

Mainline Protestantism in South Africa – and modernity? Tentative reflections for discussion

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An apology

1. Receiving the invitation to make a contribution to this workshop, I immediately declined, for a variety of reasons. I simply do not know enough about development – whether the theoretical discourses or the actual policies and practices in South Africa – to make any contribution to a discussion of experts, deeply involved in development work and scholarship. Most people in the group probably even know more about development work in religious communities and churches specifically in South Africa than I do, because the projects and programs undertaken with agencies are often somewhat removed from the normal, everyday activities of congregations and denominations that I am involved in and aware of.

2. When the invitation was repeated, I eventually agreed – although with much hesitation and reservation – to say something on "mainline Protestantism in South Africa and modernity." At the time, I was invited as fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin to co-operate with several others – including scholars of religion, sociologists, historians, philosophers, ethnologists, cultural critics, art historians, and more – in a joint research project on "religious transformation processes in the present," and I was hoping that after a few months I would understand enough of modernity to be able to make some meaningful contribution here. The project is being led by Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, author of the acclaimed *Die Wiederkehr der Götter. Religion in der modernen Kultur* (2004) and in a certain way it follows on a project from last year in which Hans Joas, Charles Taylor, José Casanova and Astrid Reuter worked on different forms of religion in modern societies under the broad theme of "secular modernity." After several months of continuous inter-disciplinary discussion and reflection on these and related themes – the return of religion, secularism, modernity, pluralism, individualism, notions of the self, progress, democratization – I am more confused than ever before and realise that I should have declined the invitation again.

3. The most intimidating of all, however, was the notion of "religion in South Africa." It involves such a rich, varied and complex reality that it would simply be impossible to claim to cover the whole terrain in a single contribution. Even to limit the notion to "the church in South Africa" is still far too pretentious – the spectrum including the whole range of churches, from the many African Independent (or Indigenous) Churches to the large Roman Catholic Church, is far too diverse to be understood and described within one short case-study. Any attempt to say something that applies to "religion" or even "the church" in South Africa will be so general and abstract that it is almost meaningless, and any attempt to make it more accurate will die the death of a thousand qualifications. I therefore suggested the even more limited notion of "mainline Protestantism," since I know the Reformed Churches and the ecumenical South African Council of Churches from my own experience over many years, and since there are many similarities between the Reformed Churches and the other mainline Protestant Churches.

4. In itself, this is however already too difficult a task. The history of the Reformed Churches in South Africa has often been described as "a story of many stories." Which story one hears always depends on whom one asks to tell the story. During the apartheid years, the separate worlds in which we lived as South Africans were mirrored in our separate churches, convictions, spiritualities and practices. This was also the case with other Protestant denominations. Over the last few years, however, the radical social transformation processes have made this situation even more complex. Within single churches, experiences and responses to what has been happening are

varied and diverse. Even the Reformed Churches and the ecumenical Protestant stream have been changing so radically and continuously that it has become extremely difficult to understand adequately just how for example the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, to which I belong, is responding to modernity.

5. The fact is therefore that no one would probably be able to treat this theme properly. The situation of the church in South Africa is simply too complex. Any number of different South African scholars would have given so many different answers to the same question. In the letter of invitation, Kees van Dongen already completely accurately described the relations in South Africa between religion, modernity and development as "a fascinating puzzle."

Zuid-Afrika is een heel interessante case omdat daar bij mijn weten van alles door en naast elkaar bestaat. Westerse vormen van moderniteit (maar dan veelal in sterk ge vulgariseerde versie, m.n. onder de opkomende zwarte middle class, maar ook onder arme blanken) die veelal samengaan met vasthouden aan traditionele religiositeit in blanke én zwarte kerken, maar óók met verdwijnen van religiositeit; tegelijkertijd ook een groot gebrek aan modernisering/ontwikkeling, m.n. in de rurale gebieden, gepaard aan traditionele beleving en praktisering van religie, maar ook in townships, waar je bij mijn wete zo ongeveer elke denkbare mate en vorm van religiositeit kan aantreffen. Kortom: een intrigerende puzzel wat betreft de verhouding tussen religie-moderniteit-ontwikkeling.

Indeed, "everything next to one another and mixed with one another." I am afraid that I cannot improve on that description, but only illustrate it more concretely.

"Collapsing into modernity" – South African churches after apartheid

6. Implied within these formal and apologetic remarks, however, there have already been at least *six more material claims* that I would like to develop somewhat more explicitly, before moving to some concrete illustrations of this fascinating puzzle from contemporary South African church life.

7. In the first place, there is no denial that *major social transformations* have been taking place in South African society over the last fifteen years. They have been radical, dramatic, comprehensive, and compared to many other societies in the world they happened almost overnight. The political transformation from apartheid to a democratic society based on a liberal constitution has been the most visible part of this transformation, but in reality the fall of the apartheid state has only been the tip of the iceberg, when the real and long-term effects of this transformation are considered. The country moved overnight into a process of what could be called *radical modernisation* and in many ways it still finds itself in the dynamics of this historical process. It is in fact too soon yet to look back – since everything is still in flux.

8. Secondly, the *churches* in South Africa were *part and parcel of this transformation*, of this dramatic process of becoming a modern, pluralist, democratic, free-market, secular society.

The churches, especially Protestant and in particular Reformed Churches were involved in the formation and justification of apartheid, in later phases described as "separate development."

Churches, including Reformed Churches, were deeply involved in the struggle against apartheid and for democracy, freedom, social justice, economic opportunities and development for all – in short, many of the ideals associated with Western-style progress and development.

Finally, the churches have been integrally involved in the social transformation itself, it is impossible to see the church as somehow separate from these historical and social processes, as if they are not completely part of society. What has been happening in and to society has been happening in and to the churches, there is no way of viewing them as institutions and actors with an existence of their own, in separation from the rest of society.

9. Thirdly, there is probably no single theoretical approach that can neatly analyse and describe what has been happening here, whether theories regarding modernity, secularism, pluralism, democracy, implementation of the rule of law, economic development and progress, or the role of religion. All these theoretical frameworks may contribute valuable insights and comparative experiences, but the specific combination of historical forces in this moment of history calls for ways of understanding South African realities that take the specific case and its concrete detail seriously. In short, theories applicable elsewhere may partly help to explain what has been happening in South Africa but no ready-made theory will probably be sufficient on its own. Theories of radical modernisation could probably be very helpful, but then (following Joas) seeing *modernisation as an ongoing process difficult to define*, rather than theories who speak about modernity as something known, or of modernisation as primarily synonymous with economic growth and technical progress.

10. Fourthly, in order to appreciate what has been happening in South Africa it will be of extreme importance to see it in a global perspective and to make use of contemporary theories of *globalisation*. The complex cultural, economic and political processes of globalisation impacting on the whole world are also having very real effects on South African society today. It is therefore helpful to see globalisation as in fact the intensified and accelerated form of modernisation (so Peter Berger and Samuel Huntington) – and it is in this form that South Africa today is being challenged and transformed by processes of modernisation.

11. Fifthly, this underlines the crucial insight that the churches in South Africa are themselves, as integral part of South African society, on the receiving end of these contemporary global processes of modernisation. They undergo these processes, they are recipients of these processes, they benefit from and suffer these processes, whether they want it, or not. They are not merely actors, but they are being acted upon. It is not as if they are totally free to decide whether they will contribute to modernisation, to development and progress. They themselves first of all undergo modernisation, development and progress in these particular forms. Their own convictions and values, their spiritualities and their practices are being affected by this modernising globalisation. They themselves experience both opportunities and challenges.

Accordingly, the more helpful question may be in which ways churches *resist* processes of modernisation and in which ways they accept them and attempt to contribute to them, strengthen them and *serve* them. In other words, the churches have no choice; they do not sit on the sideline. Together with the whole of South African society, they are already involved in these dramatic transformations, in these processes of modernising globalisation, and the question is only why and how they perhaps try to resist and why and how they perhaps try to support and serve these processes.

If our initial question would therefore go into the direction that we think the South African society is in some need of modernisation – perhaps even understood as economic and social development, as so-called economic growth and technological progress – and our question would therefore be whether the churches actively contribute to this historical project or whether they, through their beliefs and attitudes, spiritualities and practices, hinder and obstruct this process, in other words, if we would see the churches as potential partners in a comprehensive development project, then we may perhaps fail to appreciate fully the complexities of the South African realities. The fact is that the churches do not exist separately from the South African society, but are integrally part of its social fabric. They are themselves taken up in the processes of modernisation. Together with all of society, the churches are experiencing the dramatic "collapse into modernity" (Ulrich Beck; Anthony Giddens). The real question is *how they respond*.

12. Finally, it is necessary to unpack the term "church" that has been used so easily until now. The church exists in very specific, *concrete and visible, social forms*. Any attempt to answer the question how the churches respond to processes of modernisation should therefore attempt to distinguish

between different social forms of the church in order to consider more accurately and specifically how these different forms react to the collapse into modernity. It is in principle even possible that some social forms of the church may react differently from others, ranging from resistance to enthusiastic support – that the synod may support something which the believers may reject, or vice versa. A more complex understanding of church may therefore lead to more complex answers to the initial question. Hopefully the following questions, comments and considerations concerning three different social forms of the church could contribute to open up our discussion. For our purpose, the *three basic forms of the church* that will be distinguished are regular worship and local congregational life, the policies and practices of denominations and the ecumenical church, and the spirituality, witness and actions of individual believers.

Worship and congregations – and modernisation?

13. Does worship in mainline Protestantism churches in South Africa today contribute to resist modernisation, globalisation and development or to strengthen and support it? Does ordinary religious life in these congregations today – the structures, the programs, the activities, the fellowship, and the organizational fabric – hinder or serve comprehensive people-centered development? Is it in fact possible to satisfactorily answer questions formulated in such general and sweeping fashion?

14. How important is worship and congregational life for members of mainline Protestant Churches in South Africa? The regular worship of the local congregation is indeed of extreme importance for many South Africans, from many and diverse traditions and communities of faith. This fact in itself challenges the usefulness of applying theories of secularization and theories of the revival of religions in South Africa – religious life has never been absent and it is still strong and active today. Many South Africans indeed think of the local congregation, gathered for worship and celebration and organised to belong to one another and to support one another, when they think of "church." Particularly for members of the African Independent Churches and of many Protestant Churches, including many Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic Churches, such an understanding of "church" comes naturally. South Africans regularly attend church services and worship. This has often been demonstrated by statistics, sometimes to an extent that amazes observers.

15. The largest single Christian group in the country, the African Initiated Churches (also called African Independent or Indigenous Churches), can serve as example. The two major expressions of these very popular Churches, namely the Ethiopian and Zionist movements, are both radical forms of departure from mission Christianity. Ethiopian Churches broke away from mission control, segregation of white leadership from African membership, and the disinclination to advance Africans to positions of responsibility in the mission Churches. Zionist Churches were rooted in rejection of the structures of the exploitative colonial society and in attempts to serve the social and religious needs of the poor and illiterate, particularly in the disruptive settings of the industrial cities, and to give authentic African expression to religious experience. In many ways they offer physical healing, supportive communities, and spiritual solace to the disrupted newly urbanized people. Some of the best known, although not necessarily the most typical, of these Churches are Engenas Lekganyane's Zion Christian Church, at Moria, and Shembe's Church of the Nazirites, the AmaNazaretha. The AIC's include between a third and a half of the Africans in the land and together have more members than any other denomination. Many people are of the opinion that their vitality, their rootedness in African traditions, and their capacity for innovation will have a decisive influence on the history of church and society in the future of South Africa. They are clearly extremely important in South African society, and their impact on the everyday lives of many South Africans is enormous. But how, and why? Obviously primarily through their local presence, strong sense of belonging and circles of support, strengthened through the powerful impact of their regular worship services.

16. Is the same however true of Protestant congregations and worship? Worship is indeed popular and influential in mainline Protestantism, including the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. Although I have no empirical research to support this, it makes sense to claim, based on personal experience of participation in worship and observation of worshippers over many years that there probably exist complex reciprocal relationships between liturgy and life, between worship and ethics. The ways in which this happens may differ from one liturgical tradition to another and one form of worship to another, but several complex social processes seem to be at work, as social scholars who study symbolic forms and liturgical action have increasingly pointed out in recent years.

Based on what worshippers in our church themselves claim, worship seems to be able to form identity, collectively and individually, communities of character and characters within community; it seems to be able to subvert, undermine and challenge existing social constructions of reality, making it possible for worshippers to see with new eyes, to look in other directions; it seems to liberate from all kinds of fear and guilt and to empower for forms of service and love; it seems to form and strengthen new senses of community, of *koinonia*, creating new brothers and sisters and new possibilities of relationship; it seems to involve a sense of calling, of mission and purpose, of task and commitment; it accordingly seems to form and transform, to be able to strengthen existing identities and personalities and to be able radically to challenge, change and redirect existing forms of life, through powerful and lasting conversion. Any attentive observer who attends worship in our local congregation in Cloetesville outside of Stellenbosch will see these processes at work (recently described by the Practical Theologian from Princeton, Rick Osmer, in *The teaching ministry of congregations*, using this congregation as one of three case studies).

Many South Africans can and will share anecdotes and personal experiences of the impact of the gospel on their lives and the lives of others, with major implications for life together in society, also during the apartheid era and beyond. Clearly, worship matters.

17. Are there other indicators pointing in the same direction? The *obvious popularity of the spirituality industry* in present day South Africa could perhaps serve as further important indicator – but perhaps in the opposite direction.

Observers often point out that popular spiritual literature, also esoteric and inspired by New Age sensibilities, but certainly primarily Christian, forms the most lucrative sector of the publishing industry in South Africa today. So-called light spiritual reading – often ridiculed as ‘small pink books,’ referring to diaries, daily meditations, books focusing on words of comfort, inspiration, motivation and self-improvement – sells better than any other sector of publishing. Of course, many of these books are sold as gifts, and not necessarily read, yet it can scarcely be denied that they make popular gifts and that they obviously have some kind of popular appeal, given the present state of South African society. They clearly fulfill an existing need.

There can however be no doubt that the spirituality involved in this literature is not concerned with social and economic justice, with the eradication of poverty, with the human dignity of others, in short, with any form of development agenda. It is much rather a spirituality focused on the self, on the needs and fulfillment of the private individual. Perhaps the popularity of this literature today could be interpreted as one effect of modernisation that is working against involvement in development.

18. The popularity of this form of spirituality may however also raise new questions about the nature and popularity of many congregations, their worship and their actual roles in the lives of their members. Even if it is true that in many traditional local congregations, especially of mainstream Protestantism, and particularly of the so-called predominantly black South African churches, the worship certainly moves people to social involvement, to service and care and solidarity, questions should be asked whether this is indeed also the case in all forms of

contemporary worship, especially in the so-called macro- or mega-churches in the suburbs of the cities.

During the heyday of the apartheid years there was amazing empirical research published, sponsored by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa, on the nature of so-called "public worship," in other words religious broadcasts in radio and television, of which the results showed overwhelmingly how any form of public life and social involvement was completely absent from these forms of religion and worship. It is not impossible to imagine that empirical research today into many of the popular religious communities may perhaps show comparable trends – although there is no hard evidence already available, only interpretation based on oral reports.

19. How does this picture – including the popularity of congregations, worship, and spirituality – relate to modernisation and development? The popularity of worship and spirituality should certainly in no way be idealized as such. This process, precisely because it is so powerful and its potential impact so large, can also be destructive. The Christian religion is also a dangerous power, and has been such in South Africa. Scholars have shown, particularly in South Africa, how in fact "liturgy has been used to prevent the gospel from taking hold" (John de Gruchy). So, are these popular forms of worship, congregational life and spirituality in South Africa today *resisting or strengthening modernisation*? Is it hindering or contributing to development? Any answer will have to be informed guesswork, and will largely depend on how one understands modernisation and development. The complete picture is probably complex and ambiguous.

Denominations and the ecumenical church – and modernisation?

20. Secondly, for many people "church" refers primarily to the organisational, institutional structures and realities of *denominations and ecumenical bodies*. When they hear "church" they think primarily of the denomination, the confessional and traditional body to which they belong, and of which they carry the name. Particularly Catholic and Orthodox Christians see "church" in this way, but certainly also many so-called mainline Protestant Christians. For such Christians, "church" is associated with institutional activities and initiatives, and the church is visible in society in the form of its leadership, its representatives, its meetings and its declarations and services.

21. So, what is the actual response of Protestant denominations and ecumenical bodies regarding processes of modernisation and development? This question leads to interesting observations, this time however more concrete and empirical than in the case of worship and spirituality. Here, the dramatic effects of the radical social transformation processes are already most clearly to be seen. Modernisation has fundamentally altered the self-understanding, the identity and the role of denominations and ecumenical bodies in South Africa.

22. There is no longer an apartheid church or a form of state church, and this indeed represents a major change. There is no longer "a" church that claim to speak to government on behalf of anyone and there is no longer "a" church for the government to consult, should it feel such need.

The new democratic Constitution changed South Africa into a secular and pluralist society. The Constitution ensures religious freedom and prevents any position of privilege, describing South Africa as one sovereign democratic state founded on the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and advancement of human rights and freedoms; non-racialism and non-sexism; supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law; and universal adult suffrage, a national common voters roll, regular elections, and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness.

In a Bill of Rights the Constitution affirms the rights of all people in the country. Considered against the apartheid background, most of these rights represent the remarkable transformation the country experienced. The Bill affirms equality; human dignity; life; freedom and security of the person; protection from slavery; servitude, and forced labor; privacy; freedom of religion, belief

and opinion; freedom of expression; assembly, demonstration, picket and petition; freedom of association; several political rights; citizenship; freedom of movement and residence; freedom of trade, occupation and profession; and several rights concerning labor, the environment, property, housing, health care, food, water and social security; as well as a number of children's rights, and rights concerning education, language and culture, access to information, just administrative action, access to courts, and rights of arrested, detained and accused persons.

The common spirit in society therefore seems to be one of multi-religious tolerance and respect. The government and its official structures seem committed to treat all religions fairly and equally, irrespective of the number of the adherents. In practice, this often means that small religious groups seem overly represented in many bodies and structures. Most Christian churches seem to accept this new status, probably silently acknowledging the problematic nature of the role of some Christian churches in the apartheid era. Most churches definitely support the new Constitution and its values enthusiastically.

There is also no longer a struggle church. The ecumenical movement, very strong during the apartheid years when many churches were committed to their common struggle against apartheid, has lost most of its appeal and influence. There is no longer a common enemy, and most churches have withdrawn into their own spheres of denominational (if not congregational) activities. Attempts to recover the prophetic ecumenical spirit and to engage churches in a common struggle against for example HIV/Aids or the disastrous effects of the global economy have mostly proven to be without visible success. In general, the official churches show a spirit of cooperation towards the present government rather than one of prophetic distance on any issue.

23. Does this mean that no one now speaks publicly on behalf of religion or even the churches? Is there for example no longer any public voice of the churches to support state policies regarding development? Seeing this need, the government itself initiated several processes of consultation with religious leaders in order to develop "a Reconstruction and Development Program for the soul of the nation," as former President Nelson Mandela formulated the challenge. These include a National Religious Leaders' Forum, who regularly meets with the President and other government officials. It also includes a so-called Moral Regeneration Movement, focusing on moral issues, like corruption and moral formation. These meetings are in principle not different from many other consultations and talks by government, and they have not as yet produced any meaningful results.

24. In this regard, there has recently been an interesting process in South Africa to produce a so-called "Bill of Morals". It began as an initiative of Chief Rabbi Goldstein, who called for such a Bill during his inauguration. The idea was brought to the National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF), who presented it to President Mbeki during their regular meeting in May 2005. After some debate, also with several Cabinet Ministers, the NRLF appointed a study group, including Muslim and Hindu representatives, to enter into discussions with the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM), who had already been working on a so-called Charter for Positive Values. A concept document has now been drafted and is being discussed by several role players. The exact purpose, its final content and its possible use all still have to be determined. The argument was however that "the next stage of development as a new society" as South Africa enters its second decade of democracy, "is to articulate a moral vision that can unify, uplift and inspire us to build a great society." The "instrument that can best provide the framework for such a moral vision is a Bill of Morals, a document that would officially and nationally be recognized as containing the common moral principles of the vast majority of South Africans." Such a Bill could "provide the rallying point for the nation," help "to mould the national character," provide "the glue that binds us together as a society," be "an important vehicle for nation-building." "What other than a shared moral vision for the future can hold us together as a nation? Societies are held together by a shared moral vision and not by mere convenience. The continued survival and endurance of our new South Africa will depend on our combining to formulate a common moral and spiritual vision." Since South Africa is "a deeply traditional and religious society ... nothing in the Bill should

conflict with religious principles, which the vast majority of South Africans hold dear." The talk of a vast religious majority is pervasive through all the documentation of this initiative. So, although the language is not one of development, it is obvious that the fundamental idea is that religious convictions and practices should be mustered, one could perhaps even say instrumentalised, to contribute to people-centered upliftment, progress and moral life together.

25. Are the churches satisfied with this seeming lack of a public voice? From the side of the South African Council of Churches, a SACC Parliamentary Office has been founded "to monitor the proceedings in Parliament and the Constitutional Assembly and to convey to the relevant Portfolio Committees, Ministries and Theme Committees the concerns and opinions of the Churches."

When it was started in 1996 the expressed intention was to serve as witness, "strengthening the voices of the poor and marginalised groups in the public policy process." The original decision was therefore informed by "the ethical concerns of the Churches" and by the principle of "critical solidarity." This meant, said the SACC at the time, that they "would support government in the work of reconciliation, nation building, and reconstruction and development, but reserved the right to criticise government if it violated principles of justice and democracy or if it contravened the bill of rights."

In 2001 this principle was amended to one of "critical engagement." The amendment from "solidarity" to "engagement" is clearly intended to create some distance. This SACC Office monitors the development of legislation and policy, engages in advocacy issues, informs churches of current policy debates, conducts advocacy-training workshops and offers pastoral support to parliamentarians. The advocacy work is focused on four themes, namely building democratic institutions, securing justice for the poor, protecting children and nurturing families, and strengthening peace and security – obviously a development agenda.

What has been the impact of this initiative? This is hard to guess. Those involved in these activities witness to the fact that their voices are heard in every respect and are taken seriously by the lawmakers. Whether the process also has much of a reverse impact back on life in the churches themselves is even more difficult to determine.

Reception in the member churches, on the level of members, local congregation and normal church activities is notoriously problematic, particularly in Protestant churches, so that reception has been called the single most difficult challenge for ecumenism. This is probably also the case here. Whether churches really accept and appreciate this ecumenical initiative in such a way that it really impacts on the life of the churches remains an open question. The mere fact is that the Office today only has one full-time staff member, who is seconded by the Presbyterian Church from the USA and not by local churches perhaps points in this direction.

26. Does this represent the total picture? The answer is no, since looking at the largest *mainline denominations* in the country, one finds a truly impressive list of programs, projects, services, activities and engagements with the major social problems and human needs. There can be no doubt that the official churches are major role players in society in these fields and are having a vast impact on the concrete lives of many people, even if these activities are not always that well-known and publicly acknowledged. One only has to visit the websites of these churches to come under the impression of the scope and size of these almost routine activities – including the different Reformed Churches (about 18% of the people in the South Africa), the Roman Catholic (about 11%), the Methodist (about 9%), Anglican (about 6%), Lutheran (about 4%), and Presbyterian Churches (about 2%), in addition to smaller denominations and bodies. Such programs and projects typically include development and welfare work, justice and peace work, HIV/Aids activities, dealing with gender issues, addressing human rights violations, ecological initiatives, dealing with racism, taking care of the poor, sick, elderly, homeless, refugees, caring for children and contributing to education, and many others. Most of the churches have communication offices distributing information, discussion documents, position papers, and more.

Perhaps it is fair to conclude that these mainline churches are indeed making a major contribution to development by affecting the lives of many in society through their regular activities, however, in such a way that the right hand does not always notice what the left hand may be doing.

27. Perhaps a few concrete cases can illustrate the point better. The white Dutch Reformed Church could present a first remarkable example. A turning tide in this Church is clearly discernible and in many ways truly notable. Late in 2002 the General Synod of the DRC publicly committed itself to serve the country with its entire people and the continent with its complex challenges. Since then, a whole range of initiatives demonstrated the seriousness of this commitment – all of them directly related to what could be called a development agenda, concentrating on poverty and structural and systemic responses to its causes.

28. The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa offers a similar example, although less remarkable, since it has been consistently dedicated to a similar agenda. Already in 1982 The Dutch Reformed Mission Church drafted the Confession of Belhar, which was officially adopted in 1986, in which it commits itself to compassionate justice. It was through re-unification of the black Reformed Churches on the basis of this Confession that the URCSA was formed, with a Church Order very clearly written as an attempt to embody this kind of vision in the structure and activities of the church.

This of course raises the self-critical question how consequently and seriously the Church has been in living according to the Confession and Church Order, but the fact that it is clearly committed to such an agenda cannot be in doubt. This is a clear example where the conviction and spirituality, the liturgy and teaching, the beliefs and the practices of the denomination seem to embody a vision of human development.

29. That such an observation should not be generalized too easily is of course also obvious. There will be many congregations in the URCSA where these convictions and this spirituality are not as actively present and there may even be many believers that do not themselves share these beliefs and practices. Doctoral research conducted in several rural congregations of the URCSA in the Eastern Cape region has in fact demonstrated this fact (by Pieter van Niekerk, the same researcher who earlier conducted a national survey on poverty in the then Dutch Reformed Church in Africa together together with the well-known statistician and social scientist Mark Orkin, former head of Statistics SA and then appointed President of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa). Many members of these congregations are so completely caught in the power of poverty that they have no vision of ever escaping this life, for them or they children, and they seem completely unaware of the faith convictions of the church expressed in Belhar, in fact, they do not expect any compassion and help in their plight from either the church or from God. They simply accept their realities passively, without any vision or hope.

30. It is perhaps instructive to point to the way in which the Confession of Belhar informed the so-called Kitwe Declaration by the Southern African Alliance of Reformed Christians on worldwide economic injustice and ecological destruction. This Declaration in turn together with other voices inspired the so-called Debrecen decision of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to call a *processus confessionis*, a process of confession during which all members churches with their 75 million members were called upon to consider whether their faith is not being challenged by the realities of injustices and the state of the ecology. Finally, this process led to a strong commitment by the World Alliance in Accra, Ghana, to witness and action regarding these urgent crises in our global world today.

31. The DRC and the URCSA have already combined many of their diaconal activities, both on national and regional levels, in deliberate attempts to be more effective in serving their increasingly common agenda. In the Western and Eastern Cape this joint project is for example called Badisa,

but this is just one example amongst many new initiatives to be more effective in serving people in need through networking, co-operation and full integration of services.

There can be no doubt regarding the enormous extent of this work of these (and many other) mainline churches, the reach of their activities, the amazing amounts of money invested in their work, the sustainability over many years, the importance and reliance of the institutional structures that have been established, and the professional nature of the work. Studying their annual reports makes for impressive reading. In terms of some development debates the nature of these activities probably ranges from immediate and short-term relief work and charity to more long-term developmental work focusing on structural causes and seeking solutions through networking. It is also fair to say that these services of the churches are continuously focusing on new challenges, for example on the new faces of poverty shown as result of recent social and political developments.

It remains a question, however, also for these churches themselves, how close the ties are between these activities on the one hand and the local congregations and members on the other hand. Many people seem to be worried that the services become so professional, institutional and structural that they are increasingly alienated from any awareness and feeling of involvement on the level of ordinary congregations and members. In recent years, the URCSA and the DRC have together been involved in many discussions on these questions, considering whether it is necessary and whether it would be effective to attempt to bring these development activities of the churches closer to congregations and to the lives and spiritual practices of the believers.

32. On a much larger scale, the different religious communities through the National Religious Leaders' Forum (NRLF) have become involved in a joint national project to co-ordinate their social services and are in fact approaching the national government with concrete proposals how the churches could better be of service to the whole of South Africa. Their joint body known as the South African National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD) has been active for several years now – and serves as a clear illustration of recent initiatives to strengthen what could be called a national development agenda.

This body in fact makes very strong claims form the crucial role of religious communities in South Africa, regarding development and "the building of a caring, democratic and equitable society through partnerships" (*Building a new South Africa. The building of a caring, democratic and equitable society through partnerships between the State and the National Religious Leaders' Forum (NRLF). A perspective from the National Religious Association for Social Development, 2004; also in other documentation*).

They argue that the government alone is not able to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment. Civil society, the private sector and faith based organizations have an important role in extending the reach of government programmes, together addressing the five key areas jointly identified by government and the religious sector, namely home and community based care, social capital and social cohesion, early childhood development, social housing, including emergency and transitional shelter, and skills training and access to information.

In general, the strategy strives to foster sustainable community development, including the fostering of social cohesion and the creating of a caring society, especially integrating the marginalized into communities.

33. It would accordingly probably be accurate to say that the religious communities on a national level are committed to these kinds of development ideas, that the mainline Protestant churches on national and regional levels also share these same ideals. It is probably even fair to speculate that many if not most congregations of these churches are on their own local scale also active in projects that fall within this overall vision. It is further quite probable that most church members of local congregations today – whether as a result of the social transformation processes and new public discourses, or not – also share these commitments. The critical question would be whether these members and even these local congregations are aware of or in any way integrated into these broader national initiatives, or whether the national networks do not follow policies, strategies and

practices of their own, without necessarily involving people on grass-root level, or depending on their convictions, spiritualities and practices.

34. Another very interesting ecumenical initiative is the work of the Economic Justice Network of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (EJN of FOCCISA). It is an ecumenical body, calling itself the implementing agency of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa. With eleven national Christian Councils affiliated to them, they claim to "represent the interests of 133 million people on the poorest continent." Over several years they have been active in national and international, even global ecumenical endeavors for economic justice, for example through developing advocacy strategies and interventions on a number of selected priority issues, undertaking research on issues of particular concern that could be useful in the advocacy activities of the national councils or their partner organizations, facilitating information gathering, dissemination and exchange on areas like debt, trade and food security, encouraging economic literacy programmes by churches at all levels, and liaising on behalf of these councils with similar networks in Southern Africa, on the continent and internationally. Although they work internationally, their present director (Malcolm Damon) works from Cape Town and is a minister of the URCSA.

35. What about the leadership of churches? The leaders of several major denominations have taken several initiatives to play increasingly active roles. For some this is nothing new. One only has to read the collected essays for Desmond Tutu in *Prophetic witness in South Africa*, the autobiographies of Beyers Naudé in *My land van hoop* and Willie Jonker in *Selfs die kerk kan verander* or the papers and sermons by Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane in *A world with a human face* to realise that the South African society always had leaders and prophets, also during the last years. New voices have however joined them, voices increasingly heard and dedicated to contribute to the renewal and transformation of this land. These voices would include Cardinal Wilfrid Napier OFM (RC), Bishop Ivan Abrahams (Methodist), Coenie Burger (DRC) and James Buys (URCSA), but also many others. It even seems already as if the public media, at least the newspapers, are taking these church leaders again more seriously and are paying more attention to the activities and positions of churches. It is especially remarkable that this group of increasingly prominent church leaders also involves many from Evangelical and Pentecostal circles, like Ray McCauley, the high-profile pastor of the large Rhema-congregation, that has been very visible in all kinds of public and political initiatives. There is little doubt that these church leaders have a public profile of being concerned about public issues, including poverty, HIV/AIDS and violent crime.

36. What about ordinary members of these churches? Again, many ordinary members of churches from all traditions and backgrounds in South Africa today increasingly seem to share this commitment. During July 2003 many Christian groups together organised SACLA II in Pretoria, the second South African Christian Leadership Assembly, to identify the so-called "giants" that South Africa is facing, the major public challenges, and to commit themselves to struggle against these giants. They identified HIV and Aids, violence, racism, poverty and unemployment, sexism, and family life in crisis. Well-known public figures, also from politics and business, were in attendance and gave plenary papers, and groups were set up to continue the work after the meeting. Although exceptionally large, SACLA II was just another of many recent initiatives demonstrating that South African Christians are again seeking to make a difference.

37. What about theology, theological studies and theological training? Again, there have been remarkable developments over the last years. Perhaps the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch University could serve as just one illustration of what probably applies in many other places as well. There is the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, that is involved in a wide range of projects (including issues like arms trade, social justice, reconciliation, race and gender questions, and human dignity); there is the Unit for Religion and Development Research involved in a range

of activities, from community projects (craft training for unemployed mothers; developing entrepreneurial skills; exposure to local tourism activities) to extensive research and publication; there is the Network for African Congregational Theology, empowering many congregations in Sub-Saharan Africa to deal with the challenges of amongst others the HIV/Aids pandemic; there is the Center for Bible Interpretation and Translation in Africa, training indigenous translators from many African countries involved in publicly distributing the Bible and its message; there is the Bureau for Continuous Theological Education and Research empowering ministers and members from a wide variety of congregations for their service and ministries, including whether consciously the work with the poor and with congregations of the poor; there is the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa, serving the public role of the ecumenical church through its various activities, networks and programs, including conferences (on development; on social capital), public lectures, publications, facilitating dialogue, co-operation and networking (with local and national government on social security; with local and international business on HIV/Aids), actively contributing to public policy, supporting culture and the arts, and encouraging research; there are people deeply engaged in community interaction, for example working in local congregations and communities creating "islands of hope"; there are biblical scholars involved in research projects on reading the Bible by ordinary people and in local communities; there are those giving basic theological training to the membership and leadership of African Indigenous Churches in the Cape Town area, empowering them for their roles of leadership in the community; there are others involved in inter-disciplinary research on church-state relations, on freedom of religion under the Constitution and on concretely implementing social and economic justice according to the Constitution; there are people involved in ecumenical initiatives regarding globalisation, economic injustice and ecological destruction; almost all staff members are active in two joint research projects dealing respectively with combating poverty and respecting human dignity; there are some who play leading roles in regional and national government initiatives to regenerate public morality and to strengthen responsible leadership; there are those who participate actively in public debates on themes like race, gender and diversity, homosexuality, or language politics and policies in tertiary education – many of these activities clearly have to do with a development agenda, broadly understood.

38. Of special interest and worth separate mentioning is the fact that new modules on church and development and theology and development have been introduced in recent years as central to the basic theological training of ministers (in Stellenbosch the responsible person was Kalie August, who wrote his own doctoral dissertation on the history of the Moravian Church in South Africa as a history of public church in the service of development). At other universities in South Africa similar and very popular courses on development were introduced, for example in Natal by Steve de Gruchy.

39. Again, of particular importance is also the extensive research of the Unit for Religion and Development Research, especially the theoretical work by Ignatius Swart on development debates in the ecumenical movement, on people-centered development and on so-called fourth generation development. He speaks and publishes widely on these theoretical discourses, adding a dimension to the church's theological reflection that is most certainly innovative and of crucial importance.

40. Finally, of special interest too is the extensive research and publication projects on ecological themes by Ernst Conradie, a colleague at the near-by University of the Western Cape. His work is widely read and used, not only in scholarly circles, but also in the popular market. He most certainly contributes to a change of consciousness regarding ecological justice and care and therefore issues of sustainable development. His work on the ecology has for example very recently been awarded the Andrew Murray prize for popular theological literature for 2007 – showing its popular impact. Several churches, including the URCSA, has made use of his

knowledge to develop liturgical material and to organise special worship services on specific Sundays in the year dedicated to meditation on creation.

41. So, what does this picture, regarding denominations and the ecumenical church, say about modernisation and development?

Individual Christians – and modernisation?

42. Finally, there is the social form of the church as individual Christian believers, as salt of the earth and light of the world, each involved in their own daily ways of following Jesus Christ and confessing the faith through their lives and actions. This is certainly the direction in which many people will think when they hear the question concerning the influence of the church in society and the impact of modernisation on the church. What are the attitudes of Christian people regarding modernisation and development? How do Christians resist or support these processes? How are they organising themselves, with or without others, to contribute to these initiatives, the structures and the organisations? In short, how do they experience processes of modernisation and how do they respond to these processes in contemporary South Africa?

43. How do they for example contribute to public opinion in this regard? In the two spheres of public life critical for the formation of public opinion, namely the public media – including public broadcasting, television, publishing houses and newspapers – as well as education – including public schools and the tertiary education system – there has been a remarkable silence on the part of the churches in recent years. This is obviously a gross generalization, but compared to the presence of the church in schools and the news during the apartheid and struggle years, the impression is overwhelming that the church has either retreated or been shifted to the margins. The voice of the church is seldom heard, public declarations on the part of the church are no longer made, church activities, initiatives and programs are no longer regarded as interesting news.

44. What happened, then, to the voice of believers – so clearly heard during the apartheid era as the voice of the voiceless? Still generalizing, a few comments may perhaps be fair.

45. Firstly, many Christians probably feel that the voiceless are no longer voiceless and no longer need spokespeople. An advocacy stance, earlier often called contextual and even prophetic, has been replaced by one of gratitude and loyalty, sometimes even uncritical loyalty. For completely understandable reasons many of the former Black and prophetic theologians now serve in Parliament or in very influential positions in government, business, public life and tertiary education. Frank Chikane, the former activist, leader of the Apostolic Faith Mission and General-Secretary of the SACC is only one prominent example. He now serves in the Office of the President as the right hand of President Thabo Mbeki. There are many others like Chikane – a list would read like a who's who of the church struggle, including amongst many others Brigalia Bam, Saki Macazoma, Itumeleng Mosala, Barney Pitso, Stanley Mogoba, Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, Allan Boesak, Tshenuwani Farisani, Arnold Stofile, Russel Botman, Takatso Mofokeng, Simon Maimela, Charles Villa-Vicencio, Chris Nissan. One could interpret this trend positively, arguing that this is precisely the presence of the church in the harsh realities of policy-making, money-making and governance that is urgently needed to contribute to development, but many would of course disagree, missing the element of critique and resistance.

46. Secondly, some of the Christians who had been involved in defending and practising apartheid clearly lost their nerve and now strive not to make the same mistake twice. Many of them argue that faith and politics do not and should not mix. Many have clearly lost all interest in public issues, in social responsibility, in political involvement and in a calling in everyday life. They have become apathetic and uninvolved. For a confessional tradition like the Reformed tradition for example – where vocation to serve, public life and social responsibility all lie at the heart of the

Christian life – this spelt a major crisis of identity and sense of purpose. It has become a serious question for many whether it is still possible to be Reformed, in any traditional sense of the term. This is clearly an effect of the internalization of assumptions supposed to belong to modernisation. People who share these assumptions would probably feel that it does not belong to the task of the church to strengthen or serve development activities either.

47. Thirdly, in the earliest years of the transformation, the church as church did not visibly, fully and enthusiastically participate in the reconstruction of the new society. In many ways and for many reasons it was not expected of them, and they were not invited. Church leaders did not play active roles in the initial negotiations, they were not there discussing the new Constitution, and they did not participate in the crucial debates on television and in the newspapers about the future of the country. They were onlookers, rather than participants. Even when the church was present, for example in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was an ambiguous presence. While Archbishop Desmond Tutu as chairperson clearly played an incredibly influential and widely respected role as a spiritual person and leader, the official churches did not escape the process without many hesitations, questions and ambiguities.

48. Fourthly, new forms of Christian spirituality are growing popular who support and undergird these new forms of apathy regarding South African realities and public life. Berger and Huntington have demonstrated what many others have also already argued, namely that "evangelical Protestantism, especially in its Pentecostal version," is one of the major carriers of contemporary cultural globalisation. They document how American-style Pentecostal Protestantism impact on many regions, societies and continents, leading to individuation and an increasing disregard for tradition and collectivity. According to them, this should be understood as "the perduring challenge of modernisation, albeit in an intensified and accelerated form." Paul Gifford describes this process by using the notions of 'externality' (intricate dependence on external links, partnerships and support) and 'extraversion' (external relations creating and sustaining domestic African groups). He uses these terms to refer to the increasing links between African societies and the rest of the globalising world, particularly America, showing that this is of special importance to understand the role of churches, since they often have very strong external links.

For all the talk within African church circles of localisation, inculturation, Africanisation or indigenisation, he says, external links have become more important than ever. Through these links the churches have become a major, if not the greatest single, source of development assistance, money, employment and opportunity in Africa. These links – bringing ideas, status, power, structures and resources – operate for different churches in different ways, at different levels (Gifford).

He finds this applicable to all churches, from Catholic, through mainline Protestant to Evangelical and Pentecostal, albeit in different ways, but in contemporary South Africa it is of special importance regarding the nature and local impact of Pentecostal spirituality. Gifford is at pains to assure that he does not see the American impact as an imperialist plot or conspiracy. It is rather the result of the church growth movement and of what he calls "the mission industry," but the impact is still enormous. He specifically refers to AD 2000 and Beyond (with the related Joshua Project 2000 and the Celebrate Messiah 2000 projects) and the Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE, with its South African GCOWE '97, held in Pretoria), but it is possible to describe many similar initiatives targeting South Africa in similar ways.

(L)ocal churches, groups and people do not lose any obvious autonomy, but are nevertheless subjected to forces tending to homogenise them or make them part of a concerted strategy. The key players are all American. The entire ethos is also American; its stress on quantification, sophisticated software, programmes, planning, networks, reports, publicity, assessment – all are unthinkable outside its origins in the United States. It brings with it a discourse, a set of images (in

our terms, a theology), diffused through workshops, conferences and literature. The focus is totally on evangelism – and in one sense Christianity is here reduced to numbers, planning and marketing. This is the sector of Christianity with the crusading missionary thrust. This Christianity, though not socially involved and not even particularly politically aware, necessarily plays a socio-political role in contemporary Africa. This parachurch movement, because of its paradigm-enforcing power, has had an enormous effect on Africa's mainline sector as well. The sign and symbol of this reinforcement may be the US-style supermarket at one end of the boulevard and the US-style church at the other end (Gifford).

The implications are clear. This powerful process produces new kinds of Christian people and new kinds of churches, often mega-churches, large congregations and networks, with new spiritual visions, agendas and commitments – which not always call for traditional forms of public service and responsibility, but often rather for privatistic and individualistic, sometimes even self-serving, -rewarding and -enriching forms of life and engagement. The collapse into modernity in its present form of American cultural and economic hegemony also impacts on South African society. One only has to observe the role of paid television channels, televangelism and American religious broadcasting, many of them proclaiming a success -, prosperity - and wealth-gospel.

49. The recent survey by The Pew Forum on Religion and the Public Life called "Spirit and power. A 10-country survey of Pentecostals" (October 2006) also included South Africa. It is however not possible to gain any direct information concerning the attitude of South African Pentecostals concerning development issues. When asked about moral and social issues, the emphasis is very much on sexuality, alcoholism, gender issues and abortion. When asked about social and economic issues, the interest is primarily in trust of other people and of institutions and on being careful when dealing with others, on their own financial situation and economic prospects, on views of God as a key determinant of economic success, and on the importance of education. When asked about perceptions of political problems, only three are mentioned in the report, namely corruption among political leaders, moral decline and conflict among religious groups. It would however be unreliable to draw any conclusions based on the absence of development themes, since the questions may not have included such issues.

50. Once again, what does this picture, regarding ordinary believers and their attitudes and convictions say about modernisation and development?

Concluding reflections: actual church practices and development?

51. In short, what collapsed in South Africa at the beginning of the 90's was much more than just the apartheid regime. What has happened in South African society over the last decade or more was much more dramatic and radical than just the change of government or the transformation of the political sphere. The whole fabric of society itself has been radically transformed and the process is still continuing. It is indeed possible to argue that South Africa collapsed into modernity itself, almost overnight. Social, economic, cultural, educational, legal, intellectual, and indeed political transformations that took centuries to develop in some other countries, particularly in the West, have been happening here within just more than a decade.

Of course, the apartheid regime did collapse and the political transformations took the central stage. The 'miracle' of the 'rainbow-nation' was in the first place and certainly in the first phase a political miracle. During this initial phase the church was certainly involved in a variety of ways and forms. The collapse of the apartheid regime and the miraculous political transformation, however, only paved the way for the real, radical and lasting changes, affecting every fiber of society. The government's own overview of the first decade of democracy covers a full range of social, economic, legal, security, cultural, health, educational, human development, nation-building and other achievements and challenges – and hidden behind these enthusiastic descriptions, ideals

and commitments, the face of accelerated and intensified modernity is obvious for anyone to discern.

52. In sum then, what has been happening with mainline Protestantism in South Africa during these processes of modernisation? How do they respond, and what specifically are their attitudes regarding any development agenda? These questions deserve careful and complex responses. In many ways the impact *on* the church was much stronger than the impact *of* the church on society – the impact of the rapid and radical processes of transformation into a democratic, pluralist modern society, deeply affected by the present worldwide collapse into cultural, economic and political globalisation.

Still, the church in South African society remains a very important presence with a major impact on the lives of many and on the very nature of everyday life, cultural, moral, social, economic, and political. Faith convictions, religious practices, personal spirituality and piety, beliefs and attitudes of religious people most certainly play a major role in the social fabric of South African society – yet is it possible to describe this presence more closely, even to ask specifically about the importance of all of this for the development policies and activities of the government and of development agencies?

One could only attempt to answer by way of informed observation and generalisations, in the absence of properly researched and documented information.

53. In the first place, the obvious importance of congregational life and the regular, loyal and often enthusiastic attendance of worship surely indicate that the liturgy and spirituality of the Christian tradition is important for many, and in measurable ways even increasing in importance. At the same time, the story is very complex and can only properly be told with many twists and turns. There are different forms of worship, different forms of spirituality, different reasons why they grow in popularity and influence – and obviously widely diverse forms of impact that they have on society. In Gifford's words, South African society is also inhabited and influenced like Africa in general by "different Christianities" at one and the same time. Some forms – propagating individual success, personal happiness, and own achievement – obviously work against agendas of care and people-centered development. Some forms – propagating human dignity and rights, social and economic justice, and eradication of poverty – obviously serve and justify agendas of care and people-centered development. Ironically, all these forms of "different Christianities" may be the result of processes of modernisation.

54. Secondly, what is the actual contribution of official denominations and the ecumenical bodies on development? Again, careful distinctions are called for. The impact of modernisation on these churches has been strong. – to the point where it seriously challenged their self-understanding and even led to forms of what has been called self-secularisation. Although by far the majority of South Africans are confessing Christians, there is on the surface not much Christian discourse, rhetoric, values and ideals to be discerned in political life. The churches seem to feel that they have to be silent in public. The new sacred canopy rather seems to be provided by modernisation itself, by liberal democracy, strongly individualistic human rights and the highly regarded Constitution.

55. In this regard, the widely respected South African missiologist and public figure J.J.F. (Jaap) Durand recently published a very insightful analysis of this process, particularly applying it to the experiences of Afrikaans-speaking Churches in South Africa today, in an essay on "Secularism, pluralism, and the Afrikaner Churches in the twenty-first century," but later more developed more fully in a monograph called *Ontluisterde wêreld. Die Afrikaner en sy kerk in 'n veranderende Suid-Afrika* (2002). He refers to forces, other than the political, that have been "unleashed" during the last decades. These forces "can be rubricated under the headings of secularism and pluralism." They have taken on such proportions that the leadership in these Churches "is left baffled, uncertain how to cope with these forces and, paradoxically, with the new forms of spirituality these forces

engender." This bewilderment paralyzes them, "rendering them incapable of dealing with" issues of transformation, he argues. His description of the nature of the present transformations is certainly accurate and helpful. Modernity, and specifically the forces of secularism and pluralism, has been unleashed in South Africa. The title *Ontluisterde wêreld* deliberately alludes to Weber's notion of disenchantment, to describe the quality of life under conditions of modernisation.

One specific effect of this form of modernisation is of course the intellectual challenges it presents to more traditional faith convictions. Also in this respect, the powers of modernisation have certainly been unleashed in many South African churches. It is almost as if many of the developments within critical scholarship during the 19th century have only reached ordinary members of these churches since the end of apartheid. Both scholarly theological and more popular books dealing with these questions have overnight been published in numbers, with titles like *Die omstrede God* (*The controversial God*, an extensive documentation of an internet discussion), *Geloof sonder sekerhede* (*Faith without certainties*, by a prominent philosopher), and *Die Nuwe Hervorming* (*The new reformation*, essays with critical voices claiming that they represent a new reformation movement in history), *God? Geloof in 'n postmoderne tyd* (*God*, with a question mark). There have been regular debates in newspapers concerning the historical Jesus and the resurrection of Christ. In another study called *Doodloopstrate van die geloof* (*Faith's cul-de-sac*) Durand also dealt with some of these challenges.

It is still too soon to interpret and evaluate the importance of these developments for the mainline churches in South Africa. It may indeed still turn out to be an important phase of secularization and self-secularisation, also with implications for their public role and their commitment to social agendas, but it is not yet possible to know.

56. Thirdly, in the economic sphere one must already acknowledge the absence of Christian language and commitment in the real corridors of power – although that was also the case during the time of apartheid and the struggle, when all attention was only focused on the state and political power. The free market in the form of global capitalism seems to be the reigning idol, proclaimed and celebrated through popular culture and eagerly worshiped by many, even in many churches.

This does not however imply that the church is completely silent. Some Churches, including the Ecumenical Movement in the form of the SACC, the Roman Catholic Church, and many member Churches of the WARC indeed play strong advocacy roles. They even attempt to be prophetic voices in the economic sphere, in the way they did in the political sphere during apartheid. Internally, much is done by way of study, analysis, discussing possibilities, education and distributing information. All of this, however, still seems to have little impact, if any, on the realities of the global economy.

Perhaps this is precisely the point, namely that the impersonal, faceless nature of the global economy leads to marginalization and exclusion, especially of Africa. Even governments lose their power, if not their will, to intervene meaningfully. If the economy is the real battlefield, determining the quality of life of most people in society, then the conclusion should probably be that the church does not yet have much of an impact.

Economic development has of course been at the heart of the transformation in South Africa, and even more so during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki. One government initiative after the other has been framed in terms of development – the original Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Growth, Employment and Redistribution plan (GEAR), as well as more recent initiatives. South Africa was of course also deeply involved with others in formulating visions for the development of Africa, including the African Renaissance, the present New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the United Nations Millennium Goals (to eradicate poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and empower women; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development).

Although these are national and even international programs and global and comprehensive ideals, it is probably fair to say that South African believers have been and still are supportive of most of these visions and goals. The enthusiasm for some was definitely higher – the RDP and the African Renaissance for example were strongly supported by churches and people as visions to which they were deeply committed. GEAR was more controversial and NEPAD and the Millennium Goals are probably further away from everyday reality and practices.

57. One specific economic issue with which many mainline churches have been involved is the proposals for a Basic Income Grant (BIG) for all South Africans. The idea is that such a grant would be affordable since it would fact be funded by the more privileged citizens, but that it could make a very meaningful contributions in the lives of really poor people and households, in spite of the fact that the amounts involved are very small. A well-known supporter of this idea is Pieter le Roux, the director of the Center for Social Development at the University of the Western Cape and the supervisor of both Dirk and Claudia Haarmann, the Lutheran ministers who are themselves deeply involved in a similar initiative in Namibia. Le Roux often speaks about the BIG during church meetings, he has been invited to address synods and ecumenical bodies, and there is widespread support for this idea in church circles, although it has not been officially accepted as public policy by the government. The whole process however provides an instructive case study of how mainline Protestant churches can become conscious of and even supportive of a very specific economic project that could perhaps eventually contribute to concrete development actions. Even if this would not be accepted and implemented by government, the initiative most certainly focused the attention and discourses of many people in the churches on the immediate plight of the poor and on practical but systemic steps to do something about that.

58. Regarding the economy, one more perspective involving another economist with support in the churches may perhaps also be instructive. Sampie Terreblanche, a retired professor from Stellenbosch University, published a widely read and influential, albeit controversial, study called *A history of inequality in South Africa 1652-2002* (2002). It offers a detailed historical reconstruction of the developments in the country from systemic exploitation to systemic exclusion. He analyses the complex relationships between power, land and labour through six successive periods of history – from slavery and colonialism to a final phase that he calls "a new accumulation strategy: increased globalisation and privatisation." He is very critical of what he calls "the inability or unwillingness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to uncover the truth about systemic exploitation" and the present "rise of a black elite, and its tendency towards elitism and self-enrichment." His criticism is already directed against the GEAR strategy too. He gave witness before the TRC with concrete proposals, but they were not accepted for the final recommendations. In this study, he develops these proposals as "working towards a social democratic version of democratic capitalism" as the only way to get rid of the legacy of colonialism, segregation and apartheid. He pleads for nothing less than "a new power shift," although he seems skeptical of the necessary political will to achieve this, today. He is of course not the only one who suggests that such radical socio-economic transformation is in fact needed in South African society, but the fact that he is well-known and respected in the churches and that he is often invited to speak to ministers, theologians and church-people, has the result that these radical proposals are being discussed in church circles. It is obvious that he calls for much more than any normal development agenda to face the real structural challenges of the South African economic realities.

59. Finally, are believers contributing development discourses in the sphere of the public media and the formation of public opinion? The answer is again ambiguous, but probably no. Perhaps understandably, Christians and churches are not seen to be part of the mainstream of voices forming and informing public opinion in South Africa today. In a way this is remarkable, since by far the majority of citizens are confessing Christians and probably deeply religious, but then again

there are good reasons explaining this trend, including the privatised role of religion in typically modernised, secular societies.

Again this is important, at least if the development theories also represented by Ignatius Swart are correct. According to him (explicitly following David Korten's theories of third generation and especially fourth generation development approaches) the most powerful contribution that churches could make to development follows from the fact that churches (at their best) can represent "a politics of ideas," the fact that they can contribute as "value institutions" in the "unlimited space of social life," where they impact through "the power of their ideas, their values, their transformed relationships and their communication." What churches can do best, according to this approach, is "to appeal to and change the attitudes and consciousness of people across boundaries and cultures." Churches can become "a significant if not indispensable actor in promoting but also resisting the implementation of particular values viewed as the precondition and foundation for meaningful development."

If, therefore, churches, even in the form of individual believers, are not seen as active role players in the formation of public opinion – most probably as a result of the impact of processes of modernity and self-secularisation – then it is obvious that they will also be unable to fulfill this crucial role in fourth generation development.

60. So, what about civil society? There can be little doubt that the church is very active and crucially important as actor in civil society. What is true of so many other societies in the African continent also applies here. Many recent studies have shown this. The activities, funding, involvement, social care and welfare, poverty relief, health services, educational contributions, justice and peace work, and much more in many ways all together form the heart of the functioning of everyday life in South African society. Many local congregations, many denominations and many initiatives of groups of dedicated and caring people do this in collaboration with all kinds of NGO's and international development agencies, churches, or partner congregations. The number of these activities is hard to imagine. They seem to exist everywhere. This is of course a major presence, recently leading the state and the private sector to seek for more forms of serious partnership and cooperation, since they realise only too well that without this involvement of the church important parts of life in South Africa would simply be impossible and non-existent.

61. In this regard, it may be interesting to conclude with two very important recent contributions. Firstly, The speeches of President Thabo Mbeki, many of them available in the volumes *Africa, the time has come* (1998) and *Africa, define yourself* (2002), are very instructive to understand the national agenda. His speech at the occasion of the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture on July 29, 2006 is in this regard particularly instructive.

He speaks about the common wish of many South Africans that a new and moral society will be born. His rhetoric is explicitly a language of religion and morality, even of explicit faith and religious practices. "I believe that the great masses of our country everyday pray that the new South Africa that is being born will be a good, a moral, a humane and a caring society." He repeatedly quotes the Bible, since it teaches "the spirit of ubuntu" – the spirit of living in community with others, not withholding the good from others by saying no to them, not devising evil against others and causing them harm of adopting their evil practices.

He appeals to Nelson Mandela who many years ago said that our country needs an "RDP of the soul," a Reconstruction and Development of its soul. In fact, he contrasts this appeal with the economic and political "Reconstruction and Development Programme that constituted the core of the election manifesto of the ANC in the first democratic elections. At the time, they attempted to "change the material conditions of the lives of our people, but (we) made no reference to matters of the soul." These material objectives, he says, were and remain critically important and South Africa must continue to pursue them, yet "all revolutions ... are in the end and in essence concerned with human beings and the improvement of the human condition," and for that reason

it has now become important to say the "human fulfillment consists or more" than the material conditions envisioned in the original DRP document. "Human beings also have spiritual needs" and "all human societies also have a soul." The question that arises, he says, "for those among us who believe that we represent the good, what must we do to succeed in our purposes?"

In the heart of his speech, he then argues against greed, against "individual acquisition of material wealth becoming the defining social value in the organization of society." After liberation, he says, this has become the dominant social value, affecting the entirety of our population, and this fact forms the heart of present challenges in society. "The new order born of the victory in 1994 inherited a well-entrenched value system that placed individual acquisition of wealth at the very centre of the value system of our society as a whole. In practice, society assumed a tolerant or permissive attitude towards such crimes as theft and corruption, especially if these related to public property." For him, this belongs to a capitalist logic. "The values of the capitalist market, of individual profit maximization, tend to displace the values of human solidarity. Destroy relations of 'kinship, neighborhood, profession and creed,' replacing them with the pursuit of personal wealth by citizens who become atomistic and individualistic."

Put differently, he attributes these destructive developments to the impact of modernisation – and he describes this change in values in powerful, almost religious symbolism. "Thus everyday and during every hour of our time beyond sleep, the demons embedded in our society, that stalk us at every minute, seem always to beckon us towards a realizable dream and nightmare. With every passing second, they advise, with rhythmic and hypnotic regularity – get rich! get rich! get rich!" For many who want to escape poverty, the message is communicated that they should "get rich at all costs." In this process, publicly exhibiting personal wealth has become the means to communicate publicly that one is a worthy citizen of the community, "the very exemplar of what defines the product of a liberated South Africa." Manifestations of wealth now determines individuality, happiness and self-fulfillment, the meaning of freedom is now defined by "the designer labels on the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the spaciousness of our houses and our yards."

His point is clear. The problem is not merely evil, but the new value system that is redefining what being human means, and with that also undermine or redefine all other social values that underlie our life together. "The cult of success has replaced a belief in principles. Society has lost its anchor. Nothing can come out of this except the destruction of human society, negating the most fundamental condition of the existence of all human beings, namely the mutually interdependent human relationships without which the individual human being cannot exist." The Bible, however, teaches that human life is about more than the economy and material considerations. "I believe that as a nation we must make a special effort to understand and act on this. When we talk about 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. We must place at the centre of our daily activities the pursuit of the goals of social cohesion and human solidarity. We must strive to integrate into the national consciousness the value system contained in the world outlook described as ubuntu. We must say that the Biblical injunction is surely correct, that 'Man cannot live by bread alone.'"

Again, it is quite extraordinary how he appeals to religious conviction, spiritual commitment and attitudes and practices of faith to contribute to what certainly could be described as people-centered development.

62. Secondly, Allan Boesak, a major figure during the anti-apartheid struggle, published a comprehensive study called *The tenderness of conscience. African Renaissance and the spirituality of politics* (2005). He is a theologian and minister, but writes this study as a social and political commentator. He engages critically with President Mbeki's earlier vision and call for an African Renaissance. Supporting this vision and call, he is critical of a lack of historical awareness of what really took place during the struggle and as a result thereof a lack of appreciation of the nature of the present challenges and the way forward. For Boesak, both the struggle itself and the way forward today

depend on what he calls "a spirituality of politics". As a believer and theologian from the Reformed tradition, he also calls this "the tenderness of conscience" in the Calvinist tradition. In many different ways, in eloquent and persuasive and often moving ways, he makes the same rhetorical appeal again and again through all the chapters of the book, for such "a spirituality of politics." He begins his analysis with an overview of the African situation, calling for "a politics infused with compassion." At stake in Africa and in leadership in Africa is what we understand under "the soul of politics." He speaks about "political morality," about "the spiritual quality of our politics," about "moral leadership." In the second chapter he discusses the notion of an African Renaissance itself, under the theme "in search of the African soul." He speaks – affirming Mbeki – of the "rediscovery of our soul as the beginning of our rebirth as a continent." He looks rather critically at the so-called miracle of the rainbow nation and the work of the TRC. The present realities and the shocking statistics warn us against "a politics of delusion." An adequate response to Aids, in particular, "has a spiritual dimension to it government cannot hope, and cannot be expected, to give, and about which, frankly, our politicians know precious little. It has to do with our own reading and understanding of the Scriptures, our judgment of our own prejudices, our capacity to love our neighbours as ourselves. All this has to do not just with ignorance but with a sinfulness no government campaign can adequately address." In the history of the struggle, he argues, South Africans have benefited from "a spiritual dimension" and "a spiritual tradition" that it is impossible to do without in future. He clearly writes with prophetic passion. "What kind of country does South Africa want to be? ... It is not a question of political common sense only; it is a question of morality." The church therefore needs the courage to criticize government, to speak "against an awakening that speaks of poverty but not of the poor; of the soul of Africa but not of its salvation; of politics but not of its spirituality." The third chapter continues the same kind of argument and rhetoric, applying the language of spirituality, faith and prophecy to the realities of economic globalisation. The next three chapters then turn the focus from Africa more specifically to South Africa, but in exactly the same way, remembering the crucial role of faith in the struggle for freedom and proclaiming its crucial role in today's search for reconciliation, transformation and a new future. In a final chapter, he very explicitly charts a possible course for what he calls "a spirituality of politics" without which our country and our world are doomed. It is in this chapter that he draws on Kuyper's "tenderness of conscience," but also on several other voices arguing for the infusion of spiritual values in public life, everywhere.

63. These examples obviously demonstrate that some of the most influential thinkers in the country, both from the side of politics as well as from the side of the churches, are convinced that firstly, in spite of and perhaps even as a result of dramatic processes of modernisation, economic and social development in South Africa is not being achieved in the way South Africans would wish, and that secondly, there are resources available in the form of faith and spirituality that could indeed contribute towards more people-centered development.