

# **Unstructural Analysis of the Bible Reinforcing Unstructural Analysis of African Contexts in (South) Africa?**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

*In the 1980s South African biblical scholar Itumeleng Mosala argued that there was a danger within South African Black Theology that “unstructural understanding of the Bible” might simply “reinforce and confirm unstructural understanding of the present.” This article argues that what Mosala predicted might happen within Black Theology has indeed happened, but that it has happened more generally within the religious sector as well as the state sector in post-apartheid South Africa. The article goes on to argue, using the work of Paul Gifford, that this trend brings South Africa into alignment with a similar development in many other African countries. The article concludes with some reflection on what a “structural understanding” of the biblical economic systems might contribute to a more structural understanding of current African contextual realities.*

## **A INTRODUCTION**

Religion has made a quiet and steady return to the public realm of South Africa since 1994. It is not surprising that religion retreated from public space after political liberation. Religion, particularly forms of Christianity, had been alliance partners with both British and Afrikaner forms of apartheid. So we would have expected some reticence about a public presence and role for religion. However, it is also not surprising that religion has recently stepped back onto the public platform, for we are a religious people. We could only bracket our religious life in the public realm for so long!

My focus in this article is on the kind of religion that has begun to assert itself in our public discourse. There are clear signs that both the state and the church (and the mosque and the synagogue and the temple) prefer and promote forms of religion that concentrate on the personal and the moral, rather than forms of religion that engage the social and the structural-systemic. In particular, my article analyses how the Bible operates within public forms of Christianity in South Africa, for the Bible has played a central role in the return of

religion to the public stage. This was most evident in Thabo Mbeki's tenure as President, and so my paper will begin with a brief analysis of Mbeki's appropriation of the Bible in his speeches before considering the current President Jacob Zuma's deployment of the Bible. Alongside these political representations of religion I will place the church's, focussing on what the *Kairos Document* called, twenty five years ago, "Church Theology,"<sup>1</sup> in both its traditional "evangelical" forms and in its more recent "neo-pentecostal" forms. Again, my particular interest is biblical interpretation. The article argues, in sum, that Church Theology is now the default position of both church and state, enabling both to insist, for their own respective reasons, that the personal and the moral is the domain of religion and that the social and systemic is the domain of the state. The Bible, I argue, is used to bolster this contention, and so, the article concludes, there is work to be done for the socially engaged biblical scholar, who fears that "unstructural understanding of the Bible may simply reinforce and confirm unstructural understanding of the present."<sup>2</sup>

## B THE "RDP OF THE SOUL"

For all his reticence about religion, it was perhaps Nelson Mandela himself who opened the door for the return of religion to South Africa's public domain. In an address to the South African parliament on the 5th February 1999 Nelson Mandela stated: "Our nation needs, as [a] matter of urgency ... an 'RDP of the Soul.'"<sup>3</sup> This was somewhat ironic, given that Mandela presided over the liberation government's abandonment of the original RDP, the state's macro-economic Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was not originally about morality, but the economy. The original RDP emanated from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and particularly its most powerful affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and was envisaged as "a set of socio-economic benchmarks against which the performance of

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<sup>1</sup> Kairos, *The Kairos Document. Challenge to the Church* (Rev. 2nd Ed., Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Norman Gottwald, "Socio-historical precision in the biblical grounding of liberation theologies," (an address to the Catholic Biblical Association of America at its annual meeting, San Francisco, August 1985), 5, cited in Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 32.

<sup>3</sup> Nelson Mandela, "Address by President Nelson Mandela to Parliament," ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1999/nm0205.htm>. I have been unable to trace whom Mandela is quoting.

a new democratically elected government would be judged.”<sup>4</sup> Driven by COSATU, many members of the democratic movement made contributions, including the African National Congress, though the bulk of the work was done by members of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).<sup>5</sup>

The RDP stated that “the democratic government must play a leading and enabling role in guiding the economy and the market towards reconstruction and development,”<sup>6</sup> and warned that policies concentrating primarily on promoting economic growth “would accentuate existing inequalities, perpetuate mass poverty, and soon stifle economic growth.” Thus the government was tasked with actively integrating economic growth with economic reconstruction and social development, being ever mindful of the distortions and injustices that had become endemic during racial capitalism and white political domination.<sup>7</sup>

Swept to power in the 1994 election, with the RDP as its election manifesto, the ANC and its national President Nelson Mandela declared the RDP to be “the cornerstone on which the ... GNU (Government of National Unity) is based,” and “the centerpiece of its socio-economic policy.”<sup>8</sup> As Sampie Terreblanche argues, “Its symbolic importance and consensus it created cannot be overemphasised, because it formed an important part of the nation-building and healing process after centuries of deep divisions and conflict.”<sup>9</sup> The RDP provided a “bold new social democratic vision,” based on a state which would take the lead in promoting major structural adjustment toward a high-wage, high-productivity economy, while at the same time providing “basic welfare rights,” including “the right to basic needs such as shelter, food, health care, work opportunities, income security and all those aspects that promote the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of all people in our country, with special provision made for those who are unable to provide for themselves because of special problems.”<sup>10</sup>

Driven, to a considerable degree, by the trade unions and civic organisations, the RDP emphasised that central to the new government’s planning process must be “both the meeting of the populace’s basic needs and the active

<sup>4</sup> Sampie Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652-2002* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 108.

<sup>5</sup> Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa*, 108.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa*, 108.

<sup>7</sup> Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa*, 108-09.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa*, 109.

<sup>9</sup> Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa*, 109.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Jeremy Seekings & Nicoli Nattrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 347.

empowerment of that populace in driving its own development process.”<sup>11</sup> In macro-economic terms the RDP put forward non-market mechanisms for the provision of basic goods and services, advocated a process of decommodification by turning exchange-values back into use-values, and set about democratising access to economic resources.<sup>12</sup> And even though its central chapters were compromised “in the direction of free-market premises,”<sup>13</sup> it was hailed by left intellectuals as posing “challenges to the commanding heights of capitalism, racism and patriarchy” by proposing “structural reforms” which would start the building of socialism under capitalism and lead inexorably to a socialist transition.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding its weaknesses, the RDP was, wrote John Saul at the time, “less what it is, than what it might become” in the context of further class struggles.<sup>15</sup>

However, within two years of its adoption, the RDP was replaced, with almost no consultation – the hallmark of alliance liberation politics up to this point – by a new, pro-capitalist, macro-economic policy, GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution). Indeed, writes Martin Legassik, though the name of the RDP continued to be invoked by the ANC up to the 1999 election campaign and even later, “the economic leadership of the ANC had from the start no intention of implementing the RDP where it clashed with their pro-business aims of export-orientation, trade liberalisation, fiscal austerity or privatisation.”<sup>16</sup> Swept to power under the flag of the RDP, the ANC government began, within days, to dismantle the RDP’s African socialist potential.<sup>17</sup> The iconic status of Nelson Mandela and the power of the office of the presidency were used by the ANC to enforce “acceptance” of GEAR, even though Mandela later regretted the way in which it was done,<sup>18</sup> for there had been no discussion of the shift away from the RDP even within the ANC National Executive Committee, nor had there been any consultation with the Tripartite Alliance partners, COSATU and the SACP.<sup>19</sup>

In the analysis of the SACP, “the GEAR process needs essentially to be

<sup>11</sup> John S. Saul, *The Next Liberation Struggle. Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 206.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), 456-457.

<sup>13</sup> Saul, *The Next Liberation Struggle*, 206.

<sup>14</sup> Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 457.

<sup>15</sup> Saul, *The Next Liberation Struggle*, 206-207.

<sup>16</sup> Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 457.

<sup>17</sup> Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 458.

<sup>18</sup> SACP, “Special Edition,” in *Bua Komanisi!* (Information Bulletin of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party, 2006): 31, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 458.

understood as the first decisive step in the launching of a new state project under the effective direction not of Mandela, but of his successor, then deputy president, Thabo Mbeki.”<sup>20</sup> This does not mean, the SACP goes on to acknowledge, that there were not “objective” economic factors that shaped the character and evolution of the post-Mandela presidency and its adoption of GEAR.<sup>21</sup> However, to argue that there is a certain “objectivity” about the South African presidency and its macro-economic policy is not to argue, says the SACP, that their particular trajectories were or are inevitable. Clearly global and national realities impose real constraints, which the South African left need to appreciate, but “national realities would have allowed (and still do allow) different, much more transformative outcomes.”<sup>22</sup>

This, then, forms the socio-political backdrop to Nelson Mandela’s initial call for an “RDP of the Soul.” Five days after his inaugural call, Mandela reiterates this phrase in his closing address to the debate on his State of Nation speech, claiming that “many sectors have resolved to join hands to work for the moral regeneration of our society, its ‘RDP of the soul.’”<sup>23</sup> And four days after invoking a return to religion in the political public realm, he invokes it within the religious community, in a speech to a Methodist church in Langa, Cape Town. Here he overtly invites religion to return to the national public realm:

In Parliament last week we discussed the need for an RDP of the soul. These last years have shown how deep the poison of an inhuman system seeped into the fabric of our society. We have been distressed to learn that amongst those who fought for freedom are people who have turned out as corrupt or self-seeking, if not more so, than those they replace. The best efforts of government to bring lasting change for the better will fail if we do not repair the moral fabric of our society. Greed and disrespect for others; a lack of community feeling and social responsibility – these are spiritual enemies of our efforts to build a new society in which we can live in harmony with one another, in peace and prosperity. As religion fortified us in resisting oppression, we know that it can help strengthen us to carry out the mission that history has given to our generation and the next – to make a reality of our hopes for a better life for all.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> SACP, “Special Edition,” 21.

<sup>21</sup> SACP, “Special Edition,” 22.

<sup>22</sup> SACP, “Special Edition,” 22.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson Mandela, “Closing Address by President Nelson Mandela in the Debate on the State of the Nation Address,” ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1999/nm0210.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson Mandela, “Mandela Speech at a Methodist Church Service in Langa,” ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history>

Not only was Mandela the one who seems to have called for the return of religion to a national public role, he is also the one who has set the parameters of religion's public role. First, it is clear that the religious sector has a primary role in working towards an "RDP of the Soul." This is evident in the above address to the Methodist church in Langa and is restated, with a wider scope, in the African National Congress's 1999 Election Manifesto, where it is stated that "The struggle to build a better future for all requires, not just material transformation, but an *RDP of the Soul*. The ANC calls upon all communities of faith, to be active *partners in shaping our moral vision*, and in fostering the moral renewal of our society."<sup>25</sup> And while the call for an "RDP of the Soul" is not directed to the religious sector exclusively,<sup>26</sup> it is clearly the primary sector being addressed.

The second distinctive feature of Mandela's understanding of an "RDP of the Soul," evident in the quotations above, is that its focus is moral regeneration, in the context of mounting public sector corruption. Five years later, in delivering the 5th Steve Biko Lecture, Nelson Mandela elaborates on what he sees as the moral substance of an "RDP of the Soul:"

We South Africans have succeeded quite admirably in putting in place policies, structures, processes and implementation procedures for the transformation and development of our country. We are widely recognised and praised for having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. The solidity of our democratic order, with all of its democracy supporting structures and institutions, is beyond doubt. Our economic framework is sound and we are steadily making progress in bringing basic services to more and more of our people.

It is at the level of, what we once referred to as the RDP of the soul[,] that we as a nation and people might have crucially fallen

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/mandela/1999/nm0213.html.

<sup>25</sup> ANC, "Elections 1999 Manifesto. Together, in Every Sector, Fighting for Change," ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/elections/manifesto/sectors.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Malusi Gigaba, a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee, writes in the ANC's *Umrabulo* that "Whilst religious groups no doubt have an important role to play, the campaign for the RDP of the Soul or moral regeneration must be broad, itself secular, be spread to youth, women, teachers, nurses and other sectors and exist in everybody's door-step. It is not given that corruption should prevail. It can be defeated. For the purposes of building the national democratic society, corruption must be beaten." Malusi Gigaba, "The Development State as a Social Construct," *Umrabulo* 32 (2010), n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pubs/umrabulo/umrabulo32/art6.html>.

behind since the attainment of democracy. The values of human solidarity that once drove our quest for a humane society seem to have been replaced, or are being threatened, by a crass materialism and pursuit of social goals of instant gratification. One of the challenges of our time, without being pietistic or moralistic, is to reinstate in the consciousness of our people that sense of human solidarity, of being in the world for one another and because of and through others.<sup>27</sup>

The third strand in Mandela's conceptualisation of the "RDP of the Soul" is a separation between social spheres, with the social, political, and economic on one side and the moral on the other side. In the quotation immediately above this is particularly clear. There are social domains that are "in order" and there are social domains that are "out of order." What is in order are "policies, structures, processes and implementation procedures for the transformation and development of our country," as well as a progressive Constitution, "democracy supporting structures and institutions," and a sound economic framework. What is not in order is our desire as individuals for "crass materialism and [the] pursuit of social goals of instant gratification." Individual morality is the fundamental problem, both in and of itself and because of its consequences for "human solidarity."

The fourth and, in terms of this analysis, final element is closely related to the third, namely, that the "RDP of the Soul" is primarily about personal morality, but with wider social implications. So while the "RDP of the Soul" is a national initiative, its focus is primarily on the individual. The problem, according to Mandela (in the quotation immediately above) is that we have lost our "sense of human solidarity;" in other words, we have become fixated on personal profit at the expense of communal well-being. We have lost, Mandela argues in his lecture, what Steve Biko struggled for, "a humane society."

Together, these four dimensions of the "RDP of the Soul" produce the following form of argument. While the original Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was about transforming the economy, the "RDP of the Soul" was to be about transforming the soul of the nation, beginning with the personal morality of individual South Africans. This task should be taken up primarily by the religious sector (though not exclusively) for individual personal morality is the main terrain of religion. So, while the government focuses on social spheres where structural-systemic concerns are central, such as the

<sup>27</sup> Nelson Mandela, "5th Steve Biko Lecture by Former President Nelson Mandela," ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/2004/nm0910.html>.

political and economic, the religious sector should focus on the personal and the moral spheres.

Mandela remains somewhat reticent about religion in the quotation above, as always, arguing that we should take up the summons of an “RDP of the Soul” “without being pietistic or moralistic.” But his successor, Thabo Mbeki was less restrained.

### C MBEKI’S BIBLE

Shortly after Mandela invoked the notion of an “RDP of the Soul,” then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki took it up. Indeed, there is no doubt that it is Mbeki who is the one who has given this notion its considerable weight within the ANC government.<sup>28</sup> And it is Mbeki who links the notion directly to the Bible.

Within weeks of Mandela’s first invocation, Mbeki picks up the term. In his speech to the Anti-Corruption Summit in April 1999, Mbeki argues that we must make a distinction between “two distinct matters, one being the matter of the law and the other being a matter of social morality.”<sup>29</sup> “Between these two,” says Mbeki, “clearly what must come first is the matter of social morality.” The core question for Mbeki is “what it is that happened during the course of the evolution of our society which created the conditions for such behaviour as we might consider morally unacceptable?” And in order to address this dimension of the problem of corruption Mbeki turns to the Bible.

If the religious leaders present among us will pardon me, I would like to cite a number of verses from the King James Version of the Biblical Book of Ecclesiastes [2:3-10] in the effort to answer the question – what went wrong?

“I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainted mine heart with wisdom; I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits; I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me; I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar

<sup>28</sup> A search of the ANC’s website identifies more than a hundred and fifty references to this notion within its public documents.

<sup>29</sup> Thabo Mbeki, “Speech at the National Anti-Corruption Summit,” ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1999/tm0414.html>.

treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour."

Obviously, this text gives a vivid description of a very successful resident of Jerusalem who, through his labour, has all the material things that anyone of us would like to have – from wine to silver and gold, from an army of servants to in-house musicians, from an abundance of food to what is described as “the delights of the sons of men.”

And yet the text goes on [2:11]:

“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.”

It seems to me that this text correctly raises what is perhaps at the heart of the problem of corruption which we have to confront, the relationship within each human being and each society between the material and the spiritual.<sup>30</sup>

Mbeki then goes on to argue that, “Only the mentally blind would fail to see that the things that happen in our country everyday point precisely to this that among many of our fellow citizens there is no ethical barrier which blocks them from actions that are wrong.”<sup>31</sup> And while the law has its role to play in this regard, what is more important is the renewal of our national morality. Therefore, continues Mbeki, “we must strive to find the answer to the question – what must we all do to rebuild a system of morality in our country, a generally accepted value system that is inimical to actions that are ethically wrong!” “It was for this reason,” he declares, “that earlier this year, President Nelson Mandela called for ‘an RDP of the soul.’” Surely, he concludes, we “must do whatever is necessary to effect that RDP of the soul.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Mbeki, “Speech at the National Anti-Corruption Summit,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1999/tm0414.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Mbeki, “Speech at the National Anti-Corruption Summit,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1999/tm0414.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Mbeki, “Speech at the National Anti-Corruption Summit,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1999/tm0414.html>.

Mbeki, like Mandela, points to the sector whose primary responsibility this is: "In this context, we must all salute the initiative already taken by our religious leaders when they convened the Morals Summit last year." But like Mandela he recognises that while the religious sector is the primary sector in this regard, other sectors too must contribute: "It would seem necessary that we should also consider encouraging all other sectors of our society to follow this example so that we develop a truly national and sustained offensive to rebuild our country's value system." Finally, the law too must make its contribution: "Clearly, whatever it is that we have to do to address the issue of the RDP of the soul, we must, at the same time, ensure that we have a law enforcement system which gives no quarter to corrupt practice, whoever might be involved in such practice."<sup>33</sup>

Each of the elements in the trajectory for an "RDP of the Soul" established by Mandela are present here in Mbeki's speech. But Mbeki is much more overt about the role of religion, particularly the Bible. Indeed, having earlier on in his public political life been quite negative about the Bible and religion, there is a notable shift in his attitude, particularly once he has become President.<sup>34</sup>

Mbeki's speech at the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture in July 2006, for example, includes a sustained engagement with the Bible. So much so that he felt the need to point out in the oral presentation of the lecture (though it is not included in the published version) that his extensive reference to the Bible did not mean that he was "about to become a priest" (to which this audience responded with laughter).<sup>35</sup> Remarkably, given the Africanist Mbeki is, in this speech he grants the Bible precedence over the African notion of "ubuntu," using the Book of Proverbs to interpret "ubuntu,"<sup>36</sup> saying:

The Book of Proverbs in the Holy Bible contains some injunctions that capture a number of elements of what I believe constitute im-

<sup>33</sup> Mbeki, "Speech at the National Anti-Corruption Summit," <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1999/tm0414.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Mbeki's use of the Bible is discussed more fully in Gerald O. West, "Thabo Mbeki's Bible. The Role of Religion in the South African Public Realm after Liberation," in *Religion and Spirituality in Postcolonial South Africa* (ed. Duncan Brown, Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 78-106.

<sup>35</sup> Thabo Mbeki, "4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture by President Thabo Mbeki. University of Witwatersrand, 29 July 2006," n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>; Thabo Mbeki, *The Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture. Transcript of President Thabo Mbeki's Lecture, 29 July 2006* (DVD, Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Mbeki, "4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture," <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

portant features of the Spirit of Ubuntu, which we should strive to implant in the very bosom of the new South Africa that is being born, the food of the soul that would inspire all our people to say that they are proud to be South African!

The Proverbs [3:27-31] say: “Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.<sup>28</sup> Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.<sup>29</sup> Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.<sup>30</sup> Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm.<sup>31</sup> Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.<sup>37</sup>

Adopting an African-American type preaching cadence, Mbeki elaborates on what Proverbs might be understood “to assume” of us in our current context: “It assumes we can be encouraged not to devise evil against our neighbours ...,” “It assumes that ... we should not declare war against anybody without cause ...,” and “It urges that in our actions, we should not seek to emulate the demeanour of our oppressors, nor adopt their evil practices.”<sup>38</sup>

In the remainder of his speech Mbeki returns to Prov 3; he also engages with Prov 6:6-11, as well as with Gen 3:19, John 1:1, and Matt 4:4/Luke 4:4. Indeed, so prolific is his use of the Bible that he feels the need to explain to his audience why he has been so persistent and insistent “on the Christian Holy Scriptures.”<sup>39</sup> “Let me explain,” says Mbeki.<sup>40</sup> The crux of his explanation is that in the midst of our country’s daily economic deliberations, we must recognise “that human life is about more than the economy and therefore material considerations;” indeed, continues Mbeki, the “personal pursuit of material gain, as the beginning and end of life purpose, is already beginning to corrode our social and national cohesion.”<sup>41</sup> So, Mbeki argues, “when we talk of a bet-

<sup>37</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>. I have inserted verse numbers for reference; Mbeki’s version is from the King James Version (which clearly appeals to his “classical” ear), but does not include the chapter and verse references.

<sup>38</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>. As indicated above, it is at this point that Mbeki makes an aside, saying, “Do not worry, I am not about to become a priest”; Mbeki, *Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture*.

<sup>41</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

ter life for all, within the context of a shared sense of national unity and national reconciliation, we must look beyond the undoubtedly correct economic objectives our nation has set itself.”<sup>42</sup> What “our country needs,” declares Mbeki, is what Nelson Mandela called “an ‘RDP of the soul’, the Reconstruction and Development of its soul.”<sup>43</sup>

This is key moment in the speech, for Mbeki, goes on to detach notions of reconstruction and development from the economic sphere and to reattach them to the moral sphere. Mbeki is aware of what he is doing, acknowledging in this speech that the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) “was eminently about changing the material conditions of the lives of our people,” and that it “made no reference to matters of the soul, except indirectly.”<sup>44</sup> While Mbeki goes on to reassure his audience that the concerns of the RDP “were and remain critically important and eminently correct objectives that we must continue to pursue,”<sup>45</sup> his main argument is that the RDP’s intention to improve the human condition implies a spiritual dimension. Human fulfilment, he says, “consists of more than the ‘access to modern and effective services like electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for all our people,’ to use the words of the RDP document.”<sup>46</sup>

To make this argument, Mbeki uses the biblical texts together with other authoritative “texts.” Using Gen 3:19 and Karl Marx as authorities that both take material concerns seriously, Mbeki argues that while material considerations are legitimate, we must not abandon aspects of idealism. Again the Bible is invoked in support of his argument, as Mbeki cites from the Gospel of John (1:1): “In the beginning was the Word.”<sup>47</sup> Our preoccupation, Mbeki says, has been with Marx’s “Man must eat before he can think!,” whereas we should also be considering René Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am.”<sup>48</sup> The Bible is useful

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/2006/06073111151005.htm.

<sup>42</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>43</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>45</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

in exploring this tension because it acknowledges the need both for bread and soul, body and mind/Word.

As Mbeki draws his speech to a close he makes one further and final reference to the Bible by way of summing up his argument for an RDP of the soul:

We must therefore say that the Biblical injunction is surely correct, that “Man cannot live by bread alone” [Matthew 4:4/Luke 4:4] and therefore that the mere pursuit of individual wealth can never satisfy the need immanent in all human beings to lead lives of happiness.<sup>49</sup>

We are therefore fortunate, he concludes, because “we had a Nelson Mandela who made bold to give us the task to attend to the ‘RDP of the soul.’”<sup>50</sup>

In this speech Mbeki uses the Bible as a primary resource in shifting the emphasis of the Reconstruction and Development Programme from the economic to the moral. Having been one of the driving forces behind the abandoned of the socialist-inclined RDP macro-economic policy in favour of the pro-capitalist GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution),<sup>51</sup> in this speech a decade later Mbeki reconceptualises the RDP as a programme of moral renewal. The problem, according to Mbeki, is the person not the economic system. An RDP of the economy has been replaced by an RDP of the soul. Mbeki harnesses a whole range of references within ANC literature and links them to Mandela’s call for an “RDP of the soul” and provides in this speech a coherent ideo-theological framework within which to appropriate the phrase. This is a significant achievement.

Mbeki returns religion to the public realm, but it is not the “prophetic” form of religion envisaged by the *Kairos Document*, a form of religion that engages the structural political and economic dimensions of society. Instead, Mbeki embraces a form of “evangelical” Christianity, what the *Kairos Document* referred to as “Church Theology,”<sup>52</sup> in which the focus of religion is the

<sup>49</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Mbeki, “4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture,” <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06073111151005.htm>.

<sup>51</sup> William Mervin Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2007), SACP, “Special Edition,” 22.

<sup>52</sup> Kairos, *The Kairos Document*.

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realm of morality, narrowly construed as personal morality.<sup>53</sup>

Central to Mbeki's invocation of religion is a predilection for the rhetoric of the wisdom literature of the OT, which is enhanced by his choice of translation. Mbeki is the wise leader, passing on his wisdom to the next generation. Mbeki is the sage, explaining the order of things, how the world works. Like the sages of the wisdom tradition, Mbeki assumes that the order of things, how the world works, is self-evident. And like the sages of the wisdom tradition, the "logic" of God's order is rooted in the personal, not the structural-systemic. Indeed, if there is a connection between the personal and the systemic, the logic flows from the personal to the systemic, for what you sow in the personal domain, you reap in the structural domain. Or so say the wisdom sages, whether they be Job's friends or Thabo Mbeki. The biblical details, of course, as well as the contextual detail are more complex. The logic discerned by Job's friends and Mbeki is contested, both within the biblical text and within the South African context.

## D ZUMA'S BIBLE

Though quite different in his public persona from Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma's deployment of religion shares many features with Mbeki's, and he too makes extensive use of the Bible. In what follows I will concentrate on one representative example,<sup>54</sup> as I have done with Mbeki, drawing extensively on one of Zuma's public speeches.

Though Jacob Zuma's more casual appropriations of religion have been extensively taken up by the media, his more considered comments have not. For example, any claim that Jacob Zuma is in any way "like Jesus" has been vigorously contested in the media. An example is when he implicitly associated himself with Jesus when he claimed that the ANC breakaway political party Cope (Congress of the People) is like Jesus' donkey. Referring explicitly to the biblical story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matt 21:1-8), Zuma went on to say "The people were waiting for the Son of Man [Zuma/ANC] who was on the donkey [Cope]. The donkey did not understand it, and thought the

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<sup>53</sup> This is a form of theology that is more concerned with legitimating, sustaining, and consolidating the structures that constitute the status quo of the Church and State than with the challenges, questions, and critiques posed by the pain these structures perpetrate and perpetuate.

<sup>54</sup> For other examples see Gerald O. West, "Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem. Religion in the Public Realm between Polokwane and the Presidency," *Journal for the Study of Religion* (2010 forthcoming).

songs of praise were for him.”<sup>55</sup> Such remarks, however seriously intended, have led to a chorus of contributions, from supporters,<sup>56</sup> opposition parties,<sup>57</sup> cartoonists,<sup>58</sup> churches,<sup>59</sup> and ordinary South Africans of different persuasions. So the media have played a role in returning religion to the public realm, albeit without any in-depth analysis of Zuma’s more considered contributions. A case in point is Zuma’s visit to the Rhema Bible Church.<sup>60</sup>

This visit, which took place on the 15th March 2009 and which was widely reported in the media, is particularly significant because a careful reading of what Zuma said indicates that he is more nuanced about religion than the media reports indicate. In this case he begins his address to what the ANC’s “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document would consider a “fundamentalist” church,<sup>61</sup> with its roots in the “faith gospel” or “gospel of prosperity” movement associated with Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland,<sup>62</sup> by reminding the congregation that “Our Constitution enshrines the freedom of religion, belief and opinion. It allows religious diversity in our multicultural society.”<sup>63</sup> Though Zuma’s focus in this speech is understandably on the Chris-

<sup>55</sup> Carien du Plessis, “Cope Like Jesus’ Donkey – Zuma,” *News 24*, 19 November 2008. [Cited 9 July 2010]. Online: [http://www.news24.com/News24/South\\_Africa/Politics/0,,2-7-12\\_2429417,00.html](http://www.news24.com/News24/South_Africa/Politics/0,,2-7-12_2429417,00.html).

<sup>56</sup> Beauregard Tromp & Bonile Nqiyaza, “Crowd Raises Zuma to Status of a Deity,” *The Star* (3 November 2008), 3.

<sup>57</sup> Democratic Alliance DA, “Jacob Zuma, Jesus, and Robert Mugabe,” *Politicsweb* (30 June 2008, IOL), “‘Blasphemous to Compare Zuma with Jesus,’” n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: [http://www.iol.co.za/general/news/newsprint.php?art\\_id=nw20081201174257902C720160&sf=1](http://www.iol.co.za/general/news/newsprint.php?art_id=nw20081201174257902C720160&sf=1).

<sup>58</sup> Zapiro, “Hark the Herald Angels Cringe,” *Sunday Times* (21 December 2008), n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: [http://www.zapiro.com/scripts/zapiro/hfclient.exe?a=zapiro\\_live&l=0o1228389029&as=find%7Cmp%7C31.70.12&f=2](http://www.zapiro.com/scripts/zapiro/hfclient.exe?a=zapiro_live&l=0o1228389029&as=find%7Cmp%7C31.70.12&f=2).

<sup>59</sup> IOL, “Church Slams Zuma Remark,” (2008), n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: [http://www.iol.co.za/general/news/newsprint.php?art\\_id=nw20080506191857460C197862&sf=1](http://www.iol.co.za/general/news/newsprint.php?art_id=nw20080506191857460C197862&sf=1).

<sup>60</sup> Sapa, “Rhema Defends Zuma Visit,” *Mail & Guardian Online* (25 March 2009), n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-03-16-rhema-defends-zuma-visit>.

<sup>61</sup> African National Congress ANC, “Section 7. Rdp of the Soul,” *Umrabulo*, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/policy/2007/discussion/rdp.html>. For further analysis of this document see Gerald O. West, “The ANC’s Deployment of Religion in Nation-Building. From Thabo Mbeki, to ‘the Rdp of the Soul,’ to Jacob Zuma,” in *Power Sharing and African Democracy. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (ed. Cornel du Toit, Pretoria: Unisa, 2009), 89-120.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity. Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 48.

<sup>63</sup> Jacob Zuma, “Address by Anc President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church Prayer

tian faith, and though he does continue his speech by saying that “The ANC has its roots in the Christian faith,” he immediately adds that the ANC “celebrates and supports all beliefs in its broad membership and support base.” He justifies his Christian emphasis by saying that “We recognise that while there is extensive religious diversity, the majority of South Africans are Christians.”<sup>64</sup>

He then shifts rather abruptly to the Bible, saying that one of his “favourite books in the Bible is the Book of Exodus in the OT.” That he turns to the Bible is appropriate to his context, but that he refers to the archetypal text from liberation theology in this historically conservative (politically and theologically) church context is either bold or naive. He quotes from Exodus 3:

<sup>7</sup> The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. <sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey [New International Version].<sup>65</sup>

Zuma follows this quotation by following the narrative in Exod 5 where Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh, quoting from verse 1,

“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.’”<sup>66</sup>

With many members of the Rhema Bible Church probably squirming in their plush seats Zuma continues, saying that “The Exodus from Egypt has always symbolised the liberatory character of the church.” Zuma elaborates on this line of argument, saying that the story of “Moses and his mission as a man of God inspired many an oppressed people and made them realise that indeed God is on the side of the poor and oppressed.”<sup>67</sup> Zuma’s next move is to asso-

Service,” ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Once again I have inserted the verse numbers for ease of reference. Here and in other speeches in which he engages with the Bible he prefers the New International Version, a more modern translation than the version preferred by Mbeki. The New International Version is an overtly Evangelical translation.

<sup>66</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

ciate the ANC with Moses and his mission.

The call “Let My People Go” is not far removed from our organisation’s vision. It is not surprising that the phrase is the title of a biography of our illustrious ANC former President, Inkosi Albert Luthuli. When our leaders in the ANC and the Church said to successive apartheid regimes: “Let My People Go,” we knew that God would be on our side until our freedom was attained. Since its formation in 1912 the African National Congress understood this liberation mission of the Church and the word of God, and aligned itself with it.<sup>68</sup>

Zuma goes on to instruct them about history of the ANC’s history relationship with the Church, citing Nelson Mandela who “traces the relationship between the ANC and the church to the 1870s when the Ethiopian Church Movement was formed as a response to the rapid land dispossession from the 1800s.”<sup>69</sup> The purpose of this theological history lesson becomes clear after Zuma has mentioned a number of examples “which illustrate that the historical association of the ANC and the Church cannot be doubted,” when he states, “The ANC practically derived its moral vision from the Church amongst other sources.”<sup>70</sup>

The “moral vision” of the Church, which according to Zuma’s historical analysis includes a profoundly political dimension, not only explains the mission of the ANC but “also explains the key role played by the religious sector in the struggle for freedom in our country.”<sup>71</sup> And it is because of this relationship between the ANC and the Church that “the post-2009 election administration,” continues Zuma, “will work for a continued partnership with the faith-based sector to give practical meaning to the ANC’s moral vision, based on our country’s Constitution.” In sum, argues Zuma, “Our moral vision embodies the values of a just and caring society.”<sup>72</sup> In the remainder of his speech Zuma elaborates on ways in which the ANC needs “the support of the Church and all faith-based organisations, so that together we can release our people from the

<sup>68</sup> Zuma, “Address by Anc President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Zuma, “Address by Anc President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Zuma, “Address by Anc President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Zuma, “Address by Anc President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Zuma, “Address by Anc President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

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slavery of poverty and its manifestations.”<sup>73</sup>

In general, Zuma says to the Rhema Bible Church, government “should open its doors to enable interaction with faith-based organisations on policy and implementation.” Specifically, there are “many programmes that require collaboration with faith-based organisations.”<sup>74</sup> These include, health, education, rural development, the fight against crime, and the creation of “decent jobs.” The first two, Zuma argues, are domains in which the Church has a long history, and he commends Rhema Ministries for their support programmes for orphans and children living in the streets. The third, rural development, is important because churches “are the only institutions that are found in every corner of the country, even remote rural areas” and are therefore key partners in the ANC’s proposed rural development initiative. The fourth programme, the “fight against crime is,” says Zuma, “everybody’s business.”<sup>75</sup> Significantly, Zuma says nothing more about the fifth programme, the creation of “decent jobs.”

The phrase, “decent work,” is derived from the work of the International Labour Organization, and is embedded within a careful socio-economic analysis.<sup>76</sup> Zuma invokes this phrase, but avoids its socio-economic implications here, for this is not the domain of religion. Instead, he continues his speech by calling for “a more active role of the Church in strengthening and deepening democracy,” including popularising the Constitution and Bill of Rights.<sup>77</sup> Zuma is aware that this kind of call will cause some discomfort among his audience, for he goes on immediately to recognise that there will probably be “occasional friction between Church and State,” especially concerning “[s]ome laws considered to be progressive and necessary by politicians and administrators,” including “the termination of pregnancy legislation” or “legislation for civil unions by people of the same sex.” “The solution” to such conflict, he continues, “is to have open dialogue and discussion.”<sup>78</sup> Zuma correctly recognises that such “moral” matters will be of particular concern to this congregation. But he

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<sup>73</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Director General ILO, “Decent Work,” (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

refuses to concede too much to this kind of Christianity, accepting that “[w]here no common ground is found, we will be able to disagree without being disagreeable.”<sup>79</sup>

He concludes his speech by affirming that “[w]e believe in the power of prayer” and then urging “the church to pray for peaceful, free and fair elections and a smooth transition to the new administration after April 22,” as well as “for nation building,” working together with the ANC and government “to make all South Africans feel at home in their country, regardless of colour, language, gender or creed.”<sup>80</sup> “Working together,” he says, returning to where he began with an allusion to the Exodus biblical text, “we can definitely do more to make South Africa a land of milk and honey.”<sup>81</sup>

Like Mbeki, Zuma privileges the Christian faith, drawing on the Bible, but like “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document, Zuma acknowledges the role of a plurality of religions in South Africa’s public realm. Rather surprisingly, given the politically conservative and theologically “fundamentalist” stance of the Rhema Bible Church, Zuma is overt about the prophetic liberation tradition alongside which the ANC stands. Unfortunately, however, he does not follow through on this trajectory, choosing to downplay the national priority for decent work, focussing instead on narrower moral dilemmas such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Such is the dominance of the moral-religion trajectory in our country since liberation<sup>82</sup> that Zuma, like Mbeki and “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document, cannot even imagine the religious sector talking back to the ANC or government about the morality of economic matters! Central to this trajectory of religion in the public realm is the separation of spheres, with the religious sector being allocated (and accepting) the personal-moral, while the state reserves for itself the structural-political. There is a clear division of labour and distinct spheres of influence. This is evident in numerous of Zuma’s speeches.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church,” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0315.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Gerald O. West, “Contending with the Bible. Biblical Interpretation as a Site of Struggle in South Africa,” in *The Bible into the Public Square. Reading the Signs of the Times* (ed. Cynthia B. Kittredge, Ellen B. Aitken, & Jonathan A. Draper, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2008), 101-115.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at Kwazulu Natal Progressive Professional Forum,” ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www>

Of particular importance for this paper is how Zuma is able to invoke the politically and economically charged motif of Exodus without pursuing its structural significance. The reference to “decent work” cries out for an economic appropriation of the Exodus, remembering that it all begins with Yahweh seeing the *economic* misery and hearing the cries of *economic* oppression of “my people who are in Egypt” (Exod 3:7). That Zuma is able to quote this section of the narrative and then later in his speech refer to the concept of “decent work,” without recognising the resonances between them demonstrates two things. First, as I have argued, Zuma is unable to recognise that religion engages with the structural-economic domain, and that economic systems may be moral or immoral. Second, and less surprising, is that Zuma, like Mbeki, is unable to engage with the structural dimensions of the biblical text. Zuma, notwithstanding his citation of the Exodus narrative, remains within Mandela’s and Mbeki’s trajectory, in which the personal-moral terrain is allocated to the religious sector and the structural-economic to the state. Religion is expected to remain within its domain.

## E MY BIBLE AND I

That Zuma is unable to recognise that religion does and should engage with the structural domains of life, including the economic, and that social systems can and should be judged as moral or immoral probably says something about the kinds of Christianity Zuma courts. While the ANC’s struggle against apartheid drew forth and formed alliances with prophetic forms of Christianity within the mainline churches and ecumenical institutions,<sup>84</sup> and while Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki’s attempts to build a post-apartheid community and state, respectively, sought to co-opt these prophetic forms of Christianity within the concept of “critical solidarity,”<sup>85</sup> Zuma seems in his public speeches (and perhaps in other forums) to be building an alliance with the broad spectrum of evangelical-pentecostal-charismatic Christianity.<sup>86</sup>

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.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0324.html; Jacob Zuma, “Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma to the Easter Service of the International Pentecost Church,” ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0412.html>; Jacob Zuma, “Remarks by Anc President Jacob Zuma, at the Service to Thank Congregants for the Anc Election Victory, Grace Bible Church (Pimville),” ANC, n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2009/jz0524a.html>.

<sup>84</sup> John W. de Gruchy & Steve de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa. 25th Anniversary Edition* (London: SCM Press, 2004).

<sup>85</sup> Barney Pityana & Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Being the Church in South Africa Today* (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches, 1995).

<sup>86</sup> West, “Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem,” forthcoming.

Paul Gifford has written at length about alliances between these forms of African Christianity and African nation-states across the continent.<sup>87</sup> From the side of the state, such forms of Christianity are attractive alliance partners, he argues, given their reluctance to engage with the state on structural matters, such as economic systems. The state is content to cede the moral terrain to this religious sector, which would include the condition of the nation's soul, provided of course this was understood as the collective personal morality of the nation.<sup>88</sup>

From the side of these forms of African Christianity (and the Bible is central to them all),<sup>89</sup> though they are reluctant to enter the political arena and hardly have a socio-economic agenda,<sup>90</sup> such forms readily embrace the African political elite, whether in Jerry Rawlings' Ghana,<sup>91</sup> Yoweri Museveni's Uganda,<sup>92</sup> Frederick Chiluba's Zambia,<sup>93</sup> or the Kenya of Daniel arap Moi and his successors Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga.<sup>94</sup> This is a "domesticated Christianity," which while taking on diverse roles, the one public role it does not conspicuously play is to provide a serious challenge to the economic and political realm.<sup>95</sup> This Christianity is focused on the personal, not the structural; "it is not concerned with a renewed order or any 'new Jerusalem.'"<sup>96</sup>

This has always been the problem of the evangelical-pentecostal-charismatic trajectory of African Christianity, with its individually-orientated and

<sup>87</sup> Paul Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998); Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*; Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009).

<sup>88</sup> For a cartoonist's view on this see Zapiro, "Right Wing Religion," *Mail & Guardian* (17 September 2009), n.p. [cited 9 July 2010]. Online: <http://www.mg.co.za/zapiro/fullcartoon/2284>.

<sup>89</sup> Paul Gifford, "The Bible as a Political Document in Africa," in *Scriptural Politics. The Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa* (ed. Niels Kastfelt, London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 16-28; Paul Gifford, "The Bible in Africa. A Novel Usage in Africa's New Churches," *Bulletin of SOAS* 71/2 (2008): 203-19.

<sup>90</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 341.

<sup>91</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 57-111.

<sup>92</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 112-80.

<sup>93</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 181-245.

<sup>94</sup> Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya*.

<sup>95</sup> Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya*, 215.

<sup>96</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 339. Gifford's argument is contested, at least in part, by a number of scholars; see for example the wider discussion in Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 169-72; Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism. An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 187-205.

other-worldly ideo-theological perspective. Though the Bible is central to these forms of Christianity, practitioners over-determine (and overwhelm) the detail of the Bible with two related layers of appropriation: a strong sense of the Bible's canonical shape and a personal-salvific ideo-theological interpretive framework. The same is the case with the "newer" forms of African Christianity, the neo-evangelical, neo-pentecostal, neo-charismatic forms. This trajectory veers off from its ideo-theological parent trajectory in at least one significant way. While it retains the individual emphasis of its parent, it substitutes the other-worldly emphasis for a this-worldly emphasis. These "neo" forms of African Christianity are thoroughly material in their focus on this life, though the spiritual remains the terrain in which they do battle for material well-being.

These "newer" forms of African Christianity are finding footing across African countries (and across African churches of every kind), especially in contexts where the infrastructure of the African state has partially collapsed.<sup>97</sup> Influenced by elements of "the faith gospel" and "the prosperity gospel" from the United States of America,<sup>98</sup> but rooted, it could be argued,<sup>99</sup> in the substratum of African Indigenous Religion, these "neo"-African Christianities claim the Bible as their undisputed and central source.<sup>100</sup> Like their parent trajectory, these neo-evangelical-pentecostal-charismatic over-determine (and overwhelm) the detail of the Bible with the two related layers of appropriation: a strong sense of the Bible's canonical shape and in this case a personal-covenantal ideo-theological interpretive framework.

As Gifford demonstrates, "[t]he Bible is understood to tell my story; it explains who I am;" furthermore, the Bible "is much more authoritative about me and my destiny than my present circumstances." In other words, these forms of Christianity "put great stress on not being influenced by what you see or feel around you. Ignore your situation; you must rather believe what the Bible says."<sup>101</sup> And what the Bible says is that "Jesus has already won for Christians all the blessings of health and wealth; a Christian has only to claim what is his or hers by right."<sup>102</sup> Significantly, though the "newer" forms of African Christianity have shifted their desires from spiritual rewards in heaven to material success on earth, the terrain of struggle remains the spiritual. So such forms of

<sup>97</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 345.

<sup>98</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 48.

<sup>99</sup> They both appropriate and demonise particular aspects of African Indigenous Religion; see Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 347, and Gifford, "The Bible as a Political Document in Africa," 28.

<sup>100</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 71.

<sup>101</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 71.

<sup>102</sup> Gifford, "The Bible as a Political Document in Africa," 19. The key biblical text here is Deut 28-30.

Christianity seldom call on the state to provide material resources; instead, they claim performatively<sup>103</sup> their material resources from God, through Jesus Christ, as proclaimed in the Bible.

In this Christianity, the Bible is understood as a record of covenants, promises, pledges, commitments between God and his chosen. Not just a record of covenants and commitments to others in the past .... The Bible is covenant and commitment to me, and to me now. In the words of [the Kenyan pastor] Wilfred Lai: “You can do what the Bible says you can do. You can be what the Bible say you can be.”<sup>104</sup>

Because these forms of Christianity have “no blueprint for society in any explicitly political [or economic] sense,” there is a real danger that in our South African context the state will be allowed by this increasingly dominant form of “Church Theology” to pursue socio-economic policies of wealth extraction, whether by neo-colonial trans-global multinationals or neo-patrimonial local elites.<sup>105</sup>

## F BACK TO (A STRUCTURAL READING OF THE DETAIL OF THE BIBLE)

While I do not want to minimise some of the important contributions of these forms of African Christianity at “an indirect political level,”<sup>106</sup> socially engaged biblical scholars must continue to heed, I would argue, Mosala’s warning: “Unstructural understanding of the Bible may simply reinforce and confirm unstructural understanding of the present.”<sup>107</sup> So there is work to be done by socially engaged biblical scholars in returning the structural-systemic detail of the Bible to the public realm, thus potentially impacting the churches and the state. This is particularly important for OT scholars, for with respect to the emphasis on economic systems in this article, it is in the OT that the systemic dimensions of the economic systems underlying the Bible as whole emerge and are most evident.

<sup>103</sup> Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya*, 174.

<sup>104</sup> Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya*, 174.

<sup>105</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 4-6; Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa*, 14-14, 422-23. My use of “neo” in “neo-colonial” and my use of “neo” in, for example, “neo-pentecostal” shares an “economic” semantic feature; forms of harnessing economic resources are key to both.

<sup>106</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity. Its Public Role*, 342.

<sup>107</sup> Gottwald, “Socio-historical precision,” 2, cited in Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 32.

“Models matter,” says Marvin Chaney in his exegetical analysis of Mic 6:9-15.<sup>108</sup> More specifically, “Adding the perspectives of political economy to the exegetical toolbox,” he argues, “has proved fruitful enough in the interpretation of Mic 6:9-15 to invite similar study of other pericopes in the eighth-century prophets that presume and address the same systemic dynamics.”<sup>109</sup> The larger claim being made by Chaney, and other OT scholars like Norman Gottwald, David Jobling, Gunther Wittenberg, and Itumeleng Mosala (to name an eclectic cross-section),<sup>110</sup> is that theory, method, and data are inseparable. The archaeological and textual artifact only has meaning within a model. For example, in a recent collection of essays entitled, *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models*, the editors and authors carefully demonstrate the power of explanatory models in our construal of the economic past.<sup>111</sup> And in the essays in this volume that deal directly with the Ancient Near East and Egypt there is a clear recognition of “certain basic common structures that were shared in the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian empires and Canaanite city-states.”<sup>112</sup>

But socially engaged biblical scholar must also be careful to respect the detail of the text, resisting the urge to over-determine the detail of the Bible with our own ideo-theological interpretive frameworks. So Norman Gottwald is

<sup>108</sup> Marvin L. Chaney, “Micah – Models Matter. Political Economy and Micah 6:9-15,” in *Ancient Israel. The Old Testament in Its Social Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 145-160.

<sup>109</sup> Chaney, “Micah – Models Matter,” 160.

<sup>110</sup> See for example David Jobling, “‘Very Limited Ideological Options.’ Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes,” in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism. Interdisciplinary Intersections* (ed. Stephen D. Moore & Fernando F. Segovia, London: T&T Clark, 2005), 184-201 (192); Norman K. Gottwald, “A Hypothesis About Social Class in Monarchic Israel in the Light of Contemporary Studies of Social Class and Social Stratification,” in *The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 139-64; Norman K. Gottwald, “How Does Social Scientific Criticism Shape Our Understanding of the Bible as a Resource for Economic Ethics?” in *The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 341-47; Marvin L. Chaney, “Bitter Bounty. The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets,” in *The Bible and Liberation. Political and Social Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman K. Gottwald & Richard A. Horsley, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), 250-63; Chaney, “Micah - Models Matter;” Gunther Wittenberg, *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament. Collected Essays* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2007).

<sup>111</sup> Joseph G. Manning & Ian Morris, eds., *The Ancient Economy. Evidence and Models* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005); Ian Morris & Joseph G. Manning, introduction to *The Ancient Economy. Evidence and Models* (ed. Joseph G. Manning & Ian Morris, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1-44.

<sup>112</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Covenant Economics. A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 3, referencing this work.

right to caution those of us who would mobilise around the Bible for economic transformation of the limits of our analogies. "Given the reality that economic systems cannot be 'imported' from the Bible to meet our needs," he says, "the ethical force of the Bible on issues of economics will have to be perspectival and motivational rather than prescriptive and technical."<sup>113</sup> But as Gottwald goes on to argue, this kind of ethical force is considerable. Notwithstanding the very real differences and the distance between the economic systems of the ancient Near East and our world, what connects the two "is a common thread of economic inequity and oppression and a common thread of struggle against needless economic suffering." If we add the analysis of Mosala and Gifford to that of Gottwald we can go further, arguing that by recognising and understanding the economic systems that shape our biblical texts we (both in our private and public lives) will be better equipped to recognise and understand the economic systems that shape our current African contexts.

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<sup>113</sup> Gottwald, "How Does Social Scientific Criticism Shape Our Understanding of the Bible," 345.

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