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THE ROLE OF NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: BLACK LABOR MOVEMENTS AND THE PROPHETIC CHURCH IN THE SPIRAL OF THE APARTHEID STATE, 1980-1989¹

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Against enormous odds, non-violent resistance proved to be a major factor in the downfall of apartheid in South Africa, and the establishment of a democratic black majority government, despite predictions that the transition could come about only through a violent revolutionary cataclysm. Two explanatory factors contributed to the downfall of apartheid. The first factor was the ability of the anti-apartheid opposition to take advantage of the system's economic dependence on a cooperative black labor force that mobilized and organized itself to bring apartheid structures to a virtual standstill throughout the 1980s. The second factor was the long tradition of non-violent resistance, which has deep roots in what will be termed a prophetic mode of expression. This expression was nurtured by church leaders of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). More broadly, this article seeks to help fill a telling gap in academic literature and provide insight that will enable policymakers and others to comprehend, promote, and reinforce the positive contribution that religious or spiritual influ-

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ences can bring to conflict resolution and mediating conflict in deeply divided societies. Finally, this article, based upon the logic and evidence of the South African case, offers attributes religious organizations need to possess to advocate and mediate change in society.

INTRODUCTION

On April 27, 1994, millions of South Africans, of all racial and class backgrounds, voted in their country's first democratic election, thereby ending forty-five years of formal apartheid rule and over three hundred years of segregated rule. The 1994 elections swept to power by an overwhelming majority the African National Congress (ANC), the continent's oldest liberation movement. Never before had such a powerful and highly industrialized state been overthrown from within. That the system of apartheid gave way to a peaceful negotiated settlement is one of the great miracles in human history, and flies in the face of most analyses that predicted fundamental change could only come about by means of a violent revolution. The role of non-violent resistance was one of the critical factors in this fundamental change, with many observers referring to it as the largest grassroots eruption of diverse non-violent strategies in a single struggle in human history (Zunes 1999, 138; Wink 1987, 4).

That non-violent resistance was such a major factor is even more significant given the fact that movements for fundamental change in South Africa faced unprecedented obstacles (Zunes 1999, 163). The system of apartheid was amongst the most highly institutionalized and legalized system of segregation known to modern man, and it was accompanied by a level of human rights abuses that is essentially unparalleled. Opponents of apartheid faced a complex web of regulations, which produced a rigid stratification system that severely limited dissent by the oppressed majority. Apartheid South Africa defied most traditional political analyses, due to its unique social, political, economic, and strategic position. It practiced one of history's most elaborate systems of internal colonialism, with a white minority composed of less than one-fifth of the population in absolute control. The ruling party was led by racials who possessed an unusual level of political sophistication. They controlled some of the world's richest mineral deposits, including one-third of the earth's known gold reserves. A modern military machine stood ready in an area that lacked any other large conventional force. Its internal security system was elaborate and repressive. As a modern industrialized state in an otherwise comparatively undeveloped region, South Africa's rulers created

a degree of economic hegemony, despite almost universal non-recognition of their legitimacy.

It was the paradoxical situation of being extraordinarily powerful and highly vulnerable that gave non-violent resistance its power (Zunes 1999, 138). Despite great mineral wealth and an increasing industrial capacity, South Africa's white minority regime found itself dependent on its black majority, its southern African neighbors, and the industrialized West, to maintain its high level of modernization.

THE ARGUMENT

With these enormous odds as part of the South African landscape, non-violent resistance proved to be a major factor in the downfall of apartheid in South Africa, and the establishment of a democratic black majority government, despite predictions that the transition could come about only through a violent revolutionary cataclysm. While there are many factors that caused the downfall of apartheid, this article will focus on two. The first factor was the ability of the anti-apartheid opposition to take advantage of the system's economic dependence on a cooperative black labor force. This black labor force mobilized and organized itself to bring apartheid economic structures to a virtual standstill throughout the 1980s. The second factor was a long tradition of non-violent resistance, which has deep roots in what will be termed a *prophetic mode of expression*. This expression was nurtured by church leaders of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). The SACC provided the values and norms that sustained black labor resistance efforts. I will show that religious organizations and denominations espouse varying modes of expression in politics depending on two sets of independent variables, the first being whether or not religious organizations draw upon traditional or alternative theological traditions—in other words, their *religious context*. The second independent variable that determines the religious organizations' mode of expression is the type of state apparatus the organizations find themselves in—in other words, the *political context*. The SACC found itself in an increasingly repressive state apparatus in 1980s South Africa. That political context, combined with its adherence to an alternative theological tradition, moved the SACC to challenge the state. The form of this challenge, the *prophetic mode of expression*, was combined with a large black labor force that was able to bring the apartheid regime to its knees and enter into a negotiated settlement. The result was the transition of the South African state into what is generally understood to be a partially consolidated democracy. I will proceed in the following fashion. First, a

brief discussion is in order to situate this article beyond power politics and to take seriously the influence that norms and values can have in statecraft. Second, the model will be explained which characterizes the prophetic mode of expression that the SACC adopted in its resistance efforts in South Africa. Third, a historical sketch will be provided to bring forth empirical evidence to support the theoretical framework. And finally, I will issue attributes needed by church actors to be positive actors for change in deeply divided societies.

BEYOND POWER POLITICS: TAKING THE ROLE OF VALUES AND NORMS SERIOUSLY IN STATECRAFT

With the decline of the East-West confrontation, future conflicts that will arise will not be rooted in defunct Cold War ideologies (Johnston and Sampson 1994, xvi; Borer 1998, 9). Instead, most conflicts will arise from clashes of communal identity, whether based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion. Such disputes tend to occur at the “fault lines”² between rival nationalities where societies are suffering economic strains and rising expectations (Huntington 1993, 23). These are the most intractable sources of conflict, and they are the sources with which most international relations material is least suited to handle.

The classical tools of power politics typically include information exchange, the often manipulative signaling of position, and one or more forms of negotiation. These measures are normally suitable for dealing with conflicts that relate to tangible material interests (Waltz 1959). Such interests are inherently divisible and, thus, subject to compromise. Non-material “identity-based” conflicts, on the other hand, are often not well understood by practical-minded diplomats accustomed to operating in the old East-West context of nation-state politics. What is required is not necessarily a shrewd understanding of interests of the various “rational” actors, but of the emotional stakes of the parties, which are often deeply rooted in history, and of their personal interpretations of such principles as self-determination, justice, and freedom.

Until very recently, nonmaterial “identity-based” conflicts were further exacerbated by the restrictions that international organizations placed on themselves against becoming involved in the internal conflicts of member states (Johnston and Sampson 1994, 4). This vacuum, coupled with the changing nature of conflict, resulted in an observable expansion of the role played by citizens outside of government—religious figures and spiritually motivated laypersons among them—by way of various forms of mediation and conflict resolution (Johnston and Sampson 1994, xvi).

Because individuals operating on a religious or spiritual basis have been particularly neglected in the study of international relations, their experience in non-violent resistance efforts against apartheid in South Africa is the focus of this article. Such persons and organizations are often better equipped to reach people at the level of the individual and subnational group, where inequities and insecurities are often most keenly felt, than are most political leaders who walk the corridors of power. They are also better attuned to dealing with basic moral issues and spiritual needs, at times extending beyond the boundaries of their own faith traditions.

While the divisive character of religion is widely recognized, its positive contributions to resolving conflict have often been focused on Latin America (Borer 1998, 10; Levine 1986 and 1992; Mainwaring 1986). This article builds on the Latin American literature to provide insight that will enable policymakers and others to comprehend, promote and reinforce the positive contribution that religious or spiritual influences can bring to conflict resolution and mediating conflict in deeply divided societies. To do this, South Africa is the focal point, with the examination of the role of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the black labor movement's nonviolent resistance efforts against apartheid. These actors, in this case religious, do not behave in ways that prevalent theories in international and comparative politics hold they should behave. These actors are driven by values. In the new international context, values, which often lie outside the understanding of Weberian social science, must be taken seriously by diplomats and others. Finally, based upon the South African case, this article offers attributes required by religious actors to be advocates for positive social change.

This article engages three bodies of literature. The first is the literature on political movements for social change. On reflection, most people would acknowledge that movements from the United States' black civil rights movement to the Polish Solidarity Movement had important religious elements to them. And yet, outside the contributions of observers of religious organizations in Latin America, the acceptance of the role of religion has frequently been ignored, or understudied, in academic and policy accounts of political upheaval (Borer 1998, xvii). The second body of literature consists of much recent work analyzing the specific reasons for the changing political context of the 1980s and 1990s in South Africa. Particularly, two specific characteristics set the 1980s apart from any preceding time in South African history. The first is the intensity of state repression, especially in the aftermath of "reform" programs that were deemed inadequate and insincere. The second is the

intensity of opposition to the government, both international and domestic, including the diffusion of protest throughout all aspects of South African black society.

While the first two areas of inquiry explain some aspects of the changes that occurred in South Africa, neither one treat religious organizations as primary units of analysis. When, if at all³, churches and other religious institutions are discussed, they are seen as explanatory factors, or independent variables, that in some way help explain other political phenomena. However, the third body of literature, known as “Religion and Politics,” treats religious actors as the primary units of analysis.

The Model: The South African Council of Churches as the Prophetic Mode of Expression

Jean Francois Bayart’s Collaborative-Complementary Conflictual Model

Even though the literature is not developed in international relations with regard to the role of churches in politics, the literature that does exist in large measure focuses more often on the role that religious organizations play in confronting repressive state structures. One of the leading voices in this area of focus has been the work of Jean Francois Bayart.⁴ He advanced the thesis that overtly political challenges by churches to the state were causally linked to the level of political repression of civil society (Bayart 1973, 514). In a study of church-state relations in Cameroon, Bayart argued that churches assume critical political functions when other civil society organizations that would normally perform these functions have been actively repressed (Bayart 1973, 515; Phiri 1996, 24). Once the state moves to the development of governmentally accountable political systems, civil society is reactivated.

During the apartheid regime in the 1980s, churches found themselves being drawn into a “spiral of involvement” (Borer 1998, 1994). This involved increased repressive measures by the South African government. The changed political context prompted an increased self-identification by churches as to their proper role. The SACC, through a series of progressively overt actions, came to full confrontation with the state by the mid-1980s. Bayart’s model, which is often termed a *collaborative-complementary-conflictual* framework, asserts that the more repressive the state, the more likely church actors confront or conflict with the state. Conversely, in partially open societies, churches adopt either a complementary or collaborative role. However, these roles, though components of the theoretical model, are not within the focus of this article.

*Charles Villa-Vicencio's Dominant-Alternative
Theological Traditions*

While Bayart's model has parsimonious value to understanding church-state behavior, the model does not take into account theological thinking within church organizations and bodies. One of the most significant contributions that systematically takes into account theological views within churches has been advanced by a prominent South African theologian, Charles Villa-Vicencio. His model, with roots in the Latin American experience with repressive authoritarian regimes,⁵ argues that churches change to align themselves with the state to oppose the state as a turn from dominant theological traditions to alternative theological traditions (Villa-Vicencio 1990, 25). According to this view, a double theological tradition resides uneasily in the Western Christian Church. Under the dominant tradition, which dates back to Emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan in 313 A.C.E., Christianity grew to be an important part of the ideological framework of the ruling class. From this early era, the institutional church has been a supporter of ruling elites, and espoused a social analysis that questions the legitimacy of a government or the state only as a last resort. Following such conservative standards, churches will not challenge state structures until all other methods for bringing about justice have been exhausted. Working in this tradition, Christianity has often indiscriminately legitimated ruthless regimes that have claimed to uphold "Western Christian" values.

However, an alternative Christian dimension exists, one based on egalitarian, biblical values (Walshe 1983, 20). This minority tradition, a theology of resistance, cannot be totally repressed, no matter how "silenced" or repressed this tradition may be in society. This tradition, the *prophetic voice*, works and speaks for the poor and oppressed. The transition away from dominant theological traditions of acquiescence and towards the adoption of alternative theological traditions, was at the heart of the development of the SACC's theological debates which placed the organization on the front lines of resisting the apartheid state in the 1980s. Much of the SACC's tactics took the form of non-violent resistance. Acts of civil disobedience, sit-ins, and strikes crippled the apartheid regime's ability to function economically and politically.

The combination of a repressive state apparatus, the apartheid regime, and an alternative theological tradition, produced a prophetic mode of expression that was led by the SACC in the 1980s.⁶

THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE BLACK LABOR MOVEMENT: CONFRONTING THE STATE WITH NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE IN 1980S SOUTH AFRICA

Non-violent resistance can be defined as a conflict behavior consisting of unconventional acts implemented for purposive change without intentional damage to persons or property (Zunes 1999, 138; Wink 1987, 81). Non-violent resistance includes boycotts, sit-ins, occupations, demonstrations, refusal to pay taxes, creation of alternative and parallel institutions, and other forms of civil disobedience.

From its inception in 1912, the ANC was the primary organizational vehicle through which black South Africans pursued the establishment of their rights. After using largely legal tactics during its first forty years, the militant youth wing ascended to the leadership in the early 1950s. The rival Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), founded in 1959, also pursued this strategy until both organizations were banned in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.

Subsequently, they advocated various forms of armed resistance until the ANC agreed to a cease-fire during the final stages of talks with the government in 1991. It should be noted that the PAC had largely disintegrated at this point, as a result of government suppression, internal factionalization and a lack of internal and external support.

Evidence suggests that the armed struggle may have actually laid the groundwork for the necessity of non-violent resistance (Zunes 1999, 139). The bombing campaign by the ANC's armed wing, Umkonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), in the early 1960s seriously affected simultaneous non-violent campaigns, as the government linked the two organizations and used this propaganda to justify their increased repression (Zunes 1999, 150). Additionally, although the ANC explicitly directed their campaign towards property, a number of trained attackers used explosives on the homes of pro-government blacks, killing several people, including children. These acts fueled "justified" governmental repression, and even caused waning of support from black Africans as well (Zunes 1999, 140).
Black Labor Resistance Efforts in the 1980s

In addition to failed armed resistance efforts by the ANC in the 1960s and further solidification of apartheid's structures of control in the 1970s, the ANC and other resistance organizations began in the early 1980s to question seriously whether armed struggle would be successful. Many black South Africans questioned whether they were willing to subject their

country to the mass murder, ecocide, and rampant devastation that occurred in Vietnam. Unlike the Vietnamese, the South African revolutionaries did not have terrain favorable to guerilla warfare, nor would their opponent have been in unfamiliar territory, far from supply lines (Leonard 1981, 20). Additionally, many in the ANC leadership lived in exile in the surrounding region which were suffering from the aftermath of long and hard civil wars. Even if the blacks had won, they would have suffered potentially millions of deaths and a ravaged country. Finally, white South Africans would have fought, not to protect colonial interests, but to protect their own livelihood, since their ancestors had lived there for generations. Indeed, most Afrikaners could trace their ancestry back at least two and a half centuries and would have no place to go (Zunes 1999, 143). The logic in the decision to move from armed resistance to unarmed, non-violent resistance became evident by the 1980s, and was born, to a large extent, out of necessity (Wink 1987, 80-1). Part of the necessity also found cause in the continued Cold War context, which often found U.S. policy expressing concerns that the ANC was in the Soviet camp because of communist ties. That necessity, supported by non-violent resistant challenges from South Africa's various churches in the 1980s, would form the prophetic voice to sustain the movement to bring about apartheid's demise.

A major factor in the revitalization of the South African resistance was the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which was launched in the early 1970s. The BCM stressed self-reliance and non-violent resistance (Gerhart 1978, 285-6). The late BCM leader Steve Biko and others stressed the need for non-violence, and criticized the PAC's "reckless rush to confrontation when circumstance did not favor a black victory (Gerhart 1978, 285)." The rise of labor strikes in the early 1970s was one of the important trends towards successful utilization of non-violent resistance. The 1973 strikes in the Durban area demonstrated just how vulnerable crucial sectors of the South African economy was to resistance by black workers. The strike spread throughout Natal and beyond and by March 1973, 150 firms were on strike. The strikes paved the way to empowering the black population by demonstrating that massive political strikes could succeed (Karis 1986, 128).

A steady increase in strikes ensued in the 1970s, and by 1982, over 1,000 black workers were striking every day, a number which continued to climb in subsequent years. Yet another significant development was the increasing community support for striking workers, which first became apparent during the 1979-80 strike in the Western Cape. Consumer boycotts forced major concessions by employers during that period.

Boycotts continued with increasing frequency in the 1980s. These strikes and boycotts mobilized large numbers of blacks, upon which the apartheid economy was dependent (Frederickse 1987, 186). They evolved into long-term, mass-based structures of change across the country, not just in the workplace, but in the community as well. A particularly good example of this phenomenon was the Sarmcol strike in Natal in 1985, where, following the firing of striking rubber factory workers, the entire region mobilized to raise funds, to protest, and to engage in a one-day stayaway and boycott white businesses (Zunes 1999, 155).

The nationwide two-day general strike in 1984, the largest of its kind in South African history up to that point, terrified the government. Many observers see it, along with the government crackdown that followed, as the final push that brought the apartheid regime to the negotiating table (Zunes 1999, 155; Frederickse 1987, 180). However, before this point was reached, the South African government increased political repression and treated non-violent resistance as the equivalent of violence (Wink 1987, 79). Initially, the comprehensiveness and severity of the restrictions hampered non-violent resistance efforts. For example, merely stating opposition to military conscription, participating in a non-violent demonstration, criticizing the government or any government official, or advocating a boycott could land someone in prison for up to ten years (ibid, 79-80).

The Sustaining Prophetic Voice: The SACC Enters the Spiral, 1980-1985

Political Context: The Spiral of Involvement

Three characteristics of the political context set the 1980s apart from any preceding time. The first was the intensity of non-violent resistance to the government with the diffusion of protest throughout all aspects of black South African society. The uprisings of the 1980s were “more radical, more widespread, and more sustained than anything witnessed in modern South African history” (Price 1991, 152). Second, the 1980s were marked by an organizational sophistication of non-violent resistance that was unprecedented. The explosion of grass-roots organizations and their embrace of “alliance politics” laid the foundation for a nationwide liberation movement that the government could not fully control nor extinguish (Borer 1998, 51). And third, the 1980s were characterized by extreme repressive measures by the South African government.

The SACC responded to these characteristics and were drawn into a “spiral of involvement” (Borer 1998, 44). Broken down into interrelated processes, the spiral included three components. The first was being jarred

into action. The sheer level of repression shocked the SACC into examining the roles they needed to play in ending this brutality. Seeing that the state intended to continue in its repression, the SACC concluded that it had to move into an overtly political stance. Second, the SACC found itself in a growing church/state conflict, in the form of state reaction against church leaders and counter-reaction by the SACC. The final component is church leaders increasingly became the “voice of the voiceless.”⁷ As civil society was all but stamped out, the SACC asserted itself as the leading prophetic voice of liberation.

Thus, alongside the developments of the black labor movement, it was in the 1980s that the churches became increasingly outspoken, not just in speaking out against apartheid as a sin, but in organizing protests in open defiance of apartheid and engaging in non-violent resistance. Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, who won the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize for his anti-apartheid activism, led the SACC, which represented twenty-two of the nation’s leading denominations, in ongoing resistance. The SACC adopted the “Lusaka Statement”⁸ in July 1987 which openly questioned the legitimacy of the white minority government, and called on member churches and their congregations to question their moral obligation to obey apartheid laws (Zunes 1999, 158). The SACC openly supported the rent boycott, tax resistance, conscientious objection to military service, and registering births outside of the official race-based system. In

addition, individual churches became sanctuaries for squatters whose homes had been demolished and for those sought by the authorities. Churches also became centers for meetings and offices for anti-apartheid groups.

It is necessary to remember that the leadership of the SACC did not suddenly begin discussing the need to work actively for a more just world in the 1980s. The legacy of non-violent resistance has a long history in South Africa. One of the first non-violent resistant efforts against white minority rule was Mohandas Gandhi’s non-violent campaigns in Natal at the turn of the century. A half-century later, the 1950s Defiance Campaign, despite its demise, demonstrated the potential for non-violent resistance that is based in the townships. When violence did break out, the Campaign was crippled because it gave the government its “justification” for initiative to restore order and implement “necessary” repressive measures.

Religious Context: The Development of Contextual, or Prophetic, Theology

At least four religious sources of early influences existed on the South African scene that helped to articulate the prophetic response of non-violent resistance.

First, the SACC, along with many other clergy around the world, were profoundly influenced by the teachings emanating from the Second Vatican Council, as well as other, post-conciliar, Vatican statements issued in the 1960s (Borer 1998, 84; Schnier 1986). Several important concepts were espoused in the documents from Vatican II. One was the insistence of an obligation of international social justice, as well as of national social justice, and that social justice could not be achieved until the gap between the developed and the undeveloped economies was narrowed (Borer 1998, 84; Hollis 1991, 91). Another important concept, which came from Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, held that Catholics had a Christian responsibility to learn from the world, involve themselves in the problems of society, and work to overcome them (Borer 1998, 85). The documents were watershed documents for the Catholic church, for they contained in them the seeds from which grew a new class of theologies known as liberation theologies, of which South African prophetic, or contextual, theology is one example. Two themes which emerged that are often identified as watershed markers were the “preferential option for the poor” and the ecclesial idea of a “pilgrim people of God” (Borer 1998, 86; Stogre 1991, 20). According to these documents, wherever fundamental rights of humanity were at stake, the Church had the right and the duty “of passing moral judgment even in matters relating to politics” (Stogre 1991, 27-29).

The second landmark in the development of a grassroots prophetic theology in South Africa was the creation of the Christian Institute in 1963 by the Reverend Beyers Naude, a minister of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), the largest white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) (Walshe 1983, de Gruchy 1979, 32). Naude was later to be barred from membership in that church because of his religious and political convictions. The Institute was founded in the aftermath of the Cottesloe Consultation, convened by the World Council of Churches and its South African members in Johannesburg, 1960. The Consultation was convened in response to the Sharpeville Massacre. In March 1960, sixty-nine Africans, mostly women, were shot, many in the back, and killed by members of the South African police during an anti-pass demonstration. Almost two hundred more were wounded. Both the ANC and the PAC were banned as part of a nationwide crackdown. One result of the Consultation, formed to examine the responsibility of the churches in the post-Sharpeville context of mounting unrest and repression, was a division within the DRC and between the DRC and the other churches, prompting the withdrawal of the DRC from the SACC and the WCC. The conflict was sparked by

the final statement of the Consultation, which was critical of apartheid.

Because of the failure of the DRC to stand by the Cottesloe resolutions, Naude took a prophetic stance, establishing the Christian Institute as a nonracial ecumenical organization dedicated at first to converting the Afrikaner establishment. Proving unsuccessful at this goal, the Institute moved in a new direction in the 1970s, towards a deeper relation with black political leaders and black theologians. The new ideas endorsed by the Institute included the belief that Christians should identify with the poor, seeking a redistribution of power in society through supporting widespread participation in decision-making structures. Moreover, the Institute had also grasped the crucial difference between working *for* the oppressed to working *with* them, and it came to the firm conclusion that liberation had to be a black initiative, with only assistance from whites. A third influence was the development of Black theology. Black theology, according to one of its most prominent theoreticians, is the theological reflection of black Christians on the situation in which they live and their struggle for liberation (Borer 1998, 91; Boesak 1977, 1). The ideas propagated by black theologians matured throughout the 1970s and continued to evolve within the larger movement called contextual theology of the 1980s. The first phase can be traced to the early days of the South African black consciousness movement which was primarily concerned with bringing an awareness of the black situation to black people (Borer 1998, 91). However, at the beginning, the BCM embraced a strategy of exclusivism, and the multiracial approach of English-speaking churches was viewed as superficial. Moreover, black consciousness leaders such as Steve Biko lambasted the Christianity practiced by most whites as being hypocritical and irrelevant to the lives of most blacks.

The Soweto uprisings—much like the Sharpeville massacre—was a major turning point. On June 16, 1976, school children from the conglomeration of African townships known as Soweto demonstrated against the imposition of the Afrikaans language as a medium of instruction, police fired into a peaceful protest of 15,000, killing two. Within a week, 176 students had been killed in the surrounding areas. The Soweto uprisings ended the preparatory stage to action—consciousness—and it was replaced by a more radical theology of power. Whereas the first phase were theological reflections on such topics as action, violence, change, and revolution, this second phase confronted these issues head-on by focusing on issues of black power and political liberation.

Fourth, the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) was formed in 1981, from veterans of the Christian Institute and black theologians. The

Christian Institute, although banned in 1977 by the South African government, found refuge within institutional structures of the SACC. The Institute was formed with the specific goal of “contributing towards a theological base for the realization of a new society for South Africa” as well as the political goal of preparing for a participatory democracy in a liberated South Africa (ICT Annual Report, 1983). What were the theological ideas underpinning contextual theology? According to its own definition, contextual theology is the conscious attempt to “do theology from within the context of real life in the world” (ibid, 1). Although the definition is broad, the key point is that theology must evolve out of particular context or life situation. Two specific themes are drawn from the bible: liberation and the teachings of the prophets. These become the components of prophetic theology (Borer 1998, 98). Hence, contextual theology is often referred to as prophetic theology. The task of contextual theology is to read and interpret the signs of the current time in light of gospel teachings. The signs themselves are human events, and the process of reading these signs is that of discovering the religious significance of public events, by “discerning and relating them to God” (ICT, 1).

Contextualizing the gospel in South Africa meant to take up the theme of liberation, and several liberation themes in the bible are stressed. Social and political oppression is interpreted in light of the bible. The most quoted chapter being that of Exodus, which can be described as one of political liberation. Additionally, Jesus’ liberating mission is seen as directed towards the oppressed, blind, and downtrodden. When read from the perspective of the poor and voiceless, the bible is read as a book *of the oppressed for the oppressed*.

Thus, with all these influences operating in the religious landscape in the 1960s and 1970s, the SACC increasingly acted as a prophetic catalyst and provided the moral fuel and staying power for a non-violent resistance effort in the 1980s, even in the face of increased political repression and persecution. These resistance efforts were most effective with the mobilization and organization of a large black labor force, upon which the apartheid regime was dependent. Additionally, non-violent resistant efforts had learned from the past, and the SACC was able to instill discipline and curb violent outbreaks (Zunes 1999; 158).

The Prophet Confronts the State, 1985-1988

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the government under P.W. Botha was beginning to realize that the system of apartheid, as it had been pragmatically assembled after 1948, was no longer viable. Apartheid’s structures

were coming under increasing pressure and continued producing repressive and reformative responses. This Reform/Repression approach, also known as “Winning the Hearts and Minds” or WHAM, was designed to implement managed change while keeping political expectations within reasonable limits (Borer 1998, 45). As this strategy proved unsuccessful, the government increasingly abandoned the pretense of the rule of law and relied more heavily on force. By the mid-1980s, the apartheid regime escalated its attempts to crush the non-violent resistance effort.

Several incidents are worth mentioning to substantiate this argument. In the first few years of the 1980s, the primary target of the state’s anger in the SACC were Bishop Desmond Tutu, then the Secretary General of the SACC, and the Reverend Allan Boesak. Both were longstanding and vocal opponents of apartheid. Bishop Tutu angered the government by issuing cautious statements calling for “economic pressures” (the word “sanctions” was far from being used at this point) to promote political change in South Africa (Borer 1998, 52). A second event that served to politicize the SACC was its conference resolution, which declared that apartheid was not simply a sociopolitical order but must also be seen as a theological issue which was in complete contradiction of the gospel, and was therefore a heresy (Borer 1998, 54). This had immediate political ramifications for the SACC, which resulted in an “investigation” into SACC finances, which evolved into a four-year campaign against the Council. Known as the Eloff Commission, this diversionary tactic by the government drew worldwide attention.

The political situation took a turn for the worse when the apartheid regime imposed a state of emergency in 1985, which was renewed and widened in June 1986 and yet again in 1987. As a result of these highly repressive measures, the SACC now fully mobilized to confront the state head on. The SACC sanctioned and planned acts of civil disobedience (Borer 1998, 61).

On February 24, 1988, the South African political situation took another dramatic turn for the worse when the Minister of Law and Order banned seventeen anti-apartheid organizations and eighteen individuals. These measures represented the largest clampdown on legal protests and civil rights movements in the history of South Africa. With this final attempt at crushing opposition and civil society, the SACC, along with other church actors, emerged as the only viable organizations able to generate further resistance. Many SACC leaders worked closely with the ANC during this period of intense confrontation to the state.

After a series of emergency meetings, on February 29, 1988, twenty-five

church leaders, accompanied by more than a hundred clergy and several hundred lay Christians, held a short service in the Anglican Cathedral, which adjoined Parliament. As they left the cathedral, they were confronted by the police. The three hundred marchers kneeled, and the church leaders were arrested and forcibly removed to a police station and detained. This police action shocked the country and garnered international attention. In a press conference held after their release, the SACC and other church leaders fully acknowledged that they were now the “voice of the voiceless.”

The South African government continued to attempt crackdowns. One week after the February bannings, the government implemented and passed the Promotion of Orderly Internal Politics in an attempt to restrict foreign funding to any anti-apartheid organization. As a result of these actions, the SACC led the effort to launch the Standing for Truth Campaign. The state responded again, this time with armed violence. The SACC headquarters, Khotso (“Peace”) House was bombed. No arrests were made. The government responded by claiming that the SACC headquarters had been blown up “in error” by “ANC terrorists” (Borer 1998, 76).

In the final set of events, the SACC, along with other actors, launched the Mass Democratic Defiance Campaign on August 2, 1989, a struggle directed at the upcoming September elections for the tricameral parliament. The Standing for the Truth Campaign (SFT) declared that the role of the church is to “create peace, but on the road to negotiations, reconciliation and peace, it will be necessary to confront, pressurize, and defy” (Borer 1998, 77).

The police continued to detain, arrest, and persecute church leaders and lay Christians. However, the force of non-violent resistance proved too great for the state. On September 13, church leaders led a “Peace March” in Cape Town. It was the largest march since the one led by the ANC and the PAC in 1960. Within weeks, similar protests were held nationwide, with ANC flags being openly displayed. Three weeks after the “Peace March” over 350,000 people had participated in marches. Organizations and repressed civil society structures “unbanned” themselves (Borer 1998, 78). Finally, a month later, eight top ANC leaders were released from prison with the quintessential symbol of the resistance movement released about four months later—Nelson Mandela. The state finally gave in and came to the negotiating table in 1990; a negotiation which would culminate in the elections of 1994.

CONCLUSION

In many aspects of foreign policy, political discourse tends to follow the following pattern. As soon as it is noted that a country is afflicted by political instability or social unrest, economic amelioration is immediately offered as the obvious remedy. Indeed, economic incentives are routinely suggested as the cure-all to most, if not all forms of conflict. However, materialistic determinism often slights nonmaterial motivations, which are always important and not infrequently decisive. While most literature has pointed to the role of religion as a source of conflict, this author has sought to argue that in the South African case, the role of religious leaders, particularly the role of the SACC, were instrumental in promoting peaceful resolution to conflict.

The actions of the SACC suggest that key attributes are required when religious organizations can most effectively act as advocates for social change:

- Institutional stability and moral authority

- A capacity for empowering individuals to act

- A commitment to non-violence

The SACC possessed all three of these attributes. First, the SACC had a long history in South Africa, and drew upon many sources to develop its prophetic mode of expression. Second, the SACC was able to draw upon the successes of a cooperative black labor movement which had the effect of crippling apartheid's economic structures. The SACC's continued challenges to the state gave the black labor movement the will to continue to resist. Third, and the most important, the SACC remained committed to non-violence. All three of these attributes are necessary for religious organizations to succeed as advocates for change and accountability in statecraft.

A Final Note

In the 1994 edition of the *Journal*, Paul Rexton Kan argued that Michael Walzer came closer than Kenneth Waltz as the "heir apparent" to the realist throne (Kan 1994, 7). He made this argument by suggesting that Walzer shared more of the core beliefs about the nature of international politics, the legitimacy of states, and how they should relate to their citizens. The father of the throne, Hans Morgenthau, did not limit the role of government to providing security from external threats. "All politically

civilized governments owe their continuing existence to a consensus concerning the foundations of their society” (Morgenthau 1970, 19). In other words, a government must reflect the rules and the values, and indeed, the morals that the community holds. Now, at the beginning the 21st century, with the Cold War as history, perhaps American foreign policy will seize the opportunity and embrace both power politics and values to develop its new role in the international arena. I attempted to provide a powerful case study for a policy audience to become aware of the role that religious actors can play in statecraft and how, under the right conditions, they can become masters at mediating conflict in deeply divided societies.

Notes

- 1 The author wishes to thank David Rendelman for his willingness to offer editorial assistance and comments on the paper. The author also wishes to acknowledge that the relationship with the African National Congress and other church bodies, especially those variously categorized under the umbrella term African Independent, or Initiated, Churches, is a complex one and would be a discussion in of itself. The purpose of this article is to highlight the activities of the prophetic church, which found clearest manifestation in the activities of the SACC in 1980s South Africa.
- 2 I intentionally use Huntington's oft cited phrase is to illustrate that “fault lines” occur within countries and regions and highlights a major critique of his theory which obscures these new realities, which he insists occur at the level of the international system.
- 3 Some leading voices include Donald Horowitz's *A Democratic South Africa?: Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and Robert M. Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis: Political Transformation in South Africa, 1975-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). While these works deal with a wide range of issues, such as the state's response to social crises, insurrectionary activity, ethnicity, and other factors, they both neglect the role of religious organizations. Even more troubling is that both works attempt to prescribe a set of ideal post-apartheid institutions which neglect the particular realities, history, and landscape of South Africa.
- 4 Bayart's stature as a leading Africanist cannot be underestimated. Please see some illuminating comments in Rene Lemarchand, “Review Essay: The Africanist as Intellectual: A Note on Jean Francoise-Bayart,” *Africa Studies Review* 35 (April 1992): 129-33.
- 5 The work of Daniel H. Levine are of significant note here. Please see *Religion and Politics in Latin America: The Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), and an edited volume, *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986). Other contributions include Scott Mainwaring and Alexander Wilde, eds., *The Progressive Church in Latin America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), and Scott Mainwaring, *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil: 1916-1985* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

- 6 This paper draws upon the author's theoretical framework of analysis that blends Bayart's and Villa-Vicencio's models to explain three modes of expression, of which the prophetic is the focus of this article. The other two expressions are the conservative and evangelical modes of expression. The Dutch Reformed Churches represent the conservative mode of expression and the African Independent Churches and to a lesser extent, the English-speaking white South African churches represent the evangelical mode of expression. All four of these church bodies are analyzed in comparative perspective as they interact with a partially democratic South Africa that is still a deeply divided society.
- 7 Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu coined this phrase in the mid-1980s. See his *Crying in the Wilderness: The Struggle for Justice in South Africa*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Press, 1982).
- 8 In the final Lusaka Statement, the institutional church for the first time declared the South African state as illegitimate, stating: "It is our belief that civil authority is instituted of God to do good, and that under the biblical imperative all people are obliged to do justice and show special care for the oppressed and the poor. It is this understanding that leaves us with no alternative but to conclude that the South African regime and its colonial domination of Namibia is illegitimate."

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