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# Religion Intersecting De-nationalization and Re-nationalization in Post-Apartheid South Africa

**Abstract:** What role has religion played in the post-apartheid transition to democracy and how will it be deployed in the period after 2014, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of South African democracy? This is the question that shapes this essay. Recent research has analyzed the political and economic dimensions of ‘the South African crisis’, arguing that this current moment in our democratic transition is shaped by simultaneous processes of de-nationalization and re-nationalization. However, while this research hints at the role of religion within these processes, there is no sustained and in-depth analysis of how religion inhabits both the processes of de-nationalization and the processes of re-nationalization. The essay is framed by the period 1994–2015, but focuses on a pivotal moment within these dual processes. When Thabo Mbeki, then President of South Africa, delivered the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture in July 2006 the Bible was his central source. Mbeki used the Bible, alongside a number of other literary and political sources, to present a religious argument for both de-nationalization and re-nationalization. Given that Mbeki’s public pronouncements prior to this on religion in general and the Bible in particular had tended to be rather dismissive, this turn is significant, indicating a deliberate and strategic use of the Bible and religion. The essay analyzes this moment, locating it within a trajectory that was set in motion by Nelson Mandela, given clarity by Mbeki, and has been continued by Jacob Zuma (and other political figures and policies).

**Keywords:** Apartheid, Bible, Mandela, Mbeki, re-nationalisation, de-nationalisation, economics, morality

## 1 Introduction

Since its arrival in Southern Africa, the Bible has been a site of struggle, though often in more complex ways than most post-colonial analysis has acknowledged (West 2016). This chapter reiterates some of that history but focuses on the period after political liberation, from 1994 to the present, examining the place of the Bible in the South African public realm more than two decades after liberation. In particular, this chapter examines the re-emergence of the Bible in the context

of shifts in South African macro-economic policy, with the Bible playing a significant though unlikely role.

The history of South Africa over the past three and half centuries has been ‘a history of inequality’, as coined by Sampie Terreblanche in his economic analysis of South Africa from 1652–2002 (Terreblanche 2002). Terreblanche provides a detailed account of the systemic relationship between power, land, and labor in South Africa. He identifies a number of successive systemic periods in South African history, beginning with ‘the mercantilistic and feudal system institutionalised by Dutch colonialism during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> and most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1652–1795)’ (Terreblanche 2002, 14). This was followed by the system of British colonial and racial capitalism (1795–1890) and a related system of British colonial and mineral capitalism (1890–1948) (Terreblanche 2002, 15). Unfree labor patterns were intensified when the Afrikaner-oriented National Party won the general election of 1948, and although it ‘did not drastically transform the economic system of racial capitalism institutionalised by the English establishment, it used its political and ideological power to institutionalise a new version of it’ (Terreblanche 2002, 15). ‘Since 1990’, continues Terreblanche, ‘we have experienced a transition from the politico-economic system of white political domination and racial capitalism to a new system of democratic capitalism’ (Terreblanche 2002, 15). South Africa’s economic system has moved, Terreblanche argues, ‘over the past 30 years from one of colonial and racial capitalism to a neo-liberal, first-world, capitalist enclave that is disengaging itself from a large part of the black labour force’ (Terreblanche 2002, 422). This transformation, though it has ‘coincided with the introduction of a system of representative democracy which is effectively controlled by a black, predominantly African, elite’, still exhibits ‘an ominous systemic character’ (Terreblanche 2002, 422–423).

If, as Margaret Legum has argued, ‘It doesn’t have to be like this!’ (the title of her book on alternatives to the Washington Consensus) (Legum 2002), how then has South Africa’s socialist-leaning liberation struggle brought us to this socio-economic state? Strangely, the Bible has had something to do with this shift.

The long association of nineteenth century mission and colonialism with capitalism is well documented. While the primary objective of the missionaries who came to Southern Africa from the late 1700s was to awaken the dormant intellect of the African through the direct power of ‘the Word’ (Comaroff, Comaroff 1991, 230), Africans were always more interested in the other items the missionaries brought with them, including items such as guns, tobacco, and candles, but most of all access to the chain of trade (and later the potential of protection) the missionaries provided between the interior and the emerging European colony on the coast (West 2004). Given only muted African interest in the Word, missionaries were forced ‘to take a more circuitous route via the laborious reform

of habit' (Comaroff, Comaroff 1991, 230). In the words of the Rev. John Philip, the London Missionary Society Superintendent at the Cape in the early 1800s:

The elevation of a people from a state of barbarism to a high pitch of civilization supposes a revolution in the habits of that people, which it requires much time, and the operation of many causes to effect. By the preaching of the gospel, individuals ... may be suddenly elevated to a surprising height in the scale of improvement, and the influence of such a person, on a savage tribe, must be great; but those on whom the power of divine truth operates in a direct manner, bear but a small proportion to the numbers who are only the subjects of an indirect or reflected influence. ... [The] mass of people ... are but slightly affected with divine truth (Comaroff, Comaroff 1991, 230, citing Philip 1828, 2, 355).

Because of this conviction concerning the need to revolutionize the habits of Africans, missionaries were particular about performing 'the mundane signs and practices of European modernity', accompanied by preaching and praying, conversation and exhortation, in the firm hope that the childlike Africans would not only learn by imitation (following Ephesians 5:1) but also benefit from the temporal benefits of civilization (Comaroff, Comaroff 1997, 120). Hard work and the material benefits that it produced were central to the missionary vision; 'commerce' was an alternative and antidote to both slavery and primitive African communism (Comaroff, Comaroff 1991, 79–80), and the missionaries were determined to save the African from both. For the missionary the political economy was a form of 'secular theology' (Comaroff, Comaroff 1997, 167), and so the missionaries set out to establish economic reform with religious zeal, persuading with word and deed the Africans 'to accept the currency of salvation, a task involving the introduction, along with the gospel, of market exchange, wage work, sometimes even a specially minted coinage' (Comaroff, Comaroff 1997, 168).

This transformation of the African economy did not always proceed as planned, nor did it always match the imagination of the missionaries, but over the course of the nineteenth century, the majority of Southern Africans were 'drawn into the net cast by the commodity *form*: all came to partake of relations and transactions involving money and manufactures, whether as wage earners, as consumers, as the sellers of produce, as taxpayers' (Comaroff, Comaroff 1997, 216). And the Bible, as we have witnessed, played a part in this alteration.

## 2 De-nationalization and re-nationalization

How ironically fitting then that after more than a century and a half of racial capitalism, the first macro-economic policy of a liberated South Africa, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), should be declared to have an 'al-

most biblical character' by the then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki (Mbeki 1995, 1).

The RDP originally emanated from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and particularly its most powerful affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and was envisaged as 'a set of socio-economic benchmarks against which the performance of a new democratically elected government would be judged' (Terreblanche 2002, 108). Driven by COSATU, many members of the democratic movement made contributions, including the African National Congress, though the bulk of the work was done by members of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) (Terreblanche 2002, 108).

The RDP stated that 'the democratic government must play a leading and enabling role in guiding the economy and the market towards reconstruction and development' (cited in Terreblanche 2002, 108), and warned that policies concentrating primarily on promoting economic growth 'would accentuate existing inequalities, perpetuate mass poverty, and soon stifle economic growth' (Terreblanche 2002, 108). Thus the government was tasked with actively integrating economic growth with economic reconstruction and social development, being ever mindful of the distortions and injustices that had become endemic during racial capitalism and white political domination (Terreblanche 2002, 108–109).

Swept to power in the 1994 election, with the RDP as its election manifesto, the ANC and its national President Nelson Mandela declared the RDP to be 'the cornerstone on which the ... GNU (Government of National Unity) is based', and 'the centerpiece of its socio-economic policy' (cited in Terreblanche 2002, 109). As Sampie Terreblanche argues, '[i]ts symbolic importance and consensus it created cannot be overemphasised, because it formed an important part of the nation-building and healing process after centuries of deep divisions and conflict' (Terreblanche 2002, 109). The RDP provided a 'bold new social democratic vision', based on a state which would take the lead in promoting major structural adjustment toward a high-wage, high-productivity economy, while at the same time providing 'basic welfare rights', including 'the right to basic needs such as shelter, food, health care, work opportunities, income security and all those aspects that promote the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of all people in our country, with special provision made for those who are unable to provide for themselves because of special problems' (cited in Seekings, Nattrass 2006, 347).

What, then, did Thabo Mbeki mean when he said in 1995 that the RDP had an 'almost biblical character'? Mbeki acknowledges that the RDP had 'established a unique national consensus on the need for prosperity, democracy, human development and the removal of poverty'. 'However', he goes on to say, 'despite its almost biblical character, the RDP Base Document did not provide us with all

the answers'. This is because, he continues, '[w]e have always known that its many many priorities and programmes need to be distilled into a series of realistic steps, guided by a long term vision and our resource constraints' (Mbeki 1995, 1). What Mbeki seems to be saying here is that the prophetic vision of the RDP, like the prophetic vision of the Bible, is not really realistic.

Within two years of its adoption, the RDP was replaced, with almost no consultation – and consultation had been the hallmark of alliance liberation politics up to this point – by a new, pro-capitalist, macro-economic policy: GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution). Indeed, writes Martin Legassik, though the name of the RDP continued to be invoked by the ANC up to the 1999 election campaign and even later, 'the economic leadership of the ANC had from the start no intention of implementing the RDP where it clashed with their pro-business aims of export-orientation, trade liberalisation, fiscal austerity or privatisation' (Legassik 2007, 457).

This shift from 'racial to class apartheid', to use Patrick Bond's characterization (Bond 2005, 253–308), and the economic logic behind South Africa's thousands of 'service-delivery protests' both have a long gestation (Hart 2013, 3. 47–50). Hein Marais argues that the shift from the RDP to GEAR, though politically and economically substantive, is part of 'a longer narrative' that dates back beyond Mbeki to 'the halting efforts of the apartheid regime in the early 1980s' (Marais 2011, 137). Picking up on Marais' analysis, Gillian Hart agrees that overstating the shift from the RDP to GEAR 'downplays the extent to which alliances between corporate capital and a powerful faction of the ANC had sidelined alternatives' (Hart 2013, 181–182; see also Fine, Padayachee 2000).

Hart recognizes the role of elites, whether the elites of white capital or ANC elites, but argues that '[r]ather than *just* an elite pact – although it was in part that – the transition [from apartheid] is more usefully understood in terms of simultaneous processes of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation that have been playing out in relation to one another in increasingly conflictual ways' (Hart 2013, 156).

Instead of focusing primarily on the ANC's adoption of conservative neoliberal macro-economic policies in 1996, I am using the term de-nationalisation to encompass the terms on which heavily concentrated corporate capital re-engaged with the increasingly financialised global economy starting in the early 1990s, and the ways in which these forces are driving increasing inequality and the generation of surplus populations. While successive ANC administrations have moved in more interventionist directions since the early 2000s and now declare themselves strongly anti-neoliberal and passionately pro-poor, the ravages wrought by processes of de-nationalisation continue apace (Hart 2013, 156).

‘Re-nationalisation’, Hart goes on to argue, ‘engages ... crucial questions about how the post-apartheid “nation” came to be produced, as well as the ongoing importance of articulations of the “nation” to the ANC’s hegemonic project’ (Hart 2013, 156–157). And while Hart does not deal with the role of religion in de-nationalization, she does note how religion has been deployed within re-nationalization. Drawing on the work of Ari Sitas (Sitas 2010), Hart argues that the transition from apartheid ‘required discursive shifts – a process of scripting the “nation” through what Sitas calls “conflicting and competing narratives of commonality and indigenerality”’ (Hart 2013, 168). Key to this scripting were the ‘inclusive discourses of the “rainbow nation” associated with Nelson Mandela’, which Sitas characterizes as ‘indigenerality’ – ‘the liberal, ecclesiastical discourse of forgiveness that made possible the negotiations to end apartheid, and found further expression in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC]’ (Hart 2013, 7). Like the ‘national question’, ‘discourses of inclusion’, Hart argues, ‘were not just imposed from above’, but had ‘popular appeal’ (Hart 2013, 7); and again the religious terrain was crucial, presided over by the enigmatic prophet Desmond Tutu, the high-priest of the ‘rainbow people of God’ (Tutu, Allen 1994, see the discussion in Hart 2013, 169–171).

I turn now to examine in some detail the Bible’s presence in public discourse on the related processes of de-nationalization and re-nationalization, with an emphasis on the former.

### 3 Mbeki’s deployment of the Bible

While we should not overstate Thabo Mbeki’s role in the shift from the RDP to GEAR, we should recognize his role in returning the Bible to the South African public political and economic realm.

Thabo Mbeki has shown a rather ambiguous attitude to the Bible in his public speeches. His Mfengu (or Fingo) missionary-Christian education in the East Cape and his love for classic literature would have made Mbeki thoroughly familiar with the Bible, but his upbringing in the staunchly African Marxist home of Govan and Epainette Mbeki, and his expulsion from his missionary-Christian school, Lovedale College – in his matric year for his active involvement in the African Students’ Organization – would have made him deeply aware of the Bible’s ambiguity. And yet an analysis of his public speeches during his tenure as Deputy President and President demonstrates a gradual shift in his attitude to the Bible and in his use of the Bible.

In a speech to the International Labor Conference in 2003, Mbeki, now the President of South Africa, develops these ideas, engaging in an extended way

with ‘the Parable of the Talents in the Biblical Gospel according to St Matthew’ (Matt 25:14–30) (Mbeki 2003). Here too the Bible and economic matters are brought into explicit conversation. He introduces the parable as follows, saying:

In the Parable of the Talents in the Biblical Gospel according to St Matthew, a money merchant, angry that one of his servants did not discharge his duties as a fund manager, by using the Talent given to him to trade in the money markets, said:

‘Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed;

Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Mbeki 2003).

He then immediately demonstrates that he understands how this parable might be read as a critique of the money merchant, locating Africans in solidarity with the ‘unprofitable servant’, saying:

Among the hundreds of millions of the African world from which we came, as we travelled to Europe, the outer darkness into which the money merchant cast his unprofitable servant, there is much weeping and gnashing of teeth. Those who do not hear and do not see the agony, have neither ears to hear nor eyes to see.

But I am certain that even they who do not see or hear the people, have seen the great volumes of literature that describe in the greatest statistical detail and graphic language, the extent of the poverty that afflicts billions in Africa and the rest of the developing world. ....

The surfeit of information available to all of us says that we live in a world defined by a deep economic and social structural fault that mirrors the angry outburst of the money merchant of the Parable of the Talents, when he uttered the ominous curse not just to his servant, but to the poor of the world: ‘For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath’ (Mbeki 2003).

Recognizing, perhaps, that his appropriation of the Bible may seem a little out of place in such a context, he goes on to say, ‘Obviously, we have to explain what we have just said, lest we are accused of special pleading and being overly dramatic’ (Mbeki 2003). Mbeki then does just this, engaging in an extended appropriation of the biblical text in the context of economic matters.

This remarkable extended ‘exegesis’ of a biblical text demonstrates rather well Mbeki’s ambivalence towards the Bible. Like other classic literature, the Bible has the capacity to generate a surplus of meaning that exceeds its contexts



of production: meanings which have formed a reservoir within the public imagination and from which those who have an ear to hear might draw. Having been somewhat cautious about engaging this reservoir of meaning in his early public persona, Mbeki chooses on particular occasions to plunge in and exploit the capacity of the Bible to provide a shared memory. However, Mbeki's interpretation of this parable is not a typical interpretation, for he tends to read against the grain of Matthew's redaction of the parable, discerning perhaps the 'original' meaning conveyed in Jesus' telling of the parable to the indebted peasants of his day. And yet Mbeki, unlike Jesus (Herzog 1994, 150–168), is not calling for a radical revolution of the world economy from the perspective of the unprofitable servant who refuses to participate in the exploitative system of the money merchant, for he embraces elements of Matthew's appropriation of the parable, in which the money merchant might reasonably expect a return on his investment.

Mbeki's use of the Bible is a form of problematized appropriation. Appropriate he must, using the common silo that is the Bible to re-nationalize his people. But its capacity to speak to the South African public realm is restricted to its capacity to address the moral dilemmas of our day rather than to advocate for a radically different economic dispensation. Norman Gottwald is right to caution those of us who would mobilize around the Bible for economic transformation of the limits of our analogies. 'Given the reality that economic systems cannot be "imported" from the Bible to meet our needs', he says, 'the ethical force of the Bible on issues of economics will have to be perspectival and motivational rather than prescriptive and technical' (Gottwald 1993, 345). Yet this kind of force is considerable, particularly if we agree with Gottwald that '[t]he dominant voices in biblical economic ethics are emphatically communitarian, resolutely critiquing tributary power by seeking state reforms, urging resistance to oppressive power, upbraiding ruthless exploiters and speaking to the collective religious conscience of a nation with a communitarian premise at its base' (Gottwald 1993, 345). And, '[w]hen we interface communitarian biblical economic ethics with our own economic systems, the results are instructive', says Gottwald. 'The biblical premise of the primacy of communal welfare over individual achievement is much closer to the premise of socialism than to those of capitalism' (Gottwald 1993, 346). However, the Bible's sphere of influence for Mbeki is in the domain of the soul, and in its capacity to foresee, in broad terms, the moral shape of the predicaments that we must confront. For Mbeki the Bible has none of the perspectival potential that Gottwald envisages. The Bible is used, and its very use is a form of re-nationalizing, but how it is used plays a role in Mbeki's attempts to de-nationalize the South African economy.



The most marked use of the Bible by Mbeki was in the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture (Mbeki 2006a). What makes this occasion so significant is not only the substantial use he makes of the Bible, but how he creates a metaphor out of 'the RDP', dislocating it from economic matters and relocating it to moral matters. As indicated, so extensive is his use of the Bible in this lecture that he felt the need to point out in the oral presentation of the lecture that this did not mean that he was 'about to become a priest' (Mbeki 2006b). Somewhat embarrassed by his constant reference to the Bible in front of the elites who attend such events, Mbeki nevertheless crafts a lecture deeply dependent on the Bible, mindful of the masses watching television or listening to the radio, for whom the Bible is a significant and sacred resource.

In the first two-thirds of the speech he uses the Bible primarily to de-nationalize: making the argument via a dialogue between Marx and the Bible, materialism and idealism, that though materialist concerns are important, they cannot be allowed to be our only concerns. In the context of our South African challenges, he argues, the 'idealism' of the Bible (citing Genesis 3:19) 'must serve to focus our attention on issues other than the tasks of the production and distribution of material wealth' (Mbeki 2006a).

Mbeki interrupts his argument at this stage in his speech to deal overtly with his prolific use of the Bible: 'I am certain that many in this auditorium have been asking themselves the question why I have referred so insistently on the Christian Holy Scriptures. Let me explain' (Mbeki 2006b). The crux of his explanation is that in the context of South Africa's daily economic deliberations, the debate itself 'must tell us that human life is about more than the economy and therefore material considerations'. This is important, Mbeki continues, because, he says, 'I believe that as a nation we must make a special effort to understand and act on this because of what I have said already, that personal pursuit of material gain, as the beginning and end of life purpose, is already beginning to corrode our social and national cohesion' (Mbeki 2006a).

What this means, Mbeki goes on to state, is 'that when we talk of a better life for all, within the context of a shared sense of national unity and national reconciliation, we must look beyond the undoubtedly correct economic objectives our nation has set itself' (Mbeki 2006a). It is not GEAR, the government's neo-liberal capitalist macro-economic policy, Mbeki implies, that is to blame for the systems that enable the personal pursuit of material gain. It is some moral failing that requires, as he will go on to argue, a Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of the soul. The RDP as a macro-economic policy has been rhetorically replaced by an RDP of the soul.

And it is the RDP of the soul that forms the focus of the final third of the speech, as Mbeki turns directly to re-nationalization. In the final few pages of

his speech he emphasizes South Africa's need for a 'cohesive human society' (Mbeki 2006a), praising the South African nation's gains and pointing to the dangers that persist from our past. In the case of South Africa, he concludes:

We should say that we are fortunate that we had a Nelson Mandela who made bold to give us the task to attend to the 'RDP of the soul', and lent his considerable weight to the achievement of the goal of national reconciliation and the achievement of the goal of a better life for all our people.

.... In this regard, he was conscious of the task we share as Africans to end the conflicts on our Continent, many of which are driven by the failure to effect the RDP of the African soul, to uphold the principles of Ubuntu, consciously to strive for social cohesion, human solidarity and national reconciliation' (Mbeki 2006a).

The Bible and Nelson Mandela, together with a host of other more minor sources, construct a path for the recovery of the African soul. The cost is that the Reconstruction and Development Programme has become a cipher – 'RDP'. The forced displacement of 'RDP' from the economic to the moral sphere has been accomplished, eloquently, and the Bible has played a prominent role.

The Bible is used by Mbeki both to de-nationalize and re-nationalize. Its role in re-nationalization is to claim it as a communal South African nation-building resource, but in strictly moral terms. Its role in de-nationalizing is to make it clear to adherents of South African Black Theology and South African Contextual Theology that socialist economic policies are unrealistic and that the government (together with the business sector) has the macro-economic context in hand, having decentered the market while accepting that some compliance with global capitalism is not only inevitable, but also responsible.

In all of these examples, we see a growing awareness in Mbeki that he is addressing at least two audiences: a small classically literate and vaguely liberal elite who are somewhat embarrassed by religion (as is Mbeki himself), and a large mass of religious believers, most of whom are Christians. Mbeki wants to address them both, and the Bible lends itself to this task. It remains classic literature, even for the post-religious post-colonial African elite. And it resonates with the believing religious masses, for it remains a favored and useful sacred silo (Mofokeng 1988, 40).

## 4 Mandela's 'RDP of the Soul'

Nelson Mandela has said very little about religion, in the public sphere. Honoring our religiously neutral state (van der Vyver 1999), Mandela has been cautious about saying anything too explicit about the role of religion in the public realm.

But we can find important fragments, which taken together constitute the beginning of the theological trajectory that Mbeki consolidates and deploys in the public realm.

In an address to the South African parliament on the February 5, 1999 Nelson Mandela stated: ‘Our nation needs, as [a] matter of urgency ... an “RDP of the Soul”’ (Mandela 1999a). This very brief assertion, with its deliberate allusion to the government’s inaugural (but, by this time, abandoned) macro-economic policy, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) also has clear allusions to religion. The religious dimension becomes clearer when, five days later, Mandela reiterates this phrase in his closing address to the debate on his 1999 State of the Nation speech, claiming that ‘many sectors have resolved to join hands to work for the moral regeneration of our society, its “RDP of the soul”’ (Mandela 1999b).

Four days later he is much more explicit, having moved from the political realm to the religious realm. In a speech to a Methodist church in Langa, Cape Town, he delves more deeply into how he understands the role of religion in the public realm:

In Parliament last week we discussed the need for an RDP of the soul. These last years have shown how deep the poison of an inhuman system seeped into the fabric of our society. We have been distressed to learn that amongst those who fought for freedom are people who have turned out as corrupt or self-seeking, if not more so, than those they replace. The best efforts of government to bring lasting change for the better will fail if we do not repair the moral fabric of our society. Greed and disrespect for others; a lack of community feeling and social responsibility – these are spiritual enemies of our efforts to build a new society in which we can live in harmony with one another, in peace and prosperity. As religion fortified us in resisting oppression, we know that it can help strengthen us to carry out the mission that history has given to our generation and the next – to make a reality of our hopes for a better life for all (Mandela 1999c).

The elements of what would constitute Mbeki’s argument are apparent. Corruption and ‘self-seeking’ are individual traits, formed in part by ‘the poison of the inhuman system’ of apartheid, but unrelated to the systems of the government’s macro-economic policy. Indeed, the systems put in place by the government in order to bring about ‘lasting change’ are represented as good, but destined to fail if the religious sector does not make its contribution in repairing ‘the moral fabric of our society’.

Not only was Mandela the one who seems to have called for the return of religion to a national public role, he is also the one who has set the parameters of religion’s public role. First, it is clear that the religious sector has a primary role in working towards an ‘RDP of the Soul’. This is evident in the above address to the Methodist church in Langa and is restated, with a wider scope, in the Af-

rican National Congress's 1999 Election Manifesto, where it is stated that '[t]he struggle to build a better future for all requires, not just material transformation, but an *RDP of the Soul*. The ANC calls upon all communities of faith, to be active *partners in shaping our moral vision*, and in fostering the moral renewal of our society' (ANC 1999). And while the call for an 'RDP of the Soul' is not directed to the religious sector exclusively (Gigaba 2010), it is clearly the primary sector being addressed.

Five years later, in delivering the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture, Nelson Mandela elaborates on what he sees as the moral substance of an 'RDP of the Soul':

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

It is at the level of what we once referred to as the RDP of the soul that we as a nation and people might have crucially fallen behind since the attainment of democracy. The values of human solidarity that once drove our quest for a humane society seem to have been replaced, or are being threatened, by a crass materialism and pursuit of social goals of instant gratification. One of the challenges of our time, without being pietistic or moralistic, is to re-instil in the consciousness of our people that sense of human solidarity, of being in the world for one another and because of and through others (Mandela 2004).

The two paragraphs neatly separate the spheres of South African public life. At the level of social systems, we 'have succeeded quite admirably in putting in place policies, structures, processes and implementation procedures for the transformation and development of our country'. This is 'beyond doubt', Mandela insists. Singling out the economic domain, Mandela is confident that '[o]ur economic framework is sound'. It is at the level of the soul that we 'have crucially fallen behind'. And although reluctant to appear 'pietistic or moralistic', Mandela invokes these terms in order to demarcate the domain of '[o]ne of the challenges of our time'. In Mandela's conceptualization of the trajectory of an 'RDP of the Soul' is a separation between social spheres, with the legal, political, and economic on one side and the moral on the other side. The legal, political, and economic domains, the domains of the government sector, Mandela asserts, are working well. However, the moral domain – the responsibility (primarily) of the religious sector – lags behind, and requires more attention.

Significantly, in his speech to the Langa Methodist church cited above, Mandela laments 'the poison of an inhuman system' that has 'seeped into the fabric of our society'. Apartheid is recognized as a 'system', but the 'crass materialism'

referred to in his Steve Biko Lecture is a personal, not a systemic, problem. An ‘RDP of the Soul’ is therefore about a personal and a collective-national morality; it assumes that the problem lies in part with individuals who have lost their ‘sense of human solidarity’.

It would be from these fragments that Mbeki would forge his more carefully crafted argument, utilizing the Bible as one of his tools, as we have seen. And, as South Africa would see, religious rhetoric would become religious policy (West 2009).

## 5 From rhetoric to policy to...

The religious trajectory that Nelson Mandela inaugurated was consolidated by Thabo Mbeki, with the Bible as his primary tool. What Mbeki consolidated then became ANC official policy. While Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture prepared the ground rhetorically for a shift from an RDP of the economy to an RDP of the soul, the ANC’s 2007 policy document, ‘The RDP of the Soul’ (ANC 2007), turns rhetoric into policy. ‘The RDP of the Soul’ Policy Discussion Document was produced by the ANC Commission on Religious Affairs, and sets out to frame the ANC’s understanding of the role of religion in the public realm.<sup>1</sup> And though offering a broader conceptualization of both religion and morality, the Document remains within the basic trajectory invoked by Mandela and established by Mbeki. Jacob Zuma, the current President of the ANC and South Africa (West 2010), and Cyril Ramaphosa (West [forthcoming]), the heir apparent to both, have deviated very little from how religion, particularly the Bible, are used within the South African public political and economic realm.

That the Bible will be a part of our public political discourse is clear. The trajectory of how it will be used within the public realm to separate the moral and the social spheres of life is also clear. What is not clear is how ordinary Bible readers, the masses invoked by the use of the Bible, will engage with this discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> The information included on the production of this document and its reception and discussion within the ANC is based on discussions with, and correspondence from, Cedric Mayson, the Coordinator of the ANC Commission on Religious Affairs at the time. While writing this I learned of his death on May 23, 2015; hamba kahle comrade, may your yearning for a form of religion that brings liberation find us faithful. Much of the analysis and many of the arguments found in this document were presented for discussion by the ANC Commission for Religious Affairs in the November 2006 edition of *Umrabulo*, a journal of the African National Congress; see (ANC 2006).

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