. Some Christians have tried to respond, but there has been no detailed historical-theological response from the Church or theologians, nor has there been any critical investigation into the philosophy and underlying assumptions of secular humanism (understood as a specific movement and a broader intellectual current). (SHOULD BE REMOVED)

The study is both historical and theological in perspective. It is historical, in that secular humanism is dealt with from a historical dimension, whereby its development over centuries is traced and lessons are learnt on how to respond to this movement in Malawi today. This study is also theological, in that it explores whether Christian humanism can engage constructively with concerns raised by secular humanists. It describes secular humanism on the level of its underlying assumptions, which are laid bare and their possible weaknesses exposed. The researcher holds that a critique of the assumptions is of greater merit than that which ends only on the level of specific arguments. Such a method of critiquing is borrowed from Klaus Nürnberger, who in his book *Richard Dawkins' God Delusion: A Repentant Refutation*, critiqued Dawkins on the level of assumptions as well as Alister and Joanna McGrath who, in their book *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, challenged Dawkins at representative points, leaving it to readers to judge the overall reliability of his evidence and position. This is not to throw away specific arguments for it is through such arguments that we discern assumptions. This study is a critical engagement with the assumptions of secular humanism in Malawi, with the goal of responding to the challenges posed by their critique of religiosity.

The study seeks to offer a constructive and adequate way of engaging Secular humanists and at the same time, explores whether Christian humanism is ideal in engaging concerns raised by secular humanists. The Christian humanist John W. de Gruchy is studied. He drew from John Calvin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the study also shows how he made use of their insights.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie tesis is om 'n histories-teologiese ondersoek aangaande Sekulêre humanisme in Malawi in te stel. Sommige Christene het probeer reageer, maar tot dusver was daar nog nie 'n georganiseerde en sistematiese histories-teologiese reaksie van die Kerk of teoloë nie, daar was ook nog nie enige kritiese ondersoek na die filosofie en onderliggende aannames van Sekulêre humanisme (hier verstaan as 'n spesifieke beweging en 'n breër intellektuele stroming). (SHOULD BE REMOVED)

Hierdie studie is sowel histories as teologies in perspektief. Dit is histories, in dat Sekulêre humanisme vanuit 'n historiese dimensie benader word, waardeur die ontwikkeling oor eeue heen gevolg word en lesse geleer word oor hoe om te reageer op hierdie beweging tans in Malawi. Die studie is ook teologies, in die sin dat dit van die aanname uitgaan dat Christelike humanisme konstruktief met die vraagstelling wat Sekulêre humaniste op die tafel plaas, kan omgaan. Dit beskryf Sekulêre humanisme op die vlak van die onderliggende aannames, wat uitgelig word en waarvan die moontlike swakhede ontbloot word. Die navorser voer aan dat 'n kritiek van die aannames van groter meriete is as een wat eindig op die vlak van spesifieke argumente. Hierdie metode van kriticisering word geleen van Klaus Nurnberger, wat is sy boek *Richard Dawkins' God Delusion: A Repentant Refutation*, Dawkins kritiseer op die vlak van aannames, asook Alister en Joanna McGrath, wat in hulle boek *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, Dawkins op verteenwoordigende punte uitdaag, wat dit aan die lesers oorlaat om die oorhoofse geloofwaardigheid van sy bewyse en standpunt te bepaal. Dit is nie om spesifieke argumente weg te gooi nie, aangesien dit deur sulke argumente is wat ons aannames onderskei. Die studie is 'n kritiese omgaan met die aannames en filosofie van Sekulêre humanisme in Malawi, met die doel om te reageer op die uitdagings wat deur hulle kritiek van godsdiens gebied word.

Hierdie studie poog om op 'n konstruktiewe manier met Sekulêre humaniste om te gaan en bied terselfdertyd Christelike humanisme aan as die ideaal in die omgaan met die vraagstellings wat Sekulêre humaniste opper. Die Christelike humanis John W. de Gruchy is 'n voorbeeld van hoe 'n Christelike humanitiese veldtog uitgevoer kan word. Hy bou op Johannes Calvyn en Dietrich Bonhoeffer en die studie dui ook aan hoe hy van hulle insigte gebruik maak.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Let me take this opportunity to express heartfelt gratitude to God, some people and institutions for their support in the course of my studies for the Degree of Master of Theology.

Sincere gratitude to God Almighty for providing me with the spiritual, material and financial resources which enabled me to reach thus far. I attribute this achievement to God.

I thank my wife for encouraging me and for being supportive of my studies. Her love and encouragement made my research and writing easier and smooth.

Gratitude should go to my mother and late father for preparing me for this level of studies and service. They wonderfully encouraged me to go to school and taught me God's Word while I was young. They gave me moral and spiritual support when I heard God's call for ministry.

I thank my Promoter, Prof. Robert Vosloo, for the direction and insights he gave me and for exposing me to various reading materials. He inspired me to work hard and finish the dissertation on schedule.

Thanks go to the NG Kerk in South Africa, the Hope Project, the Grange Baptist Church in England, Zambesi Mission, Bethesda Church in Ipswich, Pastor Andrew Docherty and Michael Priestley for their invaluable financial support, without which my studies would not be possible.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Theme

Secular humanism is growing in Malawi. The Association for Secular Humanism (ASH) is treated in this dissertation as representative of the broad intellectual current of Secular humanism in Malawi. Secular humanism in Malawi, however, is not limited to the Association for Secular Humanism, but is much broader. The Association is only the embodiment of the philosophy and agenda of Secular humanism. Secular humanism has caused a stir in both Christian and non-Christian circles. The secular humanists' arguments, teachings and beliefs in informal conversations and in both electronic and the printed media are deemed provocative by many people. This intellectual current is regarded by many Malawians as cancerous and leading to the eventual erosion of morality and human dignity. Nevertheless, it is growing in both scope and membership. This study offers a historical-theological engagement with this movement; hence the thesis is entitled *Secular Humanism in Malawi: A Historical Theological Inquiry*.

1.2 Research Questions

The main research question investigates the nature of, and challenges brought by, Secular humanism in Malawi. Both the Church and society are challenged by Secular humanism. Secular humanism is studied from the broader context of the New Atheism movement, secularisation theory and post-modernity. How is this movement to be understood? What are its roots and history? What would an adequate historical-theological response entail? The socio-economic and political concerns raised by Secular humanists are genuine, but does the remedy lie in the teachings of secular humanism?

The secondary question deals with whether Christian humanism does provide a better option. This question requires a closer look at Christian Humanism's historical origins and some of its well-known proponents.

1.3 Working Hypothesis

This thesis will evaluate the assertion that secular humanism poses challenges to both the spiritual and moral welfare of Malawi. The question can be asked whether secular humanism

can act as a panacea to the social ills and dehumanisation facing our nation, or whether it would not contribute to the problem. The thesis will argue that Christian humanism (rightly understood and applied) could enrich the discourse on humanism, secularity and religion in Malawi, also as a challenge to some of the harmful effects of Christian fundamentalism. Adherence to the ideals of Christian humanism can lead the nation to dignified life for all sections of its citizens. Secularism does not necessarily follow from scientific knowledge and advancement. Accordingly, the advancement of science and technology in Malawi is not an automatic threat to faith and religious belief. The nation can advance scientifically and technologically without abandoning the sacred dimension of life.

1.4 Methodology

The methodological approach will be a literary analysis of books and articles. Books will be studied to explore the roots and historical development of secular humanist movement. Books by prominent atheists like Richard Dawkins will be read to explore their major teachings and assumptions. Works that are critical of secular humanism, such as the work of David Bentley Hart, will be studied as they will help in critiquing secular humanists in Malawi. Article publications of the Association for Secular Humanism in Malawi will be read to determine the main ideas and underlying assumptions of secular humanism. The articles will be grouped under representative topics. Works on Christian humanism will be studied to understand its development from the Renaissance period up to the present day. A major resource on Christian humanism will be books by John W. de Gruchy. He is a renowned Christian humanist in South Africa and his works provide helpful insights for any humanist imperative.

Another literature resource will be books on the history of Christianity in Malawi which will show that the spirit of Christian humanism has been there in Malawi though the name itself has not been used. Books on African theology and philosophy will also be used to explore how deeply rooted religiosity in traditional Africa, and Malawi in particular, is.

The study is from historical-theological perspective. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no author or theologian in Malawi has yet described secular humanism from that perspective.

1.5 Structure of Argument

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter one introduces the theme, research question, hypothesis, methodology and structure of the thesis.

Chapter two presents the roots and historical development of secular humanism. The chapter will very briefly trace Secular humanism (which took on different forms, of course) from its roots in Ancient India and Greece down through the Enlightenment to the present time. The main source used in this chapter will be a book by Stephen Law, titled *Humanism: A Very Brief Introduction*. In addition, a book by James C. Livingston, titled *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century* will be used. Special treatment will be given to Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins. It is noted that George Thindwa, the most prominent representative of secular humanism in Malawi, uses these men as the principal source for most of the arguments he makes. Moreover, these are some of the principal representatives of the secular humanists in the world and treatment of their literature in this chapter will be a matter of preparing the ground for the treatment of secular humanism in Malawi in the following chapter. It will be a matter of placing secular humanism in Malawi in the context of the global debate. Critique of Richard Dawkins will be placed in a separate section. The singling out of Dawkins from the four is because he is regarded by the researcher as the most influential representative of the New Atheists today and critique of Dawkins is tantamount to critique of the New Atheist movement. In addition, Terry Eagleton's, Klaus Nurnberger's as well as Joanna and Alister McGrath's critiques of Dawkins will be presented.

Chapter three is on the rise of secular humanism in Malawi. The chapter will be of a more historical and descriptive nature and will present the rise, teachings and activities of secular humanists in Malawi. It will also note some possible questions that can be addressed to Secular humanists. The Association for Secular Humanism (ASH) was founded in Malawi in 2006 but is still struggling with the Malawi Government for registration. The Association is growing rapidly and counts well-known politicians and business persons among its members.

The group does not believe in the existence of God, the soul, spirits or Satan. It does not believe in creation, life after death, prayers or speaking in tongues. The group says witchcraft and religion are superstitious and unscientific whereas science is superior in explaining issues and contributes to the development of human life in socio-economic and political areas. They assert that the evidence of modern science has eliminated the necessity of religious belief. In other words, science eliminates religion. The Association claims Malawi is too superstitious

to develop and that the nation needs to cultivate reason and science, as opposed to religion and irrationality. For example, in case of drought the secular humanists say one should not be superstitious and pray to the gods for rains; one should just be rational and use the water we have for irrigation farming. The main sources of information for this chapter will include articles on secular humanism published every Sunday by secular humanists in the *Sunday Times* newspaper. Voices of some of the critics of secularism and secular humanism will be presented.

Chapter four will explore whether there is merit in adopting Christian humanism if one wants to make a plea for humanism in the Malawian context. With this in mind, this chapter will give a very brief description of Medieval scholasticism as it gave rise to Renaissance humanism. Special mention will be made of the figure of Erasmus of Rotterdam. The influence of Renaissance humanism upon Reformation icons like John Calvin will be mentioned. Special mention will be made of John Calvin and rule in Geneva, especially how ideals of Christian humanism were reflected in his life. An account will be given of how Christian humanism functioned during the Nazi regime in Germany and how it is finding expression in South Africa, with a view to learn how fruitful this intellectual current is for public discourse in Malawi today. De Gruchy's use of Calvin and Bonhoeffer will be explored.

The major sources will be two books by John W. De Gruchy, one titled *Being Human: Confessions of a Christian Humanist* and the other *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer*. The overall orientation of De Gruchy's thought will be discussed. Another book that will be incorporated into the argument is *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa* (a book edited by De Gruchy that resulted from a research project hosted by the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies).

Chapter five will be the logical follow-up to the previous chapter and will deal specifically with the context of Malawi. It will be explored whether Christian humanism can constructively engage some of the concerns of secular humanists, while still holding fast to a faithful Christian identity. An attempt will be made to trace elements of Christian humanism in the history of Malawi. Some critical questions regarding Christian humanism will also be addressed.

In the process, examples will be given on how the Church is endeavouring to tackle dehumanisation in the political and socio-economic arena in Malawi. The African

understanding of community and ideals of Ubuntu will be explored in order to ascertain to what extent they correspond with Christian humanism. Implications of using the name “Christian humanism” in Malawi will also be pointed out and suggestions for other names for the movement will be made. David Bentley Hart's award winning book, *Atheists Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, in which Hart extolled the legacy of early Christian centuries and forcefully explicated that adopting a secular humanist stance would lead to the loss of such a legacy will be one of the sources for this chapter. Following the mould of Hart, it will be shown how a legacy of almost one and half centuries of Christianity in Malawi could be challenged if Secular humanism is adopted by the majority and is allowed to exert influence on the nation.

Chapter six is the conclusion of this thesis. It offers a summary of the argument of the thesis and makes some observations about its possible contributions to further theological discourse in Malawi, also in light of the challenges posed to Christianity by secular Humanism. The chapter also presents what could be the possible agenda for Christian humanism in Malawi.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROOTS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SECULAR HUMANISM

2.1 Definition of Humanism

The term ‘humanist’ was probably first used to describe a branch of the educational curriculum: the humanities, comprising grammar, poetry, rhetoric and moral philosophy during the Renaissance (Law 2011:28). Renaissance humanism flourished during the Italian Renaissance to revive classical learning. The 15th century Italian term *umanista* meant a scholar or teacher of Classical Greek and Latin literature and the ethical philosophy behind it. The 19th century German historian Georg Voigt identified Petrarch as the first Renaissance humanist. Paul Johnson agrees that Petrarch was “the first to put into words the notion that the centuries between the fall of Rome and the present had been the age of Darkness” (Law 2011:28). Stephen Law elaborates that there was renewed interest in classical culture and teaching and an increased focus on the human towards the end of the medieval times. There was a rebirth of learning by going back to the classical writings. The Renaissance humanists applied the principle of *ad fontes*, or going back to the sources. Renaissance humanism was in no way opposed to the Church or institutional religion. Some of the humanists like Petrarch were ordained priests.

Law says that today humanism has come to refer to a worldview that is divorced from any religious belief. Secular humanists define their movement as a strictly secular philosophy and value system and eschew any religious language, whereas some religious humanists claim that humanism is a non-theistic religion (Cimino & Smith 2007:407). Questions abound as to whether there can be a non-theistic religion at all. Religious humanists often use a sociological definition of religion, where religion is anything one is devoted to. Religious humanists are taken to task by Secular humanists for their semantic and conceptual errors in using the term “religious”. However, framers of the Humanist Manifesto I regarded themselves as religious humanists.

Secular humanism can be defined as a philosophy built on reason and science, and gives no place to any supernatural or transnatural reality. It is a philosophy centred on the human being, as opposed to institutionalised religion which is centred upon the supernatural.

“Basically” says Paul Kurtz, “secular humanists are atheists, agnostics, or skeptics, and they do not wish to deny that fact” (Christopher P. Tourney 1993:286). Kurtz means that Secular humanists can be either one of the three, but that secular humanism is not necessarily any one of the three. That is in agreement with what George Thindwa says, namely that Secular humanism is not atheism. However, secular humanists in Malawi tend to be more atheistic than the other two designations. Kurtz maintains that Secular humanism is not anti-religious, it is simply non-religious. Secular humanists, he maintains, are non-religious critics of religious claims. They are non-theists whose life stance is scientific, ethical and philosophical. To many Christians and practitioners of traditional religions in Malawi, it does not matter whether one labels himself atheist, agnostic or sceptic. The bottom line is that there is a denial of God. Kurtz went on to say that the salient virtue of humanism is autonomy. The human being determines what is right and what is wrong. They are not accountable to any sovereign being external to themselves. The ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras said “Man (sic) is the measure of all things” (McDowell & Stewart 1982:76). It can be noted that secular humanism draws from such sentiments to place humans as the ultimate authority, thereby making the human the sovereign. God is removed from the picture and is no longer the point of reference.

Secular humanism tends to strongly endorse human rights, including reproductive rights, gender equality, social justice and the separation of Church and state. The proponents of this life stance reject deference to supernatural beliefs and addresses ethics without reference to such beliefs recognising ethics as a human enterprise. They believe human beings can flourish by simply using the capacity they have. Life is approached from a secular humanist perspective, looking at human ways of comprehending the world and moving on to meet human needs.

2.2 Roots and Historical Development

2.2.1 The Ancient World

In the ancient world, the existence of god/s was a default position. Existence of the supernatural was readily accepted until later on. Roots of disbelief can be seen in Ancient India, where the God Brahman was questioned in the Upanishads (Law 2011:8). In 6th century BC, the Carvaka School of Philosophy positively asserted that there was no deity and the school, which was essentially atheistic and materialistic, insisted that the natural world was all that there was and that religion was a false human invention (ibid.). In China, a

critical stance towards disbelief can be found in Confucius (551 – 479 BC) who wrote: “To give oneself to securing righteousness while respecting the gods, to keep aloof from them” (George Thindwa, *Sunday Times*, Religion, 4 March 2012:6). Confucius developed a system of ethical and political philosophy that stood independently of any commitment to gods and supernaturalism to a large degree. Three Milesian philosophers (Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes) largely put aside mythological and religious explanations and instead attempted to develop their own ideas and theories grounded in observation and reason (Law 2011:10). Thales is well-known for the maxim “know thyself.” Stephen Law quotes Protagoras, a self-declared agnostic and a significant philosopher from a humanist perspective, saying: “Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not or of what sort they may be, because of the obscurity of the subject, and the brevity of human life” (Law 2011:10). Aristotle is significant to humanists because he attempted to develop a rational, ethical theory rooted in a close study of the nature of human beings (Law 2011:13). Epicurus’ position was deistic; he supposed that the gods could have no interest in human affairs, that they neither rewarded nor punished and should not be feared (Law 2011:14). The Roman Cicero (106 – 43 BC) was a sceptic, believing that knowledge about the gods was impossible and that ethical values were independent of institutionalised religion and were amenable to rational, philosophical enquiry (Law 2011:14). The Roman philosopher Seneca (2 BC – 65 AD) said: “Religion is recognised by common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful” (Law 2011:14). By this, Seneca meant that the wise had the intellectual capacity to realise that which was false, whereas the common people lacked the power of rational judgement and succumbed to the falsity of religious belief. The rulers did not bother with the question of whether religion was true or not, what mattered to them was its social and political utility. The implication is that both the common people and rulers contributed to the persistence of religion, although for different reasons and from different angles.

The arguments mentioned above point towards the fact that disbelief in gods or God and the supernatural found form and was developed in the antique world. The disbelief took the form of agnosticism, scepticism and atheism. The ancient world laid the foundation for further disbelief in the subsequent times, as will be seen in the section to follow.

2.2.2 The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment (Age of Reason or period of intellectual discovery) spanned from the late 17th century to the end of the 18th century. Stephen Law argues that during the Enlightenment criticism of traditional religious beliefs and institutions tended to come from the point of view

of alternative religious beliefs and that atheistic beliefs were still rarely heard. What Law is referring to in this assertion could be the very early days of the Enlightenment period. R. Albert Mohler Jr. agrees that the Enlightenment produced a massive shift in conditions of belief and that it was only in the wake of that period that atheism became a real intellectual force and an organised worldview. A great epistemological shift in Western consciousness was noted, leading to doubt about the supernatural. State and society sought release from ecclesiastical control and theological dogma in favour of a secular culture where natural reason and social experience played a central role. However, what came – some would later argue - was not a release, but rather bondage under reason and science. Doubt became an intellectual tool and a culture of doubt and scepticism arose. René Descartes made doubting the first principle of philosophy and the model for all the sciences. According to Albert Mohler Jr., ‘the Four Horsemen of the Modern Apocalypse’ – Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud – represent a massive cultural, intellectual and epistemological shift in that each of them contributed to human thought in a way that changed the conditions of belief and the intellectual foundations of all thought (Mohler Jr. 2008:19). George Thindwa contends that disbelief became common as a more scientific view of the universe developed. In other words, the more the science, the more common the disbelief.

Enlightenment figures of note include Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and Thomas Paine. Immanuel Kant (Livingston 2006:5) is quoted saying: “Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to use his understanding without direction from another... *Sapere aude!* (Dare to know.) ‘Have courage to use your own reason’ - that is the motto of the enlightenment.” The supremacy and adequacy of reason was emphasised at the expense of any other authority, including a divine one. Livingston (2006:6-11) mentions unobtrusive words to enable us understand the inner spirit of the Enlightenment which are: autonomy (self-rule as opposed to self-incurred tutelage), reason (rational examination of empirical data), nature (natural integrity as opposed to artificiality), melioristic optimism (hope for human development and progress based on modern doctrines), progress (triumph of the human mind over Christianity, which was responsible for superstition and error) and toleration (denial of absolute truths leading to respecting and tolerating other people’s views). These unobtrusive convictions were largely secular in origin and character. The spirit was that of absolutising human ideals, transcendentalising humans,

and relativism. The world is still challenged today by the Enlightenment paradigm and secular humanists in Malawi are in line with that paradigm.

Ludwig Feuerbach questioned the historical accuracy of the Bible, while Thomas Huxley coined the term ‘agnosticism’ (Thindwa *Sunday Times*, Religion, 4 March 2012:6). Huxley even expressly urges the authority of critical reason and empirical verification specifically against belief in the Bible (Baker 2009:159). Huxley sees belief in the Bible as not making sense in the wake of scientific reasoning and the ‘enlightened mind’. Baron P.H.T. D’Holbach refers to an atheist as “a man (sic) who destroys the dreams and chimerical beings that are dangerous to the human race so that men can be brought back to nature, to experience, to reason” (McDowell & Stewart 1982:23). The definition sets aside anything supernatural or metaphysical. Human beings put themselves at the centre of reality and arrogated to themselves authority over life and responsibility for it. Christendom was then hard pressed to justify its theocentric universe and its traditional conceptions of God in a world that was becoming more and more of age.

Some scholars see secularism as the product of the Christian faith. The Protestant Reformation is held to be the only major attempt since the apostolic age to introduce the meaning of the Christian movement as the secularising of the world (MacQuarrie & Childress 1986:567). Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard saw secularism as a Christian outcome. Kierkegaard regarded the outcome as bad and believed that it was his responsibility to reintroduce a purer Christianity into the secularised Christendom. Nietzsche regarded it as good, but doubted that Christianity was an adequate basis for supporting the secularism it had inaugurated. Which way should the Church in Malawi go? The way of Kierkegaard or the one of Nietzsche? What would be the implications for each way? Or, was secularism indeed the product of the Christian faith?

In France, the Enlightenment philosophers Denis Diderot (1713-84) and Jean D’Alembert (1717-83) were highly critical of organised religion. They defined the Enlightened thinker as one who “trampling on prejudices, tradition, universal consent, authority, in a word, all that enslaves most minds, dares to think for himself” (Law 2009:19). Many philosophers have since counter-argued, saying that Diderot’s and D’Alembert’s view is incoherent as whatever forms of reason we employ will themselves be born of and be dependent upon a shared tradition. Along those lines, Alasdair MacIntyre said: “All reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought” (Law 2009:20). Reasoning does not take place

in a vacuum, not even the Secular humanist reasoning. It proceeds from some assumptions and mode of thought and is not independent of them. Reason is actually not self-directing. The question should then be asked whether absolutising reason would not result in misinterpretation of reality.

Steven Paas (2004:288) argues that the ideas of the Enlightenment had their rise in the period between the Peace Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the French Revolution (1795), but that their consequences are especially apparent today, in the individualism, materialism and secularisation of present-day Western culture. He says that the period was characterised by a shift from the authority of the Word of God to the autonomy of humans. Recognition of the authority and infallibility of the Word of God ceased to be a default position.

Christianity's responses to the intellectual and social revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries found form in three ways. The first was accommodation of Christian thought and institutions to 'modern' ideas. The second was vigorous resistance against modernity and liberalism, which frequently involved a retreat into cultural or intellectual ghetto, a fortress mentality, or highly sophisticated strategies of repristation or restoration of an older tradition of orthodoxy. The third was the reinterpretation of the classical tradition of Christian thought to ensure its congruence and coherence with new knowledge of modern science, history and social experience (Livingston 2006:2). Livingston goes on to say that both institutionally and morally, medieval culture was under the dominion of the ecclesiastical authority. The Enlightenment was then a break with medievalism. Modern culture opposes the dominance of Church authority or any divinely given standards of belief and practice. The modern world was first constituted by the emergence of the secular state and a secular economic capitalism, enhanced by a secular natural science (Livingston 2006:3). The idea is that the legacy of the medieval period was lost in the Enlightenment era as the latter elevated reason, while denying revelation any place. Secular humanists in Malawi follow the thinking of the Enlightenment. The question then is: Which of the three ways should the Church in Malawi adopt in responding to secular humanists? What should a post-Enlightenment theology look like? The concluding chapter returns to this question.

However, some scholars have also argued that there is a positive side to the Enlightenment as well. In his book, titled *Redeeming the Enlightenment: Christianity and the Liberal Virtues*, Bruce K. Ward argues that the Enlightenment's emphasis on the moral imperatives of equality, authenticity, tolerance and compassion is to be viewed positively and that it is

actually based upon Christian moral teachings. He argues that in the post-Enlightenment era we should seek to redeem the Enlightenment rather than rejecting or uncritically reclaiming it.

2.2.3 The Modern World

R. Albert Mohler Jr. (2008:17) brings new insights into debates on the development of humanist views. He says Psalm 14:1, which partly reads in the New Revised Standard Version “Fools say in their hearts, ‘there is no God’” does not refer to the atheism we know today. He indicates that in the ancient world and throughout most of human history, the question was not whether or not there is a God, but which god is God. Following that line of argument, the atheism in the Psalms was not the rejection of the supernatural and existence of the gods, but rather the rejection of the God of Israel. His contention is that even if some believed in the existence of other gods but denied the God of Israel, they were atheists. That position is different from that of the New Atheists, the most notable of whom are Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. Mohler Jr. calls these men “The Four Horsemen of the New Atheist Apocalypse” (ibid.). They deny the existence of any god and that is what makes their atheism “new”. Mohler Jr. (2008:17) says that even the word “atheism” was first used in 1568 when it was coined (or borrowed from another language) by Miles Coverdale. Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith (2011:24-38) argue that the best-selling books by Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion* 2006), Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell* 2006), Sam Harris (*The End of Faith* 2004) and Christopher Hitchens (*God is Not Great* 2007) form the “canon” of the new atheism. It can be noted that there is at least some continuity (amidst important differences) between the Four Horsemen of the Modern Apocalypse and the Four Horsemen of the New Atheist Apocalypse.

David Bentley Hart (2009:220-221) agrees with Mohler Jr. in calling these four men new atheists. He says that these men harbour thoughtless complacency, and refers in this regard to doctrinaire materialism – which is a metaphysical theory of reality that is almost certainly logically impossible – and the equally doctrinaire secularism – which is a historical tradition so steeped in human blood that it can hardly be said to have proved its ethical superiority. Hart points out what he views as the failures of materialism and secularism.

The 19th century saw a major boost to disbelief through the works of various individuals. Charles Darwin (1809-82) published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, in which he wrote that he had discovered that the current species evolved over many millions of years. William A.

Dembski (2006:19) says that “the problem with Darwinian naturalism is that it turns nature into an idol, making brute material forces rather than the all-wise God into the source of creativity in nature.” Richard Dawkins is in full agreement with Charles Darwin’s position, while Thomas Woodward is partly in agreement and partly in disagreement with Darwin. Woodward (Dembski 2006:69) says: “I agree with Richard Dawkins in *The Blind Watchmaker* when he observes that objects in space such as stars or planets, being relatively simpler objects, do not logically suggest intelligent-type explanation for their existence. On the other hand, biological entities do suggest such explanation due to their watch-like complexity.” The questions to Woodward would be: Don't even the simpler objects suggest intelligent-type explanation for their existence as they also seem to exhibit complexity when regarded in totality as a body of entities? Don't their structure, functioning and locations in the universe manifest an Intelligent Designer?

David Strauss (1808-74) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) began to reveal what they deemed the mythical character of much of the Bible. In his book, *The Christian Doctrine of Faith*, Strauss seeks to show how Christian doctrine grew out of its ancient environment and became harmonised with later philosophical speculation (Livingston 2006:215). He concludes the book by advocating the dissolution of traditional supernaturalism, replacing it with a purely secular, Hegelian theology of the Absolute Spirit. Strauss raises historical questions concerning the origins of Christianity. His programme was to test the historical claims of the New Testament concerning Jesus. He said the history of the New Testament was woven through with mythical material. Karl Barth discredited Strauss’ approach, saying that it signifies the bad conscience of modern theology. Julius Wellhausen and Karl Graf developed the so-called Documentary Hypothesis, which questioned the historicity, authenticity and reliability of the Pentateuch. Rudolf Bultmann introduced demythologisation as a hermeneutical key to understanding the New Testament. Albert Schweitzer introduced his interim ethic in understanding the Sermon on the Mount, arguing that Christ was not the Son of Man and that He miscalculated the end of times. Such questions and quests from Biblical scholars and theologians led many more people to question belief and religion in general. The questions had the potential to weaken people's faith.

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72) rejected orthodox religious views, insisting that the god of conventional religion was merely the illusory, outward projection of humankind’s inner nature. He meant that God did not have objective existence; He exists only subjectively in the mind of believers. The supernatural mysteries of religion are based upon simple natural

truths. He said human beings have created their own gods and religions that embody their own idealised conceptions of their aspirations, needs and fears. Feuerbach believed that without religious and philosophic abstractions, humanity would realise their own divinity and would stop ascribing divinity to an external non-existing being. He said consciousness of God is human self-consciousness; knowledge of God is human self-knowledge ... God is the revealed and explicit inner self of a human being (McGrath 2001:574). In addition, he indicates that human beings fail to recognise that their consciousness of God is actually their own self-consciousness and that religion is the earliest and truly indirect form of human self-consciousness. The implication of Feuerbach's position is that in worshipping God, humanity is actually worshipping their projected aspirations and feelings. The divine qualities are actually extended human qualities. The advancement of religion is the advancement of humanity's self-knowledge.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) accused Christian morality of being life-stunting and born of feelings of hatred and resentment. Nietzsche declared flatly that God was dead, meaning that belief in the Christian God had become unbelievable (Hart 2009:21). Nietzsche is quoted by Mohler Jr.:

“I wage war on this theologian instinct: I have found traces of it everywhere. Anyone with theologian blood in his veins will approach things with a warped and deceitful attitude. This gives rise to a pathos that calls itself faith: turning a blind eye to yourself once and for all, so you do not have to stomach the sight of incurable mendacity” (Hart 2009:21).

He laid the cornerstone for later nihilists by teaching that, given that God does not exist, humanity must devise their own way of life (McDowell & Stewart 1982:25). Nietzsche's nihilism has serious ethical implications and Malawi might face the consequences if the Secular humanist nihilist stance is adopted. He is known for the phrase: “God is dead ... we have killed him.” He said the successor of God would be the *Übermensch* (overman), who would arise after nihilism, embody new values and supersede even humanity. Paul Kurtz went further to say that at the dawn of the twenty-first century, we must affirm on top of Nietzsche's phrase that “humans are alive.” The whole phrase would then be: “God is dead, we have killed him and humans are alive.” However, Nietzsche saw the dangers of breakdown of belief and said that the tension brought on by the breakdown of belief would usher in a period of active nihilism, which would lead to violence and wars such as there have

never been on earth before (Livingston 2006:411). Nietzsche used the term nihilism to indicate his need to destroy traditional moral notions in order to set up radically new ones. Nietzsche's observation is true in that non-recognition of the transcendent would render life groundless and untold evils would ensue. He was intent on seeing a viable alternative to Christianity.

Karl Marx (1818-83) holds that Feuerbach did not finish his critique of religion, as he did not say how elimination of religion could be realised. Marx says that religion was the opium of the masses. He argues that religion was a product of socio-economic conditions and that it would disappear if the conditions are straightened and a classless society developed. He calls for the revolution of the proletariat. It could be argued that Marx sees humanity as having come of age and as being able to deal with dehumanisation without invoking the non-existent supernatural. He says religion originates from and sustains alienation. When he was asked about his agenda in life, he said: To dethrone God and destroy capitalism. He contends that two major enemies of humankind were God and capitalism. Together with Friedrich Engels, Marx was an architect of *The Communist Manifesto*. Karl Marx is quoted saying:

“Religion is just the imaginary sun which seems to humans to revolve around themselves until they realise that they themselves are the centre of their own revolution ... Human beings look for a superhuman being in the fantasy reality of heaven, and find nothing there but their own reflection” (McGrath 2001:540).

He describes religion as “the heart of a heartless world; the sigh of the oppressed creature; the spirit of a spiritless world” (<http://atheism.about.com/od/weeklyquotes/a/marx01.htm>, accessed on 27 November 2013). Karl Marx believes that the division of labour and the existence of private property introduced alienation and estrangement into the economic and social orders. Marx actually reduced religion to sociology. His argument for the origin of religion is not founded on any reliable research. Religion does not arise from and nor does it encourage socio-economic alienation. Marx failed in that he did not dethrone God and did not manage to defeat capitalism. People are still religious in many parts of the world and communism is not yet a popular ideology. Marx wanted to see justice for the poor, only that he used the wrong approach by fighting against religion.

Feuerbach's and Marx's views found new expression in the psychologist Sigmund Freud, who described religious ideas as “illusions, fulfilments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of humanity” and who described religion as wishful thinking, an illusion which can

easily degenerate into pathological disorder (McGrath 2001:541). Freud reduced religion to infantile behaviour. By implication, religious people are infants; they have not yet come of age. In fact, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, David Friedrich Strauss and Bruno Bauer were called Young Hegelians or the Left Wing. They followed a radical approach and they were convinced that Hegel's preservation presented the dissolution of historical Christianity and the emergence of a new humanist religion (Livingston 2006:214). Hegel, along with Kant and Schleiermacher, had attempted to re-establish Christianity on a new philosophical basis. The Young Hegelians felt Hegel's approach was not doing justice to Christianity. It can be noted from the above discussion that the 19th century brought a massive cultural, intellectual and epistemological shift. The contributions of the men mentioned above changed the conditions of belief and the intellectual foundations of all thought.

The 20th century saw the development of humanist movements. The International Humanist and Ethical Union was formed in 1952 and the British Humanist Association (formerly Union of Ethical Societies) in 1967. Stephen Law (2011:25) argues that religious belief went into sharp decline in Europe and that at the end of the 20th century about 36% of Britons shared the beliefs and values of humanism and the British Humanist Association. He goes on to argue that even the beliefs of some sophisticated theologians appear to be scarcely distinguished from those of some humanists. It is also argued by some faithful people that the views of those 'sophisticated' theologians are an exception and not the rule.

The 1960s saw the birth of the Death of God Movement. Millard J. Erickson says the new theology should perhaps be called atheology (1996:11). The point can be taken further to argue that even the theologians of the movement should actually be called atheologians. Erickson argues that the movement was short-lived and then the world saw the death of the death of God movement. If there is God, how can man really and objectively bring Him to death? If there is no God, can man really bring Him into existence? Was there any value in the death of God movement? The death of God meant slightly different things to different people within the movement. For some, it meant absence of an experience of God. For others, it meant God was inconceivable. Still for others, it meant the loss of the reality of God (Erickson 1996:12-14). The issues raised by the adherents to the movement are still relevant today, as secular humanists are still advancing them.

2.2.4 Secularisation Theory

The secularisation theorists held that due to civilisation, God would recede from human consciousness and belief in God and participation in organised religion would dissipate. Gerhard Lenski is quoted by Hadden, saying:

“from its inception (sociology) was committed to the positivist view that religion in the modern world is merely a survival from man’s primitive past, and doomed to disappear in an era of science and general enlightenment. From the positivist standpoint, religion is basically institutionalized ignorance and superstition” (Hadden 1987:587).

Lenski is looking forward to a time when, to paraphrase from Sigmund Freud, the infantile illusions of religion would be outgrown. Lenski’s point is that science will make religion redundant. Such sentiments can be seen in the Philosopher Corliss Lamont (1990), who fully expected that organised religion would continue to decline into irrelevance and obscurity late in the 20th century (Cimino & Smith 2011:412). Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists, is quoted to have said during an interview: “Religion is on the wane. That is why there is government support for it. That is why it’s going to schools ... and to Capitol Hill. Today religion is being bailed out by the government. That is why religion is equated with patriotism.” Ellen Johnson’s claim that religion was supported by government because it was on the wane is not an established fact. Was religion actually equated with patriotism? What made it wrong or questionable for government to bail out religion, if the bail-out actually happened?

James Childress, following a framework developed by Larry Shiner, distinguished five conceptions of secularisation (MacQuarrie & Childress 1986:568-569). The first was the decline of religion, which might be considered from an objective standpoint (such as institutions, membership, or participation in worship and activities) or from a subjective standpoint (religious consciousness). The second one is the disengagement or differentiation of institutions, practices and activities from religion, leading to the Government performing responsibilities formerly performed by religion and possibly privatisation of religion. The third notion is the transportation of norms from religion to the world, or the Christianisation of society, whereby religious norms might have been institutionalised in social practice despite differentiation. The fourth one is the desacralisation of the world, whereby the world is approached through rational explanation and manipulation, rather than through awe and a sense of mystery. It is argued that even though instrumental rationality dominates much of

society, religious consciousness is still persistent despite some theories of secularisation predicting its downfall. The fifth one is the conformity of religion to the world, whereby some religions would accommodate towards the world and lose their distinctiveness. Childress argues that secularisation does not always produce secularism. The questions for the Church in Malawi would be: Are there any doctrines or practices in the Church that are fostering secularisation? What conceptions of secularisation can be identified in Malawi? Secular humanists are holding on to different conceptions of secularisation, but they are far from convincing the populace of their agenda.

Both the Humanist Manifesto I (1933) and the Humanist Manifesto II (1973) viewed secularism as ascending and the latter predicted that the 20th century would be the humanist century. Hunter Baker said the sociological theory of secularisation, with secularism as its public philosophy, envisioned a future in which humankind would leave its religious childhood and would someday live in an age of pure reason, uncorrupted by superstition of any kind (Baker 2009:97). He says the theory of secularisation has its genesis in the historical period of the Enlightenment, when the role of reason was much elevated at the expense of faith and religious experience.

August Comte envisioned the death of traditional religion to be replaced by a new order based on reverence toward the powers of human rationality (Cimino & Smith 2011:98). He viewed the continuing of traditional religion as an affront to the powers of human reasoning. Emile Durkheim conceived religion as the social glue, essentially put in place by a society that personifies its agreement on social values and turns it into a god, meaning that God or any god does not exist but is merely a useful illusion (Cimino & Smith 2011:98). Thus, God or any god is the creative work of humanity and once humanity's mind is enlightened, the illusion will be recognised for what it is. Religion will then disappear.

Max Weber spoke of the process of disenchantment, by which he meant humanity entering a disenchanted (or secular) world. An enchanted world is one in which magic and spiritual forces are regarded to be at play. Modernity is understood as humanity come of age, and religious faith and belief in God were seen as recidivist, backward and limiting beliefs that would inevitably recede (Cimino & Smith 2011:29). One of the assumptions of secularisation theory was that theism was basically an inherited belief that was necessary for providing meaning, coherence and comfort. The assumption means that secularisation theorists had an essentially functional understanding of religion and an understanding of religion as merely a

social phenomenon. The understanding was that as religion's functions will no longer be needed, belief in God will recede. Education, technology, affluence and the inevitable breaks with tradition that came with modernity would lead to a massive, civilisation-wide loss of belief. The understanding of religion from a purely functional sense is mistaken in that the ontological aspect of religion is left out. Any critique of religion based on the functional dimension only is likely to be inadequate.

Weber's theory of secularisation is situated within the Liberal Protestant heritage. Liberal Protestantism can be characterised as that theological tradition that possessed an attitude detached from dogma and as tending to approach Christianity in a more historical than systematic way (Carroll 2009:1). It also adopted a scientific approach to the Bible and its scholarship and viewed it more as a cultural document. Weber's judgment of what counts as a rational advance fits within a Liberal Protestant conception of religion and situates his criteria within this schema. The Liberal Protestant's disenchantment counted as rationality (Carroll 2009:11). The more the disenchantment, the greater the rationality. Weber saw the Liberal Protestants as ethically-oriented and the Catholics as metaphysically-oriented and he liked the former. So, Liberal Protestantism provided fertile ground for the development of Weber's theory of secularisation. It is still debatable whether his view of orientation of Liberal Protestants and Catholics was right.

However, Smith saw Liberal Protestantism as a reaction to secularisation and not the root cause of it. He said the liberals were unsuccessfully trying to save religion from the secularisers through compromise and reform (Baker 2009:123). Following Smith's thinking, secularisation came first and Liberal Protestantism followed. The evidence given previously seems to disprove Smith. However, once both came into existence it could not be denied that one could affect the other in one way or another. Each could contribute to shaping the other.

Weber situates the roots of secularisation and disenchantment deep within ancient Judaism. He says that in the rejection of magical practices as ways of dealing with evil, Israel rejects Babylonian dualism and instead favours an ethical response to the theodicy question (Carroll 2009:13). He says the Jewish conception of God does not favour a contemplative union, but rather an ethical following of God's law, where emphasis is shifted from mystical practices to the rational principles of daily life codified in the law.

Secularisation is for Weber a retreat from "sacred reasoning", as secular rationality takes over the responsibilities of structuring the normative basis of society according to formal

principles. Religious experience cannot stand public rationality and so religion should be privatised. Private religion is at the heart of secularisation. Weber maintained that the gulf between faith and reason cannot be bridged. Privatisation of religion, being an aspect of secularisation, would be a step towards the banishment of religion from the face of the earth. As Jürgen Moltmann observes:

“the primary conception of religion in modern society assigns to religion the saving and preserving of personal, individual and private humanity ... Now as the result of the fact that all things and conditions must be by dint of technique and organisation, the divine in the sense of the transcendent has disappeared from the world of nature” (Livingston *et al* 2006:275).

Moltmann saw privatisation of religion as both a symptom and a result of market economy. Johann Baptist Metz said an additional cause of privatisation of religion was technological rationality with its objectification of nature. Both Moltmann and Metz apply the concepts of reification and objectification to what happens to religion when it is privatised in modern society (Livingston *et al* 2006:276). The concepts describe a state where religion has been reduced to an object of personal consumer choice. It is a state where religion is a personal matter and not a public one. The person chooses with all the freedom and responsibility as he or she chooses any commodity on the market.

Carroll notes that the intellectual dominance of Liberal Protestantism came to an end with the rise of Karl Barth’s dialectical theology in the early 20th century, which sought to recover the importance of Christian revelation over against what Barth considered to be an instrumentalisation of the Gospel for cultural and political ends.

John Sommerville pointed out that one area where secularisation would take place would be at the macro-social-institutional level, a phenomenon called differentiation. Differentiation is described as a state of affairs whereby knowledge is fragmented and the Church does not have monopoly of expertise in each and every field like legal, psychotherapy and vocational issues (Carroll 2009:32). Talcott Parsons said differentiation would be a good thing for religious actors because they would be able to focus on their core mission (Baker 2009:99). Mohler Jr. rightly observes that differentiation in that aspect has really become a reality. Differentiation is not tantamount to secularisation though it may also be understood as a form of secularisation. Differentiation does not teach naturalistic rejection of the transcendent. The transcendent and supernatural are acknowledged.

Mohler Jr. observes that Charles Taylor in his book, *A Secular Age*, argues that Western history has experienced three different intellectual stages. The first stage was the time before the Enlightenment in which it was impossible not to believe. God was the only explanation and there were no rival explanations to experiences of people and the universe. The second phase was the time opened by the Enlightenment, when it became possible not to believe. Humanity became the centre of meaning and God ceased to be seen as the sovereign. The third phase, the one we are in at present, is one in which it has become impossible to believe. Theism is seen as eccentric and dangerous. This third phase is in utter contrast to the first one. Taylor himself contends that: “But we have also changed from a condition in which belief was the default option, not just for the naïve but also for those who knew, considered, talked about atheism; to a condition in which for more and more people unbelieving construals seem at first blush the only plausible ones” (Taylor 2007:12). Unbelief has become the default option.

Some scholars argue that the secularisation theory has failed and has now become the myth of secularisation. Their argument is based on the proliferation of Churches and other religious movements in many parts of the world. Jeffrey K. Hadden (1987:587) says that critical re-examination reveals secularisation to be an orienting concept grounded in an ideological preference rather than a systematic theory. By implication, Hadden is saying that secularisation is a myth. Berger holds that secularisation theory has been falsified by religious revolution, rejection and the comparatively great power of groups that choose not to adapt versus the diminished credibility of those that adapt and he concludes that modernisation and secularisation are not synonymous (Baker 2009:102). Over the centuries, evidence has shown that Christianity has a modernising influence through offering education (formal and civic) and health services, just to mention two. The history of civilisation over the past two millennia has been history of Christian civilisation and to argue that there is a necessary link between modernisation and secularisation is to commit a historical error. Hunter Baker quotes David C. Lindberg saying: “The Church in the Middle Ages was the primary patron of scientific learning and taking the Church out of the equation we see there is an enormous amount of intellectual activity that would not have occurred” (Baker 2009:157). Religious revolution has been very notable ever since the 1970s. Functional differentiation is a reality in many countries in Africa, but religious privatisation is conspicuously far from being a reality.

Nevertheless, it is argued that there are two senses in which the secularisation theory was exactly right. The first is the geographic sense, whereby Western Europe followed the theory perfectly and the second one is the world's cultural and intellectual elites (Hadden 1987:34-35). The second sense is true of Secular humanists in Malawi, who are among the intelligent elite and not from the ordinary masses.

Secularism presents itself as a neutral player. Hunter Baker (2009:15-16) argues that secularism is not a neutral player but rather a partisan, one of the many conceptual players. Religion and secularism present two different worldviews, although there maybe similarities here and there. Religion does not seek its own privatisation, whereas secularism seeks to privatise religion. In that sense, secularism cannot be deemed neutral. Removing religion from the public arena is seeking humankind without God. Proponents of secularism claim that it is intellectually and morally superior to theism. The claim emphasises the point that secularism is not a neutral player. John Rawls (Baker 2009: 114-115) advocated religion-free public discourse. He removes comprehensive doctrines such as religion from the realm of public deliberation. The question could be asked whether denying secularism means denying science or whether being scientific means being secularist. Moreover, there could be a question regarding relation between secularism and civilisation.

Pope Benedict XVI (cf. *Sunday Times*, Religion, 18 November 2012:2-3) said that all Christians must face the challenge of secularisation together. On 15 November 2012, the Pope spoke in a meeting with members of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity saying: "The spiritual poverty of many of our contemporaries, who no longer perceive the absence of God in their lives as a privation, represents a challenge for all Christians." He said authentic ecumenical prayer, dialogue and cooperation could not ignore the crisis of faith that vast regions of the planet were experiencing. Opening the Council's planetary meeting, Council President Cardinal Kurt Koch told members that division within Christianity "damages its credibility in proclaiming the Gospel." Division undermines credibility and gives way to the secularisers to spread their agenda. Pointing to the example of mass exterminations carried out by the Nazis and the Soviets, Cardinal Koch said: "Where God is eliminated from social life, there is also a strong risk that human dignity will be trampled." Secularisation can lead to dehumanisation. Disappearance of God from the public sphere could lead to serious ethical problems. Ukrainian Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kiev-Halych said with the independence of Ukraine 20 years ago the Churches could manifest their Christian identity in a social and public way (ibid.). He said while the Churches were not

united structurally or sacramentally, “we are united in action, especially on moral values, on family, defending the dignity of human life.” He then called for the rediscovery of the religious roots of morality. The call was for morality with Christian roots, as non-Christian morality does not really provide a panacea to the entrenched socio-economic and political problems the world is facing. The challenge of secularisation needs a concerted effort and faithful proclamation of the Gospel. The Archbishop also said that while secularisation places challenges before the Church, the real danger is “secularisation of the Church” itself, which begins with members living and acting as if they are not Church members.

2.3 The Positive Contribution of Charles Taylor

Charles Taylor (2007:22) provides a polemic against what he calls “subtraction stories.” He elaborates that he means stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves with earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. Those stories consider religion to be an illusion or mirage of one sort or another that will gradually be made to disappear by the advancement of science and reason.

Taylor (2007:13-14) talks of the coming of a secular age in the sense of a shift in the whole background framework in which one believes or refuses to believe in God. The frameworks of yesterday and today are related as “naïve” and “reflective”, because the latter has opened a question that had been foreclosed in the former by the unacknowledged shape of the background and unbelief has become a default option. The conditions of belief have changed: We have moved from a society where belief in God was unchallenged and unproblematic to one in which belief in God is just one of the options, or even an inferior one.

Once reference to God is lopped off, a move towards exclusive humanism is made. Firstly, the goal of order is redefined as a matter purely of human flourishing and secondly, the power to pursue it is no longer something that we receive from God, but is a purely human capacity (Taylor 2007:84). Humanity becomes the measure of all things and the ultimate authority. Reason becomes the absolute.

In disengaged reason, disenchantment and instrumental control went together. The situation prepared the ground for the new option of exclusive humanism. Deism slipped in and Taylor singles out three facets of it. The first was the notion of the world as being created by God. The notion went through an anthropological shift in the 17th and 18th centuries. The second was the shift towards primacy of impersonal order, indicating that God relates to us primarily

by establishing a certain order of things whose moral order we can easily grasp if we are not misled by false and superstitious notions. The third is the idea of a true, original natural religion, which has been obscured by accretions and corruptions and which must now be made clear again (Taylor 2007:221). The anthropological shift took place in the 17th or 18th centuries with the eclipse of the sense of further purpose, of grace, of the sense of mystery and of the idea that God was planning the transformation of human beings which would take them beyond the limitations which inhere in their present situation (Taylor 2007:223-224). There was a movement from Deism to exclusive humanism. Exclusive humanism became an alternative to the Christian faith. Scientific reason became at once an engine and beneficiary of disenchantment, and its progress led people to brand all sorts of traditional beliefs and practices as superstition (Taylor 2007:271). The focus on human flourishing with no reference to God or any metaphysical beliefs was what made this modern humanism exclusive. The anthropological shift put man at the centre of the universe as the point of reference in matters of humanity's destiny.

In the last part of his book, Charles Taylor (2007:540) indicates that the depths which were previously located in the cosmos, the enchanted world, are now more readily placed within. Where earlier people spoke of possession by evil spirits, we now think of mental illness. Taylor (2007:254) says Christianity has officially gone through what we can call an "excarnation", a transfer out of the embodied, "enfleshed" forms of religious life to those which are more "in the head". He says arguments from natural science to Godlessness are not convincing and therefore calls for the deconstruction of the death of God view. Naturalistic explanations are not all that there is. Their scope is the natural or physical world of experience. They cannot cater for transcendent realities. Taylor's critique of secularisation theory is relevant in critiquing secular humanism in Malawi as will be shown in chapter 5. The next section deals with the four men who are arguably the most influential representatives of the new atheist movement.

2.3 Dennett, Hitchens, Harris and Dawkins: The Embodiment of New Atheism

2.3.1 Daniel Dennett

Daniel Dennett (2007:9) defines religions as "social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought". Dennett fails to see the proper link between the supernatural and anthropomorphism. He argues that in the Old

Testament, Jehovah is very anthropomorphic. Dennett goes on to argue that there is a taboo against scientific investigation of religion and that the taboo is a spell which should be broken. He quotes an anonymous author (2007:17) saying: “Philosophy is questions that may never be answered. Religion is answers that may never be questioned.” He regards religion as a natural and not supernatural phenomenon and says that it should be subjected to scientific inquiry.

The implication of Dennett's description of religion is that the existence of the supernatural is not granted and that religion is a social system based on a wrong belief. Thindwa and Dennett are in agreement in their denial of the supernatural. Dennett further quotes David Hume to stress the point that religion is a natural phenomenon, saying: “As every enquiry which regards religion is of the utmost importance, there are two questions in particular which challenge our attention, to wit, that concerning its foundation in reason, and that concerning its origin in human nature.” Dennett is implying that the place of the supernatural in religion is not warranted, as religion is a natural phenomenon with no grounding in the supernatural.

Dennett mentions that religion can help bring out the best in people. He (2007:54) quotes Langdon, saying: “Religious allegory has become a part of the fabric of reality. And living in that reality helps millions of people cope and be better people.” He says that religions provide the social framework for creating and maintaining moral teamwork. He argues that although religion helps bring out the best in people, it is not the only phenomenon with that property. There are many wise, engaged, morally committed atheists and agnostics who could even be more ethical than religious people. In his opinion, people with no religious affiliation exhibit the same level of moral excellence as born-again Christians and that people delude themselves when they hold that there is a relation between spirituality and moral goodness. The implication of Dennett's point is that religion should not boast of bringing out the best in people as there are other avenues of achieving the same goal. To further show the value of religion, Dennett (2007:253) quotes Alan Wolfe, saying: “Religion can lead people out of cycles of poverty and dependency just as it led Moses out of Egypt.” Dennett then takes a twist when he says that religion causes some people to do bad things. Dennett questions whether religion is the foundation of morality and whether the benefits of religion actually outweigh its negative effects. He (2007:279) quotes Steven Weinberg, who says: “Good people will do good things, and bad people will do bad things. But for good people to do bad things, it takes religion.”

Dennett (2007:56) also quotes Loyal Rue, saying: “The more we learn about the details of natural processes, the more evident it becomes that these processes are themselves creative. Nothing transcends Nature like Nature itself.” He mentioned the free-floating rationale, which are “blind, directionless evolutionary processes that discover designs that work.” He says these were endorsed by natural selection and said the concept of free-floating rationale rules out the existence of Intelligent Design. However, critics argue that the concept itself is not based on any scientific finding and so, should not be used in scientific investigation.

Howard Rachlin observes that the three requirements for a Darwinian evolutionary process are replication, variation and selection. He mentions that Dennett discusses various theories of how the three processes, especially selection, may have operated in the evolution of religion. It is argued that Darwin himself identified three processes of selection (Dennett 2007:354). The first is methodical selection by foresighted and deliberate acts intent on artificial selection. The second is unconscious selection, in which human beings have engaged in activities that have unwittingly contributed to the differential survival and reproduction of species. The third is natural selection, in which human beings have played no part at all. It is natural selection that is mostly mentioned as behind the origin of religion. Dennett believes that one can accept an evolutionary framework and still be religious. He also believes that the origins of religion may be approached scientifically and that once a dialogue has been opened between science and religion, there will be moderation of current religious extremism. Dennett maintains a Darwinian perspective in answering questions of how religion evolved in human nature and how it is maintained in modern times. Dennett argued that the root of human belief in gods is the disposition to attribute agency to anything complicated that moves. Rachlin tells us that according to Dennett, the crucial question for any behavioural pattern including religion is *cui bono* (who benefits)? Dennett himself (2007:90) mentions three groups that benefit. The first is everybody in the society, because religion makes life in society more secure, harmonious and efficient. The second are the elite who control the system and who benefit at the expense of the others. The third are societies as wholes, given that the perpetuation of their social and political groups is enhanced at the expense of rival groups. Dennett indicates that religion has value and cannot just disappear. He (2007:103) goes further to mention three favourite purposes (or ground for existence) of religion: the first is to comfort us in our and allay our fear of death, the second is to explain things we can't otherwise explain and the third is to encourage group cooperation in the face of trials and enemies. The three points mentioned show that Dennett has a functionalist

understanding of religion. Dennett (2007:179) quoted David Sloan Wilson, who says: “Religions exist primarily for people to achieve together what they cannot achieve alone.” He means that religions have social origins and are perpetuated by the human desire to achieve more. He claims (2007:183): “Religious organisations are social enterprises whose purpose is to create, maintain and supply religion to some set of individuals and to support and supervise their exchanges with a god or gods.”

Dennett mentions the intentional stance as the reason behind the origin and continuation of religion. He says, however, that the intentional stance works well in explaining behaviours of other people, but may be misapplied in case of natural phenomena. He says the inherited trait most responsible for religious behaviour is our tendency to attribute agency to complex moving objects. Dennett believes that what is keeping religion going today is the over-extension of the intentional stance, benefits to the individual from cooperative behaviour, the comforts of a belief in life after death and the placebo effect of faith healing.

Daniel Dennett (2007:241-243) disproves what are generally called traditional or classical arguments for the existence of God. He says that the Ontological argument fails in that ever since Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century there has been a widespread conviction that you can't prove the existence of anything (other than an abstraction) by sheer logic. St Anselm of Canterbury (1033 – 1109) described God as 'a being greater than which nothing can be conceived.' Anselm affirms God's being to prove His existence. According to him, the greatest being that can be conceived is God. Other critics, apart from Dennett, have noted weaknesses in the ontological argument. Critics ask: How can one be sure that the greatest being they are conceiving is God and not something else? Does that being actually exist or it ends only on the level of concept? How sure are we that people conceive of the same greatest being and not different greatest beings? How if there exists a being greater than God but which cannot be or has not yet been conceived of? What would such an inconceivable or not-yet-conceived being be named? Does conceivability necessarily mean existence? Such questions challenge ontological argument for the existence of God.

The Cosmological argument fails in Dennett's opinion, given that quantum physics teaches us that not everything that happens need to have a cause. If something in the universe is self-caused, why can't the universe as a whole be self-caused? The logical conclusion according to Dennett is that the universe can be self-caused and there would be no place for an Intelligent Designer. He argues that evolution could lead the involuntary acts to the universe

as we have it with the fine-tuned laws of physics. McGrath says all the Five Ways (*Quinque viae*) of Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) do is to show the inner consistency of belief in God and not its evidential foundations. The fundamental thought of Aquinas is that the world mirrors God. Aquinas' argument should be understood in the broader context of his doctrine of the analogy of being (*analogia entis*). Aquinas says God has stamped divine signature upon the creation and that He impressed His image and likeness upon it (McGrath 2001:245). The Five Ways are motion, efficient cause, gradation, contingency and intelligent design. The argument proceeds on the assumption that there could be no regress and that God is the ultimate author.

The implication is that the traditional arguments should not be attacked as failing to prove God's existence. They definitely fail as proofs for God's existence. They should be understood as coming from faith assumption to demonstrate sensibility and inner coherence of belief in God. Apart from the atheist Dennett, some theologians have already noted the weaknesses of the classical arguments as proofs of God's existence. The value of the arguments lies in demonstrating sensibility and inner coherence of belief in God. The arguments were made in the general context of scholastic theology where rational grounds were propounded for religious belief.

2.3.2 Christopher Hitchens

In his book, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, Christopher Hitchens argues that religion is poisonous. He argues that religion has its origins in the human pre-history when humanity was afraid of many things which have explanations now. He says there are now scientific explanations for the things that humans feared like death, weather, the eclipse and many other things. Hitchens argues that religion is no longer intelligible, because there are now explanations for the things that gave rise to religion. Atheists do not hold their conviction dogmatically, but respect free inquiry, open-mindedness and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. He understands atheism to be better than religion in that he views that religious convictions are held dogmatically. He further argues that the design argument at both macro and micro levels is irrational as both the universe and particular elements therein support evolution.

Christopher Hitchens (2007:4) raises what he called four irreducible objections to religious faith saying “that it wholly misrepresents the origins of man (sic) and the cosmos, that because of this original error it manages to combine the maximum of servility and the

maximum of solipsism, that it is both the result and the cause of dangerous sexual repression, and that it is ultimately grounded in wish-thinking.” Hitchens’ thinking is that religion is an illusion and associated with harm. He further said that religious people hold their convictions dogmatically, which is not the case with him and those in his category. Thus, he discredits religion and the Scriptures and holding religious belief is not an intelligible or noble choice. His belief is that religion is the product of humans and he associates it with evils. No wonder he concluded that: “Religion poisons everything.” He maintains that humanity needs a new Enlightenment leading us to transcend our prehistory. His argument implies that religion has taken us back to the pre-Enlightenment world, when superstition prevailed. It would follow that now humans go beyond our past in order to reach high levels of rationality where superstition is known for what it is. His position means the pre-Enlightenment past should be discarded.

Lucretius (Hitchens 2007:15) is quoted, saying: “*Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*” (meaning, to such height are men (sic) driven by religion). His point is that religion drives people to do evil of any magnitude. It is a threat to human progress and survival. Many of the examples he uses to prove that religion kills are from Islamic extremism. Extremism is not the norm and it is criticised by people of other religions. Such cases should not be used to judge religion wrong. Hitchens holds the attitude of religion to science hostile. There again, the hostile attitude is not the norm. It is a result of religious fundamentalism whereby, for instance, some religious leaders deny their followers medical attention. Religion *per se* is not against medical science. Hitchens (2007:52) brings three provisional conclusions regarding religion: “the first is that religion and the Churches are manufactured, the second is that ethics and morality are quite independent of faith and cannot be derived from it and the third is that religion is not just amoral but immoral.” Hitchens effectively denies the Transcendent and regards humans as the centre of everything. He quashes revelation both in the Old Testament and New Testament. He goes on to say that the evil of the New Testament surpasses that of the Old and that the four Gospels are not historical accounts.

Hitchens (2007:12) maintains that “the argument with faith is the foundation and origin of all arguments, because it is the beginning – but not the end – of arguments about philosophy, science, history, and human nature.” His view suggests that religion permeates all areas and disciplines of life.

2.3.3 Sam Harris

Sam Harris, in his book *The End of Faith*, pointed out what he believed to be the dangers of faith and organised religion and then called for an end to religious beliefs, saying they have caused evil in the history of humankind. He goes on to say that technology is forcing us to accept that our religious beliefs are the greatest threat to our survival and that faith evades rational justification. His point is that technology is good as it reveals our enemy. He blames humans for accepting religions' sacred books as authoritative and historically accurate. Harris also mentions the problem of intolerance and supremacist notions amongst different religions, which leads to all sorts of evils, including killing one another. He includes a long catalogue of evils associated with the Islamic religion and complains that all evils caused by religion are done in the name of the sovereignty of God and are justified by means of sacred books. He also maintains that religious elitism of America or any state is dangerous as it renders the state immune to scrutiny. To him, the evils of religion penetrate the whole of life.

Sam Harris (2005:16) acknowledges that there is a sacred dimension to human life, but denies that coming to terms with it requires faith. He says that rationality rather than faith should be the ground for spirituality. However, it is difficult to visualise the sort of spirituality that there would be without faith. He could be thinking along the lines of Albert Einstein, who was described by Dawkins as a deeply religious non-believer. In that case, Harris could be described as a deeply spiritual non-believer. He argues that scriptural literalism leads to religious fundamentalism, whereas a moderate reading of the Bible leads to moderate religion. He has disdain for both moderate and fundamentalist religions. He argues that moderate religion provides the springboard for religious fundamentalism. He laments that people who use reason and evidence in other areas of life fail to use them when it comes to religious claims. Harris (2005:20) says that "the problem that religious moderation poses for all of us is that it does not permit anything very critical to be said about religious literalism." He makes that claim despite the fact that many religious people have spoken against the evil of religious fundamentalism. For instance, some Christians have spoken against the crusades. In his opinion, moderate religion is not a solution to the evils of religious fundamentalism, but the solution lies rather in employing reason and creativity in full force. In mentioning the evils in the history of the Church, he emphasises the Inquisition and the Church's complicity in the Holocaust. The role of the Church in these evils is said to be deplorable. Before Harris, some believers had already spoken against such involvement as against the biblical faith indicating that such practices were not normative for the Church.

He claims that religion is resistant to progress in an age where other areas of human life are progressing. His observation that religious dogma is becoming less useful by the day means that religion is redundant. The observation that religion is losing significance is based on wrong premises. Failure to see the essential worth of religion does not mean that religion is worthless. It could just mean that people are using wrong standards to measure the worthiness and truthfulness of religion. For Harris, the evidence he wants to ascertain the truthfulness of religious belief is scientific reasoning which cannot actually manage to test the truth claims of religion. He mentions that religious experiences give birth to religious ideas which in turn threaten to destroy us. Harris (2005:44) emphasises the centrality of belief when he says: “As a man (sic) believes, so he will act.” He then cautions humankind against holding beliefs that are inherently dangerous to our welfare and civilisation. Beliefs are principles of action and hence, the need to hold right beliefs. He laments that religion has immunity against rational discourse.

Harris says that what are called wars of religion are really wars of religion because they are fought for religious reasons and not for any other reason, such as political or racial reasons. They are based on religious beliefs, which are untrue and invalid. He claims that religious wars will persist as long as religions persist, because religions are naturally intolerant of one another. Harris (2005:208) subscribes to the physicalist position which believes, among other things, that our mental and spiritual lives are wholly dependent upon the workings of the brain. No place is given to the supernatural. He holds the naturalist explanation for spiritual matters. Spiritual experiences are said to be natural propensity of the human mind. Harris (2005:221) says the beginning of a rational approach to our deepest personal concerns is the bringing together of reason, spirituality and ethics. His assumption is that reason is currently excluded in Christian tradition and spirituality.

Harris concludes that discarding the whole dogma of faith is the remedy for religious wars, tribalism and many other evils prevailing in the world. He associates religion with irrationality, ignorance, intolerance, injudiciousness, delusion and primitivity. He dismisses faith-based approaches to life as counter-productive and would accept nothing of moral theology or theological ethics. He absolutises humans when he says (2005:226): “We are final judges of what is good, just as we are final judges of what is logical.” In that, human reason is taken to the level of metaphysical ultimacy. He is in agreement with others that

humanity has come of age and should abandon faith once and for all. His argument is that the future would be better without religious faith. The end of faith would be the end of terror and an affirmation of the vital role of reason.

Ravi Zacharias (2008:31) points out that a worldview basically offers answers to for necessary questions – questions that relate to origin, meaning, morality and hope. He noted that the worldview propounded by Harris is misleading and inadequate. Science does not have moral capacity. Scientific advancement without wisdom and virtue could be detrimental. But couldn't it be argued that adopting Harris' worldview would lead to making unethical decisions and to failure to realise the human destiny?

2.3.4 Richard Dawkins

Richard Dawkins is Emeritus Fellow of New College, Oxford and was the University of Oxford's Professor of Public Understanding of Science from 1995 until 2008. He is given special treatment here as representative of the new atheists and because of the influence he exerts on George Thindwa in Malawi. Thindwa's assumptions are taken from Dawkins, for example, in regarding scientific evidence as absolute and denying the existence of the supernatural.

Some of Thindwa's topics in newspapers have *The God Delusion* as their source. To illustrate the point: topics such as the evolution of religion, the burden of proof, Pascal wager, science and creationism, importance of promoting secular humanism and the omniscient God are all rooted in *The God Delusion*. Understanding the underlying assumptions of Dawkins is helpful in critiquing the assumptions and specific arguments of George Thindwa and the Association for Secular Humanism (ASH) in Malawi.

Dawkins asserts the irrationality of belief in God and the grievous harm it has inflicted on society. He strongly attacks religion of any kind and says that religion fuels war, foments bigotry and abuses children. He intends that religious readers of his book should become atheists when they finish reading it. Dawkins is in agreement with his friend Sam Harris. The book is intended to raise consciousness in four ways to the fact that to be an atheist is a realistic aspiration, and a brave and splendid one. Firstly, one can be an atheist who is happy, balanced, moral and intellectually fulfilled. Secondly, he asserts the power of cranes such as

the natural selection to explain reality. Thirdly, there is the whole matter of religion and childhood, whereby he says children are too young to have a stand on religion. Fourthly, atheist pride, as he says atheism really always indicates a healthy independence of mind. A critique of Dawkins could consider whether he actually manages, on the level of his assumptions, to raise the consciousness he intends to raise.

In chapter 1 of *The God Delusion*, Dawkins supports Albert Einstein's anti-God views. He says Einstein, who was a Jew, was using 'God' in a purely metaphorical, poetic sense. He distinguishes between Einsteinian religion and supernatural religion. Albert Einstein is the most distinguished exponent of pantheistic reverence. What can be called religious in Einstein's thought is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world as science reveals it and it is in that sense that Dawkins calls Einstein "a deeply religious non-believer". Einstein did not believe in a personal God. Dawkins (2006:18) said Einstein was using God in a purely metaphorical poetic way. Pantheists use the name God as a non-supernatural synonym for Nature, the universe, or the lawfulness that governs its workings. Dawkins prefers not to be called religious, as it is misleading because it implies "supernatural". The metaphorical or pantheistic God of the physicists is different from the supernatural God of the theists. Dawkins says the respect and privilege that religion gets are undeserved, given that religion itself is an illusion. Dawkins referred to Thomas Jefferson who said the Christian God had negative attributes like cruelty and injustice and went on to repudiate the doctrine of the Trinity and who also said that a professorship of theology should have no place in our institution.

On the God hypothesis, Dawkins says that "any creative intelligence of sufficient complexity to design anything comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution". Creative intelligences arrive late in the universe. So, God is a pernicious delusion. He says religion progressed from tribal animisms to polytheism to monotheism. Dawkins attacks Abraham as mythological patriarch and the supernatural as meaningless. Dawkins claims he is not attacking one version of God, but everything and anything supernatural, wherever or whenever they have been invented. He quashes even the deist God of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. He notes that deists are indistinguishable from theists as both believe in a supreme being who created the universe.

Dawkins says the Founding Fathers of the American Republic were secularists who believed in keeping religion out of politics. He claims that the God hypothesis, in any of its forms, is unnecessary. The question to Dawkins would be: By keeping religion out of politics, did the Founding Fathers mean to be exclusive humanists, as he is? Secularism, though a possible breeding ground for secular humanism, is not itself secular humanism.

Dawkins noted the Poverty of Agnosticism. There is Temporary Agnosticism in Practice (TAP, evidence not yet available or understood) and Permanent Agnosticism in Principle (PAP, the very idea of evidence is not applicable). Dawkins quashes agnosticism in extraterrestrial matters. He argues agnosticism is not a reasonable option when it comes to debates about God and the supernatural. Agnosticism means no knowledge. Dawkins says that for extraterrestrial or supernatural matters, we have knowledge and the knowledge is that such matters do not exist. For him, agnosticism applies only to empirical matters that can be tested by scientific reasoning and logic. For him, the category of mystery is a non-starter.

Bertrand Russell (Dawkins 2006:53) says the burden of proof rests with the believers, not the non-believers. The burden of proof refers to the question of who has the prime responsibility to justify their claims. According to the legal framework in Malawi, the burden of proof lies with the accuser, who is to show beyond reasonable doubt that the accused is really wrong. Russell's thinking is that believers should prove beyond reasonable doubt that God exists. Dawkins says that those who say God exists are atheists when considering Zeus, Apollo and other gods. He means that even Christians are in some way atheists, because they deny the existence of other gods.

Stephen Jay Gould introduced NOMA (Non-Overlapping Magisteria), meaning that science and religion do not overlap. Magisterium refers to the sphere of authority or domain of competency. The magisterium of science is different from that of religion. Gould said religion and science are two domains of concern and inquiry that can coexist peacefully, as long as neither poaches on the other's special province. He said the magisterium of science is factual truth on all matters and that of religion is the realm of morality and the meaning of life. Dawkins disagrees with Gould and indicates that the two overlap. He says the presence or absence of God is a scientific question. Gould is right in this particular respect, as the magisteria of science and religion are indeed different: Science deals with empirical matters and religion deals with non-empirical ones. Christopher Hitchens contends that the two do

not overlap but they are still antagonistic. It is on the presence or non-presence of antagonism where Gould and Hitchens differ. Dawkins differs with both as he holds that the two overlap.

Dawkins says Aquinas' cosmological arguments rely on the idea of regress and that God is invoked to terminate the regress. He says the assumption that God himself is immune to regress is unwarranted. He notes that Thomas Aquinas arguments are a *posteriori*, whereas the ontological argument is a *priori*. On proofs for God's existence, he believes both cosmological and ontological arguments fail. Dawkins also attacked the following arguments: Arguments from personal experience (such experiences are illusions), arguments from Scripture (the Gospel accounts do not present a reliable record of what actually happened), arguments from admired religious scientists (some are religious in the Einsteinian sense and he talks of the inverse connection between religious belief and/or educational level), Pascal's Wager (it is wrong to feign belief in God and that the sheer number of potential gods and goddesses destroys Pascal's logic) and Bayesian arguments (the arguments work on probability).

On natural selection, Dawkins says it raises consciousness. He mentions of the futility of the trickle-down theory of creation and that natural selection explains the whole of life and also raises our consciousness to the power of science to explain how organised complexity can emerge from simple beginnings without any deliberate guidance. Intelligent design is not proper alternative to chance, but natural selection is.

Dawkins also attacks the argument of irreducible complexity by saying that intelligent design is not proper alternative to chance. Dawkins attacks the worship of the God of gaps and quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer in support. He said that gaps shrink as science advances and God will have nothing to do in an age informed by science and scientific reasoning. The intelligent design movement based primarily in North America argues for an intelligent Designer, based on gaps in scientific explanation, such as the irreducible complexity of the world. On both scientific and theological grounds, the approach is found wanting. It makes Christianity vulnerable to scientific progress. The worship of the God of gaps is not the norm in Christian tradition and Dawkins is attacking what is actually abnormal. The Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne contended that the capacity of science to explain itself requires explanation; in other words, the intelligibility of the universe itself needs explanation or explicability itself requires explanation (McGrath 2007:31). It is therefore not gaps that point

us to God, but rather the very comprehensibility and explicability of the universe. In that sense, scientific and technological advancement does not pose as a threat to God, but rather helps us to better appreciate God.

Dawkins says religion is a by-product of an underlying psychological propensity, which in some circumstances is or was once useful. He says the idea of immortality survives and spreads because it caters for wishful thinking. But does wishing something make that object false? Don't human beings wish things that exist? So, can wishing be proof of non-existence of anything? The fact that people wish immortality is not evidence enough that there is no life after death. Would proceeding with the argument along the line of Dawkins be scientific? Dennett asked whether there could be a god centre in our brains and Richard Dawkins is quoted, saying: "If neuroscientists find a god centre in the brain, Darwinian scientists like me want to know why the god centre evolved. Why did those of our ancestors who had a genetic tendency to grow a god centre survive better than rivals who did not?" The question then regards how the hypothesis could stand, given that neuroscientists have not yet discovered a god centre in the human brain?

Dawkins mentions memes, which he says are cultural units that replicate in the same manner as genes. He says the meme theory and the psychological by-product theory of religion overlap. Christianity and other religions probably began as local units, in Dawkins' opinion. Memes continue to exist, either due to their absolute merit or compatibility with other memes. David Sloan Wilson (Barrett 2007:58) argues that religious systems encourage pro-social behaviour and groups that exhibit pro-social behaviour (cooperation, lack of cheating and stealing, *et cetera*) will tend to survive and produce groups that do not exhibit these traits. The implication of Wilson's argument is that religious beliefs and communities will continue to exist because of their social utility, not necessarily because of any truth-value. On cultural replicators, Dennett (2007:78) said that cultural transmission can sometimes mimic genetic transmission; permitting competing variants to be copied at different rates, resulting in gradual revisions in features of those cultural items, and these revisions have no deliberate, fore-sighted authors. He further said cultural symbionts, memes, are passed on from parents to offspring by cultural, rather than genetic means in the same way as many other socialising skills.

Dawkins (McGrath 2005:120) associated his idea of the meme with religious belief, regarding religions as the prime example of memes and as basically mind parasites. Dawkins sees belief in God as self-replicating information that leaps infectiously from mind to mind. Alister McGrath quashes the whole concept of memes as unnecessary saying there is no link between biological evolution and cultural evolution. Eagleton quashes Dawkins' idea of memes saying in meme theory we see the conflation of the cultural and the biological. It can be observed from McGrath's and Eagleton's arguments that the biological does not necessarily translate into the cultural.

Dawkins posits Darwinian reasons for being moral. The reasons are genetic kinship, reciprocation and the benefit of acquiring reputation for generosity. He says you do not need religion to be moral. He refers to Einstein's comment that if people are good only because they fear punishment, and hope for reward, then we are a sorry lot indeed. Einstein and Dawkins pose a challenge to Christianity which teaches that morality should be out of reverence or awe for God not for fear of consequences. Dawkins says moral principles that are based only upon religion may be called absolutist.

Dawkins says Scriptures might be a source of morals either by direct instruction or by example. However, he dismisses the Old Testament as a source of morals. From the theistic side, the underlying moral principles in Old Testament times are applicable to modern times though Dawkins sees a disconnection between scriptural and modern morals. He says Joshua's destruction of Jericho is morally indistinguishable from Hitler's invasion of Poland and described the atonement, the central doctrine of Christianity, as vicious, sado-masochistic and repellent.

Dawkins introduced the idea of moral Zeitgeist. The moral Zeitgeist moves in a relatively consistent direction. He says it is impelled by the driving role of individual leaders and improved education and that it undermines the claim that we need God to be moral. Dawkins indicates morality has Darwinian roots and mentions the selfish gene as a force behind moral development. He quotes Steven Weinberg, who said: "Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it, you'd have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things." Blaise Pascal spoke along those lines when he said: "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction" (Barrett 2007:249).

The argument against Pascal would have to deal with whether doing evil from religious conviction mean that religion is evil.

Dawkins said individual atheists may do evil, but not in the name of atheism. He goes on to say that no wars are fought in the name of atheism, but that religious wars have been frequent in history. He says the refusal of Pope Pius XII to take a stand against the Nazis is a subject of embarrassment to the modern Church. The anti-Nazi campaigners of the Confession Church would agree with Dawkins' verdict on Pope Pius XII. Hart (2009:96) argued that it is a fiction that the new secular order of state supremacy rescued Europe from conflicts prompted by religious faith and thereby, brought peace to the Continent. According to Hart, the wars were ideological rather than religious, although they were fought in the name of religion. Religion was used as a weapon in the wars of ideologies.

Dawkins says he is passionate, not fundamentalist, about evolution and that creationists are fundamentalist about the origin of the universe. He says fundamentalism ruins the scientific enterprise. Even moderate religion should have no place, as it gives room to religious fundamentalism. His observation that religious extremism is dangerous is right but is he right in his critique of moderate religion? For him, even moderate religion should have no place at all because it serves as breeding ground for fundamentalism and subversion of science.

He says religion performs four functions: explanation, exhortation, consolation and inspiration. He then goes on to discredit religion in all the four areas, saying that religion is redundant as there are now other ways in which the needs mentioned above are achieved. Dawkins has a functionalist, rather than essentialist understanding of religion. That understanding renders religion redundant in view of other players on the field whereas an essentialist understanding sees the value of religion even in the wake of many players in the public sphere.

Dawkins (McGrath 2005:84) delivered a lecture at the Edinburgh International Science Festival in 1992, in which he set out his views on the relation of faith and evidence. He said: "Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence ... Faith is not allowed to justify itself by argument." Four years later, he was named humanist of the year

and in his acceptance speech, he set out his agenda for the eradication of what he regarded as the greatest evil of our age.

The four new atheists discussed above have many things in common. They all argue for the non-existence of God, that religious belief causes evil, that morality is not ultimately grounded in religion and that science is the absolute. They all claim to the effect that religious belief is irrational, that all reality should be explained in naturalistic terms, that religion should be described in functionalist sense and they all attack the abnormal in religion and go on to discredit religion based on the aberrations. The section that follows presents critiques of Dawkins by Terry Eagleton (himself an avowed atheist), Klaus Nürnberger, as well as Alister and Joanna McGrath.

2.4 Critiquing Dawkins: Eagleton, Nürnberger, and Alister and Joanna McGrath

2.4.1 Terry Eagleton

Terry Eagleton is Bailrigg Professor of English Literature at the University of Lancaster, England and Professor of Cultural Theory at the National University of Ireland. In his book *Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*, Eagleton attempts to show the futility of the arguments of Dawkins and Hitchens, whom he calls Ditchkins. He argues that Dawkins and Hitchens misinterpret religion, Christianity in particular, and that the two reached wrong conclusion concerning the nature of the Christian faith and its theological claims. Their arguments are based on an erroneous understanding of religion. He quashes them for understanding religion as an explanation for the universe and for maintaining that all Christians subscribe to fideism. Not all Christians are fideists and not all fideists are Christians. Eagleton gives an example of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who he says was a fideist but not a believer. Eagleton himself is against religion. The only reason for critiquing his anti-religious friends is that their arguments lack substance and their approach is wrong. He (2009:xi) comments: “I therefore have a good deal of sympathy with its (religion’s) rationalist and humanist critics. But it is also the case, as this book argues, that most of those critics buy their rejection of religion on the cheap.” That implies that his arguments against religion go deeper than those of many critics of religion.

Eagleton contends that “God is the reason why there is something rather than nothing, the condition of possibility for any entity whatsoever” (2009:7). He goes on to say that God

himself is a non-entity. He states that science and theology are for the most part not talking about the same kind of things. That could mean that there is a partial overlap between science and religion. Eagleton could be thinking along the lines of Joanna and Alister McGrath's concept of Partially Overlapping Magisteria (POMA).

Eagleton (2009:15) argues, as Albert Schweitzer did, that Jesus taught interim ethics, wrongly thinking that the end of the world was near. He (2009:19) goes on to say that "there is nothing heroic about the New Testament at all and that Jesus is a sick joke of a Saviour." Moreover, he (2009:23) holds that Jesus died in solidarity with the *anawin* (Hebrew), meaning the destitute and underprivileged, who Eagleton says are the shit or scum of the earth.

Eagleton argues that his account of the Christian faith is thoroughly orthodox, scriptural and traditional (2009:47). Questions could be posed to him: Does his description of Jesus and the New Testament demonstrate a deep understanding of the nature and teachings of the Christian religion? Is there really no opposition between secular liberalism and religion? Could Christianity be regarded as all about morality? He (2009:18-19) says that salvation is not by observance of religious rituals, but by performing humanising works. Is that really a Christian version of salvation?

Eagleton laments religion's remoteness from the practical world. He says Christianity long ago "betrayed its own revolutionary origins and shifted from the side of the poor and disposed to that of the rich and aggressive" (2009:55). Here, he acknowledges the positive impact of the teaching of Christianity on the welfare of the society in the days of old. These days, the Church is siding with dehumanisers, whereas in the past she used to fight against dehumanisation. However, he goes on to say that the Church has committed atrocities in the name of Jesus. He researches the history of the Church and gives a catalogue of what he views as the evils. There, he commends Ditchkins for powerfully exposing the social and political evils of Christianity. He indicates, however, that liberalism has produced some bad things.

Eagleton distinguishes between the Scriptural and ideological kinds of Christian faith and argues in support of the scriptural version, maintaining that the ideological has no basis in Scripture. The Kierkegaardian phrase 'saving Christianity from Christendom', which

Eagleton (2009:58) quotes in support is similar to Bonhoeffer's concept of religionless Christianity. Religion has failed to live up to its founding principles. In order to be relevant to the society, the Church should speak out against social and political evils. Christianity becomes not just a matter of adherence to doctrines, but of standing for and acting on behalf of the oppressed and sufferers. He regards the scriptural Church as revolutionary in nature in that she subverts the situation where the prevailing human conditions are dehumanising.

Eagleton says the enlightened liberal humanism serves as the legitimating ideology of the capitalist culture. He contends that it is mythical to think that the Enlightenment led to the ousting of an age of faith in favour of that of reason. He points out: "Scientific rationality represented a new form of human self-understanding, not simply a negation of what went before" (2009:77). Scientific rationality did not dispel religion. However, he says postmodernists should not cast doubt on the value of science. For that, Ditchkins would love him. He says that like religion, science has betrayed its revolutionary element. It could be drawn from his line of argument that a return to revolutionary science and revolutionary religion is the way to go in dealing with social and political concerns raised by Secular humanists.

For Dawkins, scientific development and moral evolution go hand in hand. He says that there is a general upward trend and moral progress with some setbacks. Dawkins means that the more the scientific development, the higher the levels of morality. In his opinion, the evils of humankind are just setbacks, but the general trend is that of moving higher and higher to a better morality. Eagleton quashes that view arguing that such an understanding of scientific progress deprives us of our cherished historical heritage.

Eagleton argues that the Christian tradition set the ground for the development of the Enlightenment thinking. He says Christianity's rejection of false religious beliefs and practices led to the Enlightenment's rejection of superstition in favour of human-centred values. Eagleton (2009:69) maintained that "this enlightened liberal humanism served as the legitimating ideology of a capitalist culture more steeped in blood than any other episode in human history." He notes the dangers brought by liberal humanism.

2.4.2 Klaus Nürnberger

Klaus Nürnberger, Professor emeritus and Senior Research Associate at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, argued in his book *Richard Dawkins' God Delusion: A Repentant Refutation*, that there is no opposition between science and the Christian faith, which evolved within the same cultural realm. Nürnberger (2010:13) noted that ever since the Enlightenment, “science has lost its transcendent foundations and faith has lost its credibility” and that “both modernity and Christianity are in crisis.” Science has become atheist and faith has become superstitious. Nürnberger critiques Dawkins’ on the level of assumptions exposing the fundamental challenge that his stance poses to the Christian faith and stressing the basic failures of Dawkins’ reductionist interpretation of the theory of evolution. He stresses that he has no problem with the theory of evolution, but has problems with Dawkins’ approach of taking it to metaphysical ultimacy, whereby the theory becomes the ultimate. On the theory of evolution, Nürnberger’s concurs with Joanna and Alister McGrath that the theory has some merit but they disagree with Dawkins’ reduction of everything to evolution. They are all in the category of theist Darwinists.

According to Nürnberger, Dawkins is fundamentalist as far as his view of scientific evidence is concerned. Nürnberger (2010:15) says naturalists’ view of nature as a self-generated, self-propelled, self-directed and self-explanatory process is a metaphysical assumption, not a scientific finding. He considers the broader theme of the relationship between science and faith and argues that the two are soul mates, not antagonists. There he differs with Dawkins, who argues that the two are in opposition to each other. Nürnberger (2020:19) summarises Dawkins’ position as follows: “that the notion of God lacks evidence, coherence, explanatory power, utility, ethical integrity and genuine comfort.” Nürnberger argues that the Christian faith is not superstitious, irrational and fanatical as held by Dawkins.

Nürnberger’s response is based on the existential experience of faith in Christ. Faith is about ultimate grounding, meaning and destiny of reality. He says experienced reality is not self-sufficient but depends on a transcendent Source and Destiny and that meaning should be based on transcendence. Denying the transcendence means accepting an insufficient position on matters of ultimate grounding, meaning and destiny of reality. Discussion with Dawkins has to be conducted at that level of underlying assumptions. Nürnberger becomes a scientist to the scientists by accepting the validity of scientific approach. He reconceptualises the

Christian gospel in ways sensible to the scientific community. Nürnberger adopts an approach whereby the Christian faith is reconceptualised in ways relevant to the contemporary times. His approach is modelled on the early Church, whereby the Christian faith was reinterpreted in Platonic metaphysics as it moved from Palestinian to Hellenistic culture. He (2010:65) says: “This approach moves from existence to essence, from history to ontology, from time into eternity, from space into universality, from power plays into harmony.” Reconceptualisation of the Christian faith would make it relevant for dealing with human concerns. The Apostles followed that approach when they took the Gospel to the Hellenistic culture.

Believers, as Nürnberger says, entrust themselves to the dynamics of God's creative and redemptive projects. Nürnberger (2010:76) comments: “Self-entrustment also prevents humans from hubris. The ancient Greeks have defined hubris as the self-elevation of humans to the status of divinity to which they are not entitled.” Human beings participate in the work of God on earth. God is the Source and Destiny of reality. Nürnberger argues that absolutisation of the human mind becomes idolatry. Human beings should appreciate the role they are given by the Almighty and honour God as they should. No hope should be placed in humans and modernity. Scientific advancement is no guarantee for high moral standards.

Nürnberger locates Richard Dawkins' *God Delusion* in the broader context of the discourse of modernity, whereby the underlying assumption is denial of transcendent authority and humans assume the authority. Science ceases to acknowledge its limitations and mandate and becomes what we can call *science sans frontieres* (science without borders). Science denies the transcendent, which is at the heart of the Christian faith and it becomes its own transcendence. In Nürnberger's words (2010:44-45): “Transcendence means reaching beyond experienced reality towards God ... Transcendence also de-absolutises experienced reality as such.” Experienced reality is neither the transcendent, the ultimate, nor is it the absolute.

Human beings are then invited by God, the Transcendent Being, to participate in His creative and redemptive projects. The duty of humankind then is noble, as it originates from the Transcendent God, who is beyond the universe. Nürnberger does not posit an unreachable God, but he shows that although God is superior to people, He is involved in the affairs of the universe. Nürnberger is not deistic. Deism does not add value to the Church's struggle against Secular humanism. The deistic God is easily subdued by the Secular humanists. Nürnberger argues for the indispensable role of convictions and claims that they cannot be replaced by

scientific facts and theories as Dawkins wants the situation to be. Nürnberger (2010:145) advocates “combining best science, best religion and best art into a concerted effort to get us out of the mess.” Combining the best of one thing with the worst of the other does not help matters, but rather worsens the situation. Aberrant Christianity is not a license for absolutising science and reason, neither is it license for adopting a secular humanist stand. The remedy for aberrant Christianity lies in biblical Christianity. There is need to distinguish between critique of aberrant Christianity from that of biblical Christianity.

2.4.3 Joanna and Alister McGrath and Others

Alister and Joanna argue that Dawkins regards and employs science beyond its bounds and that leads him to unsatisfactory conclusions. The principle of NOMA makes sense. Science is not the only epistemological model that there is. By saying scientific knowledge is the only knowledge that there is, Dawkins is actually being reductionist or exclusivist. He actually subscribes to scientism, that is, the refusal to concede any limits to the sciences. Scientism is not scientific. McGrath (2007:11) noted that although an atheist, Gould was absolutely clear that the natural sciences, including evolutionary theory, were consistent with both atheism and conventional religious belief. Dawkins felt that natural sciences were not consistent with theism. According to Dawkins’ view, no real scientist can be a theist. An Oxford immunologist by the name of Peter Medawar (McGrath 2007:38-39) emphasised that science was limited by the nature of reality. He acknowledged that science was incomparably the most successful enterprise human beings have ever engaged with and went on to distinguish what he called transcendent questions, which were better left to religion and metaphysics and questions about the organisation and structure of the material universe, which were questions for science. He held that scientists needed to be cautious about their pronouncements on these matters, lest they lose the trust of the public by confident and dogmatic overstatements. He mentioned that doctrinaire positivism dismissed ultimate questions as nonquestions or pseudoquestions, such as only simpletons ask and only charlatans profess to be able to answer. The basic point of Medawar is that there exist questions and concerns beyond the realm of science.

For Dawkins, there is only one magisterium, that is, the magisterium of science that deals with empirical reality. In Gould’s opinion, there are two magisteria: those of science and of religion, which do not overlap. For Alister and Joanna McGrath, there are two magisterial: those of science and of religion, which partially overlap. As Gould talks of Non-overlapping

Magisteria (NOMA), the McGraths talk of Partially overlapping Magisteria (POMA) (2007:41). POMA holds that science and religion offer possibilities of cross-fertilisation on account of the interpenetration of their subjects and methods. Francis Collins (McGrath 2007:41) is quoted, speaking of “a richly satisfying harmony between the scientific and spiritual worldviews” and saying: “The principles of faith are complementary with the principles of science.” Collins spoke in support of the partial overlap.

According to Alister and Joanna McGrath, Dawkins has a limited and erroneous view of reality. Reality comprises the physical/natural and the metaphysical/supernatural. By denying the existence of the supernatural, Dawkins is actually doing injustice to reality. Scientific evidence cannot falsify religious beliefs, as the latter are in the realm that science cannot test. Using scientific findings to falsify or verify religious beliefs is committing a metaphysical error. McGrath (2007:11) noted that in *The God Delusion*, there is a lot of pseudo-scientific speculation linked with wider cultural criticisms of religion. The book falls short of thorough scientific analysis. McGrath asked: Why were the natural sciences being so abused in an attempt to advance atheist fundamentalism? McGrath remarks that Dawkins displays hostility to religion and adopts rhetoric at the expense of principles of scientific research.

Dawkins is right on the dangers of religious extremism, but the remedies are questionable. However, biblical beliefs should be distinguished from aberrant ones. Some Christians already speak against cases of religious extremism. The stand of religious extremists is not the norm in Christianity. Confusing the two leads to a prejudiced critique of religion. Many religious people have spoken against the crusades, inquisition, Islamic Jihads, attacks on America on 11 September 2001 and suicide bombs in many Muslim-dominated countries. It shows that such religious extremism is not a necessary element of religious belief. Dawkins would do justice if he could distinguish between a norm and an aberration in religious tradition.

McGrath argues that Dawkins fails to understand the theologies of the Church Father Tertullian and the Reformation icon Martin Luther. Dawkins thinks the two produced tricks to aid the survival of religion. He finds support in their writings to the effect that reason and faith are not soul mates and that faith should be irrational. The two men actually did not mean that faith and reason are antagonistic. McGrath (2007:24) argues that Dawkins follows an

unscientific method when he says: “Dawkins’ inept engagement with Luther shows how Dawkins abandons even the pretence of rigorous evidence-based scholarship.”

Alister McGrath (2005:7) faults Dawkins for presenting Darwinism as a universal philosophy of life, rather than a mere scientific theory. He goes on to say that Dawkins' atheism is inadequately grounded in the biological evidence. McGrath holds that Dawkins’ critique of religion is based on hearsay and anecdotal evidence, rather than on hard research and he employs rhetoric not rationality. Dawkins proceeds from a Darwinian theory of evolution to a confident atheistic worldview and says that after Darwin, we can speak only of the “illusion of design” and no longer of intelligent design. Dawkins holds that the natural sciences, especially evolutionary biology, represent an intellectual superhighway to atheism. Dawkins makes that stand even in light of the failure of the secularisation theory. Can natural sciences really lead to the abolition of theism? McGrath (2007:22) also faults Dawkins for presenting the pathological as if it were normal, the fringe as if it were centre and crackpots as if they were normal.

Drawing from the thinking of Michael Polanyi, McGrath (2005:104) concludes that scientific theorising is provisional, meaning that it provides what is believed to be the best account of the experimental observations currently available. The implication is that Dawkins should not be certain that his views will be true for all time. The history of science has proved that what was once regarded as secure knowledge is today no longer regarded as such.

2.4.3 Other critical voices

As Alister McGrath critiques Dawkins from the field of science, Alvin Plantinga critiques Dawkins from the field of philosophy. Both men identify Dawkins as the New Atheist of most central concern. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (2008:83-85) says: “In some sense, the Achilles heel of the critiques offered by McGrath and Plantinga might be their own acceptance of the larger project of evolution.” The implication of Mohler Jr's critique of McGrath and Plantinga is that the two great scholars did not go far enough by subscribing to the broader project of evolution. In other words, their position is compromised as evolution naturally leads to materialism and naturalism. Logan Paul Gage, a PhD student in Philosophy at Baylor University, lauds McGrath for observing that while Dawkins is a scientist writing about religion, he fails to study religion scientifically (<http://www.discovery.org/a/4450>, accessed 17

November 2013). However, Gage faults McGrath for not attempting to counter Dawkins' neo-Darwinism, claiming that “any critique of Dawkins' atheism without tackling its Darwinian foundation is bound to leave the reader unsatisfied” (ibid.). Gage finds fault with theistic Darwinists such as McGrath. He finds McGrath's programme of deconstructing Dawkins unfinished. The implication of Gage's position is that evolution and theism do not go together, though science and faith are compatible. How can a Darwinian be a Christian or a Christian be a Darwinian? Can we logically talk of a Christian Darwinist or of a Darwinist Christian? The meaning of Gage's position is that a Darwinian cannot be a Christian.

Similar to McGrath's is the Pope John Paul II's position who on 22 October 1996 issued a statement to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences offering support for the general notion of biological evolution, while criticising certain materialistic aspects of the idea. Richard Dawkins' observation is that the Pope is a hypocritical and superstitious person, who is just pretending to be rational. Conservative Protestants would also criticise the Pope for compromising his Christian faith. These Protestants completely deny the idea of biological evolution. Their perspective is a total and not simply a partial denial of Darwinism. Could the Pope be a Darwinist Christian or Christian Darwinist? Should the Church in Malawi adopt the way of the Pope in responding to secular humanists? Won't Secular humanists criticise the Church for hypocrisy and superstition as Dawkins did to the Pope?

This chapter has taken us on a journey seeking the roots and development of secular humanism from the ancient world through the Enlightenment to the state of debates in the present times. Critiques of the secularisation theory as well as secular humanism and its dimensions were presented and we also noted the resurgence of religion today even in the wake of anti-religious movements. It is from this broader context that secular humanism in Malawi is dealt with in the next chapter. The assumptions and specific arguments of the New Atheists are particularly important as the same are evident in the secular humanist agenda in Malawi. Therefore, the stage for a meaningful engagement with secular humanism in Malawi is set.

CHAPTER 3

THE RISE OF SECULAR HUMANISM IN MALAWI

Secular humanism, as a movement and intellectual current, is a relatively new phenomenon in Malawi and its teachings and arguments are unsettling to many Malawians. Democratic ideals of freedom and tolerance from the early 1990's, positive in their right, have given space to new trends including secular humanism. The phenomenon has the potential of encouraging Malawians to think seriously about issues previously neglected and to desist from religious fundamentalism.

It is propagated mainly by the Association for Secular Humanism in Malawi, whose Executive Director is George Thindwa. Thindwa is married to Victoria Msiska and they have three children. He hails from Nyungwe in the northern tip of the Chitipa district bordering Tanzania. He holds a Master's Degree in Trade and Development, obtained in the United States of America and worked with a number of Government departments before retiring. His views on the God debate anger many people, to the extent that he was kicked off a bus from Lilongwe to Blantyre. He happened to be reading a book by Christopher Hitchens, titled *God Is Not Great*, when a preacher boarded the bus and began proselytising. Thindwa objected to hearing the preacher's message. Commotion ensued and in the end, with police intervention, it was settled that he be dropped from the bus. He identifies secular humanism with the Enlightenment epoch and religious belief with the Dark Ages.

The objectives of the Association for Secular Humanism in Malawi are the promotion of science, free inquiry, and critical thinking away from superstition and irrationalism. The Association applied for incorporation under the Trustees Incorporation Act in 2009 but the then Minister of Justice did not sign their papers, indicating that doing so would be going against his conscience. Upon counsel from their lawyers, Ralph and Arnold (Associates), the Association applied to be registered as a limited company but the Registrar of Companies was reluctant to do so, until their lawyers threatened legal action. The Association is now registered as a limited company and is still fighting for registration with the Ministry of Justice and with the Human Rights Consultative Committee (*Sunday Times*, National, 4 August 2013:2-3).

According to Mathias Junior Luka (2012:25-28), the process of forming the Association for Secular Humanism was led by Dr Paul Munyenembe, then a lecturer at the Bunda College of Agriculture, a constituent college of the University of Malawi. The first humanist conference in the country was held on 26th September, 2008 at Nathenje in Lilongwe. During the same year, the Bunda College Association for Secular Humanism was formed at the college campus. In March 2008, the Association had attended an international conference in Uganda on “Humanism Growth and Development in Africa” particularly in East and Southern Africa. The Association also held a national conference from 4 to 5 September 2009 at the Ministry of Works in Blantyre. The topic of the conference was “Humanism, Religion, and Witchcraft”. The conference received papers on humanism, superstition in the health sector, witchcraft and the oppressiveness of religion on women. The year 2010 was named “the year of anti-superstition campaign in Malawi.”

Luka argues that membership of the Association grew from less than ten in 2006 to ninety in 2009, to two hundred and fifty by January 2011 and to three hundred and fifty in 2012. He further says that fifteen are Members of Parliament, five are cabinet ministers, forty are senior civil servants. He then says that forty percent of the members of the Association are young people from institutions of higher learning in Malawi such as Chancellor College, Bunda College and Mzuzu University. Luka mentions that membership fee per annum is MK5,000 for ordinary members, free for undergraduate members, US \$70 for international members and that the fee for life membership is US \$350.

The discussion to follow focuses on representative topics in the writings of secular humanists in Malawi. Groups of articles are put together along thematic lines.

3.1 Representative Topics

3.1.1 Definition of Secular Humanism

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 23 September 2012:6) describes secular humanism as a worldview with several principles. The first principle is the conviction that dogmas, ideologies and traditions, whether religious, political or social must be weighed and tested and not simply accepted on faith. The second one is a commitment to critical reason, factual evidence and scientific methods of inquiry, rather than faith and mysticism, in seeking remedies to problems of life. The third one is a constant search for objective truth, with the view that new knowledge and experience are beneficial to humanity. The fourth is a concern for this life, a commitment to making it meaningful through understanding of ourselves, our history,

intellectual and artistic achievement. The fifth one is a search for viable individual and social principles of ethical conduct. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 23 September 2012:6) further argues that secular humanists are naturalists in that they do not accept the existence of supernatural entities. They do not recognise anything beyond physical laws of the universe. Supernatural events such as miracles are viewed with scepticism. He also says that secular humanists are generally non-theists and non-religious.

Secular humanists from 50 countries met in Oslo, Norway, in August 2011 to identify ways of ending the current political challenges facing different countries, especially in Europe and Africa. George Thindwa, the Executive Director of the Association, who also led the delegation, said the theme of the meeting was 'Humanism and Peace'. Thindwa observes (*The Nation*, 15 August 2011:15): “The conference is discussing religion and conflict, justifications for war like the Libya case. Humanists are saying there is no justification for any war, especially when we live once and in this earth only.” The fact that humanists met in Oslo for world peace, means that they think their movement can provide a solution for wars and conflicts around the world.

Secular humanists rely upon critical reason, the lessons of history and experience to create meaning in life. The implication is that humanity gives meaning to life and that meaning is not bestowed from above. On whether Secular humanism is a religion or not, Thindwa minces no words in saying that it is not a religion. He says that Secular humanism lacks essential characteristics of a religion, of believing in God and an accompanying transcendent order. Its approach to life is philosophical and not religious at all. He follows Richard Dawkins' line of thought. Dawkins argues that his humanism is secular and not religious and that he does not use “religious”, as the term confuses people into thinking that the supernatural is implied. He says even Einsteinian religion is not religion in the conventional sense of the word. Thindwa thinks along those lines when he says that the life stance that secular humanists adopt is non-religious.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 31 July 2011:6) holds that a humanistic outlook is based upon modern science. He says that humanism is the dominant theme of the modern intellectual world, because it provides a perspective on humanity and nature that is derived from natural, biological and behavioural sciences. He exalts science as one that is leading to us knowing more and more of the nature of humanity and the universe. Like Dawkins, Thindwa contends

that scientific methodology is the only reliable avenue to gaining knowledge. Humanism is a commitment to the use of critical intelligence and rational inquiry in the understanding of the world and in solving problems. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 20 October 2013:21) quotes A. Smith saying, “To explain the known with unknown is to forsake all intellectual sanity. To explain the unknown by known is an intelligent procedure.” Thindwa, who contends that phenomena do not have religious or supernatural explanation, finds support in A. Smith. In fact, Thindwa's epistemological approach regards religious explanations as of intellectual inferiority to scientific ones. Even in the traditional setting, knowledge has a transcendental dimension in that it is imparted upon people by the Supreme Being and ancestors. Thindwa's theory of knowledge would probably not be accepted by the traditional communities since it would be perceived as denying knowledge its transcendental roots.

Secular humanists engage in activism. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 31 July 2011:6) quotes J. Dewey: “Humanism is a method of solving social problems. A method of inquiry, that is, we should change our position in light of new evidence and altered circumstances”. He says the reason for engaging in social action is to bring positive development and progress for humanity. Paul Kurtz said that purely theoretical humanism is a mere abstract concept and that what is central is its relationship to praxis. This relation of humanism to praxis he calls eupraxsophy. He said secular humanists believe deeply in the potentialities of human beings to achieve the good life, applying virtues and principles of humanist ethics to enhance the human condition. Their interest is to apply reason, science and free inquiry to all areas of human concern and to develop rational ethical and social alternatives. It is written in the Humanist Manifesto II that: “No deity will save us; we must save ourselves”, meaning that we are responsible for developing a just social order and ultimately for our own destiny.

Though secular humanism is not necessarily atheism, Thindwa tends to associate himself and other secular humanists in Malawi with atheism. In an article titled *Interviewing an atheist*, Thindwa says atheism means without God, just as asexual reproduction means reproduction without sex. Bishop Fulton Sheen defined an atheist as “a man (sic) who has no invisible means of support” (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 18 August 2013:21). Thindwa does not believe in what he calls religious theories of heaven, hell, life after death and a personal God. Thindwa says when Christians mention Psalm 14:1, which says that “fools say in their hearts, there is no God”, he in turn mentions Matthew 5:22, which says to the effect that whoever calls another a fool shall be in danger of hell fire (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 18 August 2013:21). Thindwa implies that there are inherent contradictions in the Scripture and he

boasts of knowing the Bible better than some Christians and of being able to use Bible verses to silence Christians. Thindwa contends “I am an atheist because no more evidence supports the Christians' god than supports the Greek/Roman gods. There is no evidence that god as portrayed by any religion exists” (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 18 August 2013:21). He says he dismisses the Christian's god in the same way as Christians dismiss Greek and Roman gods as ridiculous. Secular humanists in Malawi maintain that many people believe because they were taught as children to believe and that they join many others who believe. They say all people were atheists, without religious belief in their childhood and that they adopt belief as they are taught by their parents and guardians. Thus, Thindwa bemoans what he views as religious indoctrination.

3.1.2 The Difference between Humanism and Religion

Thindwa says humanism does not have mythic faith of believing in things with insufficient evidence as religion does (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 26 May 2013:6). He holds that religious people are gullible people, who just believe anything religious, even in the absence of enough evidence. He argues that humanism puts people first and does not use human being as a means, but rather as an end. He says humanists uphold human reason and secularism for want of a free society away from religious strangleholds. Thindwa quotes Bernard Shaw, who said: “Never accept anything reverently without asking it a great many very searching questions.” Thindwa exalts the scientific method as he thinks that in religion everything is accepted unquestioningly. His thinking is akin to that of Sigmund Freud (Hitchens 2007:155): “Where questions of religion are concerned, people are guilty of every possible sort of dishonesty and intellectual misdemeanour.” Religious people are deemed blind and unthinking, who throw intellectual rigour to the wind in religious matters. McGrath (2007:16) quoted Dawkins defining faith as “blind trust, in the absence of evidence even in the teeth of evidence.” Dawkins further said it is a process of non-thinking and evil, because it requires no justification and brooks no argument. Thindwa thinks along the same lines as Dawkins, while failing to see weaknesses in the latter's position. He says faith is infantile, which should be abandoned as people are capable of evidence-based thinking. Dawkins pointed out in his “Thought for the Day” on BBC Radio in 2003 that humanity can leave the crybaby phase and finally come of age. The Christian definition of faith is discarded by secular humanists as essentially and irredeemably irrational.

Thindwa further says: “The other elements of religion include the belief that human beings have some obligation to be sacred; the ability of that supernatural realm offers solace and

religion is the gate way to that realm. In religion, there exist institutions, hierarchy and priesthood to act as intermediary between the Gods and humans” (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 26 May 2013:6). He goes on to say that humanists see no virtue in faith, blind obedience, chastity or self-denial. Thindwa is coming from a background where he believes the supernatural does not exist and that the comfort that humanity has in the ability of the supernatural is misguided. For him, religion and all its institutions serve no valid purpose. To him, the comfort or solace that derives from religious belief is an illusion.

Thindwa defines superstition as “a belief in influences and events that are incapable of being justified on rational grounds ... a belief affording the relief of an anxiety by means of an irrational notion” (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 15 September 2013:21). The irrational notion, coupled with fear, renders a belief superstitious. Superstitions restrict liberty and happiness, while at the same time promoting cruelty and terror. Four categories of superstitious beliefs are mentioned. The first is the prediction of the future, which include, among others, astrology and prophecies. The second is the world of spirits, which comprise beliefs in ghosts, demons, devils and life after death. The third is magic, which covers charms, miracles, witchcraft, sacred objects and god-men. The fourth one is religion, whose beliefs are held emotionally and irrationally (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 15 September 2013:21). Thindwa contends that the greater the superstition, the greater the challenge to develop.

3.1.3 Meaning of Life

Another prominent Secular humanist in Malawi by the name Charles Tembo (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 7 October 2012:6) argues that believers deceive themselves by posing the theological existential paradox of asking whether one can realise a significant life if they abandon faith in immortality. Tembo says that it is the believer who squanders life. Tembo asks: “In what sense would life be worthwhile if God existed? What kind of life can be said to be significant if we are totally dependent upon this God for our existence and sustenance?” He admonishes the believer for saying that humanity's chief end is to glorify God and that God promises eternal salvation for the elect. He says the immortality myth warns that if we don't pledge allegiance to God, we are damned. He quotes Bertrand Russell in approval, “to continuously sing hymns in paradise throughout all eternity would be sheer boredom” (ibid.). Tembo then argues that believers have woven a fanciful fabric by mythological imagination in order to soothe their fears of death and to comfort those who share their anxiety.

The assumption of Charles Tembo is that the meaning of life is not bestowed from any supernatural reality, but it is humanity who gives meaning to life. For the believer, God gives meaning to life and life without God is meaningless. Full realisation of existence will be in Paradise when humanity will dwell with God eternally. For Tembo, Paradise and life after death are not realities. He dismisses such stories as mythological. The dismissal is not based on any scientific finding, but on sheer opinion. However, Tembo should be taken seriously as the believer is to avoid a flight from the realities of this life. His assumption that secular humanist agenda enlightens one to discover meaning in life should be given due attention as it poses a challenge to faith.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 12 May 2013:21) started his article by quoting R. Ingersoll, saying: “The time to be happy is now, the place to be happy is here, and the way to be happy is to make others so.” He says death is not an evil as regarded by some and he quoted Herbert Samuel: “We shouldn't see death as an injury but, rather, life as a privilege.” Humanists do not believe in the doctrine of life after death and they say it is that doctrine that makes religion so popular. Bernard Shaw is quoted, as follows: “Now the man (sic) who has come to believe that there is no such thing as death, the change so called being merely the transition to an exquisitely happy and utterly careless life, has not overcome the fear of death at all: on the contrary, it has overcome him so completely that he refuses to die on any terms whatever”. Thindwa notes believers' belief that the after-life will be good and wonderful. He argues that injustice here should not lead us to a belief in the after-life and that the after-life is a false belief though it makes people comfortable. Thindwa says if the omnipotent God cannot prevent evil from triumphing here, why assume that He will manage to perfect things in the age to come? He says the issue of personal survival raises the question of personal identity and asks: “What would survive that would really be you?” He concludes that the more you think about the after-life, the more snags and lies you will see. Thindwa holds no belief in the after-life.

Another prominent Malawian Secular humanist by the name Harold Williams, who died in July 2011, dismissed the after-life and said that his body should be offered to medical scientists after his death. He regarded organised religion as the construct of people in order to control other fellow humans and as a dangerous addiction. By positing a sociological explanation for religion, it can be noted that he is thinking like Karl Marx who said religion was sustained by socio-economic alienation. The body of Williams was actually given to the College of Medicine for medical research.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 14 July 2013:21) begins his article by quoting E. Stanton, saying: “The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of women's emancipation.” Thindwa continues that the Bible degrades women and the Church keeps them in bondage. He quotes the Free Thought Magazine of 1896, which said “Through theological superstitions, woman finds her most grievous bondage.” Thindwa then expresses concern that women are more religious than men in Malawi, even when religion keeps them in bondage. Explanations for women being more religious include: Women being very superstitious, women being less educated, the desire to meet friends as men do on Fridays and finally, women being more caring and less critical. Thindwa presents sociological reasons for women being more religious than men. Some women may be religious for reason given by Thindwa but others may be religious but not for any of the reasons given above. Do all women have that functional understanding of religion? Does the Bible and the Church actually keep women in bondage as Thindwa contends? In cases where the Church has perpetrated discrimination against women, is it the Bible per se which is the ground of such discrimination?

3.1.4 Thindwa on the Importance of Promoting Humanism in Malawi

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 8 April 2012:6) argues that humanism is good for Malawi. He begins by quoting Mark Twain, who said: “Man ... (sic) is kind enough when he is not excited by religion.” The quote introduces us to Thindwa's thinking that religion turns humans into monsters. He views religion negatively and exalts non-religiosity.

In addition, Thindwa asserts the importance of promoting humanism. He says that in the first instance, truth and rational belief are important goods that are worth promoting. Secondly, humanism combats the hatred, violence, exploitation and discrimination that are often enforced by religious belief. He mentions examples of such evils as discrimination against homosexual people and the oppression of women as second-class servants and the property of men. In his opinion, such evils are the products of religion. He contends that humanism frees people from such evils. Thirdly, he says humanism fosters the development of secular morality and public policies based upon the concerns of humankind. Thindwa regards the divine commands as having negative effect upon lives of men. He mentions Churches' opposition to birth control as an example. He says the mindset that obedience to God is a religious virtue is antithetical to our need to think and act as rational agents. Thindwa says that belief in God promotes weakness over strength and dependence over independence. He says the energy spent in prayer could be used in more productive ways if humanity was not

religious; science and human effort have helped end problems like diseases and prayer has not helped in any way to end such difficulties in life. In saying so, Thindwa quashes the notion of the efficacy of a faithful prayer and that of an answering God.

Moreover, in stressing the importance of promoting humanism, Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 15 April 2012:6) quotes J. Goethe, who said: “Living will teach you to live better than Preacher or Bible.” The assumption is that the Bible has no moral authority and should therefore be disregarded. Moral values can be discerned and discovered in life and humanity has the capacity for such discernment. Humanism promotes the value of earthly life and belief results in devaluation of life on earth in favour of an afterlife. Thus, humanism, for Thindwa, honours life as opposed to religion which degrades life. He goes on to say that belief in God leads humanity to think that they are superior, which in turn leads to the exploitation of other creatures. He says humanism combats such “institutionalised speciesism.” He takes it for granted that such institutionalised speciesism is the product of religious belief. Christopher Hitchens (2007:15) thinks along the same lines, when he quotes Lucretius: “To such height of evil are men driven by religion.” His thinking is that human beings are led to be evil by religion. Hitchens mentioned how he witnessed evil done in the name of religion in the cities of Belfast, Beirut, Bombay, Belgrade, Bethlehem and Baghdad. He maintains that religion is a threat to human progress and life. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 4 August 2013:21) quoted Voltaire, saying: “Christians have been intolerant of all men.” However, the Secular humanists themselves should be examined whether they do not exhibit elements of intolerance in their critique of religious belief. If they were a majority, would they not suppress Christians and other religious groups?

Thindwa argues that although believers regard the deity as the paragon of moral virtue, the fact is that the traditional God makes for bad role model. God is characterised by cruelty, threatening humans with hell and demanding praise. Thindwa says the world would be a worse place if all human beings emulated such behaviour. What Thindwa actually presents is a caricatured picture of God, which is proceeding from misconceptions and erroneous exegesis.

A further argument that Thindwa advances against religion is that belief in God is anti-intellectual and contemptuous towards free-thinking. He says believers and religious institutions treat any doubt and critical thinking as sinful acts. He says independent inquiry relying on rational faculties is frowned upon. He understands Ecclesiastes 1:18 as supporting

his position, “for in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” He does not entertain, moreover, the idea that the verse does not support anti-intellectualism.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 25 November 2012:6) quotes Richard Ingersoll, saying: “The country that is more religious is in the worst development condition and that has the least religion is the most prosperous.” The argument of Secular humanists is that Secular humanism is good for Malawi, whereas Christianity is bad for Malawi. Thindwa refers to a debate between Humanists and Pastors/Prophets at African Bible College on 20 September 2012, whose topic was 'Why Christianity is bad for Malawi?' For Thindwa, Malawi doesn't develop quickly because people are too religious, whereas Mozambique, which is non-religious, is developing fast. Christianity has dogmas that are anti-developmental and harmful. He says Christianity opposes the scientific principle of natural law and discourages a scientific approach to problems. Thindwa is coming from the assumption that religion and science are not compatible and that one cannot be religious and scientific at the same time. He ignores the historical factor that Christianity advanced science. Thindwa regards denominationalism as sheer pandemonium. Which denomination should we trust? He asks. He mentions a case whereby Church leaders prevent their members from seeking medical attention. But he doesn't check whether that is orthodox or aberrant Christianity. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 4 August 2013:21) quoted J. Burroughs, saying: “Science has done more for the development of Western civilisation in 100 years than Christianity did in 1,800 years.” Secular humanists advocate their agenda, which they take as fostering science and rationality.

Thindwa argues that the contention of churchmen that some great figures in history such as American Presidents were conventional worshippers is not true. He (*Sunday Times*, 25 March 2012:6) quotes M. Alder: “One of the embarrassing problems of the Christian faith was that none of the first six Presidents of the United States was an orthodox Christian.” He states J. Haught's observation that most of the founders of United States of America were deists, who doubted that Christ was a God and challenged religious beliefs. Thomas Jefferson is one of the Presidents who give inspiration to humanism. Thindwa says Jefferson was a sceptic who wrote many attacks on the clergy and was denounced as an enemy of religion. Jefferson rejected his Church's supernatural dogmas like the belief that Jesus was divine. F. Brodie is quoted saying: “No other statesman could match Jefferson in his hatred of the established faith and his distrust of clergymen as prisoners of the human mind” (ibid.).

Abraham Lincoln (1809 – 1865) (*Sunday Times*, 27 May 2012:6), the 16th President of America, is another President who gives inspiration. He is quoted saying: “I am approached ... by religious men who are certain that they represent the Divine Will ... I hope it will not be irrelevant in me to say that if it be probable that God would reveal his will to others, on a point so connected to my duty, it might be supposed he would reveal it directly to me.” He is also quoted saying: “My earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of the scriptures have become clearer and stronger with advancing years and I see no reason for thinking I shall ever change them.” He is known for emancipating millions of people by abolishing slavery. He disobeyed God because the word of God, the Bible – condones slavery. What Thindwa implies by mentioning Lincoln, is that religion enslaves, whereas Secular humanism emancipates, hence the need to promote humanism. Thindwa can be read as contending that what people attribute to Christianity in America is actually the work of Secular humanism.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 8 September 2013:21) further quotes J. Haught, saying: “The Church has always been willing to swap off treasures in heaven for cash on earth.” Thindwa contends that the Bible encourages poverty. He mentions Luke 18:18-30, which concludes by saying that it is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God. He thinks the Bible is against wealth. Thindwa says the after-life is not a reality and so does not compensate for earthly poverty and suffering. He dismisses the idea of storing treasures in heaven. Secular humanists use reason, experience and empathy to oppose the inequalities that cause poverty and to improve the welfare of the human race. That they do not because of adherence to any religious imperative, but due to the humanness in people. Secular humanists dismiss fate or an angry god as the causes of evil. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 8 September 2013:21) says the causes of evil include: Lack of education which could produce professionals who help create a better future, lack of women’s empowerment, exploitation of the poor by the rich as the latter desire wealth and status, traditions and religious beliefs that stand in the way of progress, corruption and inefficiencies that let a few people exploit resources at the expense of the masses and natural disasters like drought and floods, which hit the poorest the hardest. Secular humanists focus their efforts on finding rational and pragmatic solutions in the fight against ignorance and poverty. For them, recourse to God does not make sense as people have the capability to put things right. According to a survey conducted among British Humanists in the year 2000, humanists contribute very much to humanitarian organisations which work towards alleviating the undesirable conditions of the

poor (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 8 September 2013:21). Secular humanists' thinking is that they should be credited with efforts to end poverty, whereas religion should be discredited for encouraging poverty through teaching about the after-life and storing treasures in heaven.

In summary, secular humanists see their ideology as advancing corrective measures to the evils caused by religion. In that sense, they see humanism as worth promoting. The question to them is: Are the evils mentioned really the evils of religion? Does religion *per se* lead to evil or it is wrong understanding and application of religion that breeds evil?

3.1.5 Does God Exist?

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 3 June 2012:6) begins his article by quoting Aristotle: "Men (sic) create gods after their own image, not only with regard to their form but with regard to their mode of life" and Le Sottisser: "If God created us in his own image, we have more than reciprocated." The quotes reveal Thindwa's assumption that gods have no independent existence but rather exist only in the minds of humans. His thinking is along the lines of men like Ludwig Feuerbach, who said that God-consciousness is actually human self-consciousness. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 30 June 2013:6) further says that God survives through philosophical arguments and daily noisy pronouncements of Pastors or Priests. He says God was designed by believers to explain what they don't understand. He quotes Edward Abbey, saying: "Whatever believers cannot easily understand, they call God: this saves much wear and tear on their brain tissues." His assumption is that God is the creation of humans. He says there is no evidence that the First Cause thinking is true as it is not supported by observation in life. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 20 October 2013:21) quotes Benjamin Disraeli remarking, "Where knowledge ends, God begins." Thindwa means that people invoke God to explain what they do not understand.

Thindwa's thought on God is in line with that of Daniel Dennett. Dennett (2007:210-216) described God as an intentional object. Intentional objects are things that somebody can think about. Dennett laments that sometimes the things we think about are not real and the problem is that people fail to discern that what they are thinking about does not have objective existence. He further argues that what exists is the concept of God not God. Dennett (2007:240) quoted Voltaire, saying: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary for us to invent him." Thindwa also thinks like Dawkins (2006:38), who described the Old Testament God as a psychotic delinquent invented by mad, deluded people. It is noted that both Dennett and Dawkins inform Thindwa's thinking about the God subject.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 21 July 2013:21) begins another one of his article by quoting Burroughs, who said: “Man (sic) is, and always has been, a maker of gods. It has been the most serious and significant occupation of his sojourn in the world.” Thindwa draws similarities between God and humans to stress his point that God is the creation of humankind. He says many of the gods have the same form, behaviour, qualities and other activities as humans, only that when it comes to God the qualities are amplified beyond the extent to which humans are. Both God and people do well to those who do well and punish those who do wrong. He says the human being creates rules and God has the Ten Commandments. People have jails for those who commit criminal deeds and God has hell for those who do evil. On that matter, he quotes Luther Burbank, who has problems to conceive hell: “The idea that a good God would send people to a burning hell is utterly damnable to me, the ravings of insanity, superstition gone to seed! I want no part of such a God.” Thindwa means that such a God who creates hell cannot exist. He also draws on JR Ackley: “I am halfway through Genesis, and appalled by the disgraceful behaviour of all the characters involved, including God.” By this quotation, Thindwa thinks like Richard Dawkins, who blames God for what he called atrocities committed by Joshua. He says men demean women and God does equally. The article is concluded by the words: “Man (sic) remains a silent spectator to starvation and poverty. God also remains silent when human beings starve.” Thindwa thinks along the lines of Ludwig Feuerbach, who says God is the projection of human qualities and aspirations.

Thindwa says humanists do not have belief in God. They do not say that God does not exist but simply deny belief in God. Humanists assert nothing about God and states that the word “god” has no meaning to them. That leads us to the problem of religious language, which will be dealt with in chapter five. Thindwa says children are born without belief in God and belief is introduced later in life. Those who live without belief are labelled atheists. Thindwa argues: “Using science, reason, evidence and experience, the humanist tests the believer’s claims as to whether there exists a God with attributes as defined by the believer.” Thindwa portrays the believer as one who goes against all available evidence, which clearly reveals that a God with qualities as held by the believer cannot exist. Thindwa adopts the logical positivist thinking that beliefs must be justified on the basis of experience and the rationalist thinking that reason is the only way to knowing.

To beef up his argument, Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 1 July 2012:6) quotes Charles Bradlaugh: “An atheist does not say, 'there is no god,' but he says, 'I know not what you mean

by God, the word God is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation.” The implication of Bradlaugh's statement is that there should be no talk of God since he does not know what the word God means. Doesn't the fact that Bradlaugh does not know what God means suggest that he has no grounds for challenging believers who know what the word God means? Although some atheists may not say there is no god, doesn't the bottom line of their position exhibit denial of the existence of god? Questions such as posed above could be addressed to secular humanism in Malawi.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 15 July 2012:6) begins his article by quoting d'Halbach, who says: “If the ignorance of nature gave birth to the gods, knowledge of nature destroys them.” He indicates humanists define God as “a concept devised by human beings in an attempt to explain to themselves what they do not understand and to accord to themselves a status in the cosmos they do not deserve.” Movement here is from humanity to the concept of God and not from God to humanity. Thindwa says that “humans have always created gods based on ignorance, fear of nature and insecurity.” He contends that history has it that when ignorance vanishes and knowledge sets in, gods cease to be gods. He gives an example of the “Aztec tribe which killed many people and offered their hearts to the sun god to ensure the sun continued its journey around the earth” (ibid.). The sun ceased to be a god when the Aztecs were enlightened by the Spaniards.

In the same article, Thindwa claims: “The subtraction of gods continued till monotheism was achieved in 1600 BCE. However, the formation of the universe remained an enigma and the concept of a creator-god was developed.” He says the final subtraction has been made – no god. In other words, the world should come of age and realise that the gods are but nothing. The subtraction has reached its logical conclusion. He mentions developed countries where the subtraction theory has reached zero at no god, which include Sweden (85%), Denmark (80%), Norway (72%) and Japan (65%). Following Thindwa's line of thinking, how do we account for the presence of polytheists today? How reliable is Thindwa's history of belief and disbelief? Is subtraction a theory or a reality? Are there sufficient grounds for holding on to it? Such questions pose a challenge to the subtraction theory.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 8 July 2012:6) argues that believers need to do three things to prove the truth of their claims. Firstly, they need to describe what is it that they are claiming to exist. Secondly, they need to demonstrate how this thing exists. Thirdly, they need to demonstrate why it exists. He says failure to do these things destroys the believer's

case and justifies atheism by default. He says believers must prove the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and all-loving God in the face of untold human suffering. Thindwa concludes the article by the following observation: If God exists, then the attributes of God are consistent with the existence of evil; the attributes of God are not consistent with the existence of evil; therefore, God does not and cannot exist. The implication of Thindwa's argument is that God with the qualities as given by the believer does not exist; if God exists, He is not of the qualities stated by the believer. The question would be: If a God exists without qualities stated by the believer, would He still be called God? Epicurus said that if God had the power but not the will to remove evil, then that was malignity. If He was neither able nor willing, he was both impotent and malignant. If he was both able and willing, which alone is consonant with the nature of God, how then could the presence of evil be explained (*The Lamp* (9), May-June 2012:14). Epicurus questioned the existence of God with qualities of omnipotence and loving as taught by the Judeo-Christian tradition. Richard McBrien says that the new universe of being created by Jesus' resurrection was the ultimate response to the problem of evil and suffering (Chigona 2012:19). That response transcends the realm of the historical and the empirical in origin. From McBrien's perspective, it originates from the Transcendent Source of Destiny and is the only definitive response to the problem of evil and suffering.

With the assumption that God does not exist, Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 11 March 2012:6) quotes Voltaire, saying: "The word of God is the word of the pastor/priests ... to believe in God is to believe in all that the priest/pastors tell us." The implication is that what is said to be the word of God is actually not the word of God, although it is believed to be so. He finishes the article by asking: "Why are there lower rates of non-believers in Africa and other poor countries?" Thindwa and his fellow humanists identify religiosity with poverty and underdevelopment. He says Malawi is too superstitious to develop. The question then is: Is Malawi poor because of religiosity and are the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Denmark and Sweden) rich because of atheism? Is there really a connection between religiosity and poverty on the one hand, or atheism and prosperity on the other?

With the same assumption, Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 22 April 2012:6) argues that prophecy is lying professionally. He quotes a Sheikh, who says "there are no prophets in the modern day". In that humanists and the Sheikh are in agreement with each other. Thindwa says there is no evidence that prophecies are fulfilled and that God communicates his mind to the prophets. He mentions a number of biblical prophecies, which he says were not fulfilled.

Jesus has not yet come despite the prophecy that he would return within a generation before the listeners died. Damascus is still standing, despite the prophecy in Isaiah 17:1 that it would cease to be a city. The Nile river is still running, despite the prophecy in Zechariah 10:11 that it would dry up. With indirect reference, Thindwa says that the death of our President Bingu wa Mutharika was not in fulfilment of the prophecy by T.B. Joshua. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 29 April 2012:6) quotes Bob Churchill, a humanist saying: “Africa is run by elderly Presidents and wagers that in any given year a President will die”. Thindwa then concludes that prophecies about their death are meaningless. The implication of his thinking is that believing in prophecies is a mark of uncritical thinking. He identifies prophets with fraudsters and warns people against paying attention to the words of prophets. Some people in Malawi believe that the death of Bingu wa Mutharika was in fulfilment of God’s prophecy given through T.B Joshua. Thindwa also quotes Pierre Bayle, saying: “In matters of religion, it is very easy to deceive a person and very hard to undeceive him.” In his opinion, matters of religion are accepted uncritically. However, religion does not of necessity exclude rational scrutiny. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, 7 April 2013:5) says Pastors, Priests, Prophets, Bishops and Bible Teachers are self-appointed men of God and are a menace these days, who should be got out of humanity's head. He mentions three tricks to have one's head cleansed of self-appointed messengers of God. Firstly, digging into one's religion and that of one’s own and reading ancient texts critically, asking how religious dogmas got into one's own head. Secondly, to scrutinise the lives of religious authority figures to check if they are role models. Thirdly, questioning the authenticity of religious messages by using what is learnt in Science, Astronomy and History.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 1 April 2012:6) states, however, that humanists do not wager. Pascal’s Wager is a position expounded by the French mathematician Blaise Pascal, which proceeds from agnosticism and teaches that given that we have no knowledge, it is safer just to believe that God exists, just in case. Thindwa says even many believers have doubts about the existence of God, because of the problem of evil and that of Divine hiddenness. Thindwa asks along with many people why God should remain hidden from Malawians in the wake of the fuel crisis, child labour and women fistula. He goes on to give four reasons why humanists do not wager: Firstly, believing is costly considering the time, money and other resources that are wasted. Secondly, how does one know the right God? Won't one be punished for worshipping the wrong God? Thirdly, the argument trivialises religious commitment to being merely a safe bet. It presents religion as not a serious

business. Fourthly, what is so special about believing and pleasing God at all? In the concluding paragraph of the article, Thindwa thinks God will respect Bertrand Russell's courageous scepticism more than Pascal's hedging. If confronted by God, demanding to know why he did not believe Him, Russell would answer: "Not enough evidence, God, not enough evidence."

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 10 February 2013:5) calls matters that lack evidence "hypotheses". He defines hypothesis as a concept that awaits evidence or data to be proved; that is, works in progress. He says we have the God hypothesis, Satan hypothesis or Jesus hypothesis. He says all supernatural entities believed by the religious people remain hypotheses to humanists and are false. The following are said to have no evidence: the existence and resurrection of Jesus, life after death and sacredness of the Bible. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 28 April 2013:5) says: "Using historical records, artifacts and comparative mythology, the conclusion is very clear: Jesus did not exist as a real figure but, rather, he is a mythological character like all the gods of Egypt, Greece, India, Phoenicia, Rome, among others". By denying the historical Jesus, secular humanists in Malawi attack the very foundation of Christianity and assign it the status of nothingness. Christians believe that there is a direct link between faith and history in that faith is contingent upon the historical fact of the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thindwa thinks like Prometheus, who said that he hated all gods.

Khwauli Msiska, who is Alliance for Democracy (Aford) Member of Parliament for Karonga Nyungwe took an oath for ministerial position of Deputy Minister of Economic Planning and Development on 30 April 2012 without holding the Bible or Quran. The oath ends with words "So, help me God", but humanists say that those words do not add any real value. Msiska is said to be an executive member of the Association for Secular Humanism (<http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/05/01/khwauli-takes-ministerial-oath-without-holy-book/>, accessed on 1 April 2013). Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 6 May 2012:6) begins his article by quoting Noyes, saying: "The evidence of heavenly witness – God – would be rejected in any court of justice." The implication of Noyes' statement is that God cannot be called upon as witness as there is no evidence to trust it as true evidence. Msiska's conduct and Thindwa's thinking are along the lines of Andy Rooney, who was quoted by Dennett (2007:193), saying: "The Pope traditionally prays for peace every Easter and the fact that it has never had any effect whatsoever in preventing or ending a war never deters him. What goes through the Pope's mind about being rejected all the time? Does God have it in for

him?” Rooney indicates that prayer to God does not make sense and so, should be discontinued.

3.1.6 The Problem of Evil

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 3 June 2012:6; 17 June 2012:6) questions how an omnipotent, omniscient and all-loving god can exist, considering women who suffer from fistula and those who are poor. Fistula and poverty are some of the challenges facing Malawi. In Salima, a man had his private parts hacked. In the Nkhotakota district, a son accused his father of witchcraft and eventually killed him with a machete. In Dowa, a madman hacked four people to death. Thindwa argues that the existence of such challenges mean that a god with the characteristics mentioned previously cannot exist. He maintains that God has more of a moral obligation to avert suffering than others, because he has more power to do so. The more the power, the more one is obliged to avert suffering. By extension, we can say that the more the knowing, the more one is obliged to avert suffering. It would mean that God, being omnipotent and omniscient, has greater or the greatest moral obligation to avert suffering. Questions from secular humanists are: If he exists, has he forsaken his moral obligation? What could be the grounds for forsaking it? Elsewhere Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 17 June 2012:6) quotes B. Montesquieu, saying: “If triangles made a god, they would give him three sides.” By the quotation, he asserts that gods are creatures of humanity and that they bear qualities that humanity bestows upon them. He says the gods do not actually exist, but humanity is just under the delusion that they exist. The logical conclusion of Thindwa's thinking is that the presence of evil does not mean that God has forsaken His moral obligation but that He is a nonentity. Thindwa's thinking is that God of the Christians does not have objective existence outside the mind of people.

3.1.7 On Creation

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 13 January 2013:5) began his article by quoting J. Sommer saying: “The sacred texts are so wrong on physical matters, why trust them on spiritual ones.” By quoting Sommer, Thindwa displays his assumption that the Bible should not be trusted. In his opinion, the biblical and scientific cosmogonies are in conflict and it is the scientific ones that are authentic. He says the biblical universe is flawed, as it presents the earth as flat, stationary and as the only planet. The scientists Copernicus, Galileo and Bruno stood against the biblical universe. For instance, Copernicus stated that it was the sun that was the centre and not the earth; a stand to which the Church responded that it was foolish and false in theology. In 1929, the astronomer Edwin Hubble observed that distant galaxies

are moving away from us meaning that the universe is expanding. Thindwa says the expanding universe is good evidence to support the Big Bang, which is estimated to have happened 13.7 billion years ago. He is surprised that the fundamentalist changes tune and claims that the Big Bang was started by God. There Thindwa is referring to theists who seek a balance between theism and naturalistic explanation of religion. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Opinion, 21 October 2012:6) quotes Bishop Harries, saying: “Nowadays there is nothing to debate. Evolution is a fact.” Thindwa goes on to mention that even the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury have no problem with evolution. He calls creationists history-deniers, because they deny evolution. The question regards whether Thindwa himself is not a history-denier since he denies creation as presented in the Bible.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 19 June 2011:6) notes inconsistencies in the biblical creation account, some of which include creation from nothing, light being produced three days before the sun, the sky being presented as solid and creation of man from clay, whereby clay contains no organic molecules. From the story, the earth is less than 6,000 years old, but it is known that there was civilisation in Egypt well before 6,000 years ago. Thindwa concludes the article by saying: “With science and critical thinking, we have evidence based origins of humans and the universe in evolution and the Big Bang.” His assumption is that the biblical account of creation is unscientific and irrational. However, closer examination reveals that he does not entertain the idea that the Bible does not intend to give scientific explanations for reality.

Aubrey Mwasinga, Senior Pastor of Redeemed for a Purpose International Ministries observes: “Science is not necessarily wrong as it is just a concerted human effort to understand better the history of the natural world, and how the natural world works, with observable physical evidence as the basis of that understanding.” He said the Church benefits a lot from scientific innovations like hydroelectric power. Bishop Brighton Malasa of the Anglican Church in Malawi said: “Science is of great value to the Church but the problem comes when science is taken as a substitute for God.” The two clergy show that science is an asset that the Church can use for her own ministry. However, science should not be used to say that God does not exist.

3.1.8 The African Delusion

Another Malawian Secular humanist, Stevens Thengo, begins his article by quoting Dawkins, saying: “When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people

suffer from a delusion, it is called religion” (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 27 November 2011:6). Delusion here means a persistently false belief held in the face of contradictory evidence. He ends it by saying: “Unless we shed off superstition, mythology and fear and adopt rational principles and science to solve problems, Africa will remain backward in development.” Thengo laments that Africans still have inclination to superstition even in today's scientific age. He says Africans still believe that some diseases are caused by evil spirits and not bacteria and viruses and they consult witchdoctors or faith healers under the delusion that they would be healed. He regards it as self-deception and an irony when believers go to the hospital and then claim that they are healed by God.

Thengo goes on to lament that Africans regard natural disasters as the product of supernatural forces. He mentions the Karonga earthquake, which was deemed to be the wrath of God, satan or the devils and the prayers that were organised for the victims as examples of how Malawians delude themselves. Geologists found that the Karonga district is on the fault zone of the Great Rift Valley and is prone to earthquakes. Thengo wonders why Malawians should seek recourse to imaginary beings, even in the wake of scientific explanations. He mentions S. Hawkings, the world scientific genius, who asserted that heaven was a fairy tale. Mention of heaven, as well as of hell, do not make sense to the humanist. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 18 March 2012:6) quotes Gloria Steinem, saying: “It is an incredible con job to believe something now, in an exchange for rewards after you die. With corporations, with their reward systems, do not try to make them after death of employees.” In Steinem’s opinion, belief in life after death is a delusion. Thindwa mentions Denmark as an atheistic and prosperous country, which rejected delusion. He maintains that religiosity is an unnecessary distraction.

Thengo (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 27 November 2011:6) repudiates the 'God of the gaps' hypothesis, by arguing that gaps in knowledge should be work in progress, subject to further explorations and study and not to be filled with mythical entities. He sees no merit in attributing phenomena that humanity fails to explain to God. George Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 3 February 2013:5) quotes E. Abbey, saying: “God is a sound people make when they are too tired to think anymore.” Thindwa says that when there is a knowledge gap, a state of present ignorance, the believer assumes that God must fill it. He says “the believer seeks out areas of ignorance to claim victory by default”. He calls an intellectual flaw when believers bring in God where science has no explanation. As science seeks areas of ignorance

to research on, the believers seeks them to proclaim God. Thindwa maintains that “ignorance shrinks as science advances and God is threatened with having nowhere to hide”.

Thengo (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 27 November 2011:6) calls for disenchantment. He argues that Africa is living in the enchanted world of the Dark Ages and not in the disenchanted world of the 18th century. In the article, Thengo described disenchantment of the world as the collapse of seeing the world in magical or spiritual powers or forces around the mysterious cosmos. George Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 25 November 2012:5) quotes J. Burroughs, saying: “There was a time when religion ruled the world. It was called the Dark Ages.” For the secular humanists Africa, Malawi inclusive, is identified with the Dark Ages. Malawi is regarded as a superstitious nation that has not yet come of age. Secular humanists lament the religious situation we are in.

3.1.9 Witchcraft

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 27 January 2013:6) comments as follows on witchcraft: “While 87 percent of Malawians believe in witchcraft, witches or wizards cannot exist.” He urges Malawi to wake up and abandon their belief in witchcraft. He says the Enlightenment contributed to the end of witch-hunts throughout Europe, because the Enlightenment stated that there was no empirical evidence that alleged witches caused harm.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 19 August 2012:6) says witchcraft is a belief informed by fear and ignorance. He laments that efforts to eradicate witchcraft-based abuses are being undermined by groups that benefit from the witchcraft discourse; these being Pastors, Prophets, chiefs, witch-finders, witchdoctors and jealousy neighbours. He says Christians justify witchcraft by quoting Exodus 22:18, which reads: “You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live” (New Revised Standard Version). He argues that the Bible supports witchcraft, because those who wrote it were believers in witchcraft. He says there are no people who fly in baskets (malichero) and no people who scavenge graveyards for human flesh. He (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 2 December 2012:5) says the claims of witchdoctors are false and delusional and that witchcraft cleansing is not real. He says that there is no evidence that witchdoctors are truthful in their methodologies of identification of witches, that children's revelations were unreliable and that some confessions are made under duress.

George Thindwa (AFJ tv, 24 August 2011: 6-7 pm) pledged K500,000 for anyone who could bewitch him. He says education is important in dealing with the belief in witchcraft. Once people are educated, they come of age and become rational. He also points out the great value

of hard work, for it leads to avoidance of poverty. He says no misfortunes, poverty, troubles or death come due to witchcraft and he blames Nigerian films for exhibiting witchcraft as real, which lead to children recapping pictures at night and then think that they are involved in witchcraft.

Thindwa dares witches again. He says: “Yes, they are welcome and the prize is now K1 million and my number is 0888853150; get me on that number and tell me what you want to do to me” (<http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/02/19/malawi-humanist-thindwa-dares-witches-again-prizes-k1m-for-sorcerers-to-bewitch-him/>, accessed 19 February 2013). His contention as expressed in the same article is that “Witchcraft does exist as a belief ... but what we are talking about are people who claim to be witches, those who claim to fly at night, visit graveyards and eat dead people; it is this part that has never been proven.” He said the fact that he was not bewitched two years from the time he made the initial challenge shows that witches and wizards do not exist. Masiyambuyo Njolomole, President of Dedza Herbalist Association, claimed that he had risen to the challenge to bewitch Thindwa and asked for K2m. Thindwa denied having been contacted by the herbalist. In a twist of events, the herbalist refused to avail himself when contacted through the phone, saying he did not want any confrontation with Thindwa (*Malawi News Agency*, 8 March 2013).

Thindwa launched the K207m Malawi campaign against witchcraft based violence, aimed at mitigating violence and other human rights violations faced by children, women and the elderly accused of witchcraft. The eradication of witchcraft based violence is currently being implemented in eleven districts of Karonga, Rumphi, Mzimba, Kasungu, Dowa, Lilongwe, Mchinji, Machinga, Mulanje, Chikhwawa and Neno. The project is funded by the Norwegian Embassy. Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 25 August 2013:21) laments that the police in Salima were prosecuting Rose Safari, aged 80 of Liganga village in the district for allegedly practising witchcraft. He sympathises with Safari and urges law enforcers to comprehensively understand the law so that ill-treatment of women and the elderly could stop.

George Thindwa (*The Nation*, 7 August 2009:14) argues that witchcraft and many other superstitions such as religious ones have no role in our lives and society. He said witchcraft is a supernatural or superstitious phenomenon and that we will remain backward if we do not apply reason and rationality. An explanation based on evil spirits, prayers or talking in tongues is religious superstition and is not good prescription. He says even the soul has been subject to scientific proof and it has been proved to be non-existent in human beings.

Scientists regard the soul as figment of the theological imagination. Thindwa holds that a scientific way of explaining issues is superior to any other form of analysis because science has a methodology. He says belief in witchcraft is non-developmental because it diverts people's attention from real issues to imaginary ones; it prescribes wrong solutions to real problems; it is unscientific and detrimental to society's well-being. The problem is that we are very superstitious people and tend to be irrational in our decision-making. Thindwa's argument is similar to that of Dennett (2007:211), who said that witches, meaning evil-hearted spell-casting women who fly around supernaturally on broomsticks and wear black pointed hats, do not exist. The witches that Dennett recognises are men and women who practice a popular New Age cult called Wicca, but those witches are unknown to the traditional people in Malawi.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, March 10 2013:5) says the Association for Secular Humanists introduced a project called *The Eradication of Witchcraft Based Violence (WBV) towards Children, Women and the Elderly* in Malawi. The project is aimed at eradicating Witchcraft-Based Violence in Malawi. He says many Traditional Authorities (T/As) welcomed the project, saying it would exonerate them from accusations of being witches/wizards themselves and of siding with witches/wizards.

Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 18 November 2012:6) quoted the Ambassador of Norway, Asbjorn Eidhammer, speaking at Cresta Hotel on 20 July 2012 on the occasion of launching a research entitled *The Extent of Witchcraft-Based Violence (WBV) towards Children, Women and the Elderly*. The gist of Eidhammer's message was that Witchcraft-Based Violence was a shared concern. He says WBV was a matter of human rights violation and said all had the moral obligation to protect the victims of WBV. However, Temwani Mgunda (*Sunday Times*, 5 August 2012:3) reports Professor Boston Soko's (of Mzuzu University) claims that witchcraft has been around for a long time, although the colonial government outlawed it in 1911.

Mbuya Isaac Munlo (*The Nation*, 3 August 2009:29), an article contributor to the Nation newspaper, argues that in the case of Agnes Musolo (the Mulanje lady who gave birth to a stone), we assigned to science a task for which it had neither understanding nor the methodology or tools to execute effectively. The lady gave birth to a stone. One version, including the couple itself, said it was the work of witchcraft and another one said she inserted the stone herself. Science experts like the pathologist Dr Charles Dzamalala and the

geologist Dr Kalindekaffe were assigned the task of inquiring into the matter. Their conclusion was that the object was a real stone with all properties of a stone. Thus, the possibility of witchcraft was ruled out. Secular humanists spoke against witchcraft stories and against prayers organised by various Churches for the couple. Munlo's point is not that the renowned scientists are Secular humanists, but that they did according to the scope assigned to science only that the matter was beyond the reach of science.

He submits that the reductionist approach in which the analysis was done reflects a fundamental problem and impoverishment of the whole investigation. A reductionist approach believes understanding is best obtained by breaking wholes/incidents into their fundamental elements. Science is characterized by a search for objectivity, quantification, systematic technologies and the determination of solutions to tangible problems. Munlo contends that in the Agnes Musolo case, the scientists conducted a normative analysis on a case which was not normal. The case was beyond science. Recourse was to be sought to the supernatural.

According to Munlo, it must be understood that medicine belongs to only one school of thought processes, paradigm (theoretical framework). Different paradigms prioritise different ideals and hence, different values. The scientific paradigm is not the only one and neither is it the superior one. While science has contributed a lot to human advancement, it is not the only form of knowledge or rationality. There are other rationalities: The religious rationality, the traditional rationality and indeed the practical rationality.

Munlo contends that dealing with complex problems like that of Musolo calls for creative approaches that are not premised on a mechanistic concept of the world in which everything is regular. The mistake we have made is to raise science to the status of meta-knowledge. He says that perhaps it is time we as a nation embraced a school of thought that is based in a higher paradigm, a meta-paradigm that encompasses a hybrid of scientific, traditional and practical rationalities.

Would Munlo's mode of thought be relevant in dealing with cases where scientists refute anything supernatural or metaphysical and accepts that which can only be proved by logical argumentation and scientific methodology? Is it a valid point that existence comprises both the physical/natural and the metaphysical/supernatural and that adequate comprehension of reality requires acknowledgment of both dimensions of existence? Is science actually taken beyond the bounds of its scope when it reaches conclusions on the supernatural? In the

case of Agnes Musolo, does the fact that the stone was proved real by scientists rule out the possibility of witchcraft involvement? Thindwa holds the view of mechanical explanations to phenomena. But how about the traditional position that there are personal and spiritual causes behind observable phenomena?

3.2 Critiquing Secular Humanism in Malawi

Rev. Dr. Winston R. Kawale, a lecturer at Mzuzu University, is one of the critical voices against secularism and, by extension, of secular humanism. The gist of Kawale's article (*The Lamp* (99) Nov-Dec 2012:18-19) is that Malawi is not a secular state, but rather a God-fearing nation. He argues to that effect from the Republican constitution, the history of Malawi and the general praxis of the people of Malawi. Kawale wrote against the background of the contention that Malawi is a secular state and that its laws are secular and that the state should perform its affairs without religious interference. Secular humanists argue that Malawi is not a Christian nation, given that the Constitution does not make any explicit statement to that effect.

Kawale notes that the word "secular" is used to denote something anti-religious. Some dictionaries have defined the word "secular" as worldly, non-spiritual or non-religious. According to such definitions, a secular society is one in which practically all significant procedures, norms and values are generally judged in terms of rational utilitarian values. George Thindwa (*Sunday Times*, Opinion, 12 February 2012:6) says: "Secularism is where a nation opts for an identity that is neither religious nor anti-religious but simply neutral. Neutrality means Government disassociation from religion and non-belief. Religionists equate neutrality with hostility to religion". Thindwa contends that it is atheism that is hostile to religion.

Kawale says in secularism there is separation of society from religion and the culmination of secularisation is a religion of a purely inward character, influencing neither secular institutions nor corporate or state action. Secularism is then the bitter anti-religious propaganda and hatred of religion. It is where previously accepted religious symbols, doctrine and institutions lose their prestige and influence. It is a human betterment without reference to religion, a protest against dominance and control of human life by ecclesiastical institutions. In other words, secularism is the privatisation of religion. According to him, personal piety and religious organisations lose their significance as the emphasis is on achievements of modern technology.

Kawale says that the Constitution acknowledges the existence of religion in Malawi. Section 2 of Chapter One of the Constitution says: “Malawi shall have ... a National Anthem.” The fact that God is evoked in the National Anthem means that Malawi is not a secular state. The first line of the National Anthem reads: “O God bless our land of Malawi.” Furthermore, in the whole of the first stanza God is evoked to bless Malawi and its leader, to make it a land of peace, to defeat all the enemies and to unify the people. The National Anthem is sung at state and many other functions. In Sections 20 and 33 of the Constitution, it is said that there shall be no discrimination on grounds of religion and that there shall be freedom of religion. Section 1 (1) describes how the President and other leaders take an oath when elected. The oath ends with the phrase “So help me God.”

Kawale argues that running this country in a secular manner will create anarchy. He quotes Niccolo Machiavelli, who said: “Observance of divine institutions is the cause of the greatness of republics, so the disregard of them produces their ruin, for where the fear of God is wanting, there the country will come to ruin.” Machiavelli's conclusion was that “religion is one of the chief causes of prosperity ... religion gave rise to good laws, and good laws bring good fortune, and from good fortune results in happy success in all enterprises”. By quoting Machiavelli, Kawale shows that the state and religion are partners in national development. Historically, the partnership has been practised to the benefit of the masses.

Robert Masikamu, though not a secular humanist, says that the fact that the Constitution does not mention that Malawi is a Christian nation means that Malawi is not a Christian, but rather a secular nation (www.nyasatimes.com/2013/08/13/of-anti-god-group-in-malawi-and-constitutional-rights/, accessed on 13 August 2013). He contrasts it to the Zambian Constitution, which mentions that Zambia is a Christian nation. The Malawi Constitution just says that we are a sovereign state, without indicating whether we are a Christian or a secular state. He laments that we have put our faith on the Constitution rather than on God; the Constitution is the point of reference. The framing of the Constitution was not premised on God's will for the nation. The fact that about 80% of people in Malawi are Christians does not make Malawi a Christian nation. He further laments that Malawi has embarked on a journey of promoting evil in the name of human rights. He mentions an example of atheism itself and other ideologies and practices, which are clearly against God's Word, but have found space in the nation given that the Constitution, which is our reference point, does not bar them. Masikamu said: “I have a problem with atheism and to date, I take it as a fallacy and its proponents are what I can call Satanists working against God's will”. He argues that there is no neutrality in

humanity, either you are for God or for the Devil and that judgement awaits all those who do and promote evil in the name of human rights and freedoms and on that day the Constitution will not defend them. It could be argued that Masikamu's point is that human rights and indeed, the entire constitution, should be grounded in God. Could that mean advocating a theocracy or just a democratic regime whose reference point is God?

Masikamu also laments that two human rights organisations, the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) and the Centre for Development of People (CEDEP), spoke in support of registering the Association of Secular Humanism in Malawi when news broke that the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Information and Human Right Consultative Committee (HRCC) had sidelined the Association. The two organisations referred to Sections 20, 32, 33 and 34 of the Republican Constitution, which guarantee every person right and freedom to conscience, religion and thought. The two organisations say the Constitution is a secular document and not registering the Association for Secular Humanism is unfair, undemocratic and unconstitutional and called for the supremacy of the Constitution to reign over all matters in the general interest of all Malawians irrespective of their political, religious, sexual or economic divide. They said: "Without spewing umbrage at somebody's staunch religious beliefs, we at CHRR and CEDEP find it baffling that some officials have chosen to drag their beliefs into matters of the State, nay Constitution of the Republic of Malawi. We do not need to remind each other that top government officials, Cabinet ministers inclusive, do take an oath of office to solemnly protect and stand by the principles of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi in their execution of duties" (www.nyasatimes.com/2013.08.08/register-anti-god-group-urge-malawis-rights-groups/, accessed on 8 August 2013). But Masikamu says that registering the Association will be provoking God's wrath upon our nation. To many Malawians, the delay or implicit denial to register the Association is good news.

Masikamu says Malawi should depend on hard work and creativity to develop and not on aid that promotes evil in the name of Constitutional rights. Reference here is to the West, which withholds aid when Malawians do not comply with their unethical demands. His advice to the faith community is that against all odds, they should keep their faith and pray for fellow believers and our country as a whole. He says these are the last days and the Church should intensify evangelism and pray that the Devil does not devour many for the benefit of his kingdom. The sentiments of Masikamu towards Secular humanists seem to be representative of the masses in Malawi. However, he differs with Dr Kawale on whether Malawi is a Christian or secular state. Both Kawale and Masikmu tend to agree that Malawi is not a

secularist state. Their arguments point to the fact that religion plays a significant role in public life of the nation and privatisation of religion is not yet a reality.

Malawi could be called 'religious' state in the sense of religious assumptions mostly underlying decisions and practice. It could also be designated 'secular' state in the sense of secular-sacred distinction where the religious dimension is acknowledged. It could as well be described as 'God-fearing' in the Tillichian sense of the ground of being or being itself. The bottom line regarding the three senses is the place of religious beliefs and a commitment to the metaphysical level of existence.

The chapter explored the rise of Secular humanism in Malawi and its teachings. Some voices critiquing Secular humanism were noted. Against this background, the next chapter (chapter four) focuses on Christian humanism in an attempt to engage the question whether it is a viable option in Malawi, also in order to address the concerns raised by Secular humanists.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXIT SECULAR HUMANISM, ENTER CHRISTIAN HUMANISM? ENGAGING JOHN W. DE GRUCHY

4.1 The historical development of humanism

In order to assess Christian humanism as a viable option to Secular humanism, it is important to attend to the historical development of humanism. The journey begins from the medieval period which extended from the Fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD to the beginning of the Age of Discovery in 1492, when Christopher Columbus discovered the New World. Scholastics endeavoured by means of reason to reconcile Christian revelation with philosophy, in particular, Aristotle's. In a sense, Aristotle was being re-discovered. Scholasticism gets its name from the medieval monastery and the cathedral. The term scholasticism defined an approach or method, rather than a specific set of doctrines which result from the application of this method (McGrath 2001:37). Augustine's Neoplatonism laid the foundation for theological reflection in the early stage of the Middle Ages, and Aristotle's teaching in the hands of Aquinas dominated the medieval period thereafter (Pate 2011:35). Philosophy and theology were bound together. This is evidence that no stage of the medieval period was void of intellectual activity.

Jonathan Hill (2003:118) remarked that the Middle Ages was the age of 'Christendom', united by the Catholic Church and the power of the papacy. He went on to say that great cathedrals and monasteries were built throughout Europe and a new breed of theologians arose and Europe's great minds turned from devotion to philosophy and science to careful systematising of Christianity. Faith and religion, reason and science and philosophy were all united into a seamless body of learning. Hill's point disproves the contention by some people that the Middle Ages was a period when the Church suppressed science, reason and philosophy. David Bentley Hart (2009:56) argues that respectable historians of science today are well aware that the supposed war between Christian theology and Western science is pure mythology. According to him, an amateur historian Charles Freeman wrote in 2003 that there was a late Roman Hellenistic culture that cherished the power of reason and pursued science and high philosophy, and then came Christianity, which valued only blind obedience to irrational dogma and which maliciously extinguished the light of pagan wisdom. Hart disproves Freeman's thinking and indicates that faith and reason existed as soul mates in the

Middle Ages. Hart (2009:66-67) contends that any claim that the history of Western science comprises two epochs of light – the Hellenistic and the modern – separated by a long dark interval of Christian ignorance and fanaticism is altogether absurd. The above-mentioned point to the fact that Christianity did not suppress science and reason in the Middle Ages as it is often portrayed.

Practically, one can argue, all ethicists in the period from 600 AD to 1450 were theists. Medieval ethics was nearly always teleological with the basic question being: What is the ultimate good or end toward which the free actions of human beings should be directed so that they may live well (MacQuarrie & Childress 1986:375)? The final end was identified objectively with the perfect good (God). Arguments to show that God is the only highest good (*summum bonum*) are found in Augustine (City of God), Boethius (Consolation of Philosophy), Aquinas (*Summa Contra Gentiles*) and many other treatises. Christian ethics before the 20th century was generally a theistic approbative teaching in which God's wisdom or will or law was the highest and ultimate norm of morality (MacQuarrie & Childress 1986:376). Peter Abelard (1079 – 1142) lays emphasis on the internal character of a moral act. Issues of intention, motive, attitude and character were central to ethical living. What went on in the human consciousness was very important. That meant a good action done for wrong motive was not moral. A motive was good if it was in line with God's will. In short, God was central to people's life. His Word was the standard with which to measure the correctness of actions. There could be no talk of moral living without God. By that standard, what would be the secular humanists' basis for talking of morality in a Godless world?

“Scholasticism is best regarded as the medieval movement, flourishing in the period 1200 – 1500, which placed emphasis upon the rational justification of religious belief and the systematic presentation of those beliefs. Scholasticism thus does not refer to a specific system of beliefs but to a particular way of doing and organising theology – a highly developed method of presenting material making fine distinctions, and attempting to achieve a comprehensive view of theology. It is perhaps understandable why, to its humanist critics, scholasticism seemed to degenerate into little more than logical nit-picking” (McGrath 2001:37).

Scholasticism was submerged in abstract and theoretical speculations. The scholastic method was popularised in the 12th century by Gratian in the systematising of canon law in the *Decretum* (Dowley 1990:283). The scholastics tried to reconcile opposing statements through

logic. The scholastics quest for faith was a quest for logical formulation. The method of scholasticism was a process relying chiefly upon strict logical deduction, taking on the form of intricate system and expressed in a dialectical or disputational form in which theology dominated philosophy. For instance, Thomas Aquinas accepted the revealed and traditional theological truths and endeavoured simultaneously to provide rational argumentation in order to make these revealed truths comprehensible to the rational mind (Pate 2011). The scholastics endeavoured to bring together Christian theology and philosophy.

In Western Europe at the height of the Middle Ages all education was in the hands of the Church, and the great thinkers were all monks and clergy (Dowley 1990:286). All schoolmen belonged to the Church, but the theology that interested them was philosophical. Some of the scholastic theologians included Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas. Anselm said that faith must lead to the right use of reason. He said, “*Credo ut intelligam*”, meaning “I believe in order to understand”. He also put forward the ontological argument for the existence of God, saying God was “a being greater than which nothing can be conceived”. Peter Abelard's book *Sic et Non (Yes and No)* (1122) set the stage for discussing the relationship between faith and reason in Christian theology (Dowley 1990:289). He believed that genuine Christianity was both reasonable and consistent. Thomas Aquinas, to his own satisfaction, harmonised faith and reason (Dowley 1990:291). He accepted Aristotle as a guide in reason and Scripture as the rule of faith and believed that there was a meaningful relationship between the two. He felt revelation supplements rather than contradicting reason. Terry Eagleton (2009:80) maintained that for Aquinas, God “is the ground of both being and knowing and thus the guarantee of their harmonious correspondence” and that there was “No epistemology without theology.” For Aquinas, all reason and knowing was centred on God.

4.2 Religiosity of the Dark Ages

The term Dark Ages derives from the Latin *saeculum obscurum*, originally applied by Caesar Baronius in 1602 to a tumultuous period in the 10th and 11th centuries. Generally, The Dark Ages is said to be the period between the fall of Rome in 476 BC and the 13th century. Scholars who call the period dark do so because of what they call lack of civilisation and intellectuals, which had been replaced by feudalism and religious dominance. Christopher Hitchens (2007:43) quoted Heinrich Heine saying: “In dark ages people were best guided by religion, as in a pitch-black night a blind man is the best guide; he knows the roads and paths better than a man who can see. When daylight comes, however, it is foolish to use blind old

men as guides.” The implication is that religion should be discarded in this world that has come of age. He cites as cases of blindness some religious people’s refusal to have children vaccinated against polio in Nigeria and other countries. However, denying medical care is not the norm in religious faith. Hitchens thinks it is a norm and uses it as a basis in his critique of religion.

Recent studies have shown that the label “Dark Ages” is an irrelevant designation of the period, because the lights of antiquity and intellectualism lived on in the monasteries in Europe. Ronald Numbers mentions examples of popular myths that have passed on as historical truths. The misconceptions include that “the Church prohibited autopsies and dissections during the Middle Ages”, “the rise of Christianity killed off ancient science”, and “the medieval Christian Church suppressed the growth of natural philosophy” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Ages_\(historiography\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Ages_(historiography))), accessed on 12 March 2013). Some scholars have made arguments against the ‘darkness’ of the so-called Dark Ages. The arguments contradict some of the secular humanists’ ideas referred to in the previous chapter.

Gerald Chigona notes that prior to the medieval times there was a single community of Christendom and no secular-religious distinction. That single community had dual aspects of *sacerdotium* (the priesthood) and the *regnum* (the monarchy). The Church and the monarchy were the only institutions that wielded power and authority over private and public life (*The Lamp* (96) May-June 2012:19). Religion permeated all life. The secular, as referring to the rejection of God and religion, did not exist. “Secular” was used with reference to “not sacred”. The sacred was just presupposed in the secular. It means that even the secular was not devoid of sacredness. Sacredness was the underlying assumption in the whole of life. There were no secularist or Secular humanist trends. Such a state of affairs could find expression in Malawi today whereby sacred-consciousness, which is highly significant in Christian humanism, would inform private and public life in all its dimensions.

4.3 Renaissance Humanism

Renaissance humanism arose in reaction to scholasticism. Humanism is generally regarded as being a response to the cultural poverty and theological overprecision of scholasticism (McGrath 2001:39). Humanism regarded scholasticism as futile, arid intellectual speculation over trivia. The Humanists, rather than focussing on what they considered futile questions of logic, semantics and proposition analysis, focussed on the relation of the human to the divine, seeing in human beings the summit and purpose of God's creation. Their concern was to

define the human person's place in God's plan and the reaction of the human to the divine, and hence called themselves humanists (www.lin1000.org/scholasticism_to_humanism.html, accessed 6 May 2013). Their humanism was first and foremost a religious and educational movement. The Humanism of the Renaissance was God-centred and is different from that of the Enlightenment, which was secular. Humanists were concerned with renewing and purifying Christianity. They saw such studies as Scholastic logic, arithmetic and theology and natural science as completely unrelated to the most important of one's life; of all the studies, the highest studies involved moral philosophy and its application in the real world. The Humanists recovered much of the literature of classical antiquity and they set out to recover the original spirit and meaning of foundational Christianity by reading the original Greek texts. Humanists explored the rich heritage of classical antiquity but the end of humanist education was the formation of a truly human consciousness, open in every direction, through historico-critical understanding of the cultural tradition. They said such a study "expands our personality beyond the confines of the present instance, relating to the paradigmatic experience of man's history" (ibid.). Drawing from the rich heritage of the past enabled the humanists to deal with moral dilemmas of their times. The Humanists felt that the place of Aristotelian science and philosophy was exalted beyond reasonable limits. Many humanists did advocate Platonism but there were some who favoured Aristotelianism.

However, in critiquing Renaissance Humanism, in both German idealism and Anglophone analytical philosophy, the philosophical superficiality or emptiness of humanism has become a topos. For instance, Hegel believed that humanism was incapable of purely conceptual and rational thinking; Heidegger thought that humanism had neglected *das Wesen des Menschen* (the essence of being human), while Bertrand Russell wrote that the Renaissance had brought nothing original in philosophy. It is argued that humanism was concerned with how ideas were obtained and expressed, rather with the actual substance of those ideas; that no single philosophical or political idea dominated or characterised the movement; that the term humanism would have to be dropped from the vocabulary of historians because it had no meaningful content and that some humanists were obsessed with magic and superstition (McGrath 2001:40-41). These points show that humanism, though a positive development, was also open to critique. Any Christian humanism today should consider both its method and content to ensure adequacy in addressing contemporary issues.

Desiderius Erasmus is generally regarded as the most important humanist writer of the Renaissance. His *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (Handbook of the Christian Soldier)

developed the revolutionary and highly attractive thesis that the Church of the day could be reformed by a collective return to the writings of the Fathers and the Bible. Recourse to Biblical and Patristic theology made his humanism thoroughly-grounded. De Gruchy (2009:51) says the book was a powerful manifesto for reform, in which he used his humanist learning in his attempts to reform the Church. In his opinion, scholarship was a passion in itself, but it was also a means to a greater end – reforming both Church and society (De Gruchy 2009:51). His characteristically humanist emphasis upon inner religion leads him to suggest that the reading of Scripture transforms its readers, giving them a new motivation to love God and their neighbours (McGrath 2001:48). According to Erasmus, the “philosophy of Christ” is really a form of practical morality, rather than an academic philosophy. He further said that the New Testament concerns the knowledge of good and evil so that the readers should love the former and avoid the latter (McGrath 2001:48). Erasmus's love for classical literature drove him to print classic Greek and Latin texts, including the first printed Greek text of the New Testament. His love for ancient learning was matched only by his contempt for scholastic doctrine, which he thought was marred by its theological jargon and pietistical tedium (Pate 2011:56). The implication of his position was that faith was presented by the scholastics as something complicated. Erasmus felt the teachings of Jesus were simple to the mind and did not need to be presented as complex.

4.4. The Christian Humanism of John de Gruchy and its sources

John W. de Gruchy is a possible contemporary voice to consider not only to critique Secular humanism in Malawi but also as part of a project towards affirming the possible positive contribution of Christian humanism. His models, in turn, were John Calvin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The study takes us back to the past to learn how De Gruchy made use of the two men. De Gruchy is the Emeritus Professor of Christian Studies at the University of Cape Town, and also Extraordinary Professor in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University and Fellow at Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS). In his work, he addresses the issue of dehumanisation and advocates humanisation.

4.4.1 The Humanist Imperative in Geneva: Retrieving John Calvin

In his book, *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer* published in 2009, De Gruchy addresses the issue of the recovery of John Calvin in order to reform society today. He quotes Karl Barth, saying: “In Calvin studies we cannot keep Calvin to what he once said as though he had nothing more or new to say today” (2009:21) and Andre Bieler,

saying, “The humanism of John Calvin is found in the Gospels and its essence has lost none of its vale today (2009:129). The meaning is that John Calvin is still relevant today. The concern is that the society is full of socio-economic and political evils and is in need of renewal. De Gruchy emphasises the ugliness of dehumanisation. The book has two parts. Part one is about John Calvin among the Reformers and part two is on key themes in Calvin's legacy. In the epilogue, De Gruchy presents what he thinks are important insights for the future of Reformed tradition in South Africa.

De Gruchy claims that John Calvin was a Christian humanist as manifested in his (Calvin's) writings and life. He adopts sympathetic criticism of Calvin whereby he agrees with the orientation of Calvin's thought and at the same time shows areas where Calvin needed to do otherwise. John Calvin heavily influenced the Reformed tradition in Geneva. De Gruchy distinguishes between traditionalism and living tradition: “Traditionalism is dead whereas a living tradition is dynamic and changing, always rediscovering itself, though always in continuity with the past” (De Gruchy 2009:23). Calvinism is a living tradition and it can help change matters today. The Reformation itself was a retrieval of Christian tradition of the first century and Patristic Christianity. The Reformation icon, John Calvin, learnt from Renaissance humanists the need to return to the sources of renewal and for him that meant both the classical authors and the Scripture, though the latter were by far the most important. From the humanists he also learnt the importance of language and rhetoric in arriving at the truth and in communicating it to others in a persuasive manner. Bouwsma is quoted saying that humanists compelled Calvin, “if not consistently, to adopt a remarkably human view of the theological enterprise. He understood, at least sometimes, that theology, as a human enterprise, does not state truths in an absolute sense, from God's standpoint. Its truths are as limited as the human beings who developed them” (De Gruchy 2009:41). The point is that Calvin benefited from Renaissance humanism. That compels us today to study humanism of the Renaissance with a view to benefit as we engage in Christian humanist agenda in Malawi.

Calvin (1509 – 64) was educated at the scholasticism-dominated University of Paris and he subsequently moved to the more humanist University of Orleans at which he studied civil law (McGrath 2001:68). That education prepared him for the work of reforming both Church and society. Through his friendship with Martin Bucer, the Strasbourg reformer, Calvin was able to develop his thinking on the relation between the city and the state. Calvin employed humanist exegesis, which he applied to his study of the Bible and that equipped him to become what Reinhold Seeberg called “the greatest exegete of the Reformation period” (De

Gruchy 2009:82). Karl Barth said John Calvin was a theological humanist, by which he meant a God-centred humanist, which indicates a change of Calvin's perspective about the relationship between God and humanity (De Gruchy 2009:85). In Wendel's words: "To humanism, which by definition rested upon the greatness of man, he (Calvin) had now and henceforth to oppose the corruption of mankind by its sinfulness and alienation from God" (De Gruchy 2009:85). Those statements lead us to the observation that Calvin was a serious humanist and that his humanism was founded upon God's ideals.

De Gruchy mentions areas where he thinks Calvin's views, or at least how they were represented by others, were misjudged. The charges that have been levelled against Calvin by other people include moral dogmatism and policing; double predestination, whereby some are elected for paradise and others doomed for eternal damnation; Max Weber's view that Calvin and his later followers were responsible for the spirit that gave rise to modern capitalism; wanting to establish a theocracy in Geneva; and that Calvin had no aesthetic sense. De Gruchy presents the other side of Calvin and defends the Christian humanism he (Calvin) pursued.

De Gruchy counters the misjudgement by going deep into the writings and life of Calvin, by giving the historical context of Calvin, especially in Geneva. He also does that by contrasting and comparing Calvin with his contemporaries like Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. By the time of the Reformation, Geneva was a city of about 10,000 people and in the midst of social and political upheaval. The large proportion of the population was made of immigrants and refugees who came as a result of religious persecution in France and conflicts arose along the way. At some point there was turmoil in Geneva as the magistrates and citizens preferred being Protestant rather than return to Catholic control. There were tensions between traditional rivals for power that were worsened by the coming of about five thousand French Huguenot refugees, making up almost half of the population (De Gruchy 2009:96). There was great deal of strain on the resources of Geneva and tension ensued between the refugee immigrants and the resident citizenry. Calvin was invited and he came from Strasbourg to help consolidate the Reformation, deal with the refugee problem and bring order to the city. Calvin's strict measures should be understood in the light of the decadent moral condition of the city and the moral laxity in the Church. We then learn that Calvin was not intending to establish a theocracy and moral policing in Geneva, but that worsening conditions necessitated serious measures. For instance, he spoke against the scandal of the wealthy and aristocratic classes, who were living in ostentatious luxury at a time of widespread poverty,

especially among the refugees. Such luxurious living goes against ideals of being human. Today many people are suffering while wealth is in the hands of few people. The message of Calvin comes strong to us.

In Calvin's view, Geneva “was a perverse and an unhappy nation, full of perverse and wicked people” (Elwood 2002:26). In trying to rectify matters from the Christian perspective, it was thought by some that he wanted to make himself Bishop and rule in Geneva as the former Bishops had done. In Calvin's view, Reformation involved something more radical than a change in ideology. Reformation was a project aiming at a complete reorientation of religious and civic life in accordance with what God discloses as God's will in Scripture, the building of what later Calvinists would call a holy commonwealth, a perfect school of Christ, a city on a hill (Elwood 2004:28). In 1558, Calvin founded the Genevan Academy to offer advanced education. Students were trained in humanistic and evangelically oriented curriculum. The implication for today is that Christian humanism requires well-trained people who have the intellectual muscle to understand the world from a Christian perspective and argue for reordering where there is no order. Calvin is used to show that an anti-intellectual stance is not to be equated with the Reformed faith, on the contrary, a Reformed faith is open to science.

John Whale is quoted saying: “Calvin's first creative achievement was a Book, the 'Institutio'; his second was a city, Geneva. Book and city were complementary. In the one, doctrine was systematically formulated; in the other, it was systematically applied” (De Gruchy 2009:99). The Book (Institutes of the Christian Religion) and the City (Geneva) stood as a typical case of theology and ethics going together. De Gruchy says civic affairs and theology, social issues and matters of religion, were all part of God's domain. Harro Hopfl is quoted saying: “He (Calvin) could not possibly be thought to have regarded civil laws and institutions as matters remote from theology” (De Gruchy 2009:99). The message for us today is that Christian tradition on one side and civil life on the other are both under God's domain. This means the Church should not withdraw from public life, saying it's not their sphere. The Church should play a pivotal role in reforming society. Reform of Church and that of society go hand in hand. Visser't Hooft argued along those lines when he said, “the time has come to reconsider and set forth Calvin's teaching about Christian humanism” (De Gruchy 2009:161). Dirkie Smit, Professor of Systematic Theology at Stellenbosch University says:

“Wherever God is known, there humanity finds glory, is cultivated, is nurtured, is nourished, flourishes, is cared for. God is glorified when concrete human beings are respected and loved – also strangers, exiles, the poor, widows, orphans, the sick” (De Gruchy 2009:161).

The implication of Smit's point – following Calvin - is that knowledge of God should lead to humanisation. The Church honours God when elements of Christian humanism are incorporated in her teaching and life. By extension, the Gospel of the Kingdom is actually liberating rather than enslaving.

De Gruchy also refers to the following oft-quoted remark by Calvin:

“We cannot but behold our own face as it were in a glass in the person that is poor and despised ... though he were the furthest stranger in the world. Let a Moor or a Barbarian come among us, and yet inasmuch as he is a human, he brings with him a looking glass wherein we may see that he is our brother and our neighbour” (De Gruchy 2009:205).

Here Calvin implies that every human is your neighbour. The neighbourhood does not depend on any external factors but just on the mere fact of being human. Carlos Eire is quoted saying:

“The Reformation for which Calvin struggled was not as much one of doctrine, but rather one of piety, which required profound social and cultural changes. To be properly 'Reformed', a community would not only have to change its theology, but also its outward expression of faith, not to mention its attitude towards the material world” (De Gruchy 2009:205).

Here the implication is that to be reformed is not only a matter of adopting the right doctrine, but also of right living. Sound doctrine should bear on ethical living. This thought is in line with James' teaching that faith should produce good works (James 2:14-26) otherwise it will be deemed dead.

De Gruchy presents alternative Calvinism that existed in South Africa as a model. That Calvinism was humanising as it helped in the struggle against apartheid. He is in favour of the covenantal model, whereby God's sovereignty is connected to public life. In the Old Testament prophets like Amos and Hosea, we see the covenantal model at work. In the New Testament we see that the Apostle Paul taught good treatment of slaves. James (1:27) teaches that “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”. Jesus

Himself is the prime model of what it means to be truly human and to promote the well-being of others.

De Gruchy persuasively argues that the recovery of the Reformed tradition can lead to renewal of the Church and society in South Africa. The proof to some extent is in the way Renaissance humanism helped shape the Reformation, in the way Calvin helped shape public life in Geneva and in the way alternative Calvinism helped shape the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

De Gruchy retrieves the riches of Calvin and the Reformed tradition in the mould of Karl Barth who himself sought to retrieve the tradition in creative ways relevant to his contemporary times. Karl Barth contended that Calvin was a theological humanist with God-centredness, that Calvin was both totally a reformer and Renaissance man and that Calvin has something to say to us today.

De Gruchy is advocating Christian humanism. He gives concrete examples of how that has worked in history. He challenges the Church to be a model of new humanity, a humanity that fears God and says not to dehumanisation. Reform should start right in the Church before extending to the society. In that view, De Gruchy makes a major contribution by pointing out the sociological dimension of the Reformation. There is much dehumanisation in our society, and also in Churches. Some Churches even use the Bible to support dehumanisation.

De Gruchy's insights impress upon a Malawian reader the need for serious programmes of Theology and public life in our Universities. That can boost the Church's capacity to deal with the problem of dehumanisation. The Church will then be pro-active in enhancing humanisation and in curbing dehumanisation. The alternative Calvinism that De Gruchy embraces is also very relevant to Malawi.

4.4.2 The Humanist Imperative in Germany: Retrieving Dietrich Bonhoeffer

From the perspective of De Gruchy, Bonhoeffer could be referred to as a Christian humanist in view of both his life and writings. Bonhoeffer resisted Nazism at a risk of losing his own life. His writings call for Christian action in the wake of dehumanisation perpetuated by the Nazi regime. De Gruchy regards Bonhoeffer as a model for Christian humanist endeavour in South Africa. Bonhoeffer's humanism deals more constructively with dehumanisation than do religious fundamentalism or Secular humanism. His humanism has a supernatural dimension and is rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. De Gruchy sees Bonhoeffer's central

tenets of the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus as enabling a new and true humanity and as a recapitulation of humanity. Being truly and fully human means becoming human in the image of Jesus Christ. Moral and social action then has a transcendent point of reference.

As is well known, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of the German Republic on 30 January 1933. Hitler's philosophy was that of the nazification of the Church and elimination of the Jewish race. There was much oppression and mass killings during the Nazi regime. Hitler felt the German nation was a superior race and he led the nation to deal harshly with what he felt were inferior races. Unfortunately, some sections of the Church sided with the oppressors and in that failed under Nazism. Karl Barth (Swiss) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (German) struggled against the evils of the Nazi regime. Just when Adolf Hitler came to power, Karl Barth knew that he had to resist National Socialism, but realised that the German Church was not prepared to resist because of the long standing alliance between the altar and the throne (Livingston *et al* 2000:99). Barth was influential in the production of the Barmen Declaration in 1934, which affirmed the sovereignty of the Word of God over against all idolatrous political ideologies, effectively consigning National Socialism to the category of idols. The Barmen Synod and its Declaration is a model of Christian witness in the world of political threat and persecution or any form of dehumanisation.

Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) did his doctoral studies at the University of Berlin under the supervision of Reinhold Seeberg. His thesis was “*Sanctorum Communio: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church*”, in which he brought together social philosophy and the (Barthian) theology of revelation and introduced a theology of sociality built on a relational view of personhood. Bonhoeffer understood revelation in its social form – the Church – as “Christ existing as community.” Bonhoeffer benefited from Seeberg's emphasis on the social dimension of human existence, although he did not agree with his (Seeberg's) Protestant liberalism. For that position, Bonhoeffer was in agreement with Karl Barth, who announced the bankruptcy of Protestant liberalism and proffered a theology of revelation, whose starting point was not human religious experience but the word of the wholly other God (Haynes & Hale 2009:8).

Bonhoeffer challenged the “orders of creation” theology, which the nationalists used to link Nazism with God's will. In 1933, the Evangelical Church of the German Nation wrote: “We see in race, volk and nation, orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God. God's

law for us is that we look to the preservation of these orders ... In the mission to the Jews we perceive a grave danger to our nation. It is the entrance gate for alien blood into our body politic ... In particular, marriage between Germans and Jews is to be forbidden” (Livingston *et al* 2006:99). The statement from the Evangelical Church could be understood as dehumanising against the Jews and could have propelled Hitler’s anti-Semitic views. Bonhoeffer decried the anti-Jewish and non-Aryans campaign as against God's will, as well as the Church's silence in light of the evils of Nazism. Bonhoeffer's theology was Christocentric, as he asked: “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” He explored the theological place of Christ incarnate in the Church and what that means to being human and being in relation with other humans. He said the I-You relationship (intersubjectivity) should not be conceived as a subject-object relationship, but rather as a dialogical relationship invoking serious ethical decisions. He said one's real relationship with another person is a relationship mediated by God and that relationship is Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology (Haynes & Hale 2009:85). The implication is that the essential nature of humanity is not contingent upon historical circumstances but upon the fact of being created in the image and likeness of God. He said the Church is the Christ of the present. That understanding can lead to an end to dehumanisation. It could be observed that the Church in Germany missed that understanding and that the Nazi regime misunderstood the I-You relationship in terms of the Kantian transcendental philosophy in which the 'You' was the object. The Church in Nazi Germany did not live Christ.

Bonhoeffer saw Karl Barth as the first to recognise the error of Protestant liberalism, which accommodated the Gospel to world culture. He said of Barth: “He led the God of Jesus forward to battle against religion ... but in the nonreligious interpretation of theological concepts he gave no concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or ethics” (De Gruchy 2009:429). Bonhoeffer saw himself as finishing what Barth started. Barth’s theology is characterised by Christological concentration and Bonhoeffer follows that approach, his theology is as well characterised by Christocentricity. So, Christ should be presented as model and solution in any case of dehumanisation. His humanisation is rooted in Christ.

Haynes and Hale (2009:94) remark that the whole life and theology of Bonhoeffer are summed up in understanding of discipleship as following after Christ. They say discipleship cannot be understood minus Bonhoeffer's key theological concepts which are Christ existing as community, costly grace, vicarious representative action (*Stellvertretung*), ethics as formation and religionless Christianity. By not fighting against the evils of the Nazi regime,

the Church in Germany failed the test of discipleship. They did not portray what it means to follow after Christ; a call to discipleship entails speaking and acting against dehumanisation. A disciple of Christ identifies with the sufferers, speaks and acts on their behalf and in so doing portrays who is Jesus Christ is for us today. Jesus suffered and died vicariously for humanity.

Bonhoeffer joined resistance and even the plot against Adolf Hitler. He was spurred on by his understanding of the call to discipleship. He had compassion for the Jews and all non-Aryans suffering at the hands of the Nazi regime. He was executed on 8 April 1945 at the Gestapo concentration camp of Flossenburg. He still stands as a paragon of Christian humanism at a time when Hitler perpetrated crimes against humanity and when the Church ignored the precious discipleship mandate. His theology and life challenges the Church today to match doctrine with practice and act on behalf of the sufferers. Remaining silent in the wake of dehumanisation is tantamount to participating in dehumanisation. Bonhoeffer remarked: “One only learns to have faith by living in full this-worldliness of life ... And I think this is faith; this is metanoia. And this is how one becomes a human being, a Christian” (De Gruchy 2009:486).

Bonhoeffer asked: What does a Church, a congregation, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life, mean in a religious world? How do we talk about God – without religion, that is, without the temporally conditions presuppositions of metaphysics, the inner life, and so on? How do we speak in a worldly way about God? How do we go about being religionless-worldly Christians ... In a religionless situation, what do ritual and prayer mean? Is this where the arcane discipline or the difference between the penultimate and the ultimate have new significance? (De Gruchy 2009:364-365). Bonhoeffer's point was that the arcane discipline would guard humanism of the Church against becoming liberal. He said the Church is Church only when it is there for others and that the Church must participate in the worldly tasks of life in the community – not dominating but helping and serving and that the Church will have to confront the vices of hubris, the worship of power, envy and illusionism as the roots of all evil (De Gruchy 2009:503). The Church in Germany failed by far as measured by such questions and remarks. The Church was not there for others but embraced religiousness at the expense of the suffering brothers and sisters. Bonhoeffer, as did Barth, realised the failure of liberal theology to deal with the secularised world and the need to bring in the living Christ. He also realised the failure of 'religious Christianity' and called for religionless Christianity.

In his prison letters, Bonhoeffer argued for the need to retrieve arcane discipline (*disciplina arcani*, meaning 'Discipline of the Secret') so that the mystery to which the doctrine of the Trinity points should not be profaned when proclaiming the Gospel in a world that has come of age. Arcane discipline was practised in the early Church to keep intimate mysteries from non-believers and even from those under instruction in the faith. The early Church recognised mystery as a genuine religious category. Bonhoeffer recognised the mystery behind Church doctrine and knew that it would be profaned in the secular world. The arcane discipline would ensure that the creeds are used within proper limits (De Gruchy, 2013:130-131). Creeds point out to mysteries. However, our attempts to demonstrate mystery as credible religious category to the secular world should not lead to arbitrary invocation of the creeds which are for worship, inner Church life. Retrieval of the arcane discipline is essential in Christian humanism for it can help the Church to retain transcendental grounding in engaging with public life.

The brief reference to Bonhoeffer's theology and witness above, makes it understandable why – for De Gruchy – Bonhoeffer could be referred as a Christian humanist in view of both his life and writings. Other scholars have agreed with De Gruchy's line of thought. Zimmermann & Gregor (2010: xv) argue that Bonhoeffer's Christian humanism manages to uphold the divine and the human as well as the transcendence and the immanent. Such humanism addresses well the issues of human dignity by virtue of its acknowledgement of the transcendence as a reference point. Frick (*ibid.*, 58) quotes Bonhoeffer saying, “the destruction of humanness – *Menschsein* – is sin.” In that, Bonhoeffer viewed the violation of human worth and dignity as sin before God, who is the transcendent point of reference. Christian existence is a participation in the very life of Christ who became a human being and died vicariously for humanity. De Gruchy makes reference to Bonhoeffer's use of patristic theology like Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation and of the early Church's arcane discipline. De Gruchy, as does Zimmermann, deems Bonhoeffer's humanism as continuing in the tradition of the Church Father's theology.

Bonhoeffer was misunderstood and misinterpreted by some people. His concepts as worldly Christianity, mature worldliness, religionless Christianity, living in a world come of age, not *homo religiosus*, non-religious relationship between God and man, before God and with God we live without God, *deus ex machina* and *etsi deus non daretur* made some think that Bonhoeffer was against belief in God. Even the secularisation theorists and death of God

theologians of the 1960s thought that Bonhoeffer was one of them. Those concepts should be understood within the broader context of Bonhoeffer's Christocentric theology. We note that Bonhoeffer was concerned with living out the practical implications of being Christ's disciples not just holding on to dogma without living vicariously. Christ did live and die vicariously. Bonhoeffer's question remains ever-relevant: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? We should check the doctrinal and ethical dimensions of that question. It calls for a paradigm shift where the Church has been 'religious' and given tacit approval to dehumanisation; and where the Church has worshipped the *deus ex machina* or political ideologies.

De Gruchy understands Bonhoeffer's humanism as properly Christian. He observes that Bonhoeffer's question 'Who is Jesus Christ for us today?' is central in addressing conditions of dehumanisation in South Africa.

4.4.3 The Humanist Imperative in South Africa: The Contribution of John W. de Gruchy

De Gruchy who was influenced by Calvin and Bonhoeffer can also be described by the term "Christian humanist." In fact, he has himself claimed that label as it is evident in the title of his book *Being Human: Confessions of a Christian Humanist* published in 2006. In this book he addresses the issue of being truly and fully human from the perspective of Christian humanism. His approach is historical, theological and philosophical. The major concern is the prevalence of dehumanising ideologies and practices in the world, and South Africa in particular. Some people are having their humanness neglected. Dehumanisation is not only physical abuse; it is also emotional and psychological. "Confessions" in the title of the book is not used in the sense of confessing sins or repenting. De Gruchy's Confessions are in the mould of those of Augustine. He is giving a reasoned account of faith and hope and his life experiences are an aide in the exercise. De Gruchy describes Christian humanism as a critical humanism that arises out of the Christian gospel, challenging the dehumanisation powers of the world, whether secular or religious, in the interests of human well-being (2006:18). Christian humanism deals with issues of human dignity, human rights, freedom and hope. Human dignity is intrinsic in human beings and is not bestowed by any other human being. Human beings have dignity by virtue of being created in the image and likeness of God. Dignity cannot be removed, it can just be ignored. Actually, dehumanising others is self-dehumanisation. Rebecca Chopp is quoted saying: "To be human is to make, to create, and to live out new ways of being in history" (De Gruchy 2006:33). Many people are undergoing

suffering and struggle in life and the Christian humanist, rather than aggravating the problem, attempts to rectify matters.

Even the Christian tradition has in one way or another participated in dehumanising tendencies. Take for example, Christian fundamentalism, whereby the Church does not stand up against oppression by the Government. In Malawi, some Churches refuse to speak against socio-economic and political evils and in so doing, indirectly participate in dehumanisation.

In recent times, secular humanism emerged as the rational defender of humanity and the common good, standing against religious dogmatism, ecclesiastical triumphalism and popular superstition (De Gruchy 2006:86). The response of both the Catholic Church and major Protestant denominations was one of unqualified opposition. Any sign of modernist or liberal approaches was frowned upon and often punished. De Gruchy faults the approach, arguing that it helped advance the cause of secular humanism. The message is that when the Church ignores its rightful role in the humanisation project, secular humanism becomes an option.

Projecting from De Gruchy's thinking, it could be argued that Christian humanism, with its recognition of the transcendent, has leverage over secular humanism and fundamentalism. Furthermore, De Gruchy's hypothesis is that Christian humanism presents a good understanding of what it means to be fully and truly human. He argues against both Christian fundamentalism and secular humanism. Christian humanism presents a retrieval of the legacy of the humanism of the Renaissance. It is not developing from enlightenment humanism, which arguably had an undue focus on human reason.

De Gruchy presents his experiences in life and how they have shaped his theology. He exposes some ideologies about being human and points out their weaknesses or failures. He gives vivid examples of dehumanisation, such as Nazism in Germany. He cherishes the Christian Gospel and is quick to mention that what he thinks are errors in the Church's understanding and application of the Gospel message. The Incarnation and Resurrection are essential for our understanding of what it means to be Christian and being human.

De Gruchy states that the Christian story of creation and redemption is a grand narrative, which can lead to humanisation. Our own personal and national narratives should be understood in the context of that grand narrative and we can have the well-being of other human beings at our hearts. It should be noted that Christian humanism would meet

challenges with respect to grand narratives in circles where recognition of the role of grand narratives is dwindling.

Christian humanism is characterised by love of learning. The love of learning is not for its own sake, but for the sake of transforming society in ways that make human flourishing possible. Anti-intellectualism goes against what Christian humanism stands for. Anti-intellectualism portrays good scholarship and holiness as inevitable enemies. The study of humanities is of the essence. De Gruchy (2006:176) argues that “the future of humanities in Africa and, by extension, across the world, thus depends on whether or not they are able to deal compassionately and redemptively with the problem of human suffering”. The legacy of the humanities is too wonderful to be squandered. Christian humanism cannot prevail where the humanities are downplayed. Humanities give us the tools for in-depth analysis and abstract reasoning which are required for the Christian humanist project. Humanities help to enhance human life and place science in its proper place. Christian humanism is also characterised by love of the wisdom and truth of God and that is what makes it distinctive. Christian humanists cherish the love of learning both for the sake of the Church's ministry in the Church, and because of its importance for human well-being, for the simple reason that the two belong together (De Gruchy 2006:180). This means institutions of high learning have a strategic role as far as the humanisation project is concerned. History shows that scholarship was very important for the Reformation to materialise. Today, scholarship can play a vital role in transformation of Church and society. Anti-intellectualism can give opportunity to secular humanism or fundamentalism.

The orientation of De Gruchy's argument is that Christian humanism as opposed to Christian fundamentalism and secular humanism is the right approach to being human and being Christian. If the position of Christian humanism is adopted, the problem of dehumanisation could be alleviated. The glory of God is manifested when humanity is fulfilled and how can humanity be fulfilled when there is dehumanisation? How can humanity be fulfilled when human rights and dignity of others are violated? De Gruchy manages to show the evil of dehumanisation and some of the thought patterns leading to dehumanising tendencies. He manages to highlight the gap in approaches to tackle dehumanisation and then shows how Christian humanism is well-placed for the task.

De Gruchy says a true confession of Christ is not for the sake of demonstrating doctrinal purity, but for the sake of the well-being of the world. However, both doctrinal purity and

ethical living/praxis are essential. Ideally, doctrine impacts practice. Holding on to sound doctrine is essential, although not the end of things. Good doctrine should manifest itself in good living.

De Gruchy presented a paper at the University of Virginia in November 2007 titled *Christian Humanism against Fundamentalism and Secularism*. His argument was that Christian humanism was an alternative to both and that it was an essential tool for constructing a Christian identity. De Gruchy pointed out the religious and theological dangers of fundamentalism on one hand and the social and political dangers on the other. He argued that secularism and scientism are secular forms of fundamentalism. He mentioned both to be as dangerous as religious fundamentalism to both personal and social well-being. He said both were aberrations of secular humanism and should not be confused with it. Secularism has replaced God with the self and its own interests, rather than the interests of humanity; scientism has replaced God with technology unchecked by moral constraint. The question to De Gruchy would be asked whether secularism and scientism are really aberrations of secular humanism?

De Gruchy said that secular humanism has become the defender of values that were previously advocated by Christian humanism since the Enlightenment: culture, humanity, tolerance and freedom. Secular humanism had become the rational defender of humanity and the common good against religious dogmatism, ecclesiastical triumphalism and popular superstition (2006:86). De Gruchy's critique of Secular humanism takes the sympathetic approach. He described it as an attractive option for people who have become disillusioned with the Church and disenchanted with teachings of Christianity. He said the best Secular humanists he knew sensed the need for something more transcendent than mundane. But the question then is: Do they still remain secular humanists in view of the fact that denial of the transcendent is one of the central tenets of Secular humanism?

De Gruchy held that Renaissance humanism drew on both classical antiquity and Europe's Christian heritage. It affirmed the dignity, potential and freedom of humanity, the importance of reason, moral values and virtue, and the significance of language and texts for communicating truth. Today, it is important to recognise our common humanity and how, individually, we are contributing towards enhancing other people's lives. De Gruchy said a Christian humanism for today must be a critical humanism expressed in solidarity, both with those who struggle for justice and with those who are victims of injustice. He states that

Christian humanism stands in contrast and contradiction to all dehumanising forms of religion. A critical humanism has a sense of the transcendence and is cautious of fundamentalism because fundamentalism leads to dehumanisation. Failure of the Church in some circles does not mean failure of the Gospel but rather means the Church's misapplication of the Gospel message. The Gospel should be allowed to change the Church and then to exert its influence on the society. The Gospel is, by its very nature, humanising.

In another book, *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa*, published in 2011 and edited by De Gruchy (which was the result of a research project hosted by the Stellenbosch Institute for Advance Studies), the issue addressed is the meaning and implications of being human together in South Africa. The concern is that there are many dehumanising conditions in post-apartheid South Africa. To obtain the meaning of what it actually means to be human and actually living by it will help in the humanising project. The problems noted include social injustice, violence, poverty, materialism and environmental degradation. It is noted that Christian humanism is a viable option in addressing those challenges.

The problem is tackled from many perspectives, as the authors are from a variety of disciplines and that makes the book rich. The authors – amidst all their difference – share the same spirit of humanisation. Although the context is particularly that of post-apartheid South Africa, the ideas put forward in this book are of universal significance and application. The authors are serious about translating theories into something workable for the actual life-setting.

The authors are committed to the humanist agenda. Bernard Lategan, for instance, argued for the de-centring of the human subject and Denise Ackermann considers relationships to be the key to being human (De Gruchy 2011:27). As humanity relates to God, we also relate to fellow human beings. Relationships should be life-enhancing and should extend even to the entire environment. The recognition of interconnectedness and mutuality helps humanity to identify and stand in solidarity with the sufferers. De Gruchy (2011:59) argues that the reasons for labelling himself a Christian humanist are more than theological; they are also strategic and polemical. They are strategic in that all people committed to humanisation should work together and they are polemical in that he does not accept the absolutist and exclusivist assertions of fundamentalist or triumphalist religion.

The concept of ubuntu is often referred to in this volume. It is argued that the values and practices of ubuntu contribute to humanisation in South Africa and in our global context. The

authors take a holistic view, and in the process environmental factors, future generations and all classes of people are considered. All dimensions of human life are touched upon: the social, economic, political, cultural and the technological. The indication is that Christian humanism is all-embracing.

John W. de Gruchy links the debate on Christian humanism to the religious category of mystery. He acknowledges that people participate in something that transcends and overwhelms us. The human mind cannot explain all reality. The Church Father Augustine is quoted, “I cannot grasp all that I am” (De Gruchy, 2013:135). Scientists in the fields of neuroscience and molecular biology tend to deny the mysterious as superstitious and mythical. These scientists follow the empiricist approach to life. De Gruchy attempts to disprove science's challenges to religious faith. He argues that he needs faith not scientific findings to stand in times of tragedy. The challenges of life need to be encountered with faith rather than scientism.

John and Isobel de Gruchy had a very painful experience in February 2010 when they lost their son, Steve, who was in his own right a theologian of note. The Christian faith, particularly the doctrine of the resurrection, helps them to come to terms with such a tragic death of their son. Out of these struggles was born his book, *Led into Mystery: Faith Seeking Answers in Life and Death* (2013)

In this book De Gruchy (2013:69) also argues that the Enlightenment and its Deist philosophy rejected the mysterious elements in Christianity in favour of a natural religion within the limits of reason alone. Mystery was an essential element in Bonhoeffer's theology as it is in De Gruchy's book. Bonhoeffer is quoted saying, “The lack of mystery in our modern life means decay and impoverishment for us. A human life is worth to the extent that it keeps its respect for mystery” (ibid., 1). The implication of Bonhoeffer's statement is that rejecting mystery means rejecting a very important dimension of life leading to developing insufficient explanations of life and sowing the seeds of dehumanisation.

De Gruchy's explication of the religious category of mystery displays how he could not embrace Secular humanism which draws from Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism without regard for the mystery of God. Christian humanism embraces mystery. The mystery advocated here is not the Einsteinian one which is not transcendental. Albert Einstein is quoted, “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all

true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, ... is as good as dead: his eyes are closed" (ibid., 95). Einsteinian mystery is a sense of awe at nature and has nothing to do with transcendence. It is non-supernatural mystery. It is not the type of mystery which Christian humanists acknowledge. It does not provide strong grounding for dealing with hardships of life. Albert Einstein's mystery should be understood within the overarching context of his religiosity which is naturalistic. Christian humanism, in turn, acknowledges and finds nourishment in the mystery of God.

The fact of mystery grants us the possible ability to come to terms with evil and suffering in this life. Pain and sorrow surround us and are part of life. Issues of disease, poverty, wars, violence against women, all innocent suffering, corruption and death come on humankind with full force. We are assured that God sees the broader picture and that our specific circumstances are part of the whole which is moving towards a specific destiny. This is not to glorify evil and suffering. These were not part of God's original plan. The human mind cannot understand the full measure of things and it does not necessarily follow that what people cannot understand is superstitious or mythical. The mysterious is a legitimate category of existence. On account of acknowledgement of and humility before the Transcendent Source, Christian humanists move with hope and certainty even in the wake of many puzzles in life.

The Christian Humanism of William Schweiker, the Chicago theologian, is in agreement with that of De Gruchy. In his article, *Flesh and Folly: The Christ of Christian Humanism*, Schweiker (Schuele & Thomas, 2009:86) argues that the heart of the humanist agenda of the fourteenth century was the humanities and concern for reclaiming classic texts including the Bible. Schweiker attempts to further the legacy of Christian humanism in our troubled age and to address the question of what should a Christian humanist say about Christ. According to Schweiker, Christian humanists see faith more as a way of life than a set of beliefs. Though doctrinal formulations have their place in the Church, Christianity is essentially a way of life. Theology is a means not an end in itself and doctrinal formulations should not stand in the way of genuine Christian living. Christian humanists live what is called practical Christianity and they are drawn to such living by the fact of salvation in Christ, the Incarnation and the law of love (ibid., 87). God visited the world to redeem us so that we be formed into the community of Christ and live in communion with Him. The Christian

humanism of Schweiker, as that of De Gruchy, is therefore characterised by transcendence and practicality.

In De Gruchy's writings, the influence of Bonhoeffer can be seen in the use of the concepts like mature worldliness, discipleship, critiquing fundamentalism, not being religious and in being Christocentric. De Gruchy states that Barth and Bonhoeffer contributed to his understanding of the Church struggle against apartheid in South Africa (2006:17).

The next chapter makes a plea for Christian humanism in Malawi. In De Gruchy, as in Calvin and Bonhoeffer, we see distinguishing marks of a Christian humanist. Christian humanism, I would like to argue, holds potential to help address the concerns raised by Secular humanists.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHURCH AND HUMANISATION IN MALAWI

This chapter argues, with reference to history, and without romanticising the role of the Church, that the Church has also played a positive role in challenging dehumanisation. The depth of religiosity and a religiously-grounded ethical system will be explored as challenges to Secular humanism and at the same time as possible fertile ground for Christian humanism to flourish.

5.1 Arguments from History

5.1.1 Churches Challenging Dehumanisation

In the history of the Malawi nation, the Church has spoken out and acted against dehumanisation. This chapter, among other things, highlights a few episodes of how the Church has fought for humanisation. It will be observed that though not employing the term 'Christian humanism', the Church in Malawi has exhibited elements of the movement in her struggle against social and political ills and for recognition of other people's worthiness and dignity. The Presbyterian missionaries came to Malawi in 1875 and were already well-established when Malawi became a British Protectorate in 1891. The missionaries were fiercely critical of Government policy on such matters as land, labour and taxation (Ross 1996:11). That was despite enjoying protection against Arab and Portuguese interference. The Presbyterian missions at Blantyre and Livingstonia opposed the dehumanising practices of the colonial regime. The Native Associations, which were begun by the Livingstonia Synod were precursors of the Congress movement, which eventually achieved independence in the 1960s. Some of the ills under the British included racial segregation and work without pay (Thangata). The dignity of the indigenous people was not recognised. Eliah Nthara claimed that the Livingstonia Synod played a crucial role in educating Malawians during the colonial era (*Sunday Times*, Religion, 27 October 2013:18). The goal was that people should become self-sufficient in trade and agriculture. The founder of the Synod, Dr. Robert Laws, is accredited with the positive contribution of the Synod to spiritual and socio-economic life of the people. He retired in 1927 and died in 1934 but his legacy lives on. The Synod has a University, a health sciences College, three hospitals, secondary and primary schools.

Unfortunately, the Church remained mostly silent in the post-independence era, even in the wake of many social and political ills. Kenneth Ross (2006:19) argued that the Christian Churches had, to some extent, contributed to the creation of what critics have called the Frankenstein monster of the Banda dictatorship. He went on to quote the General Secretary of Blantyre Synod, Rev. Misanjo Kansilanga who confessed on 8 November 1995: “The silence of the Church was costly to thousands of Malawians who lost their lives and spent their time in prisons.” In that sense, the Church helped entrench dehumanisation. The silence served as an indirect legitimisation of injustice, exploitation and oppression.

Rev. Dr. Winston R. Kawale (*The Lamp* (99) Nov-Dec 2012:19) claims that Malawi is what it is because of religion. He says it was religion and Christianity, to be specific, that ended tribal wars and slave trade. All social services such as education, health, industries and commerce were first started by the Missions. The first commercial shops of Mandala and Kandodo were missionary shops. Kawale further says that the Church ruled this country for 16 years, from 1875 to 1891 and that the British Government only came in 1891 at the invitation of the Church. The implication of Kawale's argument is that the Church is at the very centre of our country, Malawi. The country has benefited from the positive contribution of the Church in spiritual, social and political realms. The Church turned things around when there was dehumanisation.

5.1.2 The Pastoral Letter of 8 March 1992

The period from 1992 to the present is a prime example of the Church's engagement with dehumanisation. In 1992, the Roman Catholic Bishops released a Pastoral letter that led to the demise of the one-party system and to the coming of the multi-party regime. The Pastoral Letter (that was authored by Archbishop J. Chiona, Bishop F. Mkhori, Bishop M.A. Chimole, Bishop A. Assolari, Bishop A. Chamgwera, Bishop G.M. Chisendera and Monsignor J. Roche), and titled *Living Our Faith*, was read on 8 March 1992, the first Sunday of Lent. It was re-published later in the year by the Catholic Institute for International Relations in London under the title *The Truth Will Set You Free*. The Letter made a very big impact on the social and political front, as it set the stage for Gospel-based reforms. The Letter is reproduced in its original form in *Christianity in Malawi: A Source Book* (1996:204-215), edited by Kenneth R. Ross. The Letter came from a background of social and political ills in the one-party regime.

The Letter stresses the dignity and unity of humankind by saying that every person is created in the image and likeness of God and is sacred. Pope Paul VI is quoted in the Letter, saying: “The Church is certainly not willing to restrict her action only to the religious field and dissociate herself from man's temporal problems.” The Bishops indicated they would fail if they remained silent in areas of social and political concern. Ideals of honesty, righteousness, mutual respect, equal opportunity for all, acceptance, justice, love and unity were advocated. Many social and political ills are mentioned in the Letter. The bottom line is that the ills dehumanise people created in the image and likeness of God. The State and all individuals who were perpetuating the ills effectively ignored the dignity of the fellow Malawians. The Pastoral Letter then can be said to have a humanisation agenda. The Bishops called the nation to the basis of our unity; being created in the image and likeness of God.

The Letter indicates that the biblical truth of John 8:32 (The truth will set you free) does not have an exclusively spiritual meaning but also has meaning in the social arena. A society that knows the truth of God is set free from social and political ills. Social justice and human progress prevail. The words of Jesus in Luke 4: 18-19 were quoted and it is shown how they apply to the social arena. The implication then is that the Church should follow the example of Jesus, who came to proclaim liberty and that dehumanising tendencies go against the ministry of Jesus Christ, our Lord. To stress the Church's social concern, the Bishops quoted Micah 6:8, that reads in the New Revised Standard Version: He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

The Church should be the voice of the voiceless living in situations of hopelessness. Some could argue that the change of political dispensation in Malawi was not a merely sacred cause as even the non-religious were involved in the fight. However, the Church played a central role in shaping the struggle for multi-party democracy.

5.1.3 From 1992 to the Present

Martin Ott (2000:120-157) contends that there are two approaches to how the Church makes the gospel message “effective” in the world. The first is the prophetic approach, whereby the Church courageously stands against injustice and oppression. The release of the Pastoral letter by the Catholic Bishops can be viewed as prophetic. The second one is the institutional, whereby the Church contributes towards social and public order and good governance according to God's will.

Ott observes: “It is only this theological meditation that leads into the depth-structures of human experience and of human society, and, in our case, to the theological answers for contemporary Malawi” (ibid.) He goes on to argue that social dynamics require theological dynamics, that there should be proper theological balance between prophetic and institutional approaches towards politics and that theology should dialogue with other disciplines in a democratic Malawi. He says the kairological understanding of the gospel and of the Churches' presence in the world might help to overcome fears that beloved traditions might be lost forever. Ott's observation is valid in that the principal tenets of the Christian faith should remain intact in the wake of cultural dynamics. What is drawn from Ott's position is that addressing social and political concerns requires theology. The problems of dehumanisation are deep-rooted in Malawi and other parts of the world and dealing with them requires an approach that goes to the depth of things.

The point is that there should not be a time when the Church is silent as far as social and political life is concerned. The implication of Ott's view is that the institutional approach becomes a pro-active measure against dehumanising tendencies. The Church should work towards entrenching positive values of respect for human rights, good governance, love of education, hard-working, justice and fairness in order to address situations that could lead to dehumanisation. The Church should ensure that the four cornerstones of the one-party era, which were unity, loyalty, obedience and discipline, are not forgotten but are rather enforced by being given a theological grounding, without falling in the process into the trap of instrumentalising religion.

Ever since the release of the Pastoral Letter, the Church has continued to make her prophetic voice audible. Dehumanising tendencies have been perpetrated even in the multi-party era and the Church has spoken strongly against such evils. For instance, in the second term of President Bakili Muluzi (1999 – 2004) the Church stood strong against attempts by the ruling party to have an open term for the State President. In the second term of President Bingu wa Mutharika (May 2009 – April 2012) the Church stood against evils of mass killings, selective application of the rule of law and deprivation of the right to education. Many people felt that the Government was engaging in practices that were leading to the dehumanisation of the masses. The Church was involved in the humanisation project. At present, the Church is speaking against dehumanising tendencies of the People's Party led by President Joyce Banda. The masses are still experiencing the unpleasant effects of devaluation of the Kwacha and are hit hard by the unnecessary expenses. The Church speaks in various ways advocating

principles of justice and consideration of the plight of the poor and the disadvantaged. What the Church has shown and continues to show is that social concern is rooted in the very nature and work of God.

Bishop James Tengatenga (2006:192) of the Anglican Church holds that in the multi-party era the Church and the state have co-existed. He appeals to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who spoke of a dialectical and polemical relation of the Church and the state. Tengatenga (2006:193) goes on to refer also to Karl Barth, who looked at three concentric circles: The Church is the inner circle, the government is the outer circle and these two are inside the circle of the Kingdom of God. The Church has worked together with Government and even the civil society for the common good of the people of Malawi. This means the Church followed models similar to those of Bonhoeffer and Barth. The Church's social concern is modelled on ideals of the Kingdom of God. Tengatenga (2006:196) says the sacrament model would be useful for the Anglican Church in Malawi. The Church is the sign of God's Kingdom and of God's grace. Understanding the Church sacramentally leads the Church to stand for the ideals of God's Kingdom, which advocate recognition of human dignity and social justice. The Church cannot remain silent in the wake of dehumanising practices. It means the Church went against its essential nature by remaining silent during the one-party era when there were many social and political ills that effectively dehumanised the masses.

5.1.4 Christianity's Resistance against Dehumanisation

In his book *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*, David Bentley Hart addresses the issue of the positive contribution of Christianity in the late antique world and related to that, the effect of Christianity upon the development of Western civilisation. The concern is that some scholars and authors demean the positive influence of Christianity in its first centuries. Some go on to blame Christianity for the evils and dehumanising tendencies of that period. Hart disproves any of such a reading. He argues that there are actual social effects that followed from the triumph of Christianity that corroborate the claim that the gospel substantially transformed the moral and spiritual consciousness of Western humanity. Christianity with its novel message made notable social differences in the late antique world. Its message of redemption set it apart from other worldviews. The God who suffers and who identifies with the sufferers was unique.

Some claim that even in the modern times we don't need religion, especially the Christian faith. The position they praise is nihilism. Reason and the concept of freedom are extolled.

Modernity is post-Christian and is presenting itself as age of reason overthrowing the age of faith. In the process, the picture of Christianity is distorted. For instance, Peter Watson is quoted saying: “Without question, ethical monotheism ... This has been responsible for most of the wars and bigotry in history” (Hart 2009:4).

Hart refutes accusations levelled against Christianity by giving detailed and well-researched evidence. He shows how in objecting to the Christian faith, the opponents actually committed conceptual and historical errors. He (2009:19) says that “scientific”, “moral” or “rational” objections to faith are not really scientific, moral or rational in any but a purely rhetorical sense. According to Hart, the indictments of religion advanced by the New Atheists lack substance and fall short of the tests for scientific standards, morality and rationality.

Hart mentions the treasures that Christianity brought to the late antique world and argues that modernity is leading us to lose those treasured values and principles. He shows what he sees as the vanity of modernity and the dangers of a Godless world. Some of the treasures of Christianity include the humane treatment of slaves, women and other socially marginalised people; establishing hospitals and alms giving houses; teaching against infanticide and other evils; and helping to end the gladiator combat. Christianity brought the “transvaluation of values” in the late antique world, Hart argues.

Hart recommends a return to the ideals of early Christian centuries and of monasticism and a rejection of modernity with its undue emphasis on reason and human freedom. Modernity is a veil that will prevent us from cherishing the rich inheritance of the early Christian centuries. Modernity will lead to more and more dehumanisation. The early Church teaches what it means and implies to recognise the dignity of other human beings. Christian humanism of today has much to learn from the early Christian centuries with regard to opposing dehumanisation with a view to bringing the ‘transvaluation of values’.

Hart (2009:235) mentions that transhumanists like Lee Silver look forward to the day when humanity will take responsibility for its own evolution by throwing off antique moral constraints and allow ourselves to use genetic engineering in order to transform future generations of our offsprings into gods. Hart sees no pressing need to improve the human race and sees no ethical imperatives attached to the science of special evolution. Hart (2009:237) maintains that the idea that humanity relentlessly progresses toward ever more rational and ethical forms of life is a modern myth.

The thought of Hart is relevant to Malawi today in that his argument helps to develop an understanding of the role of Christianity's impact on society that does not demonise it in an uncritical way and is open to celebrate its positive influence. The valued legacy of almost 150 years of Christianity is cherished. The following section follows Hart's line of thought and highlights some aspects of the contribution of Christianity to the spiritual and moral life of Malawi. The point though is not to give thorough discussion but to argue against one-sided negative view of Christianity.

5.1.5 The Valued Legacy of 150 Years of Christianity

Christianity was introduced in Malawi in 1861 by the Universities Missions to Central Africa (UMCA), who were later followed by other missionaries. Notable were the Scottish missionaries who came in 1875 and 1876. These were followed by Joseph Booth, who founded Churches like Nyasa Industrial Mission (now Evangelical Church of Malawi) and Zambezi Industrial Mission (now Zambezi Evangelical Church). The very early missionaries implored the British to protect Nyasaland against Arab and Portuguese interference. The interference of either Arabs or Portuguese would probably have brought serious effects for our nation. There would have been civil wars as there were in Mozambique and Angola and that would have derailed progress and development. The Missions fought against slave trade and later against work without pay (thangata). They also helped fight against the evils perpetrated by the colonial regime.

Christianity resulted in the fact that made many locals started to realise that slave trade was evil, deeply immersed in cruelty. Of Dr David Livingstone, the Director of Museums in Malawi, Lovemore Mazibuko said (*Sunday Times*, Special Feature, 24 March 2013): “Livingstone brought in the spirit of brotherhood and we always remember him for his humanitarian works. Christianity, commerce and civilisation came to stay in Africa and also more in our own country largely because of him.” The article goes on to mention a slave, Tom Bokwito, who was freed in those days at the age of 15 by David Livingstone and Anglican Bishop Mackenzie. Slave trade was dehumanising and here we see missionaries who fought for humanisation.

The Missions introduced education, which enlightened the indigenous people who later rose up against the government. For instance, John Chilembwe revolted against the colonial masters when he realised that the Africans were subjected to dehumanisation. Most of the people who struggled against the colonial regime had gone through Mission schools. The

struggle ended in the attainment of independence in 1964 and in that way, we can argue that the legacy of the Missions is long lasting. From 1992, the prophetic and priestly voice of the Church has helped a lot in shaping our destiny as a nation. The Church has helped deal with social and political ills which dehumanise the masses. It is undeniable that the Church has played a vital role in the history of the nation.

In the sector of education, we can see many schools opened by Missions and Churches. The provision of secular education has had a great impact on social and political development of the nation as enlightened people have become top leaders in both Government and private sector. Both humanities and science have been emphasised in the schools opened by Missions and Churches. Today, Churches like the Roman Catholic and Livingstonia Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian have Universities, meaning that the Church is playing a vital role in the provision of higher education. In the health sector, hospitals started by Missions and Churches have helped in having healthy communities who have done some development work. Even the provision of medical training has enabled more individuals to be trained. The Church has helped alleviate the problems of lack of medicines and medical personnel effectively alleviating dehumanisation arising from lack of access to good health facilities and staff. The Church is playing a great role in sensitising people against chokolo (levirate marriage), kusasa fumbi (ritual sex with girls who have reached puberty) and kulowa kufa (ritual sex with widows to avoid misfortunes). These cultural practices are very degrading and dehumanising to women, whose dignity is not recognised. The practices result from seeing women as mere sex objects or as weapons to cast out misfortunes. The voice of the Churches carries weight for many people as it is grounded in the supernatural; it is theocentric rather than anthropocentric. The Church appeals to worldview and attitudes in order to bring about a change in practice and traditional values.

From mid-1980s to about the turn of the century, the problem of discrimination and stigmatisation against those infected with HIV and AIDS was rampant. Stigmatisation and discrimination were social evils negatively affecting those diagnosed with or thought to have the virus. They were regarded as already dead and that was very dehumanising. Degrading terms were used against them and the concerned individuals could not participate fully in the life of the communities. Some were even using the Bible to stigmatise those who were HIV positive. The Church taught against stigmatisation and discrimination to such an extent that the problem has been greatly reduced.

Borrowing from Hart, it can be contended that the doctrinaire materialism and doctrinaire secularism advocated by Thindwa and his fellow secular humanists are challenged as lacking ultimacy and authority. Hart (2009:230-231) says: “If nothing else, it seems certain that post-Christian civilisation will always lack the spiritual resources, or the organising myths, necessary to produce anything like the cultural wonders that sprang up under the sheltering canopy of the religion of the God-man.” Secular humanism in Malawi could be said to be post-Christian and hence, a challenge to the legacy of 150 years of Christianity. Not turning to spiritual resources would mean using temporal ones, which are not adequate for dealing with ultimate concerns and questions. Having highlighted some aspects of the positive contribution of Christianity over the past 150 years, the discussion now moves to the section that draws together a possible critique against secular humanism, with the researcher drawing on his own reading and research.

5.2 Critiquing Secular Humanists

George Thindwa is a representative of Secular humanism in Malawi. His teachings are a reflection of the figures of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett. All those known to be secular humanists are well-educated, a fact which renders the observation of Charles Taylor valid that the secularisation theory is true in the elitist sense. To the best of the present researcher’s knowledge, no large number of uneducated people has expressed secular humanism in their life and utterances. Even among the educated, it is a small percentage that is subscribing to the secular humanist agenda. The critique, done on five fronts, attempts to demonstrate that secular humanists’ critique of Christianity is based on inadequate grounds.

5.2.1 Questioning the Rationality of Religious Belief

Secular humanists in Malawi – one can argue – subscribe to modern foundationalism and evidentialism. Foundationalism is, from a logical perspective, a view that some of our justified beliefs are mediate beliefs; that is, they are based on and inferred from other immediate or foundational beliefs that are not derived from other beliefs (Livingston *et al* 2006:507). The latter beliefs are either deductively or inductively established first principles. Evidentialism is the claim that the standard of rationality is evidence or argument grounded in or provided for by basic beliefs, whereby the basic beliefs must either be self-evident or evident to the senses (Livingston *et al* 2006:507). On foundationalist and evidentialist grounds, the rationality of religious belief is challenged. Thindwa quotes in approval the

foundationalist and evidentialist 20th century thinker Bertrand Russell, who held the irrationality of religious belief.

Proponents of Reformed epistemology like Alvin Plantinga have challenged foundationalism and evidentialism on grounds that their criteria for rational beliefs do not meet their own conditions. Plantinga appealed to the writings of John Calvin, who said that belief in God “is implanted in us all as an innate tendency, or *nisus*, or disposition to believe in Him”. Nicholas Wolterstorff insisted that the project of Reformed epistemology was to answer the evidentialist critique of Christianity (Livingston *et al* 2006:509). The modern empiricist evidentialism goes back to John Locke. Nicholas Wolterstorff and others believed that the Church’s response should not be recourse to natural theology or reconstructing the Christian faith in ways acceptable to the modern evidentialist critique. They said the Church needs to carry out a critique of modern evidentialist assumptions and to have some form of spiritual therapy that can both bring to light the roots of the unbeliever’s resistance and relieve the unbeliever of his or her obstinate self-will (ibid.). Following that approach, secular humanists should be critiqued at the level of assumptions for us to know why they resist belief in God. Reformed epistemology attempts to confirm the rationality of religious belief. However, it is argued by some scholars that one weak point of the Reformed epistemologists is their acknowledgement of fideism. The Church should draw from the strengths of Reformed epistemologies while avoiding fideistic tendency in critiquing secular humanists in Malawi.

The rationality of the Christian faith should give no room to indoctrination. People are allowed to ask questions for them to understand, it is about “*Faith Seeking Answers in Life and Death*” to use the subtitle of De Gruchy’s book *Led into Mystery*.

5.2.2 The Problem of Evil

Secular humanists dismiss Christianity in light of what they perceive as its inability to deal with the problem of evil. On that charge, explanations have been attempted in the tradition of the Church for the justice of God in the presence of evil and suffering in the world. These arguments defend the view that God is just, omnipotent, omniscient, good and all-loving and is not responsible for any evil, whether natural or moral. For instance, two approaches to the problem of evil were given by the Church Fathers Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine of Hippo. Irenaeus spoke of soul-making theodicy in which encounter with evil is seen as a necessary pre-requisite for spiritual growth and development (McGrath 2001:292). Augustine spoke of the free-will defence in which the presence of evil is explained by people's misuse of

freedom. (McGrath 2001:293). Human beings choose evil instead of good. Theologians of theodicy argue that humanity, not God, is responsible for evil.

5.2.3 Non-acknowledgement of Transcendence

Secular humanists do not acknowledge the transcendence realm of existence. However, secular humanism, with its absolutisation of human reason and transcendentless activism does not provide an adequate solution to the socio-economic and political ills the nation is facing. Thindwa's assumption that scientific reasoning and knowledge is the only true one is not necessarily a scientific finding; it is merely an assumption. Metaphysics and transcendence cannot be denied so easily, because even science has metaphysical grounding and meaning is often still based on transcendence. It could be an error of the epistemological category to absolutise science and reason. Scientific fundamentalism, which could also be termed as *science sans frontieres* (science without borders), is then pseudo-scientific. All knowledge, including scientific one, is harmonised by virtue of deriving from a common transcendent source. A term 'divine-origin epistemology' could be coined to describe that state.

Nürnbergger (2010:90) notes: "God is not to be found, therefore, in empirical evidence, metaphysical speculation or mystic contemplation." Science deals with issues of immanent reality, not those of the transcendent reality. To borrow the words of Nürnbergger (2010:114), the difference between religious convictions and scientific facts must be analysed with greater precision than is found in Thindwa and other Secular humanists. Secular humanists in Malawi would want to replace religious convictions with scientific facts though the two belong to distinct domains of knowledge. True science does not discredit true religion.

5.2.4 Questionable Biblical Hermeneutics

Thindwa blames God for what he calls Joshua's atrocities and other evils though it is obvious that the human mind is limited and prone to error. Thindwa argues that similarities between God and people means that God is the creation of humanity in that people project their positive attributes into God. From the biblical perspective, the similarities between God and people are accounted for on the basis that we were created in the image and likeness of God. God shares communicable attributes with humans and examples are being good, holy, just, loving and faithful.

It is the researcher's view that Thindwa's biblical hermeneutics does not lead him to distinguish between biblical and aberrant Christianity. Nürnbergger's assertion that aberrant

Christianity merits no justification is helpful in critiquing Thindwa. An argument could be advanced that secular humanists, though to some extent understanding the weaknesses of religion, confuse between biblical Christianity and aberrant Christianity. When some children of one family threw themselves on a fire in Ndirande some years ago, that was not biblical Christianity. When secular humanists admonish Christianity on the grounds of cases such as the previously mentioned, are they attacking biblical or rather aberrant Christianity? Could it be concluded on such grounds that religion *per se* causes evil? Klaus Nürnberger (2010:127) rightly notes that “authentic faith and the use of faith assumptions for ideological purposes should not be confused”. Should biased use of faith assumptions for ideological purposes be used by secular humanists in arguing against authentic faith?

Following Nürnberger’s remarks, this study holds that Malawian secular humanists’ adopt a reductionist approach to hermeneutics whereby everything is reduced to scientific method and reasoning to the exclusion of other valid methods of knowing. In critiquing Dawkins, Nürnberger (2010:140) says: “He seems to follow a reductionist, rather than an emergentist approach to scientific investigation”. However, the reductionist approach which Secular humanists use is losing popularity even in science itself.

5.2.5 The Problem of Religious Language

A reading of their writings, reveal that Malawi secular humanists follow the model of logical positivism with its principle of verifiability. According to the principle of verifiability, a statement or proposition is meaningful only if it can be verified or falsified by sense experience. The positivist has empiricist background and assumes that sense experience is the only experience that there is. Auguste Comte, who coined the term 'positivism', applied a scientific attitude not only to science but also to human affairs. George Thindwa follows the model of Comte. Spiritual experience is considered invalid by the standards of positivism. However, logical positivism does not adequately deal with the phenomenon of religion which deals with supernatural experiences.

5.3 Faith in the Face of Secularism?

The term ‘secular’ deserves further engagement. Gerrit Brand, who was Lecturer at Stellenbosch University in Theology until his untimely death, expresses uneasiness with the concept of secularism. Brand (2011:1) cites Harvey Cox, who had argued that the modern city would be more and more characterised by the apparent absence of God from public life, only to present a retraction in 2011 after noting that the influence of religion on modern

society had not dwindled. Cox had argued that the new social order should not be opposed by Christians, but rather be welcomed as humankind's increasing coming of age. The implication of Cox's stand is that the response of the Church to secularism should be that of acceptance and of privatising the faith. Cox's retraction was in line with some developments in the social sciences, whereby people were questioning the accuracy and usefulness of the secularisation theory.

Brand agrees with Cox that religion had never left. The difference is in that Cox bases his claim on socio-historical considerations, whereas Brand bases his own on philosophical (logical and conceptual) considerations. The meaning of Brand's view is that secularism never took place. Brand (2011:2) mentions Paul Tillich, who argued in 1919 that all culture by its very nature has a religious dimension and that all religion necessarily takes a cultural form. Tillich's thesis rests on an analysis of the very meaning of culture. Brand says Tillich defines God as the ground of being or being itself. The word God is used in a generic sense to refer to whatever qualifies as the ground of being. Tillich means that some "god" is inescapable or unavoidable. Brand asks how it can be claimed that faith in some or other god is universal in view of contrary views. He answers that faith should be thought of as a behavioural disposition – an inclination to react in certain ways given certain circumstances. In that sense, Tillich's claim that everyone believes in some "god" and that culture is an expression of widely shared religious convictions are accurate. Culture has a religious dimension – not only in terms of beliefs concerning the ground of being, but also in terms of primary determinants of meaning or ultimate concerns. Brand gives philosophical grounds for the position that religion cannot depart from a culture. Brand argues that secularism in the sense of absence or decline of religion cannot exist.

Brand (2011:7) argues that secularism can exist as an ideology in the sense of commitment to an ideal that religion should no longer influence culture or the public sphere. Brand then comments that what faith faces is not secularism as a state of affairs, but the ideology of secularism, which is possible even through incoherence. A secularist culture is one that denies its own religious dimension, not one that has no religious dimension, as no culture can be without religious dimension. A definition of religion should include notions of beliefs concerning the ground of being and commitment to an ultimate concern. Issue of ground of being and ultimate concern are generic and are shared by the general populace. Brand (2011:12) concludes the paper by saying that the contrast should be between the secular and the sacred and not between the secular and the religious. He states: "Faith can therefore face

secularism meaningfully by insisting on a new language about secularism and related terms that undermine the sacralisation of cultural phenomena like neo-liberalism as beyond religious critique.”

Yokoniya Chilanga, the Founder-designate of the Association of Philosophers Against Secularism, argues along the same lines as Brand though in a different style. Chilanga says that secularism is not real, but rather a maliciously invented abstract term aimed at distorting some religious truths and realities (*The Nation*, Opinion, 20 August 2010:14). Historically, religion has defied all odds and has persisted even in the wake of scientific advancements. He maintains that the fact that many people in the First World countries do not attend religious functions does not mean that they are secular. Science has only made people too busy to attend religious functions arguing that religion is in the heart. The implication is that people can still be religious even without attending religious ceremonies. Religion touches at the core of one's being and so cannot be discontinued. Chilanga could be arguing with Brand that secularism exists only at an ideological level but not on the level of practicality. Secularism is a totalising ideology in that it denies religious values any place in the public sphere and it challenges religion only on the ideological level.

Brand's stance is very relevant to the discourse on secular humanism in Malawi. What is said of secularism can be said of Secular humanism in Malawi. Removing religion might mean removing the essence of culture, effectively removing culture. Therefore, removing the religious dimension is actually removing culture. It could be argued that the failure of the secularisation theory gives credence to the argument that secular humanism can exist only on the ideological but not on pragmatic level. However, some could still argue that Secular humanism exists both on ideological and pragmatic levels. It should still be explored what challenges secular humanism, whether existing only on ideological or on both ideological and pragmatic levels, would pose to Church and society. Would the challenges be the same? Would they require the same responses?

5.4 Religiosity in the Traditional Society

History of religiosity of representative tribes which include the Chewa in the centre, the Tumbuka in the north and the Lomwe in the south shows faith on one hand and science and reason on the other, existing together before Christianity came to Malawi. The case is put that the two can and should exist today. The names of God show the people's conception of God as spirit, pre-existent, omnipotent, loving and caring, provider, Creator and Sustainer (Van

Breugel 2001:29-33). The worldview of the selected representative tribes is religious and the whole of life from birth to death is embedded in religiosity.

Hegel (Makumba, 2011:40) said the Negroes lacked that which was the basis of religious conceptions, that is, “consciousness of a Higher Power”. He went on to say that the Negro was not endowed with a “spiritual adoration for God, nor with the empire of Right”. He reduced all African religions to magic and found the idea of a Supreme Being lacking and then concluded that a sense of the divine was foreign to Africa. John Mbiti (Makumba 2011:41) is quoted testifying against Hegel, saying: “All African peoples believe in God. They take this for granted ... but exactly how this belief in God originated, we do not know.” Lucien Levy-Bruhl (Makumba 2011:44) described Africans as primitive, mystical, pre-logical and pre-scientific. Makumba argues that Africans were philosophers and not primitive as Levy-Bruhl said. It could be observed that the traditional society was scientific. For instance, they made fire using sticks and made *ulimbo* (sap or glue for catching birds). These came from a sophisticated mind and show that the people were scientific. Evidence abounds that the people were philosophical. For instance, the proverb like “*Amene yamkwana nguwo, mlekeni avale*” (The one whom the cloth fits, let him/her put it on) has the same conceptual framework as Plato's understanding of justice as a matter of doing what one is best suited for. Many other proverbs and idioms demonstrate that the people were capable of conceptual or abstract reasoning. All this points to the truth that faith on the one hand and science and reason on the other co-existent in the pre-Christian and pre-missionary society. That co-existence is a model of how faith and science/reason can and should co-exist in the post-missionary Malawi. Science and reason did not make belief redundant but they actually historically co-existed in the mind and life of the ancestors.

John Mbiti says Africans are traditionally very religious. He (Makumba 2011:166-168) says Africans are notoriously religious and religion “has dominated the thinking of the African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organisations and economic activities ... religion is closely bound up with the traditional way of African life, while at the same time, this way of life has shaped religion as well.” He further maintains that there are no irreligious people in traditional society, first because religion belongs to the community and every African must belong to a community and secondly, because African religions are written everywhere in the life of the community. Secular humanist teachings are then foreign to the traditional mind and life. The traditional worldview is deeply religious to such an extent that dislodging them from religiosity in effect

means removing from them the whole essence of being human. They would remain groundless or rootless. They would be deprived of life-force and ultimately of life itself. Such pre-Christian religiosity has left behind an invaluable legacy for today's Malawi. The Church should draw from the traditional conception of God and life in addressing challenges posed by secular humanism in Malawi. However, it should be noted that nowadays secularity, though at a slow pace and low magnitude, is making inroads as evidenced by the presence of secular humanists.

5.5 The Ethical Dimension of Community

Notwithstanding the above comment, there have been questions on whether moral systems and ethics in traditional Malawi, as well as in the whole of Africa, are really God-centred. Some scholars have argued that traditional African morality is anthropocentric, meaning that humanity is at the centre. They claim that humanity is moral, not for the sake of the supernatural, but for the fear of consequences of immorality. Closer examination of the ethical statements, the life of people in the village, the context in which the statements are made and the spirit of the statements reveal that moral life is still very much centred on God. The ancestors are mentioned as mediators between humanity and God. There then is common ground between traditional and Christian morality in that both are grounded in the Supreme Being. Benezet Bujo (1997:25) argues: "Indeed, it is hardly conceivable that the African, whose thinking is always set in a religious context, could have a morality without God." He maintains that although the human person stands at the centre of African morals, the position of God is distinctly emphasised. The ethical codes are heavily binding, owing to their grounding in God. Secular humanism, with its message of a Godless world, is foreign to the thinking and worldview of the traditional people. Its ethical standards would thus probably not be appealing to people of Malawi.

The ethical community is not limited to the living only. The religious ontology of the traditional society consists of a triangle of God and deities, the living dead and the living. Secular humanism breaks the triangle as it denies the existence of anything beyond the physical or natural world. We note that Christianity has common ground with traditional communities in that both acknowledge the place of the supernatural. Christianity teaches that the supernatural exists and exerts influence on the living. Many Christians do not accord the living dead any place in life, but they acknowledge the existence of angels and demons. The Christian ethical teaching is grounded in God who created the heavens and the earth. The

theonomous grounding of Malawians' ethical systems is a tool for addressing Secular humanists' concerns, whose standards are grounded in human reasoning.

Benezet Bujo (1997:54) argues that African ethics cannot be lived out in an individualistic manner. He says that with regard to substantial ethics, the African model refers to communal experience, which is essentially based on the forefathers' wisdom and that of the clan elders. He further says that according to the African conception, the human being does not become human by *cogito* (thinking), but by *relatio* (relationship) and *cognatio* (kinship) and that the fundamental principle of ethics is not *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), but rather *cognatus sum ergo sum* (I am related, therefore I am). What Bujo says is true of the society in Malawi where ideas of extended family, kinship and community are strongly emphasised. The goal of ethics is the common good. The individual should live in consideration of others and the welfare of the entire community. This is in view of common grounding in the supernatural. Secular humanist ethics, with its focus on human autonomy and scientific reasoning, would definitely go against the masses' understanding of ethics. One can argue that Secular humanism leads to individualism, where the 'I' is more important than the "Thou", as opposed to the African model where the 'I' exists for the community and is assisted by others to become more complete personality. Bujo (1997:57) rightly observes: "Today's ethical problems seem not to be manageable through the model of individual ethics, which is often lived individualistically". It is questionable whether individualism will manage to tackle ethical problems facing Malawi today.

In the African model, reasoning is done in light of wisdom of the forefathers, which is firmly grounded in the very nature and work of the Supreme Being. In other words, African rationality could therefore be said to be sapiential. The Christian teaching of the Church as Christ's community and understanding of Christ as the Wisdom of God enrich Christian ethics. Science and technology should embrace wisdom. Secular humanists do not acknowledge the supernatural grounding of Christian and traditional wisdom.

Professor Ignace Marcel Tsiamalenga Ntumba of the Democratic Republic of Congo posited the philosophy of *bisoité* in his description of the Africans' understanding of community. *Bisoité* is an Egyptian-African project of "the One that becomes millions"; this One, both "processuel" and encompassing the divine, the cosmic and the human, opposes René Descartes' and Edmund Husserl's "mentalist solipsism" (Bujo & Muya 2006:166). It is what Tsiamalenga calls "Nous englobant et processuel" or "Nous-sans-frontières". The concept of

bisoité conveys the meaning of 'us-ness' or 'we-ness'. In Chichewa, the sense conveyed would be that of “*uife*”, portraying the ‘I’ (*ine*) and the ‘You’ (*inu*) in subjection to the ‘We’ (*ife*). The concept precludes any spirit of individualism, but conveys the African ontological position, whereby community embraces both the physical and the supernatural. The divine has a central place in the philosophy of bisoité. The “I” does not have supremacy over the “You” as the case is in the Western tradition. The concept of palaver (public discourse) applies. The community dialogues and also each individual is recognised for their dignity and inherent worthiness. In bisoist terms, the ‘we’ has absolute primacy over the ‘I’ and the ‘You’ and therefore manifests African solidarity. The solidarity is built upon divine foundations as opposed to Secular humanism, which founds its ideologies on human reasoning and capacity. The dialogue advocated by secular humanists, which would take place without supernatural assumptions, would go against the spirit of bisoité and of palaver. In a deeply religious traditional society of Malawi, secular humanism would pose a challenge to the ideals of solidarity and supernaturalism in favour of those of individualism and materialism.

In Malawi, the prohibitions against suicide, euthanasia, abortion, commercial sex and other social issues are given supernatural grounding. The Church plays a significant role in strengthening arguments against such practices. Questions could be posed whether principles and values that are anthropocentrically-grounded can help us sustain the precious moral and social order we inherited from generations before us. The Church should guard her moral authority. Christian humanism corresponds well with acknowledgement of the supernatural dimension to ethical living in Malawi communities. It could help guard against self-centredness and egoism, the emergence of the overman and establishment of might as right.

5.6 African Humanism?

Maurice Makumba (2011:143) mentions that Kenneth Kaunda, the former State President of Zambia, was convinced that Africa conquered colonialism not because of being a greater power but because it occupied a superior moral position. It was because Africa was human-centred that it triumphed over a power-centred European society. As a Christian humanist, Kaunda believed that the drive towards human self-realisation was God-centred; whose incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, is our perfect example. Kaunda is quoted as saying, “the spiritual dimension is an integral part of the human personality ... humanism operates on the boundary between religion and politics as a channel for the best gifts of all true faith: compassion, service and love – to be lavished on the nation's people” (Makumba 2011:143). From the

quotations, it can be observed that Kaunda's humanism was Christian humanism and not Secular humanism. De Gruchy (Zimmermann and Gregor, 2010:23) remarked that Kaunda distinguished himself from a secular humanism that lacked transcendence and a religious fundamentalism that denied humanism.

God is the liberating God in whom self-realisation is achieved. Kaunda sees the need for religious believers to harness the power inherent in their religious faith for socially desirable ends. His humanism has supernatural grounding. The morality he mentions is Christian morality. Such morality has the power to defeat even those with much military strength. That is the humanism that Malawi should adopt. The social and political concerns we are facing are great and they need a great solution. Christ is the solution and Christian humanists should invoke Him to whom was given all authority in heaven and on earth. Kaunda is right to advocate African humanism as Africa's gift to the world culture.

5.7 The Humanist Imperative and Ubuntu

The ideals of Christian humanism are akin to those of ubuntu theology. Ubuntu (Umunthu, in Chichewa) stands for the values of personhood, hospitality and dignity. Ubuntu is a value or belief system from which stems many good characteristics. Rev. Augustine Musopole (*The Lamp* (38) Nov-Dec 2002:21) described umunthu theology as an inculturation of liberation situated and developed within the Malawi culture and primarily for Malawi: "It attempts to reformulate Christology based on the concept and reality of umunthu." He quotes Gerald Chigona, saying:

"Jesus is the perfect human person, who perfects and completes our umunthu. And as a perfect human person, Jesus is the foundation of our umunthu. In this regard, umunthu theology is a ferment and catalyst in the creation and consolidation of umunthu communities, communities of life and wholeness – the Jesus communities."

The quote means the Incarnation is very important in any talk and practice of umunthu. Christ became a human like any human being and so, any human being should be respected. Any human being occupies a dignified position in the universe. Dehumanising tendencies are against theology of the Incarnation, which gives umunthu theology a unique grounding.

The implication of Musopole's argument is that umunthu has a supernatural grounding and is centred in Christ Himself. Any meaningful talk and practice of umunthu should hinge on Jesus Christ. Christ is the perfecter of our personhood and humanity. Even in the traditional

religious understanding, umunthu has a religious aspect. It draws from principles laid down by ancestors and is practised by people who would want to be remembered as ancestors. Going against umunthu principles means the neglecting of one's religious duty. John Hailey (2008:5) quoted Louw, saying ubuntu expresses the “religiosity or religiousness of the religious other.” Umunthu is best viewed from the religious perspective.

Umunthu communities would be those which recognise the dignity and worthiness of other human beings; everyone regards the other in the right manner. Everyone sees the other as truly and fully human. Neglecting other people's dignity means neglecting one's own dignity. Mutual respect and recognition of dignity would be tools against dehumanising tendencies. Such communities would achieve wholeness, being rooted in the very nature of Christ. They would achieve fullness of life; salvation in all dimensions of life. Being ‘umunthu-conscious’ would mean saying no to human trafficking, human body parts business, violence against women, corruption in public service and private sectors, robbery, witchcraft and injustice in the court system. Umunthu leads to cherished and good quality relationships, whereby one thinks of the betterment of the other and of the community. The observation is right that some of the socio-economic and political ills are as a result of neglecting the political dimension of umunthu, which deals with issues of justice, rule of law, good governance, freedom of association and developing pro-poor policies. It is true that we affirm our humanity when we acknowledge that of others. It is inhumane to dehumanise others. Umunthu means being diminished when others are being oppressed. It means being the voice of the voiceless. No one with umunthu would be happy when a fellow human being is going through dehumanising circumstances; remaining silent in the wake of dehumanisation means silent approval of the dehumanisation. Umunthu is a concept of humanity towards others: sympathising with them, acting for their good and making their conditions our own.

Umunthu stands for the essence of being human. A person's umunthu does not depend on any external factors, but on the integral image and likeness of God that the person carries. All human beings are of the same essence, what differs are accidents only. We are essentially the same, given that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. The differences are just accidental and these include race, sex, social standing and many more. The late Evison Matafale, in his song *Yang'ana nkhope*, says: “Kodi tidaniranaji? ... Yang'ana nkhope yako, yang'ana nkhope yanga, yang'ana nkhope za ena, timangoofanana, tifanana ndi Mlungu.” (Why do we hate each other? ... Look at your face, look at my face, look at others' faces, we are alike, we are like God). What Matafale means is that in others we see God and there is a

way in which we are all like God. How then can one dehumanise others in whom one sees God? Dehumanisation clearly goes against the very nature of God, who created humanity in His own image and likeness. Umunthu says no to individualism and competition, but rather enhances qualities of cooperation, interconnectedness, partnership, participation, reconciliation, collective identity and extended family.

Principles of umunthu have such moral authority that they inform one's and community's moral consciousness. One who abides by those principles leads a virtuous life. Ubuntu is associated with wisdom. Here wisdom is differentiated from intelligence. Some intelligent people lack wisdom and lead life that falls short of umunthu. Malawi has many intelligent people who just need to live by the principles of ubuntu for them to make a more positive contribution towards national development. Umunthu deals with micro-ethics of individual behaviour and macro-ethics of large social institutions. Micro-ethics are issues of hospitality, generosity and respect for others, whereas macro-ethics are issues of rule of law and good governance, although the border between micro-ethics and macro-ethics is porous.

Christian humanism is very similar to ubuntu theology. Ubuntu theology deals with what it means to be human (umunthu) from a Christian perspective and the ethical implications of that understanding. Dehumanising tendencies are tackled on the basis of the Christian message. Kenneth Kaunda and Bishop Desmond Tutu are good examples regarding being a Christian humanist in Africa. They mention story-telling as one way of stressing what it means to be human. This is very relevant to Malawi where we have folk tales and proverbs which mostly stress moral living.

In Malawi, some Church circles are very much involved in humanising projects. For instance, the Presbyterians have the Church and Society Department and the Roman Catholics have the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). These projects work towards humanisation. They speak against oppression and ill-treatment of citizens by the Government, corruption, gender-based violence and many other evils in the society. So, something is being done and what is needed is intensification of efforts and collaboration. A synergy of Christian humanist and umunthu ideals would lead to greater levels of effectiveness and efficiency.

However, critics have argued that the uncritical use of the concept of ubuntu would encourage dehumanisation in some ways. Elements like parasitism and loss of individuality

(not individualism) would follow. The critics' position calls for critical reading and employment of the concept of ubuntu to ensure its relevance to the modern age.

5.8 The Nomenclature of 'Christian Humanism'

The name 'Christian humanism' would probably be received with suspicion in Malawi. In some circles it is thought to be secular humanism in disguise. The masses abhor secular humanism and the general thinking is that any humanism is wrong. Christian humanism may be thought of as secular humanism in a Christian veneer. Using the term Christian humanism without adequate explanation can lead to the movement being misunderstood and possibly rejected. People would have no problems with the ideals that Christian humanism stands for, but they can be put off by the name. It is noted that what the Missions and the Church have done from the colonial to the present times is in line with Christian humanist agenda. Then there are some who understand any humanism as human-centred and as elevating humanity while denying God His place in humanity's life and in the universe. In that sense, Christian humanism as ideology or intellectual current would not be accepted by many.

John de Gruchy (2006:28) pointed out that Karl Barth was sceptical about the term "Christian humanism", although not about what it really signifies. Barth did not suggest a replacement. His scepticism could be because of the reasons given in the paragraph above. Andre du Toit (John W. De Gruchy, June 2011:118) understood Dr John Philip's approach to issues of social reform (such as education, judicial reform and treatment of the insane) as to be more accurately termed as "Evangelical humanitarianism". However, Du Toit sees no problem in recognising this as a contemporary version of humanism. In view of the foregoing discussion, it would be proper to enlighten people before employing the term "Christian humanism" in Malawi. It would need to be made clear how Christian humanism differs from other forms of humanism. Illustrations would be needed from history, indicating how ideals of Christian humanism have worked for the general welfare and common good of the people. Alternatively, another term like "evangelical humanitarianism" or "Christian humanitarianism" would need to be employed.

This chapter has attempted to highlight some elements of humanisation in the history of the Church in Malawi. The possible interplay between the ideals of Christian humanism and those of umunthu theology was noted. It was suggested that recognition of the supernatural grounding, correspondence with some traditional values and the concept of umunthu would serve as a favourable seedbed for the cause of Christian humanism.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Overview

This concluding chapter presents some insights drawn from the preceding historical-theological inquiry which could help in addressing the challenge of secular humanism and in making a plea for Christian humanism.

This study argued that the concerns raised by secular humanists are genuine, albeit that Christian humanism is better-placed to address the concerns. Chapter one introduced the research theme and questions, working hypothesis and structure of the argument. In chapter two we were introduced to the history of secular humanist thinking, secularisation theory, the new atheism and works that critique the new atheists. Chapter three dealt with Secular humanism in Malawi, presenting its teachings and some works critiquing it. We were led to chapter four which explored Christian humanism of John W. de Gruchy and how he benefited from Calvin and Bonhoeffer. In chapter five, argument from history showed that the spirit of Christian humanism has existed in Malawi and that the legacy of almost 150 years of Christianity is valuable. It was explored whether the ‘notorious’ or ‘incurable’ religiosity and ethical system of traditional society and the concept of *umunthu* could provide a conducive environment for the flourishing of Christian humanism.

Secular humanism was found to be an inadequate response to dehumanisation because of its denial of the supernatural realm of existence and of the Transcendent Source and Destiny of life. Its scientism and naturalistic worldview lack sufficient foundation for addressing the circumstances leading to and challenges brought by dehumanisation. The concerns raised by secular humanists like murder, rape, innocent suffering, underdevelopment, corruption, gender imbalances and witchcraft-based violence can be addressed through a commitment to a Christian humanist agenda and not by an absolutisation of humanity. The history of Christian humanism over the centuries demonstrates it to be well-placed to address dehumanisation. Acceptance of the supernatural and the category of mystery as interpretive frameworks, adherence to the Christian tradition, congruence with some positive traditional values and recognition of the fact that science and religious belief are actually soul mates, all enable Christian humanism for the task of humanisation.

6.2 A Possible Agenda for Christian Humanism in Malawi

6.2.1 Critique of Fundamentalism and Rationalistic Grounding for Religious Belief

As the history of religious thought demonstrates, religious fundamentalism is not a panacea to social and political problems. Fundamentalism in Malawi possibly could lead to religious intolerance and a harmful exclusivist interpretation of the Scripture. Christian extremism could lead to similar incidents as noted in some cases of Islamic extremism. The testimony of the Church would be marred. Religious fundamentalism or totalitarianism could let a secularist agenda flourish as some people would prefer the latter as helpful. The Church would not stand against dehumanisation from the state machinery, but would use the Bible to legitimatise dehumanisation instead. Moreover, religious belief built merely and reductively on rational grounds would not be adequate basis for Christian humanism.

6.2.2 Traditional Culture and Religiosity

In her mission, the Church should consider the local culture and religiosity. The observation is that the people in Malawi are deeply religious and that any attempt to deal with social and political concerns should take local culture and religiosity seriously. The Church is in accord with traditional cultures and religiosity regarding acknowledgement of the supernatural world. The Church should then approach the social challenges, bearing the worldview of the people in mind. There should be proper contextualisation that ensures that the message of the Gospel gets rooted in the hearts of the people. Such contextualisation should take into account the whole life of the Malawi society, including cultural-religious, socio-economic, political, scientific and literacy aspects. The moral dimension of the society should be taken on board so that the approach is relevant and the message is entrenched in the very life of the people.

6.2.3 Towards Critical Retrieval of Tradition?

How should the Church respond to the challenges posed by secular humanism in Malawi? Should the Church accommodate Christian thought and institutions to “modern” ideas? Should the Church adopt a vigorous resistance to secular humanism, which would involve retreating into cultural or intellectual ghetto, or highly sophisticated strategies of repristination or restoration of an older tradition of orthodoxy? Should the Church reinterpret the classical tradition of Christian thought to ensure its congruence and coherence with new knowledge?

Accommodating Christian thought to modern ideas championed by secular humanists would mean compromising the Christian message. Secular humanist assumptions lead to absolutisation or ultimatisation of human beings, whereas the Church recognises the Ultimate and Absolute as God and His Word. Critical questions regard whether by accommodation, the Church would be solving the challenges raised by secular humanists. Couldn't it mean that secular humanists are setting the standards for the Church's involvement in public life?

R. Albert Mohler Jr. (2008:90) noted that any accommodation to vague spirituality and the New Atheism would put the future of Christianity in jeopardy. He called for biblical theism and full conviction on part of the Church in order to challenge New Atheism. Drawing from Mohler Jr.'s thinking, the argument would be that accommodation could possibly lead to loss of identity and uniqueness on part of the Church, a situation which could in turn lead to the voice of the Church being identified with that of secular humanists and the Church failing to address the social and political concerns.

Vigorous resistance to secular humanism by any sort of retreat would probably lead to fundamentalism and irrelevance. The Church would fail to be adequately involved in matters of public life and hence, secular humanism would shine as a viable alternative to the Christian faith. The voice of secular humanism would become louder and louder and that of the Church would become fainter and fainter. The Church would be seen to give tacit approval to the prevailing forms of dehumanisation or would herself engage in dehumanising tendencies. Then the Church could be seen as backward and de-civilising.

Reinterpretation of the classical Christian tradition to ensure its coherence with new knowledge of modern science, history and social experience would be a viable option. The approach helps to avoid fundamentalism, traditionalism and correlation of the Christian message with secular humanism. New knowledge is coming to Malawi in full measure and the Gospel should be properly contextualised. The Christian tradition should be maintained, not merely because of its utility, but because of its truth-value. Theological and historical legacies like Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity and the early Church's arcane discipline should be reclaimed.

6.2.4 The Essential Role of Higher Education

Higher education in all disciplines, including arts and humanities should be encouraged. Arts and humanities equip people with skills for deeper analysis. Responding to the challenge of secular humanism in Malawi requires people who are well-trained in arts and humanities,

who can analyse the situation and identify the right solutions and alternatives. The fact that known secular humanists in Malawi are well-educated presents a challenge to the Church. Well-educated theologians are needed to expose the possible weaknesses inherent in the secular humanists' approach and to tackle the assumptions of secular humanism at representative points. The sort of education advocated by secular humanists should be checked to determine if it is not reductionist, exclusivist, fundamentalist and materialistic in character.

High education was very significant in the theological developments of the late Medieval period. The scholastics were well-educated people who came to be called "men (sic) of school". The Renaissance humanists like Erasmus of Rotterdam were highly educated. The scholastics and humanists played major roles in the life of the Church in that age. Highly educated theologians can follow the same model today. The Reformer and Christian humanist John Calvin established an academy which played a big role in teaching Calvinist tradition. Princeton Theological Seminary, Stellenbosch University and many more Universities have Christian origins. They indicate the Church's seriousness with high learning. History is awash with highly educated people who contributed much to the life of the Church. They provided philosophical and theological grounding in times of internal crises and external challenges. Facing the challenge of secular humanism requires people of such theological-philosophical and intellectual calibre.

6.2.5 Public Discourse

Public discourse is of the essence if the authoritative teaching of the Church is to be rooted in the hearts and minds of the people. Without discourse with the masses, theologising becomes a mere academic exercise detached from the existential realities. People would not identify themselves with the end-product of such theologising. The people should be engaged in the process of theologising. Jean-Marc Ela's methodological approach of theology under the trees and Patrick Kalilombe's approach of theology at the grassroots should be given due attention. The approach helps the theologian to grasp philosophical assumptions, thought patterns and aspirations of the people and it helps make the theological enterprise relevant. Remedies for socio-economic and political ills in Malawi require such public discourse, whereby people contribute to solutions. Since public discourse is part and parcel of everyday life, the Church would do well to foster the cause of Christian humanism through such discourse. Christian humanism should emerge as a palaver-tree product if it is to take root on the soils of Malawi. The role of theologians would be to guide the direction and pace of the discourse. Being a

predominantly oral culture, palaver would make much sense to the people of Malawi. Should the Church neglect palaver, Secular humanists would take advantage of that and engage people in anthropocentric palaver like that advocated by John Rawls (see p.22, par 2). Christian palaver would help Malawians maintain their identity and enable them to realise the destiny that God has in store for them. The Church should prepare people spiritually, emotionally, socially, politically and theologically for them to be able to counter any advances from Secular humanists.

The discourse would also touch on issues of congruence between orthodox and orthopraxis as illustrated in the lives of Calvin and Bonhoeffer. Lack of congruence could weaken the testimony of the Church and any attempts at establishment and popularisation of Christian humanist movement.

6.3 The Way Forward

The systematic historical-theological inquiry is presented as a contribution towards the Church's organised response to Secular humanism in Malawi. The study presents Christian humanism as having requisite credentials to face concerns raised and challenges posed by Secular humanists.

Possible areas requiring further theological discourse and research in Malawi can be identified in the study. The areas could include the socio-political implications of secular humanism and the future of the debate on religion and secularity in view of the incipient post-modern spirit in Malawi. Theological discourse in these areas could enrich the theological enterprise in Malawi. Doctoral students can research on the areas and bring out original contributions that would be helpful to the Church, society and academy.

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