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Violence. truth and prophetic silence: religion and the quest for 3 SA common good

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WHERE HAVE ALL THE PROPHETS GONE?

Prophetic silences and religions' incapacity to help us forward

Cedric Mayson

'Where have all the prophets gone? you ask. The prophets have been promoted.

Authority learnt centuries ago that attacking prophets is bad for business. Martyrs become

. seeds of new growth. prisons make a 'Pilgrims Progress', crucifixions beget resurrection.

Prophets are silenced by upgrading them to bishops, professors, government ministers.

leading civil servants, or ngo tycoons. Religion opens its ecclesiastical arms and enfolds the

prophets in the vestments of responsibility, places them on thrones and puts power in their

hands, and promotes the prophecy out of them. Well - some of them!

The title for this session given to me was 'Prophetic silences and religions' incapacity to help

us toward. it needs unpacking. It seems to reflect the popular notion that religious institutions have a special relationship with God which enables them to make a prophetic input to society and give a lead to the State and since the new South Africa is more or less

on the right lines there is little role for the Religion except to moralise about greed, sex and

crime

i believe this is an incorrect understanding of Religion, State, and the role of prophecy

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1.1 God works through both Religion and State, and church institutions can claim no exclusive relationship as if they and they alone have a contact with God's concern or God's

voice. We must rid ourselves of this conceit that God works primarily through religion, which

. entitles the religious communities to feel superior to the State, and act as if they alone are

the channel through which direction and salvation comes to society. It is not scriptural, and it

is not so.

Religious institutions are a fact of historical experience, comprising structures, office bearers.

traditions, practices. and customs which influence society, and through which God acts.

Governments are also a fact of historical experience, comprising structures. office bearers,

traditions. practices and customs which influence society and through which God acts.

God loves us all, God is the ground of all being, all humanity is made in the image of God.

and God's spirit of love, justice and truth works on everyone like gravity, or sunshine, or life.

God causes the sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and the rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike (Mt.5.45); and 'from farthest east to farthest west. my name is honoured

among the nations' (Mal.1.11).

1.2 The difference between Religion and State is that Religion is conscious that God is operating in the world. whilst the State may be quite unconscious of it. Religious Institutions

claim to be able to evaluate that consciousness. and have a major contribution to make to

society, but they cannot claim that their interpretation of the presence of God is always

correct. Sometimes they get it right, and sometimes Religion makes disastrous errors.

Through it all. God acts and guides through human affairs. both political and religious.

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1.3 Prophets are people of vision who appear in all walks of life. and proclaim their understanding of God. Prophets invariably emerge from the reality of the experience of those who suffer, not the reality experienced by the comfortable. Prophets are driven by an experience of belief. a commanding insight, a compulsion of faith that will not let them go. They may be totally alone. or act from a small group, but because they are in tune with the purposes of God at a particular moment their voices resonate around them. Their faith can move mountains.

1.4 Prophets challenge Religion as much as the State. They have often been rejected by religious and political authorities, and sometimes by the people. These institutions pay only

secondary attention to evaluating whether the prophets' message is true: their primary judgment is usually based on how the message might affect their institutions.

1.5 This is clearly illustrated in the liberation struggle. Very few today would deny that the

liberation of the South African people from oppression was according to the will of God. Over

the decades a growing chorus of prophetic voices affirmed that the liberation struggle was a

godly initiative. But liberation was not initiated, sustained or led by the Church. Some sectors

within the Church opposed it and others endorsed it. but the Church failed repeatedly because most people in the leadership considered it would be dangerous for the Church to be aligned with the liberation movement. Most of the time most of the Church did not wish to

be involved in the struggle beyond a raised eyebrow and an occasional statement.

16 Nevertheless, a deeper vision emerged amongst those who were able to heed God in the situation and give this priority over their fears of ecclesiastical and political punishment.

This prophetic voice was mainly focussed in the Christian Institute (1961 to 1977); the University Christian Movement and Black Theology (from 1967); the SA Council of Churches (from 1968 onwards); the institute of Contextual Theology, and some denominational groupings. Events like 'The Message to the People of South Africa' (1968), numerous Cl publications until it's banning in 1977, the submissions of the SACC to the Eloff Commission

(1981ff). the 'Call to Prayer for an End to unjust Rule' (1985), the SACC Conscientious Objection issue the 'Kairos Document' (1985) and 'Evangelical Witness' (1986) and other documents and statements emerged from small prophetic groups, but each had a stormy passage in the Church institutions themselves

1.7 The story of the 'Kairos Document' is instructive. It was initiated by a prophetic group

with its roots in what God was doing in Soweto, which analysed the conflict between State Theology, Church Theology, and Prophetic theology. The title of the original edition was 'CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH' and in small letters underneath: 'The Kairos Document'.

Much of the church reacted strongly against this prophetic incursion onto its territory. Some

said they were too busy to discuss it. Most religious leaders deemed it a dangerous document which the government would use to attack the churches, and thought the analysis was far above the heads of the youth shouting 'Amandlal' in the townships. They then realised that the people were reading it. approved it, demanded that preachers expound it

, and that the Church was losing credibility by not endorsing the prophets. So a second edition

was published called 'THE KAIROS DOCUMENT' in large letters, its original title of 'Challenge to the Church' slipping to small print at the bottom of the page. Today, churches

people world wide cite the Kairos Document as a courageous publication by the Church to challenge the apartheid regime, and have no idea that it was actually a challenge to the Church. 'It is one of the most notable theological hijacks in history.

1.8 The new spirit of prophetic awareness and commitment spread through the religious community, particularly between 1988 and 1994, and event piled on event to endorse the rejection of the apartheid regime. Many whites were still reluctant, but nearly every religious

group became identified with the struggle. Much of the activity was focused on joint action

through the SA Council of Churches. and is recorded in the booklet 'Come Celebrate'. 1

Between 1991 and 1993 the inter-faith community under the auspices of WCRP-SA (the World Conference on Religion and Peace) met repeatedly to discuss the relationship between Religion and State that should exist in a liberated country, and produced the

'Declaration on Religious Rights and Responsibilities' 2. An experience of realistic inter-faith spirituality began to affect the country. The prophetic voice was widely publicised, many

more religious people began to support the struggle (especially in black congregations which became increasingly aware that God was working amongst them). Sermons harped upon slaves being brought out of Egypt, and when liberation came there was general rejoicing in religious circles that Pharaoh had been overcome.

1.9 And then the slaves became Pharaoh, and Religion had to face its dilemma all over again.

2 The dilemma answers! silenced themurch and mm

2.1 The reason for the silence of the church and for 'religion's incapacity to help us forward' is that religion does not know which way to go. It has not found its role in the new

South Africa. '

2.2 Once the 1994 elections had put the ANC Government in power, the Churches backed off. The prophetic vision collapsed, hopes that religions would play a major role in the new dispensation were disappointed. conferences and consultations to determine that role were not followed through, leadership turned its eyes inward to promote the growth of religious institutions rather than the transformation of society, and the Church, as in the days of the Kairos Document, seemed to be 'in a state of near paralysis'.

2.3 The 'Declaration of the National Consultation of Churches' at Rustenburg in February 1999 illustrates some major inadequacies. It makes no attempt to deal with the fundamental

question of the role of God in society, and apparently does not conceptualise it; it calls for spiritual and moral healing but does not diagnose the sickness; it asks affluent churches to address the plight of the poor, but fails to question the validity of an economic system which produces such ungodly poverty. The whole NCC event seemed designed to encourage evangelical churches in their own narrow traditions, and to avoid the recognition and proclamation of the Good News that God is at work in the political, economic, social and theological experience of South Africa today.-

2.4 The Church dilemma was that whilst it could oppose an evil government, it had not done its thinking about how to relate to a good one. What is the role of the Church in the transformation of society? How should the Church engage with a government whose political mandate is to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the down trodden free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour? (Isa 61.1-2; L418).

2.4.1 Should the Church withdraw from the politico-social scene and concentrate on a personal privatised religion on the North American or European pattern? Bishop Tutu spoke of 'the Church getting on with its task of being the Church for the faithful looking to those things of faith and order, Church growth and renewal that had suffered some neglect through the emphasis on the primary task of being the voice of the voiceless and the champion of the oppressed. ('Come Celebrate' ). Some spoke of 'Going back to being the church', obsessed with its own institutional self rather than the work of a living God in society.

After 1994, a sense of disassociation ran through the Church from the most staid and traditional to the froth and bubble pentecostal groups. a concern to conserve their past rather than commit their future. They had no idea where they were going.

2.4.2 Some thought that God's sole interest in society was through the Church.

Evangelical and church growth campaigns were designed to build church membership rather than transform society. Some in the Church seemed to want to go beyond the peripheral personal concern for individual souls or ecclesiastical development. their social concerns frequently began and ended with the Church. There was a quite deliberate withdrawal from ecumenical ministerial training at the Federal Seminary in order to promote separate denominational advancement.

2.4.3 Conversation in ecclesiastical circles seemed to concentrate on the desire to protect its own power and independence. The driving exultant conviction that God is at work in the transformation of South African society. and that both Religion and Government are allies in

that quest, has all but disappeared. There is a failure to grasp the fact that throughout scripture and history political transformation and spiritual power have marched together.

The Church expects the work to be done by politicians. rThat's why we put them in. isn't it? Our task is re be critical watch-dogs.'

2.4.4 Because the consciousness of the presence and power of God in building the new nation is so weak. remote and undeveloped, the Church falls easy prey to those forces which

wish to oppose the transformation. Many in the Church are so unsure of the mission of God that they prefer to side with opposition parties with whom they have little in common, rather

than be seen to stand as co-workers with the government. The Churches' fear of being coopted by government is so skilfully manipulated by the remaining forces of oppression that

the Churches do not 'realise they have been coopted by the opposition. It is difficult to avoid

the impression that many people in the Church do not think that God is up to the task of transforming South Africa. This lack of clarity and resolve in the Church has led many to believe it has lost its 'old prophetic power' and to look upon religious institutions as irrelevant.

2.5 Conversely, the ANC Government does know where it is going. From the days of the Freedom Charter through innumerable other processes to the 1999 Election Manifesto it has spelt out its vision of a liberated, transformed society, what it sees as barriers on the way

within its own ranks and within the wider community, and its commitment to serve the country to reach that goal. It also knows it cannot get there on its own.

The transformation of our country requires the greatest possible cooperation between religious and political bodies, critically and wisely serving our people together. Neither

political nor religious objectives can be achieved in isolation. They are held in a creative tension with common commitments. We are partners in the building of our society. Nelson Mandela. 24 June 1997

2.6 It is against this background of religious uncertainty that the prophetic voice must be

raised. Cynicism still rules many - including many in the Church - and there is a great need

of a new experience of hope and faith. Both South Africa and the world are ready for another

Kairos moment. In a word - the silence of the Church, its inability to look beyond itself, is

because the Church needs a new generation of prophets. It has happened repeatedly throughout history. It can happen again now.

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In a transition from one type of society to another there are many dynamics, and each has to

be brought within the prophetic vision. New thinking, new problems. new insights, new opportunities open up.<sup>3</sup> Certain features can be discerned which make prophets necessary.-

- transition means changes in all sectors of society.

- the dominant political change from a white racist male-dominated pseudo-Christian rule to a

non-racial non-sexist secular democratic rule demanded major changes of attitude.

- because whites held political power. they also held the money, education, skills, connections, and expertise. These things could not be changed by Act of Parliament but required a process of change, a period of learning, the acquisition of skills.

- the change from black-consciousness and white consciousness to a South African consciousness necessitated meeting - but we still seldom meet.

- the revolution was achieved without destroying the oppressors who are still with us.

- South Africa's economic and governmental infra-structure was discovered to be in an appalling state. '

- the sense of commitment to serve the public was invariably lacking in the people who would have to run the machinery of transformation. i

- many thought that after years of suffering and struggle they were entitled to sit back and let the new government transform society for them.

- some thought that the answer to racial capitalism and exploitation was to fast track blacks into the business world and financial systems. Others felt that an oppressive system run by blacks is as bad as one run by whites. But what is the alternative system?

- the collapse of apartheid coincided with the collapse of Soviet Russia, and many in the liberation movements who had thought positively of a socialist future were suddenly challenged to think again - knowing that any new thinking would be fiercely resisted by the owners of the money.

- the large scale rejection of religion, 'one of the most important sociological factors of our time, has failed to receive any comprehensive analysis or solution from the church.

- the 'religion-is-above-the-tray' syndrome has promoted a superior attitude which excuses involvement in many serious issues.

- the realisation that many religious institutions have brought up their young people on a diet of sermons, prayer, songs and practices which have forced them out of church altogether, or into psychological situations which are personally and socially disorientating.

- the recognition that the first five years of liberation have been accompanied by the globalisation of the market economy bringing affluence to a few, but plunging millions into unemployment and poverty, seen by some as a crime against humanity on a par with the holocaust, apartheid and Rwanda. '

This is the background of transition. Political and economic and religious society is in need of a prophetic vision which can pierce through this darkness and see the light ahead. I wish to suggest four areas to listen for the prophetic voice today.

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4.1.1 The spiritual experience which many South Africans shared in the liberation struggle united millions of us whatever our race, religion or language. That spiritual awareness still survives - despite the efforts of destructive forces - and bursts out in moments of national, ecumenical, inter-faith, inter-racial commitment or celebration. It is an actual occurrence of spiritual collectivity within our humanity which grasps us, sometimes feeling almost tangible. The grace of God is acting within us - whatever words we may use to describe the experience. Faith happens.

4.1.2.

There is a beautiful phrase used by some theologians who speak about God as 'the Ground of our Being'. Some of us find the Ground of our being focused on Umvelinqangi, Qamata, Modimo, uThixo. Some speak of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or Moses and the Prophets. For others the Ground of our Being is the Supreme Lord, the Enlightened One, or Jahweh, or Jehovah, or Allah. Others tread that Ground in the footsteps of Krishna, of Jesus, or the Prophet Mohammad - praise be upon them all! For some the Ground is the deep spirituality of a humanist ethic; others come to it through the experience of women, and some through children. But the actual spiritual experience known through these names is something we all share. Our concern today is not to celebrate ideas inherited from institutions, nor mental images of God, but our unity as people whose feet are on the same Ground of Being. We share the solid realities of vision and values, of love and justice, of truth and hope, of liberation and transformation in South Africa. We each have our own

contribution to make to this united endeavour. On this shared ground we pray, and work, and play together. 4

4.1.3 For Christians - and most of us came to theological awareness through the Church - there comes the realisation that there is something here beyond a religion. God is not a Christian and it is no disloyalty to God or Jesus to say so. There is one God shining through

all human spiritual and religious experience. 'One sees the great world religions as different

human responses to the one divine Reality. embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances' (John Hick.)<sup>5</sup>

4.1.4 Religious processes in history - including our own history - have frequently subjugated belief in God to national, denominational, or institutional restrictions, but the

prophetic voice amongst us insists that ultimately we are dealing with one spiritual Being, one

God. the Father and Mother of us all.

4.1.5 South Africa embraces many communities of faith. but we are monotheists. Even those who revere intermediary figures accept there is One Ultimate. One Supreme. and from this One Source we all draw the inspiration of love and truth, justice and peace, and the fruit

of the spirit.

4.1.6 The prophets also recognise that some of the doctrines which emerged and were of major importance in the past no longer claim that priority. Some aspects of the past are now

past and must remain in the past. This does not deny the value of the past, but recognises

that spirituality is an on-going contextual reality and not an exclusive formula cast in stone.

4.1.7 Because most South Africans are religious people they hold this concept of a living God at the heart of our affairs. The prophetic voice says that God is not a Christian and God

is not narrowly religious, but God most certainly IS. I AM WHO I AM IS amongst us. There is

a driving spiritual power in operation. Beneath the "secular state inscribed in our new Constitution lies a substratum of spiritual experience which is extremely strong. it affects us

all. including many who are spiritual people but who distance themselves from organised religious institutions. 1

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4.2.1 The deepest and widest roots of religious awareness are in the traditional spirituality

of the African people which goes back to the beginnings of time. The sense of humans made in the image of God, finding fulfilment in community, inter-lacing all experience in a holistic

reality, and dominated by a faith and hope in the beneficial influence of the unseen world. is

a root reality in the great majority of our population. It is the basic human-ness and spirituality

awareness which is developed in all the other great religious systems we embrace. Its rediscovery is greatly needed to counter the dehumanisation wrought by western civilisation.

and the emasculation of spirituality by western Christianity.

4.2.2 The more organised and recognised world religions emerged in climates which necessitated walls on which to draw and write and became focused on written traditions.

Between 3000 and 2500 years ago humanity experienced a major prophetic development which produced key teachings: the Upanishads, Gautama the Buddha, Confucius. Lao Tze, Zarathushtra and the early prophets of Israel. All of them recognised a universal benevolent

force which called out individual goodness and a loving community amongst all people.

Jesus - the second millennium of whose birth occurred in 1996 or 97 - was the driving force behind another infusion of spiritual awareness, later developed by Paul and others in the New

Testament era. 600 years later. in an Arabia wrecked by decadent corruptions of Judaistic and Christian beliefs, came the great prophetic input from Mohammed enshrined in the Qur'an.

4.2.3 All these religions, and the institutions and traditions they produced. came to South

Africa as part of colonial packages. Dutch, British and German settlers. Muslim slaves, and

Hindu indentured workers, brought different languages, traditions, rituals and institutions to

our shores. The spiritual experience they asseited was essentially the same. but the religious



institutions and traditions caused conflict. Christianity in particular became corrupted and

oppressive. and it is against this background that the prophetic voice must be heard.

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4.3.1. Jesus himself faced the necessity of challenging religious traditions which had become so dominant and ingrained that they were barriers to the Word of God. A similar challenge faces the prophetic voice in theology today. These traditions include the exclusive

claim of many Christians to the Church, Salvation, and God.

4.3.2 Although the doctrine that there is 'no salvation outside the Church' was rejected by

the Catholic Church .over 30 years ago, many Catholics and Protestants still cling to it, and

even more to its corollary, that everyone else is damned. It rests solely on the delusion that

baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist have a supernatural capacity to secure the grace of

God for the recipients. It is a false exclusive claim that cannot stand up to scriptural examination.

4.3.3 The notion that salvation is to ensure that individuals may go to heaven after death

has firmly gripped the imagination of many religions, and has featured strongly in the teaching of the Church, but in fact is not the gospel of Jesus. The Good News of Jesus - as '

we shall see later - was not focussed on individuals going to heaven, and we can no longer

permit dusty dogmas of the Church from the past to override the teaching of Jesus for today.

4.3.4 But the heart of theological prophecy today requires us to rediscover the God-centred

teaching of Jesus, which has been largely obliterated by the Christo-centred teaching of Paul,

Constantine (who was neither a Christian nor a theologian but used his clout as emperor),

and the promoters of ecclesiastical institutions who have followed them blindly into our own

age. Exclusive claims about the relationship of Jesus of Nazareth to God have been made

which cannot be sustained. Jesus did not claim to be God. nor the Son of God, nor teach the

doctrine of the Trinity. He did not proclaim himself as the Messiah, the Good News of the

gospel he proclaimed is not about his being the Christ, and such references as there are to

these titles in private conversations with his disciples are without exception under suspicion

by biblical scholars. The traditional formulations of christology' wrote Frances Young. 'so far

from enshrining revealed truth, are themselves the product of witness and confession in a particular historical environment.' 5

4.3.5 This deification of Jesus, which is a major barrier to cooperation with all other believers in God. has a long history, but it belongs to the past and must be left in the past.

Jesus worshipped and proclaimed God and his ruling power. the God he had known from his Jewish upbringing, and Jesus stands or falls on his own proclamation, not on the assertions

made by others who came after him.

4.3.6 Jesus was unique - but not exclusive. The 'myth' of incarnation means that God was encountered in Jesus, but what was encountered in Jesus is open to all religions and all people. 'The name that is above all names - the Christ - can go by many historical names: Rama, Krishna, Isvara, Purusha. Tathagata. The reality of the universal Christ does not destroy the necessity and universal relevance of the particular Jesus' writes Knitter on Panikkar.7

4.3.7 The prophetic voice witnesses very strongly to the reality of the inter-faith experience

in South Africa. Those who struggled against apartheid together discovered a common identity within the struggle which transcended separatist traditions, and built a tradition of

unity. We have lived through the transition from denominationalism to ecumenism. and from ecumenism to interfaith. and the rediscovery of African Traditional Spirituality. There is

a rising consciousness of the need to banish the sense of belonging to rival religions: we are

different members of the same family.

'God has been at work in every religious community' writes Kenneth Cracknell, and goes on to quote Wilfred Cantrell Smith. 'This has always been true. but we are the rust generati on of

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Christians to see this seriously and corporately, and to be able to respond to the vision . We are the first generation to discern God's mission to mankind in the Buddhist movement, in the Hindu, in the Islamic. as well as in the Jewish and the Christian. Having discerned it , let us not fail to respond to it.' 5

4.3.8 Traditional religion - traditional Christianity - has so often been a delusion, and a snare, that a crucial part of our liberation and transformation is to break out of it. Part of it is being liberated from the Church which has made Jesus into an oppressor, forcing us to think and say and do things which are against the divine awareness within us (which is what happened in the apartheid era).

4.3.9 There is a glorious freedom in being an ex-Christian follower of Jesus; It is an exciting quest, as of a new discovery, to discern the contribution Jesus of Nazareth has to make to the South African revolution when he has been liberated from the trappings of colonial Christianity.

4.3.10 The desire for an inter-faith God-centred theology of transformation is emerging, whether people are religious or not, and to seek this and proclaim it is an essential part of the role of Religion in South Africa. Open men and women who recognise the unique nature of the unfolding of society in our country have no alternative but to engage in an exciting journey into the spiritual reality of wider humanity. Jesus of Nazareth is a key figure in this quest.

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4.4.1 Prophetic theology will therefore move a number of issues out of the limelight, not necessarily denouncing them, but insisting that other priorities must come forward; The inaccurate non-Jesus special pleading of the western inspired Christo-centric Church cannot

be permitted to continue to drive a wedge between the people of God in South Africa today .

It is an affront both to the teaching of Jesus on the universal nature of God, and our own

South African experience of godliness in action.

4.4.2 Those still dominated by the colonial competition of rival religious institutions find

this difficult and some denounce the danger of syncretism. The prophetic voice proclaims syncretism, in the sense of a common awareness, as something of which South Africans can be proud, a theological ground of being which we should explore and witness to. before the

colonial religious empires of the north.

4.4.3 To religionists rooted in the past, cultured by colonialists to see themselves as the

sole instruments of conversion to God, these matters can be difficult. Christians may find it

instructive to recall the story of Nicodemus. a believer who needed to be born again. (John

3). His rebirth was not to do with salvation from his sins, or securing a place in heaven , or

rejecting ritual. It was a release from captivity to religious traditions into the fullness of the

experience of the spirit of the living God. One reason many in the church find it difficult to

discover their role is because they have never been challenged to liberate themselves from

colonial theology. (Have you listened to contemporary preaching?) Some have found it easier to slide back into colonial religion and reinvent the church theology as if the Ka iros

Document and the liberation struggle had never existed. 'Apartheid is not the creation of Jews, Hindus. Muslims, or secularists', wrote Martin Prozesky. 'It is the creation of people from a Christian culture' 9

4.4.4 This does not mean that we should concern ourselves with the invention of a new religion. There are countless reasons for attesting the value of our different traditions , rituals,

scriptures, priorities and peculiarities. They are supportive factors to the spiritual experience

which drives us forward and asserts the shared sense of a common awareness, a single reality behind all religious experience. This is the rebirth to which the prophets call us today.

4.4.5 *Iheryolegfjheoghyrgh*. A new role for the Church begins by liberating itself from divisive colonial theology and practice and concepts. Prophets need to challenge religion not on its peripheral concerns but at the heart of its theology about the nature and purpose of

God amongst us. They need to assert that the transformation process at work in our society today has profound theological roots, and is driven by the Spirit of God in the South African people. The Church needs to emerge from the haze of ecclesiastical superficiality and lay hold on the reality of what God is doing in our whole society. Many spiritual people have rejected organised religion because the church seems to wish to establish a different sort of priority from Jesus of Nazareth. singing songs which are of ten no more than puerile doggerel, and listening to sermons which are emotional dead ends full of sound and fury but of no significance whatever. It is time to break out of the theological cellars in which we have been sheltering from reality, and come into the open with the challenge of a new prophetic voice. There is a new consciousness emerging that after five tumultuous years of trying to find our feet, we can tackle the next five years with neither the euphoria nor the cynicism, but with a new faith and hope in the active Spirit of God amongst us. The prophetic theological vision thus asserts that the Spirit of God blows through the whole of society, not just religious society. \_ . Religion needs to proclaim this on the basis of its belief in a present God integrating spiritual power through the strength of loving and justice and peace making. Those inside the communities of faith have the knowledge of God and God's working and can proclaim this living God and stir the people to move forward. This is the heart of 21st century missionary work. 'If Christians, trusting in God and respecting the faith of others, engage in a new encounter with other traditions, they can expect to witness a growth or evolution such as the church has not experienced since its first centuries.' Knitter.10 ' Faith comes through preaching. Spelling out such prophetic theological insights, proclaiming God's power at work amongst us, is the work of the prophets. It is both offer and demand. it both knocks down and builds up, and we have to be in there. recognising faith in the experience of all communities and proclaiming it.

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5.1 The voice of prophecy in politics emerges from the realisation that God has political purposes on Earth. These are not driven by the desire to promote the national, ethnic or religious objectives which we have inherited from our colonial and apartheid past. but for justice and peace, unity and harmony in the whole body politic.

5.2 The heart of Jesus' Good News was not personal salvation, but the proclamation of the Ruling Power of God (the Kingdom of God, the Basileia) on Earth. Politics must be seen as the response to the Ruling Power of God (RPG) in any particular age, which has immediate political implications today. Christians who profess discipleship of Jesus of Nazareth have to break out of the colonial concepts of the kingdom of Heaven. The Basileia cannot be limited to an ecclesiastical kingdom in terms of Church, a spiritual kingdom in terms of soul. a heavenly kingdom of life after death, or a futurist kingdom at the end of the age. The essential Good News is of the dynamic power of God operating in the liberation and transformation of South Africa here and now.

5.3 We need to recall that for many centuries during which the doctrines of the Christians were formulated. Church and State were combined in the Holy Roman Empire. This relationship continued long after the collapse of Rome, and the Reformation, in the countries of Britain. Germany. the Netherlands, their colonies, and other places. The Church was an arm of the State and doctrine was manipulated to protect the State. This was a dominant factor in the emergence of what are erroneously called 'Christian' attitudes towards Judaism. Islam, and Eastern and African beliefs. Theology was determined by colonial political and economic objectives, and those heretical theologies are still with us. How to 'de-Christi

anise'

the crucial Good News of Jesus and translate the RPG into South African political reality today appears to depend on dialogue with the inter-faith community.

This is set out in a well known concept of John Dunne. 'The holy man of our time is not a figure like Gotama or Jesus or Mohammed, a man who could found a world religion, but a figure like Gandhi, a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own to other religions. and comes back again with new insight into his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems. is the spiritual adventure of our time.' H

5.4 The coming of political liberation in 1994 enabled all people to vote, for which we rejoiced, but very few questioned the effectiveness of the political system within which we voted. It had been inherited from the West, and we had to vote for political parties which were competing for power, often personal power. The prophetic voice does not query democratic development, but the form it should take. Debate and criticism are necessary for any process, but self-Centred destructive politics contaminate social progress.

5.5 The prophetic objectives which emerged in the overwhelming political consciousness of our people are directly related to the RPG and set out clear priorities: poverty, jobs, housing, health, education. fulfilment. The public policies of the parties overlap on these essential matters and the challenge is how best to achieve these concerns of the great majority?

5.6 The traditional African political system was based on discovering and enacting consensus, not- on perpetuating unending competition. The ubuntu objective is not to obtain personal power but to serve the community to achieve national transformation. What prophetic note is seeking to emerge here?

5.7 Democracy requires a process to ensure that the interests of minority groups are secured, provided these are legitimate requirements and not a realignment of old oppressive forces under a new hat. Minority protection and development can obviously never be achieved if it depends on winning a political majority, so what is a just way forward?

5.8 And if the communities of faith are responsive to the prophetic voice, how can they be involved? Many within Religion endorse the astonishing desire to prevent their clergy from becoming involved in the political process at all, ostensibly for fear political involvement

would contaminate the things of God. Only bumbling theology can suggest that the God of all

the Earth, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Isaiah and Jesus and Paul is apolitical. God has always been involved in the political process. The religious corruption of

the colonialists, and the hot heads of Bible belt fundamentalism have contaminated God far

more than any communistic atheistic threat from politicians. Heretics are believers who have

got it wrong - not unbelievers (who may even get it right.) Prophets see a profound difference

between seeking and supporting a positive political policy. and submitting to the worship of a political party.

5.9 Lastly, the prophetic voice is rooted in the political consciousness of communities at a local level. not in national talkshops, an issue to which we shall return. '

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6.1 All Religions express a concern for the poor, and this is often coupled with a concern

for the affluent. Throughout history there has been a tension between those who own the wealth of the world, and those who work to produce it, an awareness which Karl Marx sought

to analyse but which the prophets had denounced as ungodly and inhuman for thousands of years.

Everyone is aware that the basic divide in South Africa is between the haves and the have nots which is unjust, causes the evils of affluence and poverty. and nourishes crime and corruption. But how can it be changed?

6.2 The prophetic voice seems to suggest three aspects of economic change.

6.2.1 change of attitude. It calls for a change of attitude from a self-centredness to a neighbour-centredness. Prophets are revolutionaries, not reformists. They probe to the heart

F\_\_\_\_\_ of the matter, the fundamentals, not merely surface issues. Though some seek to resist it . there is a deep awareness in people of faith that only a revolutionary attitude towards the economy can bring about justice and peace. it cannot go on like it is, and it cannot simply be pushed into shape. We require a new attitude to demand an economy that gets rid of poverty, now. not an economy focussed on maintaining the affluent.

6.2.2 A change of commitment All religions advocate a personal response from the affluent towards those in need. Some may call 'Charity' demeaning, some say that the poor should be the responsibility of the government, some say the poor should help themselves, but a personal commitment to help others, especially those in need, remains a key feature of

a developed person. Visitors to the Chief Rabbi's office negotiate cartons of food donated for distribution to the poor: Muslims regularly give a percentage of their income away; Hindus.

Buddhists and Bahais support many 'good works'; some Christians tithe, or make regular contributions to those in need; and anyone who has watched blind or maimed people forced to beg in the streets will have seen how poor people give to those who are poorer still.

A greater commitment of this nature, at the end of the month, could change the lives of millions of haves and have nots.

6.2.3 A change of structure. But far deeper than both of these is the necessity of a change in the economic system itself from one which puts the rich before the poor. to one which puts the poor before the rich until all have a sufficiency. There is something fundamentally wrong with our present system which makes so many people poor. The globalisation of the market economy whilst beneficial to some. is destroying millions. and has

earned the name of a crime against humanity.

6.3 But what is the change to be? What economic structure can ensure the transformation of the states of Africa? is it possible to survive in the

world economy if we make the poor our priority, or to solve poverty if we compete on the terms of the world? Some claim that socialism has collapsed - others believe the political

structures which propounded socialism were defeated. but the socialist economic structure needs to be re-examined. There is widespread awareness that the collapse of capitalism is inevitable, but when capitalism self-destructs are we ready with an alternative? For Africa?

6.4 These are prophetic questions requiring prophetic answers in the quest for an economic alternative which demands joint action from united religious communities working amongst the poor. It needs a major research programme, based on experience on the ground, from the religious communities working together with the poor. The affluent will scoff

and say: 'It's only human nature That's the way the world is'. It is the poor who know that at the

oppressive economy can be changed - just as it was the poor who knew that apartheid would

crumble - and it those who work with the poor who will find the prophetic answers.

6.5 South Africa's solution cannot come overnight because we are part of the world, part of the continent, and must survive in the present system even whilst we try to change it.

But come it will - and the challenge is to be ready for the change when the present system grinds

to a halt. We are not ready yet.

1\_\_\_\_\_ It is time to change the economic structure of the world. The religious communities.

7.1 For several centuries we have been accustomed to think of human development in two ways On the one hand has been personal salvation, individual development, self-growth. On the other hand have been national and international movements of every sort from the United Nations and the World Council of Churches to transnational corporations and

the internet. But the real focus of human development is neither personal nor global, but in

local communities where people live and move and have their being. Nations are built in neighbourhoods. Personal salvation is worked out in communities and families. The Church in scripture is not a metaphysical meeting of souls, nor an international organisation, but local

groups.



7.2 The prophetic vision sees the transformation of South Africa in terms of local communities. for it is only here that individual and national liberation become reality.  
A moral

country, banishing crime and corruption, arises from communities with a moral and spiritual base. A just country, in which a just economic system enables both the poor and the affluent to be liberated and transformed, is made of communities where this is experienced.

7.3 The main challenge to Christians in South Africa today is thus not to dispute with other religions, or seek to avoid identification with political parties, but to be themselves, to enact the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth in the areas where they live. Jesus followed his assertion that the Ruling Power of God is amongst us with the command to be converted, to repent of living in accordance with other ruling powers. and to live in harmony with God's way. Paul spent little time telling his correspondents how to run churches, or how to say their prayers, but put the emphasis on the communal exercise of harvesting the Spirit (for although Galatians 5.22 sounds personal, it only has reality when practiced in community).

7.4 i What matters are not assertions about eternal life but examples of daily living, not protestations of individual belief but demonstrations of collective faith and practice. not claims for the superiority or expansion of the Church but demonstrations of its commitment to work with a collective to establish a new community. It is from the vision and experience of local society being transformed that we can progress to think about the nation.

7.5 It is all very well to make earnest prayers, or hold impressive conferences, about moral growth, or poverty, or peace, but this has no actual human meaning until people in a specific area sit down together and begin to analyse the experience of poor and rich people in their community, to consider the implications of God's Ruling Power being amongst them and to envisage and obey this out in their communal relationships. It has to be done with shopkeepers and police and teachers, with the elderly and with youth. with people of different class and racial background. and with people of different religions. It is in such circumstances that talk of jobs and welfare, homes and crime, health and recreation begin to make sense and that the long African experience of community finds new scope for action.

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7.6 Putting the emphasis on development focussed in local communities, rather than massive national or provincial programmes. requires new thinking in government, and a reallocation of resources, and there are already indications that this will be a feature of the

next government. Both the President and the Secretary General of the ANC have spoken of developing a new pattern in which more resources are directed to local government, and in which the leadership will be taken by civil society, and government will play the role of facilitator. enabler, and skilled supporter.

7.7 The role of religion in civil society is crucial, because we are spiritual creatures 'made in the image of God'. Nearly every community in South Africa has different Christian

groups within it. and many have adherents of different religions. One aspect of Community is

thus for religions to organise how to listen to one another, and seek to spell out together the purposes of God in their community today. Religion, acting in community, can call local people together in ways that were foreshadowed as the struggle against apartheid reached its

zenith, but now focussed on heeding the prophetic voices to build a new society.

7.8 The struggles of such local communities will raise problems. demand sacrifice, instil hope - and bring transformation.

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9.1 There was always a kick in the prophetic proclamation: the alternative was Judgement and collapse. It still is.

If religious people will not turn from their self-centred ways and become communities of the living God then their candlestick will be moved from its place. If oppressive forces persist in

their refusal to be part of the new South Africa they will write themselves out of history.

y like

the NP and UP and liberals before them. Arch capitalist George Soros has said: 'The collapse of the global market place would be a traumatic event with unimaginable consequences. Yet I find it easier to imagine than the continuation of the present regime.'

We have ample evidence in western civilisation about what happens to society when it ceases to respond positively to the Ruling Power of God.

9.2 For several centuries the African continent has suffered from every type of oppression from the western world, replicated often enough by Africans who have themselves become exponents of neo-colonial oppression. Wrapped in materialist plenitude, and a false sense of spiritual superiority, there are few in the west who realise how decadent

that civilisation has become, and how far it has progressed on the way to self destruction.

Many Africans do realise it, perhaps especially South Africans.

9.3 As the prophetic voices we have been envisaging emerge and find a response amongst the South African people the result may herald a revolutionary renaissance of human fulfilment in the whole continent. To liberate ourselves from oppression, and transform our nation into a place of justice, peace and sufficiency. is the driving force amongst millions. It requires great vision. deep commitment, a lot of money, and much sharing of political. economic, social and theological insights.

9.4 But above all else it requires a prophetic vision and a prophetic voice. 80 the answer to the question: 'Where have all the prophets gone?' is another question.

Will the prophets please stand up?

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'Come Celebrate'. SACC. June 1993

Available from WCRP-SA, Box 93642. Johannesburg 2198.

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3 Transition is more fully examined in 'Ethical Transformation' published by the ANC Commission for Religious Affairs.

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Meditation first used at the centenary of the death of Indian passive resisters.

John Hick. 'God and the Universe of Faiths'. 181.

Francis Young in 'The myth of God Incarnate'. 14. 2 2

Paul F Knitter. 'No other name?' 156.

7 I

8 Kenneth Cracknell. 'Towards a new relationship'. 58. W9

9 Martin Prozesky. 'Christianity amidst apartheid'. 124.

10 Paul F Knitter. 'No other name?' 230.

11 John Dunne. The Way of all the Earth.

13