

Religious Fundamentalism in South Africa

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Summary:

Religious fundamentalism in Africa must be seen first in the context of traditional African spirituality; then against the imported colonial religions; and finally assessed in the call of Presidents Mandela and Mbeki for a recovery of the soul of South Africa today. It was requested that a context be created against which the US delegates can understand the environment on Africa.

1 The spiritual power of Africa

A tall stone cross, secured by straps of iron, stands in the foyer of the Library at Wits University. You can just walk in and see it. It was originally erected five centuries ago on the sand dunes above Kwaaihoek on the Cape Coast by the Portuguese sailor Bartholemew Dias to claim this continent for Christ. The explorers of Africa found no religion, no church, no priests, no scriptures, and concluded that Africans were not spiritual people at all. They were totally wrong.

It was in Africa that homo sapiens sapiens emerged 140,000 years ago.¹ Unlike earlier creatures who had developed by the survival of the fittest, human beings discovered their development depended on the survival of the weakest. Creatures of body, mind and spirit, living in community, they discovered that survival and joy meant living together in compassion, cooperation, and commitment to their future. This spiritual component was the depth and heart of human life: not religious, but spiritual.

Though it has often been civilised out of people, you can still find this primal human spirituality world wide from American Indians and Inuits to Maories and Aborigines. Primal spirituality needs no institutions. It is deeply rooted in the critical mass of millions in Africa.

Nelson Mandela writes that the West

regards the Universe as a gigantic machine hurtling through space and time ... and individuals in it are but tiny organisms with private lives that lead to private deaths: personal power, success and fame are the absolute measure of values: the things to

¹ Bill Bryson. A Short history of nearly everything. Black Swan 2004: 548

live for... which divides the Universe into a host of individual little entities which cannot help being in constant conflict,...

The African, on his side, regards the Universe as one composite whole, progressively driving towards greater harmony and unity, whose individual parts exist as independent aspects of one whole, realising their fullest life in the corporate life where communal contentment is the absolute measure of values. His philosophy of life strives towards unity and aggregation: towards greater social responsibility. ²

Archbishop Tutu and Canon Luke Pato write:

The African world view rejects the popular dichotomies between the sacred and the secular, the material and the spiritual. All life is religious, all life is sacred, all life is of a piece. ³

The African has a sense of the wholeness of life. In traditional African religion there is no separate community of religious people, because everyone who participates in the life of the community participates also in its religion. ⁴

Mercy Oduyoye from the Gold Coast says:

Africans recognise life as life-in-community. We can only truly know ourselves if we remain true to our community, past and present. The concept of individual success or failure is secondary. The ethnic group, the village, the locality are crucial in one's estimation of oneself. Our nature as beings-in-relation is a two-way relation: with God and with our fellow human beings. ⁵

Bishop Ivan Abrahams, whose family tree entwines all the people of South Africa including white and black, Muslim and Christian, urban and rural, said at his inauguration as leader of the Methodist Church:

² Nelson Mandela: The struggle is my life.

³ Archbishop DM Tutu. An African Prayer Book. Hodder. 1995

⁴ Canon Luke Pato. 'Spirituality in Religions' UNISA. 1996:109

⁵ Mercy Oduyoye in 'African Theology en route' Appiah-Kubi. Orbis.1979. 110-111

Our African cultural values, ceremonies and practices should be affirmed and incorporated into the life and witness of the church. Our diversity is a gift from God to be celebrated. Our theology must be cooked and brewed in African pots. ⁶

The single word which captures this experience of humanness in Africa is the Nguni word: Ubuntu. There are many variations of the Xhosa phrase: *A human being is a human being through other human beings*. Ubuntu ‘refers to that sensitivity for other human beings and that experience of oneness with all human beings that enables one to become human oneself’. ⁷

Chief Albert Luthuli, the great Christian who led the African National Congress through some of its most persecuted years wrote:

Somewhere ahead there beckons a civilisation which will take its place in God’s history with other great human syntheses: Chinese, Egyptian, Jewish, European. It will not necessarily be all black: but it will be African. ⁸

And the crucial spirituality of African civilisation has nothing at all to do with religious fundamentalism.

2 The rise and fall of Colonial Religions

Formal religions were invented about 5000 years ago, somewhere in Asia, drawing the spiritual awareness of humanity into institutions. They went to India as Hinduism, east to Confucious and Lao Tze, south to the Buddha, and west to Zarathustra, Abraham, the great prophets of Israel, Jesus and Muhammad. These prophetic proclaimers did not themselves found religious institutions: but their followers did. Spiritual life which had emerged as a

⁶ Bishop Ivan Abrahams

⁷ Albert Nolan. God in South Africa. David Phillip 1988:80

⁸ Chief Albert Luthuli.

human characteristic was canalised into religious institutions, which invented dogmas and discipline.

As tribes and nations grew, the awareness of human dependence on compassion, cooperation and commitment was challenged by those who sought dominance through violence, possession, and selfishness, a conflict which continues to this day.

Early Empires often saw religion and politics as one: political and economic powers sought support from religions, which also needed backing from politics and economics. But with the emergence of morality in the so called good will religions, religious and political institutions usually separated. As the medieval world developed, and turned into the colonial quest for lands, plunder, minerals, slaves, markets, and arms, it was accompanied by religious institutions in quest of souls.

Religious institutions flooded into Southern Africa as colonial imports: Portuguese (1488); Dutch (1652); French (1688); German (1737); British (1795, 1806, 1820); Americans (1908, 1914,1920). Reformed (1665); Lutheran (1779); Anglican (1806); Methodist (1806); Congregational (1806); Presbyterian (1813); Catholic (1688,1804); Pentecostal (1908, 1914); Muslim (1658, 1694,1780); Jewish (1834); and Hindu (1860).

Religion justified its partnership with colonialist imperialism by its missionary emphasis. There were objectors, such as the Anglican Bishop Colenso and the Methodist Nehemiah Tile, but the general mind set firmly identified religion with the pursuit of colonialism.

Most of the imperialist heroes were identified in the public mind with the Christianness of Empire – not simply humanitarian, not Burke’s sense of trusteeship, but a Christian militancy, a ruling faith, whose Defender on Earth was the Queen herself, and whose supreme commander needed no identification. Every aspect of Empire was an aspect of Christ: imperial technique would certainly convert the Africans to Christianity in the end, the novelist Trollope assured himself, inspecting a South African mine. ‘When I have looked down into the mine and seen three or four

thousand of them at work ... I have felt that I was looking at three or four thousand growing Christians. ⁹

This was the paternalist approach which in due course led the Christian religion to invent the colour bar, racial discrimination and apartheid.

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But major problems were emerging as humanity grew into the modern world and found its foundations could no longer support its weight. Colonialism was out.

Empires were collapsing. Despite their might and ability to violently destroy their foes, they were falling apart, usually because they got the human thing wrong, and would not work, and just collapsed. The great age of revolutions in America, France and Russia clearly demonstrated that the structures of power could be changed. Luther had known this long before in studying the history of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome: empires collapsed.

They puff themselves up in their power alone, and when the bubble is full blown and everyone supposes them to have won, God pricks the bubble and it is all over. ¹⁰

War became more frequent and more terrible, and by the modern era everyone knew its appeal to religious justification was suspect.

Religion was deeply undermined by modern thinking in all the sciences, the arts, social concerns, politics, and within the church itself.

The Church becomes wrapped up within the processes of institutionalisation, and defines itself in terms of its hierarchical and organisational structures. ¹¹

The rise and relevance of other religions became a challenge, and the meaning of faith as believing the truth of God changed to the blind acceptance of dogmatic uncertainties about God. Trying to practice medieval or reformation theologies in the modern world was like trying to walk in the dark, and faith fell flat on its face. Millions discarded faith.

⁹ Jan (James) Morris. 'Heavens Command' Penguin. 1979:319

¹⁰ Martin Luther:

¹¹ Desmond van Der Water. Towards an agenda for Contextual Theology. Cluster. 2001:35.

It seemed as if there were no good arguments left for religion. Unless – that is to say – a way could be found which could reconcile the advancements of modern thought with the religious instincts of mankind.¹²

This was the juncture at which fundamentalism truly emerged.

3 The entry of Fundamentalism.

From her major studies of religious fundamentalism Professor Karen Armstrong has concluded that:

Every single fundamentalist movement that I have studied is rooted in a profound fear – whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim – that modern secular society wants to wipe out religion.¹³

People had become afraid of modern thinking, of collapsing nations, of war, of the threats to their institutions, and of their loss of power and authority. WB Yeats captured the sense in his poem “The Second Coming”.

*Things fall apart: the centre cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Publication of “The Fundamentals” in the US to defend their views, led to wide rejection of modern understanding, and also soon embraced an emotional quest for answers about everything. Fundamentalism became a competition to assert its sole claims to truth, turned spirituality into superstition, witchcraft, and a personal obsession with wealth, health and death. Armstrong continues:

By insisting that the truths of Christianity can be factual and scientifically demonstrable, American Protestant fundamentalists have created a caricature of both religion and science. Those Jews and Muslims who have presented their faith in a

¹² AN Wilson. Gods Funeral. Abacus. 2000:441

¹³ Karen Armstrong. CPWR. Barcelona. 2004

reasoned systematic way to compete with other secular ideologies have also distorted their tradition, narrowing it down to a single point by a process of ruthless selection. As a result, all have neglected the more tolerant inclusive and compassionate teaching and have cultivated theologies of rage, resentment, and revenge.¹⁴

Fundamentalism did not make people compassionate and loving, but self-centred, divisive, antagonistic, aggressive, and oppressive. It was a simple step to violence, so that Professor Aho could write.

Religiously inspired terrorism is a worldwide phenomenon, and every major world religion has people who have appropriated the label of their religion in order to legitimise their violence.¹⁵

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For reasons of space, an examination of the crucial link between fundamentalism and money is added as an addendum.

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The Dialogue rationale for this consultation asks: ***What is the extent of the threat from radical Islam in Africa?*** You ask for our testimony here. Reza Aslan sets out the wider context.

The clash of monotheism is by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, from the earliest days of Islamic expansion to the bloody wars and inquisitions of the Crusades to the tragic consequences of colonialism and the cycle of violence in Israel/Palestine, the hostility, mistrust and often violent intolerance that has marked relations among Jews, Christians and Muslims has been one of Western history's most enduring themes.¹⁶

¹⁴ Karen Armstrong. 'The Battle for God' Harper Collins. 2000. 166

¹⁵ Professor James A Aho. Idaho. In Alan Cooperman. Washington Post. June 2003.

¹⁶ Reza Aslan. No god but God. Arrow Books 2006:273

This is a truth which many in the world believe. But it is not our truth today in Southern Africa.

Islam in Africa is not the result of a recent influx of fundamentalist Islamic revolutionaries, dedicated to the overthrow of the United States or the West. There are more Muslims in Africa than in the Middle East, and they have much experience of overcoming oppression and fundamentalism. Muslims have been in the Cape for 400 years, almost as long as Christians have been in the United States. Muslims were translating the Qur'an from Arabic to Afrikaans even before Afrikaans was an official language. Muslims have been contributing a positive moral and spiritual role to the community for over three centuries. They are not promoting terrorism, but are cultivated South African citizens, the great majority helping to devise and fulfill the principles of the inter-faith Declaration on Religious Rights and Responsibilities in South Africa of November 1992, and the new South African Constitution of 1996 with its commitment to religious freedom.

During their long history they have not only battled with criticisms from Christians, but with the corrupt and fundamentalist fads of their own confreres. They are aware that the 11 September attack on US was not an attack by the whole Muslim world, but from one of its anti-human factions, which reveals the tensions in the Muslim world, so similar to those amongst Christians for generations.

Many South Africans - not only Muslims - have been appalled by the warmongering and lies emanating from the US/UK Empire, and are deeply opposed to many western initiatives in the Middle East: but that does not make them terrorists. No doubt there may be irresponsible mercenaries in Africa who will respond to appeals to oppose the US, and it is Minister Ronnie Kasrils job to keep an eye on them and others: but that does not constitute a terrorist threat. Many of us involved with the Muslim community see no sign of a terrorist threat from radical Islam in our country.

The Dialogue Rationale of this consultation also includes the question: *Is there a relationship in Southern Africa between religious and political radicalism and terrorism?*

Yes, there certainly is. It was called apartheid and it was promoted by the old National Party regime. We suffered the terrorism of a sincerely Christian religious and political radical regime who killed thousands, maimed and twisted the mind of millions, and called many of us terrorists.¹⁷ You ask for our testimony here.

We are South Africans. We know the context of Africa is not the context of US or UK. We are a community of South African people of faith through whom the winds of change have blown away many of the confusing colonial fogs of the past. We are grown up human beings, living in community.

We are no longer colonial Christians promoting the religions of imperialist Britain, Roman Catholicism, Christian National Apartheid, German Lutherism, or the beliefs of right wing Pentecostals in the USA. We are no longer Hindu labourers from India, Buddhists from Tibet, Muslims from Macassar or the Maluccas, Bahai's from Iran, Jews from Europe, Communists from Russia or Cuba or China. Our experience of liberation has moved us beyond the colonial cultural apartheid we inherited. We have our own vision of human society in Africa. Our varied spiritual riches inherited from religions of the past are rooted and growing in the soil of our own current experience and a new indigenous knowledge system is growing amongst us.

You are seeking an honest appraisal of the situation and I must respond by saying that it is the spread of right wing Christian fundamentalism that is seen as the major threat to peace and prosperity in Africa and the world today.

The subject requested for this paper does not call for an expose of the link between right wing fundamentalist groups and political activities in the US, which in any case is well documented elsewhere.

But we are all aware that one of President Bush's Christian advisors, the Rev Franklin Graham, (son of Billy Graham), on 2 November 2002, said on NBC Nightly News:

¹⁷ I still have my prison card to prove it!

The God of Islam is not the same God. He's not the son of God of the Christian or the Judeo-Christian faith. It's a different God, and I believe (Islam) is a very evil and wicked religion. ¹⁸

This total negation of historical fact and theological reality is built on an apocalyptic distortion of a few Biblical texts which may be sincere but is sincerely wrong. It says we are in the End Time, and the only hope is to reject all other faiths and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour because he died for your sins. God will then snatch you up into the Rapture as world war decimates most of humanity, the Anti Christ comes, Armageddon arrives, the Jewish Temple is rebuilt, and Jesus returns to take you into glory in a new world. In this scenario of destruction fit all the ingredients of support for Israel, Muslim intransigence, the destruction of non US weapons of mass destruction, and the irrelevance of global warming and ecological collapse because the world is being destroyed anyway. It is 'a theology of despair which has given up on the possibilities of redemption'.

¹⁹

Fundamentalists call for a return to the Bible, but many of their acclaimed values do not come from the Bible, but from others centuries later. The New Testament itself was not finalised until centuries after Jesus. The doctrine of the Trinity was framed by Athanasius who died in 373, the one about original sin came from Augustine of Hippo four centuries after Jesus, and the idea that Jesus died in man's place to placate an angry God comes from Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury, a contemporary of William the Conqueror. Apocalyptic teaching originated with Daniel and Ezekiel centuries earlier, and was rehashed in terms of Jesus long after him. "Revelations" was not considered New Testament material for centuries.

Most of our thinking people simply do not take this seriously. They see fundamentalism as a front for the US Empire's quest to sell arms, possess fuel, and dominate the world. It needs wars and thus terrorists; when the oil runs out it will need South Africa's platinum for its

¹⁸ Reza Aslan. No god but God. Arrow Books 2006:273

¹⁹ Rich Lang. Trinity United Methodist Church, Seattle. www.informationclearinghouse.htm 17 August 2006

hydrogen engines to work; and thus it needs presence throughout Africa. The tenure of the next South African Government from 2009 will probably cover the most crucial years in US history, so South Africa must be under its wing and sway.

We are thus extremely concerned about the support given by the US to the proliferation of right wing Christian fundamentalist groups in Africa. Rhema, His People, Way of Light Ministries, Christ Embassy Church, the Universal Church of God are some of the big ones, but thousands are emerging from many quarters, all promoting variations of the same US led fundamentalisms, and all demanding financial commitments and promising wealth.²⁰

The fundamentalist mind set needs changing from violence, greed and oppression to compassion, cooperation and commitment.

We know that religion has been discarded by many responsible thinking people today: politicians, unionists, journalists, academics, singers, entertainers, priests, and many ordinary folk. They recognise the need of spiritual power because they themselves are body, mind and spirit in community, but they cannot accept the fundamentalist packages in which spirituality is so often wrapped.

Some go to the pentecostal churches because they like the music, like talk about health, wealth and death - even if they are intelligent well-read people who know this is not the Christian gospel. Like the Da Vinci Code, it's worth a rand or two. But the insistence on turning myths and mystery into magic, the failure to grow up in this world come of age, the proud prancing of pharisaic priests promoting medieval traditions, the substitution of superstition for faith, the flaunting of religious apartheid, the Constantinian tactic of hijacking Jesus, the hypocrisy of much church language and thought forms: these cannot be accepted and drive people away

²⁰ President Mbeki commented on this in his recent address to the Mandela Foundation.

The new order, born of victory in 1994, inherited a well entrenched value system that placed the individual acquisition of wealth at the very centre of the value system of our society as a whole ... get rich! get rich! get rich!

... the dominance of the capitalist motive of private profit maximisation (which) has evolved into the central objective that informs the construction of modern human society in all its elements. Nothing can come out of this except the destruction of human society.

Thabo Mbeki: The Mandela Foundation Lecture. 29 July 2006

Many who react with horror to the loss of moral values, the sheer awful anti-humanness of the media²¹, the lust for consumerism, the emotional deadness of a cerebral religion and the intellectual bankruptcy of emotionally loaded fundamentalism are looking for a new concept of spirituality

This is most obvious of all when considering those who claim that the wars in the Middle East are a conflict of civilisations or religions. They are not. The essential truths of the three great Abrahamic religions hold, and we can imagine no more harmonious and agreeable discussion than would ensue if Isaiah and Amos, Jesus and Muhammad, sat down together. The conflict is not between them or the religions that followed them, but between the heretical fundamentalist sects which have usurped them.

The War on Terror, if it is to take on all forms of terror genuinely threatening both American lives and our democratic institutions, is not a war against Islam. It is not even necessarily a war against fundamentalism. Rather it is against the religious fascism that has embedded itself within the broad fundamentalist sectors of both Christian and Muslim society. ²²

Fundamentalism promotes theological fallacies, the economics of poverty, and the politics of destruction. It indicates the West needs saving, and Africa knows it has part of that salvation. But the answers will not come from terrorists or right wing fundamentalists of any persuasion.

4 The Soul of Africa

There is always something new out of Africa

- Pliny the Elder. Natural History VIII

²¹ The role of the media, usually owned and directed by westernism, is a major factor in modern destabilisation and needs a paper on its own.

²² David Neiwert. Fascism and Fundamentalism. www.cursor.org 8 April 2006

A century ago the Transvaal was inundated by the quest for gold. From the Vaal River to Zimbabwe and the Limpopo to the Lowveld, thousands were searching for nuggets, chipping at rocks, and panning streams, to find traces of alluvial. Not for years did they realise that beneath their feet great reefs of gold dove steeply into Earth, miles deep, hundreds of miles long, which would make the finds in river beds seem like chicken feed.

Fundamentalists are like that. They keep chipping away at the scriptures, at traditions, at cupidity, firing up fear and emotion, turning spirituality into witchcraft, promoting the politics of profit, manipulating the media, making arms and armies, polishing their golden calves to conquer wealth, health and death ... and miss the great spiritual power of humanity deep within them. But throughout our liberation struggle prophets were beginning to seek a different reality. Beyers Naude once said:

Something new is groaning to emerge which will challenge the whole church in South Africa to the depths of its being. Churches should be much more aware of the need to obtain for themselves a vision of a future South Africa, of a political economic and social system that would be more in accordance with the demands of justice and love of the gospel. ²³

Both Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki believe that way forward is to dig deep into the wells of ubuntu.

Because of the infancy of our brand new society we have the possibility to act in ways that would, for the foreseeable future, infuse the values of ubuntu into our very being as a people. ²⁴

We believed in the struggle for liberation. We knew that the violence and greed and oppression seemed to be total and unchallengeable: but they would collapse. It was a faith experience. The positive spiritual power will always come through and conquer.

Constitutional Court Judge Albi Sachs has written:

²³ Dr CF Beyers Naude: 'In Word and Deed'. SACC 1986:123

²⁴ Thabo Mbeki: The Mandela Foundation Lecture. 29 July 2006

We had in this country an amalgam of cultural and spiritual ingredients that provided a profound philosophical setting for peaceful change. It was a case of ubuntu meeting Satyagraha meeting an international tradition of struggle for revolutionary change. The result was something that has evolved and become deeply rooted in the temper of our people. As Gandhi showed through his life, idealism is sustainable in the real world. It needs only to be backed up by real commitment by millions or ordinary people. ²⁵

People often saw that Religion was a site of struggle in the Liberation period, between compassion, cooperation and vision – and oppression, violence and blindness. Humanity does not work on violence greed and lust, but on compassion, cooperation and love. It was often a struggle between the people on the ground, and the leaders on the top.

While ecumenical theologians of Faith and Order and others are still seeking convergence in understanding certain key matters of doctrine and practice, the people in the pews have gone beyond seeking. They have sought and apparently found what professional theologians are still seeking, on a level of a people's ecumenism. The tents pitched for all night vigils (for the funerals of those killed in the struggle) are the new cathedrals and sanctuaries of popular ecumenism. There you will find Catholics, Lutherans, Zionists, Methodists all doing their holy thing peacefully together, not worried by any theological scruples. ²⁶

It was not just a personal feeling – there was a communal joy and strength about it. Community is a major factor in ubuntu, the arbiter of morality and spirituality, not personal entitlement or the individualist assertions of doctrine. Community is the measure of right and wrong, not my ambition. David Mosomo writes:

A distinction exists between the African view of religious liberty and the western one, in that, for Africans, religious liberty assumes a communal dimension, rather

²⁵ Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs. Satyagraha Celebrations. 2006

²⁶ Bishop Manus Buthelezi. Church Action in the South African crisis. SACC. p16

than focusing on the individual. 'Religious' thus means rooted in the ongoing human community. ²⁷

Joe Slovo had a very similar notion:

The all-round development of the individual and the creation of opportunities for every person to express his or her talents to the full can only find expression in a society which dedicates itself to people rather than profit. ²⁸

The motto in our South African Coat of Arms is Unity in Diversity, which includes spiritual unity in religious diversity. This so-called post religious age does not mean making a new religion, or combining them all in a new polyglot religion, or adoptng a fundamentalist heresy. It means recognising that all spirituality is built around the same essential features of human beings and human community. 'It is time', writes the Pretoria paleontologist John Anderson ²⁹, 'not to merge and lose the richness in our human diversity, but to find consensus, *consilience* as put more fully by EO Wilson.' ³⁰

Dr Elizabeth Harris of the British Methodist Church agrees that the post-religious age is 'a marvelous God-inspired movement.' We are leaving behind the religious institutions of the medieval and colonial era which led to our divisive and warring past, and rediscovering spirituality as part of everyday life.

This is the word of prophets in all religions. Nearly all religions define themselves as a Way of Life, and these overlap. The Way of Jesus, the Hindu Way of Salvation, the Buddhist Eight fold Path, the Way of Tao in Lao-tse and Confucious, the Straight Way of the Qu'ran, and the Jewish Way of the Lord, all offer boundless opportunities for scholars to explore and believers to enjoy and celebrate their united humanness. That is what we found in our struggle against oppression: the bubbles burst. ³¹ But there is more to it than that.

²⁷ Professor David L Mosomo. Religious Freedom in South Africa. UNISA 1993:58

²⁸ Joe Slovo: 'Has socialism failed?' Inkululeko Publications January 1990

²⁹ Secular Spirituality: UNISA 2006:38

³⁰ Consilience: Unity of Knowledge. Little Brown and Co. 1998

³¹ Both Hitler and Churchill thought their empires would last for a thousand years but neither quite made it. Nor did Stalin. Or anyone else. Looking at the current spread of the western globalised Empire Albert Nolan sees

What is so desperately needed is not so much a better appreciation of our neighbour's religion, as a broader, more complete understanding of religion itself. ³²

This is what ubuntu is about. It can be both an exciting intellectual task between academics - or a simple human experience.

It means rediscovering the spiritual nature of humanity; liberation theology; the theology of transformation; the spiritual unity in our religious diversity. We experienced it, with surprise and delight, in our liberation struggle when we united against the evils of apartheid, as today we are united in the pursuit of compassion, cooperation and commitment against the evils of violence, corruption and selfishness. We sought it recently in a Conference on Secular Spirituality in Pretoria.

Whether we like it or not a new world is emerging which insists upon a new approach to many aspects of life. This is particularly true of the relationship between our spiritual and secular interests. We were taught to keep them apart lest the holy and profane should explode, but secular challenges require people of spiritual integrity to enact the answers, and a spirituality not anchored in the secular reality of the world is a vapid irrelevance. This study investigates a secular spirituality.³³

And if that sounds too complicated and cerebral, try the simple political and theological statement made by a South African criminal terrorist imprisoned by state terrorists for nearly 30 years, Nelson Mandela.

My wish is that South Africans never give up on the belief in goodness, that they cherish that faith in human nature as a corner stone of our democracy. The first value mentioned under the founding principles of our Constitution is that of human dignity. We accord persons dignity by assuming they are good, that they share the

that inside the United States *There is now another kind of power that is developing extraordinarily quickly and effectively: the power of peace, compassion and justice. It seems to me that there is now a real chance that today's mighty empire might be the last of the great empires, and that it will go quickly - as the apartheid regime did in South Africa.* Albert Nolan. *Jesus Today. Orbis and Double Story.* 2006:32.

³² Reza Aslan. No god but God. Arrow Books 2006: xvii

³³ CW Du Toit and CR Mayson. Secular spirituality as a contextual critique of Religion. UNISA Press. 2006:vii.

human qualities we ascribe to ourselves... In a cynical world we have become an inspiration to many. We signal that good can be achieved among human beings who are prepared to trust, prepared to believe in the goodness of people.³⁴

South Africa is seeking a simple and primal spirituality to drive it. Oppression collapses under it. Globalised empires collapse under it. Colonial religions and religious fundamentalisms collapse under it. We can turn our governments, our parties, our economies, our religions, and our media onto a new mind set. It is not simply a cranial package, but a deep heart felt experience. We call it ubuntu.

Somewhere ahead there beckons a civilization which will take its place in God's history with other great human syntheses: Chinese, Egyptian, Jewish, European. It will not necessarily be all black: but it will be African. Chief Albert Luthuli. Let my people go.

4884 words

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³⁴ Nelson Mandela to Parliament. 10 May 2004

Addendum on Fundamentalism and Wealth.

A system preying on the weakness in human values, namely greed, cannot be proclaimed with pride as the best human civilisation has to offer ... Our faith should compel us to witness to God's will for a better world and the possibility of a better economic system than one founded on the acceptance of the finality of human greed, natural competition, and the drive for more and more profit.³⁵

The quality in modern society which is most sharply opposed to the teaching ascribed to the Founder of the Christian faith ... consists in the assumption ... that the attainment of material riches is the supreme object of human endeavour and the final criterion of human success. Such a philosophy ... is a negation of any system of thought or morals which can be described as Christian ... Compromise is as impossible between the Church of Christ and the ideology of wealth, which is the practical religion of capitalist societies, as it was between the Church and State idolatry in the Roman Empire.³⁶

Man is most extravagant in wickedness when he sees himself possessed of wealth. Qur'an.

The present economic system, like an immense idol, the beast of the Apocalypse (Rev. 3) covers the Earth with its cloak of unemployment and homelessness, hunger and nakedness, desolation and death. It destroys other ways of life and styles of work which counter its own. It breeds pollution and hostility to nature. It imposes an alien culture on peoples it has conquered. In its infinite greed for wealth it sacrifices persons, mostly of the Third World but also increasingly of the First, as a bloody holocaust to itself. The beast has become a raging monster armed to the teeth with tanks and cannons, nuclear bombs, warships with computerised missiles and satellites, bringing humanity to the brink of total and instantaneous death. But in struggles of the poor and oppressed through the world against all forms of dehumanisation, there is a sign of life and victory. There is faith and confidence in the God of life.³⁷

In the apartheid era there was a collapse of an acceptable level of morality in our society. Amongst other things, this has resulted in the elevation of the self, and the serving of the interests of the self to the point that it becomes a religion.³⁸

³⁵ Dr Molefe Tsele. *An African Challenge to the Church in the 21st century.* Manguzi Guma. SACC. 1997:54

³⁶ RH Tawney. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism.* Pelican. 1922:280

³⁷ *Doing Theology.* EATWOT 1985:186

³⁸ Thabo Mbeki. *WCRP Consultation.* 1997