

SOUTH AFRICA 2016 – A COMING OF AGE: THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA¹⁾

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Abstract

This essay marks the maturing of South Africa's democracy since it was established in 1994. It raises questions as to whether the democratic dispensation has fulfilled what it promised, and it examines the reasons thereof. In essence it reasons that democracy has failed the people of South Africa because it lacks democratic accountability, and a firm foundation on the expressed will of the people. The theological and ethical factors in addressing the failings of a democratic system come into view. The essay concludes with an affirmation of the essential character of the church in promoting and defending justice in the world.

One-dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and the purveyors of mass information. Their universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which necessarily and mono-politically repeated, become hypnotic definitions and dictations... The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness that is immune against falsehood... This emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior...

Herbert Marcuse: *One-Dimensional Man* (1964)

1. Introduction

South Africa's Constitution was adopted on 8 May 1996.²⁾ It was signed into law by President Nelson Mandela at Sharpeville on 10 December 1996. The significance of the place and date should not be lost sight of. It was at Sharpeville in 1960 that the brutality of *apartheid* was laid bare, and as such the intensification of the struggle against *apartheid* became inevitable. On 10 December the world marks the United Nations Human Rights Day. On both counts, perhaps, Nelson Mandela was signalling the end of the struggle against *apartheid*, as well as the new South Africa's commitment to human rights. In South Africa, the adoption of the new Constitution by Parliament, sitting as the Constitutional Assembly on 8 May 1996 is memorable for another reason. It was the day that Thabo Mbeki, then Deputy President, addressing the Assembly on behalf of the government of national unity, declared "I am an African ...". 1996, therefore, was the year in which South Africa declared her commitment on three fronts: the end of *apartheid*, human rights and Africa.

2014 was a fiesta in South Africa. The country was marking 20 years as a constitutional democratic state. On 27 April 1994, the people of South Africa brought to an end nearly 50 years of *apartheid* rule and over 300 years of white minority regimes. On that day South Africans exercised their right to vote regardless of colour in a common, adult universal franchise. There was a great deal of making backward glances, finding superlatives to describe the miracles that had been achieved, to look into a once glorious past, and imagine an even more glorious future. Twenty years has seen the consolidation of democracy under a single political party that had won handsomely every election that was held in the new democracy. Of course, unnervingly, that was not a unique achievement for the African National Congress (ANC) government, sharing as it does a dubious honour with the *apartheid* National Party regime that 'won' successive elections from 1948 until it surrendered power in a political, negotiated settlement in 1994. Power was never seized as a result of military victory. A constitutional, democratic state was inaugurated by the elections of 1994. South Africa, it can be noted, is accustomed to lengthy rule by a single political party.

The slogan for the year that the ANC government persisted in was, "South Africa: a good story to tell". The good story was first in

honour of and under the inspiration of Nelson Mandela, the then recently departed much loved iconic figure symbolic of the new South Africa. But it was also about the extent to which the excesses of the *apartheid* state had been reversed, and the needs of the poor largely met, restoring dignity to the majority of the people of the country, and reconfiguring a constitutional state. It meant that more South Africans, especially the poor had water, electricity and housing, education and health care were being rolled out to an unprecedented degree, and the poor, indigent and elderly were beneficiaries of a massive state social grants system. There is hardly any South African who will deny such achievements. The real question on the lips of critics was whether South Africa had performed to the level of its potential, and whether it had lived up to what the country promised in 1994.

What, precisely, did South Africa promise in 1994? In a speech at the funeral of the assassinated leader of the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1993, Nelson Mandela (1993: 244) spelt out the objectives of the new dispensation as to transform and not merely reform the old *apartheid* state machinery, and to build a nation free from hunger, disease, and poverty, free from ignorance, homelessness and humiliation; a country in which there is peace, security and jobs.³⁾ That is a theme that Mandela repeated to the people of South Africa again and again, and that was also the centrepiece of his inaugural address as the newly elected President and head of state in May 1994. It is my contention then that these promises form the contract between the ANC in government and the people of South Africa.

This promise was translated into the Constitution adopted in 1996 to express the common aspirations of the people of South Africa. The Constitution not only establishes a constitutional state in which the Constitutional Court determines whether all law is consistent with the provisions of the Constitution. It also entrenches a Bill of Rights that unashamedly includes justiciable social and economic rights, separation of powers as well as independent institutions in support of democracy. Significantly, the Constitution creates a system of government that ensures "accountability, responsiveness and openness" (s.1 (d) of the Constitution, 1996). This is significant because it creates a system of government that is not just accountable but also interdependent and that all arms of government are cooperative and mutually reinforcing (s.40 (2)).

There are two aspects of the Constitution of South Africa that

must be emphasised. First, is that the Constitution is a solemn pact among all the warring factions of the South African society, and secondly, the Constitution constitutes a moral and binding commitment to a set of values spelt out in the Constitution: human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. It is not, in other words, a ceasefire pact or treaty between the vanquished and the victors. It brought *apartheid* to an end as a discredited system of discrimination, and resolved to chart a new path into a future of constitutional and democratic promise. For the purpose of this paper the third commitment to Africa earlier signalled will not be addressed.

2. A dream deferred?

It is precisely in that which it promised that the ANC in government has been found wanting. That can be detected by the literature published in recent years that spells in detail the floundering political economy of the country and the ill fortune of the governance and social project that was promised (see Marais 2011; Habib 2013; Borraine 2014). One does not wish to spell out in any great detail what has gone wrong with the South Africa project, especially in the last years. Without the benevolent figure of a Nelson Mandela, the towering intellect of a Thabo Mbeki, the shortcomings of the ANC project have become glaringly obvious during the Zuma Presidency, even though Jacob Zuma may not be the ultimate creator, and sole author of the failures of the liberation project. What analysts have noted is that the transformation promised by Mandela never happened. But this can only be half-true. For many years under Mandela the economy was buoyant, and South Africa truly tasted the fruits of freedom. But the new system continues to benefit the wealthy classes and the elites, the *apartheid* fundamentals in that sense remain in place especially in the structure of the economic system, and in human relations that continue to be marked by race-based identities, thus rendering the social cohesion objective unattainable in the immediate term.

Hein Marais is unambiguous. Equality, jobs, prosperity for all and human dignity have to be achieved in an economic and social system that breeds the very thing the state promises will be overcome. The economy has not been able to provide jobs, certainly never to the extent required to meet the needs of the people of South Africa, especially,

says Marais (2011: 4), where large parts of the civil service are "oxy-moronic, inequality has widened, precariousness routine and a palpable sense of unfairness is rampant" (2011: 4). It is fair to say that the very legitimacy of the state is constantly under challenge, and a seething sense of injustice prevails. What we then see are large numbers of and persistent protests, often called "service delivery protests" but in reality these are protests that challenge the failure of the state in significant avenues of life.

In such circumstances one is reminded of Kenan Malik's astute observation that "the system's emancipatory possibilities are gradually being realized through means and institutions which cancel their liberating potential" (2006).⁴⁾ How so? Because the system that promised freedom no longer guarantees freedom to the extent that people now use other means to express their freedom but, paradoxically, in doing so they may well diminish the potential for the exercise of that freedom. A good example of this is perhaps in the student revolts movement that swept the university campuses in South Africa in 2015.

A movement that began as #RhodesMustFall, soon gathered momentum to become #FeesMustFall. While the protests were framed around grievances within higher education institutions that had to do with the slow pace of transformation, high cost of higher education, institutional culture especially racism encountered by students, it is fair to say that the roots of the crisis ran deeper. They had to do with the current mood of grievance and disenchantment with the calibre of the political and economic project, and the perception that liberation has left many, especially among black people, behind. Hence it is fair to say that the protest itself was driven by disillusionment at the inability of the liberation project to deliver what it promised, but the effect and manner of the protests may have undermined the prospect of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, a pervasiveness of intolerance to dissenting opinions and gratuitous resort to violence are all tendencies associated with the protests but which could well undermine their legitimacy.

In truth, then, South Africa has the dubious honour of being among the most unequal societies in the world today. Levels of poverty and the extent of wealth continue to diverge. The economy and public policy are nowhere near addressing the social and economic challenges the country faces. Meanwhile, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Alarming, this gap expresses itself in race and gen-

der categories. The economy has been tottering on the brink of recession for far too long now with minimal to negative growth, without any prospects of imminent change.

Unemployment country-wide is at an all-time high. The latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey published by Statistics South Africa as at 27 October 2015 states that year-on-year unemployment has increased by 5.2 per cent and stands at 25.5 per cent by the narrow definition. The expanded unemployment rate stands at 34.4 per cent. If one also adds the percentage of economically inactive South Africans who given better economic climate could have been economically engaged, standing at 14,9 million South Africans, it tells you that of the 36,1 million working population an equal number of South Africans at 36,3 million are either out of work, or not economically active or unemployed.

Among the most vulnerable age-group (15-44 years old) it is thought that real unemployment could be as much as 50 per cent. Social breakdown and disruption are characterised by a burgeoning crime rate, especially violence against women and children, alcoholism, school drop-out, teenage pregnancy, uncontrollable urbanisation resulting in squalor and homelessness. Violence is just as rife, and in more recent years violence against immigrants from the African continent and asylum seekers has reared its ugly head.

In 2014 the longest ever strike was staged by mineworkers affiliated to the then recently formed Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), a breakaway from the more traditional National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The strike lasted five months and brought with it unprecedented levels of social upheaval and collapsed economic conditions for the miners, as well as posed long-term threats to the sustainability of the mining industry in South Africa. While the strike largely concerned the platinum industry, it actually has long-term effects on the entire mining industry in the country. It would contribute to rising levels of unemployment; it would increase levels of urban squalor. The mining industry resolved that the demands by AMCU were not sustainable. The strike is mentioned here because it represents levels of the collapse of trust and broken relationships in labour relations something that the Labour Relations Act, 1995 had sought to guarantee. The proliferation of worker unions as a result of dissatisfaction with the operations and the politics of the established unions continue unabated. This complicated labour relations further.

Meanwhile, much of what the government promises does not seem to bear fruit. No investment seems to be happening sufficiently to boost the economy, and the confidence by ratings agencies continues to be negative with successive downgrades and the resultant flight of capital, human and financial, out of the economy continues unabated. The farcical "musical chairs" as regards the swapping of Ministers of Finance in December 2015 added to the doubts in what is termed good governance practices from the point of view of potential investors and international capital. What it has done is to breed uncertainty and fear of a policy drift at the heart of the South African policy system. In the midst of all that the scourge of corruption on a massive scale is debilitating and the state agencies do not seem to be able to stem the tide.

The critical question then arises: How is it that the electors of South Africa continuously vote into power the same government that they seem to judge as "failed"? How come that they continue to express 'confidence' in this same government by consistently voting the governing party into power? The problem then becomes a crisis of democracy in that its results do not seem to coincide with the sentiment of the vocal majority of the people. It is also a constitutional crisis in that the system of law fails to guarantee what the Constitution promises.

3. Whither South African democracy?

At issue is whether and the extent to which democracy functions in the best interests of the majority of the people. That statement is easier said than done, because sheer democratic processes only tell part of the story. It is a story both of the elites capturing the power relations that control the democratic processes, or the majority of the people who perceive their "interest" in particular terms and are blinded to the extent of benefit to the other classes on the backs of the majority opinion. A further question that arises is the extent to which the outcomes of democracy are consistent with the intended visions and aspirations of the people. In other words is it just the democratic processes that matter in a functional manner or is it the outcomes or effects of democracy that help realise the ambitions and aspirations of the people? Finally, a perennial question is whether democracy is able to be a corrective mechanism for society in the event matters go terribly wrong. Does democracy correct itself?

These and other questions have preoccupied political scientists

over the ages. The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) published a book of essays, in which Lumumba-Kasongo (2005: 1) opens by quoting Nigerian social scientist Claude Ake who suggests that "liberal democracy in Africa is more likely to focus on social and economic benefit for the people rather than with abstract ideas, and it will insist on economic opportunities, the strong betterment of the people and a strong welfare system". In some respects this is stated as fact without elaboration. In reality, though, is this not precisely the problem that causes what Francis Fukuyama in a memorable address in South Africa at the Centre for Development Enterprise (CDE) described as "neo-patrimonialism"? This means taking political power and distributing the benefits to the elites who will protect one and assure that power is maintained. This is done either by ethnic or party loyalism, or cronyism. He calls this a system of renting out the goods that are then distributed to those who are the chosen beneficiaries. In other words this is a situation where the leaders or the elite treat the state as an extension of their patrimony in a feudal system. This invariably leads to a dysfunctional government and to a democracy where the power elites manipulate the system to their interests and are assured of support as long as they continue to distribute the rents as benefits.

This system is not about equality or about rights or about freedom. Fukuyama observes that democracy does not necessarily suggest good governance or the interests of the people. "When one lifts up politics to democratic contestation", he says, "it leads to clientelism. In clientelism, on this notion, a politician distributes goodies — jobs, money, contracts — to his political support base to secure their continued support" (Fukuyama 2013: 7).

In South Africa democracy has met the interests of the elite who have conspired to share the benefits of a monopolistic oligarchy. The rest of society has been reduced by a system of clientelism, as Fukuyama describes it, into receivers of crumbs from the master's table. Such a situation is not consistent with the aspiration to equality and human dignity that the Constitution promises. This may be responsible for a state of paralysis and almost indifference to the democratic project. It is worth noting that since the heyday of 27 April 1994 when over 80 per cent of eligible voters in South Africa cast their vote, in 2014 it is estimated that only 60 per cent of eligible voters registered to vote. Out of the 25 388 082 voters registered, 18 654 771 (or 73,47 per cent)

actually cast their votes on the day. The ANC received the majority of the votes cast at 63 per cent. In effect it means that the governing party represents only a fraction of the eligible voters in the country. It also means that the majority of voters, or potential voters does not have confidence or are apathetic towards the democratic credentials of our electoral system.

Given that scenario then how does one claim legitimacy for our democratic system? It is for that reason that Lumumba-Kasongo (2005: 201) concludes that liberal democratic processes in Africa have been at best dysfunctional or that they are no indicator of popular will. "The democratic process", he opines, "has been essentially a combination of up-down mechanisms created by a coalition of political elites in order to position their own interests in the state's power by isolating any possible challenges, including those which legitimately derive from the peoples' demands". He then concludes that:

- Liberal democracy has been hijacked by the political elite.
- The African state is still essentially a monopolistic agency of an 'oligarchic' class.

This democracy and its processes has not been able to address the core issues of African societies, such as the equal distribution of resources, social justice, employment, gender equality and individual and collective rights.

All this is very well as far as the descriptive and analytical levels go. My frustration with much that I have been reading coming out of South Africa these days is that it tells us what is obvious and what most of us feel. What it fails to do very much is to address our unease at a deeper level. That deeper level speaks to me at the level of a faith that has been violated, hope that is lost and frustration about a future that is promised but never materialises. That is the moment when one's structure of belief and of being fails to be realised in the objective conditions that one senses and experiences by a totality of one's senses; that is when one speaks about a crisis of faith.

4. Faith and politics

I believe that South Africa got to where it did in no small part through the prayers of the faithful through many, many generations in many

places around the world. It was out of the struggle against *apartheid* that much religious language came into prominence. That came about in part because *apartheid* itself defined itself in religious idiom, and the self-understanding of the Afrikaner consciousness always expressed itself in theological language. To some degree it made a lot of sense therefore to challenge the heresy of *apartheid* by recourse to contrasting theological images. That itself became a problem because it posited contrasting visions of God and God's activity in the world. It may have been too easily set up as a struggle between 'Good' and 'Evil'. In reality though as much as so many who were victims of *apartheid* at the hands of those who firmly believed in their destiny, it created a contestation between and within faiths and among people of faith.

It is, however, a trite statement to make that at moments in human history when situations of crisis of depth and magnitude occurred, human creativity and imagination was always able to cry out from the depths and have a very concrete sense of God's presence. "Theology moved forward", Victoria J Barnett (2002: 219) quotes American theologian Frederick Herzog, "when great questions arise". When they do so they marshal idiom and language as well as expansive insight and creativity to bring to bear the wholeness of being to what is experienced and what is believed. That becomes possible through the reading of scripture with new and urgent insight, through spiritual practice, and prayer and worship that is meaningful rather than merely going through the motions. The theology that emerges is creative and imaginative and speaks truth in a new way.

"Transformative" may well be the way this can be expressed because it seeks its source out of the ordinary and it challenges the accepted norms. It situates itself outside of and counter-purposed to the given. Barnett (2002: 216) defines "transformative acts" as "that moment when human beings see new possibilities, act upon them, and by so doing transform their previous ways of thinking and alter the subsequent course of history". Transformative behaviour as a way of life would not be possible without the freedom to think and to be seized by the power of the imagination. Theological imagination informs a radical reading of the Bible, interprets the great events of historical faith, and dares to place one's being at the heart of the history of salvation, and to step into the footprints of Christ to dare the truth of the divine promise to come to life. What is truly radical though is not so much that this is a story of faith born out of crisis, but that it makes the extra-

ordinary ordinary. It becomes the ordinary way in which people of faith, out of faith, imagine a new and different and better future. It is a radical restlessness, seeking and discovery of the possibilities that transport one beyond that which is taken for granted.

Throughout centuries of European Christian hegemony, South Africans have moved from a paralysing and psychotic fear of the unknown, as well as challenged the power of those who wield temporal power to take charge of the precepts of the faith. It dared to take charge of one's ways of believing; drawing from all that nature had bestowed them, culture, music, poetry, dance and a mind and heart that dare to challenge. It had to deal with fear because colonial and neo-colonial Christianity was built so much on fear and on images of God that could never be challenged and with which many resided uncomfortably for far too long. To challenge them then was an exercise of freedom. To engage them was to seek after truth more deeply than the system itself allowed. It meant courage where fear was the means by which faith was instilled. Colonial and imperial Christianity lacked African consciousness, and a disregard for African values and ways of being. The latent but subaltern cultures were in effect subversive in the challenge they posed to the dominant orthodoxies. Barnett, once again, says that Christianity like so many other religions in their proper contexts were essentially subversive. They found ways of expressing and living essential truths that would undermine that which was given and supposed, whilst appearing to conform to the prevailing social and political dictat.

The reason that the prevailing situation in South Africa challenges so deeply the theological sensibilities of Christians is less that it undermines key precepts of the faith but alarmingly that it behaves in matters of faith as in political life much like its predecessor regime once did, and against which Christian life sprang into action. It is not just the music and dance that evokes an evangelical revivalist imagery, but also the language that is used and it is so used simply because it speaks deeply to the ordinary men and women of faith in South Africa. It is the word that says that ANC will rule till Jesus comes again, that suggests the heresy that the ANC, and no other is the vice-regent of Christ on earth, or that all the actions of ANC and her leaders cannot be questioned because they derive from God's own stamp of approval. It does not end there. As in the *apartheid* past, the ANC also has palace prophets in its midst, clergymen of dubious character who are ready to

accord any actions of government a stamp of approval.

In every respect then one feels a sense of *deja vu*. We have been there before. The unnerving question for many of us is whether we have reached that critical moment, that decisive time, that *kairos* moment when the instruments of faith, in defence of the true faith and for the good of society ought not to say enough is enough. It would seem to me that the effect of this is to normalise and make ordinary wrongdoing, to set a culture of unquestioning and uncritical obedience. It means in reality that the promise of the Constitution and its values of equality, freedom and social justice should simply no longer be an expectation but that they become devoid of meaning. It means that the whole functioning of society becomes deducible to the Party — all dictat must be subjected to the all-knowing and all-consuming Party machinery; that the Party in its wisdom determines participation in all levels of government, and large numbers of South Africans are excluded from participating.

This is the point at which Herbert Marcuse becomes pertinent for South Africa today. His book, *One-Dimensional Man*, first published in 1962 has acute relevance in South Africa today 50 years since then. In its time it became the rallying cry of the students in revolt against their society in 1968, and Marcuse himself assumed the mantle of a high-priest of the new radical Left. Principally the young people and students objected to a society that was regimented and prescribed diminishing returns for human freedom and creative potential. The call was to the creative, critical minds to refuse to be sucked into a culture of conformity where discourse and human flourishing was reduced to one dimension, "of flattening discourse, imagination, culture, politics into the field of understanding, the perspective of the dominant order" (Robinson 2010). The importance of this for Marcuse was that a mind-set, a cultural orientation opens possibilities for social change. The voices of change should refuse to conform or to be silenced.

Sadly, in South Africa today it means that we are establishing a national security state machinery right under our noses where police can shoot to kill protesters, and at Marikana in August 2012 striking mineworkers got butchered by police who were armed to the teeth not so much to quell an unruly crowd but to teach them a lesson. A subsequent judicial commission of inquiry held largely that the massacre was caused by inept handling by the police. Notwithstanding evidence of distance between government and the working people of the country

that gave rise to the Marikana Massacre, we have a situation where the economic system whose virtue is in entrenching inequality must remain under the superintendence of the party of liberation. It suggests that the discredited trickle-down theory of economic management must be the only hope for millions of the poor to get a better life. In reality unemployment has become so embedded in the South African system that many young people are bound to remain unemployed for the rest of their lives.

Finally, to many South Africans, it speaks of a dysfunctional health and education provision that means that the poor will die in queues waiting for treatment because there are no doctors, and no medicines, and school children will die in pit latrines at school because there are no facilities for decent schooling. Meanwhile it has been documented that nearly R60 billion has been siphoned off in corruption deals and the political and family elites connected to those in power are unjustly enriched.

5. An ethical and theological provocation

I imagine two responses to this. The first is theological. It is to say that as human beings we are all created in the image of God for God's own purposes. This suggests to me that as Christian theology, has been wont to suggest, that theological reflection begins not with God, but with being humans. To be human is to seek that which God had purposed in creation and to be in constant seeking after God. In other words the character and being of God is made manifest in God's own people. Rowan Williams addressed some of these matters in his address to the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2012, shortly before he retired as Archbishop of Canterbury. To proclaim the gospel, he said, is to be able to announce the good news boldly and "to proclaim that it is at last possible to be truly human". In the face of all that seeks to confine and restrict, where the mind is constantly under siege to conform and where much that we are confronted with is ugly and painful, wasteful and a denial of the essence of being human, we do well also to remember, in Rowan Williams' apt phrase (2012: 181), "we need a positive vision of the world that compels our love and respect".

I have at times expressed that positivity as decency, love, tenderness, caring and beauty, in other words, virtue — elements that in a secular society are not tangible enough to have currency. And yet

politics has meaning in my view to the extent that it touches the hearts and minds of God's people about the common good and human value. At times like these I often turn to the First Letter of Peter for inspiration. In Chapter 1:8 we have these words:

Although you have not seen him, yet you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This is for me the blessed and living hope attested to by Paul and expressed in this Letter of Peter. This is what makes faith abundant and purposeful, not because of its immediate, take-away, off-the-shelf benefits but rather because it is in the moment of confidence, confidence in that which God has prepared for those who love God. It is with such a sense of the "indescribable" joy and rejoicing at the prospect of what is to come, that if faith fails to offer that sense of joy that it is devoid of worthiness, then faith has no meaning and it is no longer a living thing.

The Manifesto for Christian Discipleship is equally expressed in that First Letter of Peter (4: 7-11). First is that sense that "the end is near". There is no time for prevarication and delay. This moment is the time for decisive action. The *kairos* theology in South Africa, Palestine, Brazil and elsewhere has sought to capture that sense of urgency and immediacy invoked in this among other Biblical texts. Once again Rowan Williams draws us to what in his words is an act of contemplation that exudes joy and wonder and a love for God's world:

And the face we need to show to our world is the face of a humanity in endless growth towards love, a humanity so delighted and engaged by the glory of what we look towards that we are prepared to embark on a journey without end to find our way more deeply into it, into the heart of the Trinitarian life.

Engagement with the world of God is radical theological engagement that is transformative in character. I always long for that amount of tenderness in political life that spells decency and kindness that transforms politics so that it does not just become the habitat of rogues and exploiters, and the corrupt, but of men and women devoted to the service of fellow humanity.

My second point is not just a move away from theology but an integration of theology with ethics. It is also established theory of ethics

that moral conduct manifests itself not so much in the simplicities and certainties of life but in the dilemmas of human living where moral codes do not fully express meaningful ways of life and where there may well be a divergence between what one believes and what would be appropriate action or responses to human situations. The Christian faith does not become meaningful if it is simply self-referential. It finds meaning when it challenges us to a way of life that is constantly seeking after human and personal betterment. It is as engaged personalities that humanity becomes autonomous moral agents.

It is the social engagement with the world that Kenan Malik once again finds the nub of the most challenging ethical action, when he says that the purpose is "to bring reason to bear upon social relations, to define a rational answer to a moral question, requires social engagement and collective action" (2016). This is well stated in the Statement of the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II), where it says that:

The true goal of the moral life is the flourishing and fulfillment of that humanity for which all men and women have been created. The fundamental moral question, therefore, is not "What ought we to do?", but "What kind of persons are we called to become?" For children of God, moral obedience is nourished by the hope of becoming like God (para.6).

That endeavour to become "like God" is what is enjoined upon us in Leviticus as well as in the gospels. It is a call to holiness that is in the manner of God.

In reality then the whole of political life, the essence of democracy is an expression of moral consciousness. It is, I believe, about seeking the improvement of lives and the betterment of others. It is about taking the trust bestowed upon us by those who elected us, and to make that trust work in the manner in which public resources are used for the common good. It surely cannot just be a licence for wholesale thievery and corruption; nor is it a licence to dehumanise those who gave you the trust, and it may not be that the elected may do whatever they like until the next set of elections loom in the horizon. In other words a true democracy must have constant checks and balances and must allow regular popular interventions to test opinion and to act in a credible manner with integrity in honour of those who elected one. Democracy has to be vibrant and interactive. This echoes

once again in that Agreed Statement of ARCIC II, where it is said

The world in which human beings participate is not only a changing world; it is also a broken and imperfect world. It is subject to futility and sin, and stands under the judgment of God. Its human structures are distorted by violence and greed. Inevitably, conflicts of value and clashes of interest arise, and situations occur in which the requirements of the moral order are uncertain. Law is enacted and enforced to preserve order and to protect and serve the common good. Admittedly, it can perpetuate inequalities of wealth and power, but its true end is to ensure justice and peace. At a deeper level, the moral order looks for its fulfillment to a renewal of personal freedom and dignity within a forgiving, healing and caring community (para 94).

The truth is that in public life we do not deal with the Church as such. Although it must also be stated that public life and society in general provide challenges to Christian living and puts the church under judgment in terms of what it believes about itself and how it conducts its public proclamation. At the same time the Church is not a spectator in human affairs. It is a participant and an interested party. It is for that reason that the church is engaged and navigates human affairs hopefully not so much in a prescriptive manner but such that it can lead to the betterment of all and to the achievement or approximation of the common good.

I venture to suggest that this is not just a creed for a closed society. It is, I believe, the lens by which Christian life is lived and by which we judge what is good and upright and moral in the world around us.

This posture is not without controversy. Could it not be the means by which the Church wishes to impose its own mores and rules on the world, or does the Church understand sufficiently the pressures and realities of managing public resources and juxtaposing competing needs? Even more, is it sufficient or adequate to view life and make judgments on the basis of some moral code that is obscure, never declared in the first instance but also never understood?

6. The transformative power of moral consciousness

Louise Vincent cautions against what she regards as "moral panic". She argues, quoting Stanley Cohen, that societies frequently undergo

moral seizures and takes recourse to pathological expressions to describe the human condition. This diagnostic notion is inclined either to typify every human conduct as diseased, and therefore personalised. She goes on to say that "(i)f social problems can be re-interpreted in the language of morality so that they become symptomatic of moral decay, society is ripe for a recipe for propaganda that casts individual rights as arcane, 'out of touch' with 'the people', pro-criminal, anti-poor" (Vincent 2009: 213).

I believe that she is wrong. What she describes can hardly be considered to be a moral statement in essence. What she states may well be justificatory, and indeed may well produce forms of populism that fail to address the fundamental issues. And yet it can only be true that from time to time it becomes necessary for society to take stock of itself and gauge the moral barometer. It may do so as a means of social analysis and seeking to understand what is happening in society. But it must never end there. Where there is a problem, it must be admitted, is the tendency to objectify the problem and make it a problem of the other instead of owning it. It creates the impression that matters can be resolved by mere condemning them as a-moral or immoral. It is also inclined to personalise that which is a societal problem and locate it wholly in individual conduct. In that way society takes no responsibility.

South Africa, it is true, is never short of moral condemnations. Often it is understandable because it is society's expression of outrage at some of the completely senseless and inhuman criminal acts, and the degeneration into inhumane conduct that undermines human community. At times, however, it gets reduced to what Leonhard Praeg calls a "narrative of return" by which he means a glance back at some glorious past when such things did not happen, and when society was able to manage its moral life. Either way it is not about taking responsibility and seeking common solutions. It makes it possible for even those whose conduct is not exactly an epitome of moral rectitude to continue to express outrage at the conduct of others. In South Africa we have had a situation that is continuing, of large numbers of the population especially those who support the ANC casting a blind eye on the moral perversions of the leaders of the Party, and for whom moral misconduct has no consequences. Inevitably that gives licence to others that moral conscience has no place in the manner in which society conducts itself, provided one has not been declared guilty in a court of law.

But there remains a duty to maintain moral conduct in public life. This is necessary, for sure, if human life is to have quality and decency and dignity. It also means that human interactions must also have a predictable turn that gives security and certainty, as much as is possible, in the way we interact with one another. It also means that trust can be a normal human expectation and not an exception. Finally, it suggests that human goodness could be a moral expectation as a matter of human will rather than for the sake of what one will benefit from it. But moral conduct cannot be just simply about what one expects. It also should be about common action to regulate human life and to enforce ways of conduct that are necessary for human flourishing. Common action or a refusal to be treated as if one's humanity was something to be bartered in exchange, suggests that there must always be means by which humanity will insist on ethical ways of behaving, and that failure to do so will be resisted. That is what is meant by society correcting itself and bringing itself to equilibrium.

What then does this say about the Church and the future of South Africa? South Africa has experimented with various models of governance. Of particular interest has been efforts originally made to promote and secure social cohesion. This was in recognition of the knowledge not just of our past divided according to race, colour and creed, but also the fact that social division is entrenched in society after years of legitimising difference. Much of this is expressed in ongoing problems about and lack of understanding of racism in society, not least in the growing trend of xenophobic violence, as well as in gender discrimination and violence, not least in sexual violence. For some reason, policies that are in place have not meant that change brought about a better life, as promised. With all the resources ostensibly put into the public domain impact is not immediately visible or appreciable.

What then is the problem? Evidently, the problem is democracy itself. It is so easy to blame the fact that the ANC, as the dominant political formation in the new South Africa, does not have the moral calibre to build the kind of society that was premised in the liberation movement. Obviously, the ANC has failed to reform itself or to modernise itself sufficiently to be able to make a lasting difference in people's lives. It is very much a party moored to the anchors of the liberation mould especially of the exile kind: intolerant, prickly and contemptuous of opposition. The Party has not embraced the open society that the Constitution of the country seeks to foster, nor does it

take kindly to accountability and limitations of power.

The real challenge is not so much the nature of the ANC but the calibre of those who follow it and vote it into power despite such obvious limitations. Again, it is possible to suggest that the nature of the Party and its influence is such that critical and rational engagement is frowned upon, and many who need to be in favour will not question nor challenge. The result is that the Party is not capable of reforming and renewing itself. The only way, as in all democracies, it could only be reformed through the democratic processes playing themselves out. That is not about to happen. I do not believe that the ANC is at the point that the Congress Party under Indira Gandhi had reached when it was overthrown by the people of India never again to dominate Indian politics in the manner it had done for three decades.

The alternative is that a conglomerate of political forces and formations outside the Party must shape the agenda and compel the Party to be responsive to the public mood. These formations must include effective opposition parties, a broad civil society movement, the media, the churches and intellectuals. In other words it is to build a multiplicity of voices and actions that challenge the hegemony of the ruling elite and resist centralisation and subordination of all forms of national life. This process is often referred to as "democracy from below". The value of this is that it would perhaps be possible to forge a new agenda for national life than that which is dominated by class and party interests. The genius behind this probability is that it moves away from the idea entrenched in much of political thinking about South Africa, that the ANC is the one solely that holds the key to change in the country. It means that once that is addressed, then more and more South Africans must recognise that they hold the key to their own freedom.

Of particular concern is whether South African society is able to advance a new agenda, of human worth, restructuring of the economy and addressing inequality, poverty, social cohesion and human worth. In effect this means that the poor can be liberated from being mere voting fodder to a contemptuous party, but actors who shape and determine their own futures. Evidently, the economy is in doldrums and the government does not seem to have the courage to undertake the reforms that everyone is insisting that it is about time they were done. This could mean a move towards every aspect of a developmental state and freeing resources to equip people to advance their own develop-

ment; to move away from the dream of full employment, but to move towards an entrepreneurial and leisured society.

It is hard for one to understand how it is that South Africa, with so much youth unemployment, does not run a comprehensive youth employment programme. This in my view might mean that the aristocracy in the labour unions who lead an ever-diminishing band of workers in employment while a growing number of workers are out of employment must be challenged. Shorter or flexible working hours and shared jobs, with maximum resources being provided for social and leisure activities that build human worth must be considered as a means of human advancement. Of significance, surely is that in a society so riven with corruption and extremities in wages and remuneration, a moratorium on increases in remuneration for the executives, limitation on people holding more than one job at a time, a limitation on land ownership and extending land ownership to those who can make productive use of it with state support, is called for. One hopes that we could move away from a static view of democracy and rather insist on democracy by outcomes. Nelson Mandela promised in his inauguration to build a kinder, gentler, tender and flourishing society at peace with itself and a partner for peace in the world. We are nowhere near achieving that goal and there does not seem to be any appetite to pursue it any longer.

7. Conclusion

The Church as a force for public good has been decimated in South Africa since 1994, by all accounts. In part this is due to the deliberate actions and convictions of the churches that political life as such was no longer a matter for the church. The withdrawal of the Church with promises typified as critical engagement or critical solidarity have not borne fruit. Instead too many churches that once were in the ecumenical fold, have withdrawn from public life and given the running to those churches that have taken advantage of the gap that has been left wide open thereby entrenching a more conservative theology that is devoid of social meaning. Many churches have withdrawn to the cloister and rarely make any public appearance.

This has not been made easy by the woes in which the South African Council of Churches (SACC) finds itself. The SACC had been a reputable and trustworthy vehicle for the prophetic proclamation of the gospel and an agency for a new Christian discipleship for many years.

The SACC suffered from a haemorrhaging of funds and an inability to sustain its programmes in the new environment. It would seem appropriate that the Church be equipped once again to exercise the ministry not just of reconciliation but also of prophetic imagination, of radical reconciliation, and of engaged spirituality — the liberating transformation that so many South Africans yearn for. For this action to bear fruit the churches need to be more open, willing to become 'controversial' and more vocal in their critique of society, and more confident in their public proclamation. That requires a church that does not accept benefits from the state or that gets to be silenced by bribery. That will be one of the marks of the Church in mission.

Does the Church then hold the future for South Africa? I doubt it. That is because the Church in South Africa and the world are beset by a myriad of challenges that may seem insurmountable. The question is whether the Church can survive and manage to remain credible in a truly secular society? That has not been the way the Church was formed. The tendency for the Church is to seek to replicate what it believes onto society as a whole. What rather is called for is a Church that enables humanity to become truly human and to find meaning in their lives.

Finally, human well-being must flourish on all fronts, by building a society of the truly and radically free. South Africans must claim their freedom not as a gift from anyone but as a right and a duty from God. If people are truly free they will not be subjected to clientelism or made to be beholden for their very life to those in authority or who manage the public purse. They will demand accountability and they will become their own guardians for a transforming social ethic.

Endnotes

1. This is the slightly revised version of a public lecture presented at King's College London on 17 June 2014, as a Visiting Professor in Theology.
2. Act No. 108 of 1996.
3. Nelson Mandela's Inauguration Address as President of the Republic of South Africa on 10 May 1994 has this to say "We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination ... We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without fear in their hearts, assured of their

inalienable right to human dignity — a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world".

4. Address at Galle Festival, January 2016.

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