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Who is our God? The Basis of Religious Socialism

A viewpoint from South Africa

This discussion paper comes from Cedric Mayson with major contributions from Iqbal Jhazbhay¹ and inputs from Johan van Workum and Andrew Hammer. It attempts to approach Religious Socialism from a spiritual understanding, analyse problems within institutional religion, and explore ways to go forward.

1. Introduction

1.1 The phrase 'religious socialism' plays tunes on inherited themes of 'politics' and 'religion' which are not always harmonious. Many envisage a God 'out there' beyond the realities of life and respond on a 'spiritual' level only.² However, God is not 'out there' at all, but the essence of living here and now, the Ground of our Being, 'not far from any of us, since it is in him that we live and move and exist.'³ The universal sense that the spirit of God is grounded in each human being, is captured in the Qur'anic verse: And when I have formed him and breathed My spirit (ruh) into him, so the angels prostrated all of them together in homage (Qur'an, 38:72 see also 17:70).

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All humans are part of community by nature and cannot be separated from God. Our specific contribution is from a personal background in a national, religious and economic setting, but as part of wider society. Just as Beethoven, Benny Goodwin and Enoch Sitonga made music for Germans, Americans, or Africans, which also speaks to the whole of humanity, so from our different perspectives and experience we share the same vision of life: and it is godly.

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¹ Cedric and Iqbal are both members of the African National Congress Commission on Religious Affairs (ANC-CRA) but this paper is written in their personal capacity.

² **Excuse me, but actually, did you say, er, "God?"**

All talk about God, G-- and gods, Trinity and Allah, Catholic and Pentecostal, Jesus and the Prophet, Buddhists and Baptists, Zionists and New Age and Agnostics, reveals a universal sense of a spiritual 'Ground of our Being'. These spiritual forces operate within human society throughout the secular world. 'God' does not depend on a name, though some religionists find it as difficult to give up the personification as some secularists find to adopt it: but for me, for this paper, I will use the short hand, and 'let God be God'.

³ Acts 17.28. The key question in Muslim literature is: God is "nearer to you than your jugular vein", but are you close to Him? (Qur'an, 50: 16).

1.3 God did not create us and then move to outer space, but is part of the process. God is not outside existence but the very nature of it. ⁴ Your Lord has not abandoned you (Qur'an, 93:3)

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It is **existence itself** which is surely the greatest of all mysteries. ... They say I am on some sort of religious quest, looking for God, but God **is** the way it's put together. ⁵

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1.4 We sense the physical aspects of existence from stars to stomach aches and also another aspect of reality in the spiritual. We are conscious of being-ness. We are driven by the energies of faith not merely the pressures of hunger and thirst and violence. All religions agree that the heart of the spiritual life of humans is love. God is love; existence is love; humanity will only work by love, (Love = joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, loyalty, humility and self-control, according to Paul). ⁶

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Darwin concluded that physical evolution happened through the survival of the fittest. The spiritual development of the human community occurs by love: collective concern for the survival of the weakest. That is the way it is and the way it progresses. The world will not work any other way.⁷

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1.5 This spiritual nature of existence has led all peoples to forms of religion. Asserting that something is religious - music, architecture or politics – means celebrating this spirituality. Spirituality is not a religious invention but an attribute of all human beings, like self, sex, and the herd.

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It is this spiritual reality of loving and caring for all, including the weakest, which produces the concept of democratic government and a just, shared economy. Thus 'Religious Socialism' arises from the nature of existence, and the structure of human community. Like the law of gravity, the Ruling Power of God (RPG) is the way things are. If we get it right, religious socialism is not a political choice but a rediscovery of the only successful path of life for the human community.

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If we get it right.

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1.6 'Religious Socialism' is a code word to be rescued from inherited misconceptions of both religion and socialism. It is the Good News about what God is doing in us, not what we must do for God. Humanity cannot

⁴ When Paul said 'God was in Christ' and 'Christ is in you' he was saying the same thing, but modern Christians often find it difficult to update the context.

⁵ AN Wilson. *God's Funeral*. 290. Abacus. 1999 AN Wilson, commends Darwin and Huxley and their atheist friends for following the truth in rejecting the Watchmaker-God of Victorian Deism, but points out that they may not have had the whole truth. The Big Bang may alter our perception of their truth, and supply an answer to the one question Darwinism so dismally refuses to address, namely, how (let alone why!) *anything happens to exist at all*.

⁶ Galatians 5.22.

The opening verse to each chapter of the Qur'an captures this: *In the Name of God, most benevolent, ever merciful*. Muslims point out that the latter two attributes refer to God's womb-like mercy and love, emerging from the Arabic root *rahim*. Muslims also call on God's attribute *Al-Wadud*, the All-Loving, from the Arabic *wadda*: to love, to be fond of (Qur'an, 85:14 & 11:90).

⁷ Which is why it often doesn't work.

work under divisive, self-centred, power-hungry, religious institutions, or greed-based, self-centred, economic structures. Such forms of society may exercise oppressive control for a while, like fascism or apartheid, but have no future, and there must be a struggle to replace them. In the years of Apartheid we knew that the 'system' was wrong, and could not survive, but we also knew that we must spell out an alternative vision (focussed in the "Freedom Charter") and struggle for it.

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1.7 African⁸ concepts of life are holistic and appreciate the unity of spirituality and politico-economics in the human community. 'Faith' and 'politics' are two sides of the same coin. Godliness in Life exerts a bias against bad and for good. Spirit and material must be considered together. Individual and community practice an essential linkage.

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The concept of 'motho ke Modimo' expresses the mystery that the human is a portion, a tributary of the Supreme Vital Force (Modimo) itself. This is ignored in human relationships at great peril to those who do so.⁹

1.8 An Islamic interpretation reads:

The Creator is One. The first before anything and the last after everything. He is the most evident & yet veiled behind His attributes. He has created everything in pairs. The Books, Messengers, Prophets, teachings are the maps and pathways to those seeking the truth of loving, caring and sharing. The purpose of all creation is to know the creator and follow His light by surrendering unto it and thus joyfully living by it. Knowing the creator requires to know yourself; the nature of our lower self is always weak and unreliable. Only when it is groomed through dedicated service to justice, illumined faith and patience that the human self is raised to reflect the Divine spirit. Then it has fulfilled its potential and purpose.¹⁰

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2 What is the basis for religious socialism?

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2.1 Proclaiming the Vision

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Jesus came to proclaim the Ruling Power of God (RPG) was operating on Earth: Muhammad's mandate was to interpret and concretise God's Word on earth.□

Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Good News from God. 'The time has come; the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News'¹¹. Our Father in heaven, may your name be

⁸[6] This does not refer to blackness: Africans come in many colours. It is a human awareness which means liberation and independence from the thinking and attitudes of western civilisation. People nurtured in the ways of North American Indians, Inuits, Maoris, Aborigines, the folk lore of Siberia, Scandinavia, the early Europeans, or many in the East, recognise similar truths of basic human-ness. Its widest awareness is in the critical mass of the people of Africa.

⁹[7] Gabriel Setiloane. 1986:42. 'African Theology' Skotaville.

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¹¹ Mk 1.15.

held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.¹² I must preach the Good News of the kingdom of God in other towns also, because that is what God sent me to do¹³

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Jesus' phrase 'Basileia' in Greek has been misused in English. 'The 'kingdom' is a bad translation, for he was not announcing an autocratic male monarchy. The word means ruling power, not a state or place. Jesus proclaimed the Good News that the Ruling Power of God (RPG) was operating in human society and lived his life on that basis.'¹⁴

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At the heart of human society is the transforming power of God: love as a hard political, economic, social and theological reality. The RPG is a liberating spiritual power driving the material process. 'Not by might and not by power but by my spirit, says Yahweh Sabaoth'.¹⁵ The engine of power at the ground of our being is love: love with nails in its palms.

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2.2 Inspiration v Institution.

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Competitive religious industries have nurtured the belief that 'we' are right and 'they' are wrong. Fundamentalists condemn to hell everyone except themselves. Such conflicts seldom occur between the founders and inspirers of religions, but from the institutions of their followers (who have other economic and political agendas).

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In proclaiming the RPG, Jesus is talking the same language as the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, the Hindu ways to salvation, the Buddhist Eight fold path, the pursuits of Lao Tze, and many other philosophers. Each one is formulating foundational aspects of the human community and their similarities are far more than their differences. The same 'faith experience' drives them all.

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This does not mean that we are inventing one universal religion. All religions reveal the same basic truths of God from their own historical perspective, albeit with different emphases.¹⁶ Christians especially testify that the way of Jesus includes suffering and struggle.

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2.2 Faith

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Jesus proclamation of the RPG was more than the announcement of a theological theory. He inspired a gift of **illuminated faith**, which turned the RPG into an experience of vision and energy. Jesus was a life-changer who enabled people to believe in the RPG deep within themselves, and this empowered them to bring change. The proclamation of the RPG as part of the structure of being human empowered people to engage with this experience of faith and respond positively.

¹² Matt 6.10

¹³ Luke 4.43. Qur'an 33:21

¹⁴ Extract from my paper 'Methodist and Radical: Rejuvenating a tradition'
Abingdon/Kingswood, 2003

¹⁵ Zech.4.6

¹⁶ Cracknel

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Illuminated Faith is not an idea, or a dream, but a driving life-force. For many decades South Africans 'believed in the struggle'. Liberation from apartheid was coming: that faith drove us on, expressing the life force with us. We might expound it in terms of Jesus or the Prophet, align it with the story of the Exodus, illustrate it from the sagas of the East or the injunctions of our ancestors who spoke to us in dreams, but the explanation was less important than the experience. Because of this vital force of faith within us we could sing 'We shall overcome', pray 'Nkosi sikelel'iAfrica', and dance.

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Throughout the long difficult history of religion, at the heart of all the struggles against oppression and heresy, it is the constant emergence of faith in the RPG which has given people vision and energy. The essential task of religious socialists is to be proclaimers of the vision and the energy of faith (not to become politicians or economists, though they may be that too.)¹⁷

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2.3 History

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But is the RPG true? Has it been working? In the doom and gloom of yesterday's history and today's media, is there any evidence that the RPG is actually happening¹⁸

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Most history has been written about the rich and powerful. But despite oppressors today who inflict military destruction on human beings, condemn millions to globalised poverty, deny them love and care, and pronounce aggressive prayers which set their own religious empires against others, the real story of history is the triumph of the poor and oppressed.

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Oppressive empires have constantly collapsed. The Holy Roman Empire has gone, slavery has been smashed, colonialism is history, fascism is finished, people have holidays, many countries embrace free education, health and welfare; women and children have a better chance; racism is rejected; the environment is on the agenda; and although we had no money, no votes, no power, no military might, nor international leverage South Africa was liberated from apartheid. Throughout history oppressive political, economic and religious regimes have been unable to neutralise the progressive movements, which were open to the Ruling Power of God. The Davids have toppled the Goliaths. The RPG rules! Viva the RPG, viva!

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Faith in the RPG abounds in hope. It cannot be confused with the liberal idea of 'inevitable progress', or with the fatalistic idea that 'it will all come right in

¹⁷ Throughout history Church traditions have inhibited the RPG, and the genius of Jesus has prompted a return to his principles and the birth of new denominations. The ecumenical movement today reverses that process and urges the unity of ALL Christians and people of faith. .

¹⁸ Before her son was born Mary had recognised the Ruling Power of God:

His name is holy; from one generation to another he shows mercy to those who honour him. He has stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans. He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands. He has kept the promise he made to our ancestors.... See chapter 19 of the Qur'an, with the name Mary or Maryam.

the end'. Faith in the RPG means struggle. But history confirms we may look for victory in the struggle, and for dawn beyond the darkness.¹⁹

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¹⁹ Most religions also have hopes of another world beyond history: also beyond religious socialism.

2.5 Africa

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Although human life seems to have originated in Africa, the continent was sealed off by oceans of sea and sand by the time world religions began to emerge. The response of Africans to the RPG was thus largely independent of the developed 'civilised' world. What did Africans make of the world without the insights of the Hindus, Egyptians, Greeks, Jews, Christians and Muslims?²⁰ How does this different context relate to Religious Socialism?

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When Christianity came to Africa, it did not come into a vacuum. It came to a people who were open to the supernatural, who already believed in the mercy of spiritual beings, who recognized the supernatural as the source of goodness and morality, and who knew that they were being challenged to live in peace with one another. ²¹

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Land and possessions are the shared benefits and responsibilities of the community. Private ownership is a secure right, within a communal consciousness usually focussed through the chief.

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The Nguni word 'ubuntu' is rapidly becoming a part of the English language like khaki, lingua franca, or viva. 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' means a person is a person through other persons. It is an attitude not an intellectual theory. Stanley Mogoba has said:

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Ubuntu is an African understanding of humanity. Ubuntu means living as a complete human being. It has to do with realising one's full potential as a person. This is an affirmation of a way of life that embodies the qualities of decency, honesty, integrity, and respect for others. ²²

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Africans recognise life as life-in community. We can truly know ourselves if we remain true to our community, past and present. The concept of individual success or failure is secondary. The ethnic group, village, the locality, are crucial in one's estimation of oneself. Our nature as being-in-relation is a two-way relation: with God and with our fellow human beings. [Mercy Oduyoye. 1979.110-111]

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Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am, because we are and since we are, I am" [John S Mbiti. 1970 a. 141]

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The most cherished principle in life-together is to include rather than to separate. [Setiloane. 1982:10]

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²⁰ Notwithstanding the links made by such organisations as the Kara Institute..

²¹ Fr Buti Tlhagale (now Bishop of Johannesburg), 'Challenge' November 1994:10

²² 'The Spirit of Hope', Villa Vicencio. 1995 Skotaville. See in the latter text also the interview with the Muslim inter-faith leader Ebrahim Rasool and the activist of Sociology, Professor Fatima Meer.

All primary religion asserts that humanity is corporate not individualistic.²³ Authentic life integrates people into community; fulfilment is only found with others. It means sharing space, not excluding space. Religion is a deep understanding of relationships in community: "I belong, therefore I am". These African insights reflect the basic realities of the RPG.

Africa's triple heritage of African traditional spirituality, Christianity and Islam²⁴ affirm the idea of communal being. Prophet Muhammad and his followers are encouraged 5 times a day to congregate at mosques to worship and to be a mirror to each other. Jesus is a communal knowing: "I am where two or three are met together in my name." Not one on their own; not two or three million; two or three – a commune. And this is the basis of Religious Socialism.

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3 What are the main problems?

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3.1 The problem of Religious Institutions. □

The movement Jesus began (reflected strongly in the Q passages of the synoptic gospels²⁵) was centred on Peter and James in Jerusalem. It was soon eclipsed by the Christ-ian Church movement of Paul and Barnabas which spread widely through the Mediterranean suburbs of the Roman empire. The teaching of John and Paul about the Christ was taken up by the early Church, and within half a century the ecclesiastical captivity of the gospel was firmly established. The gospel changed from the message of Jesus about the salvation of the world to the message of the Church about its role in personal salvation. Instead of the prophetic announcement of the activity of the God of Love in the whole human community, the story of Jesus was re-scripted to apply, often exclusively, to the after-death salvation of individual souls. Thus the Church has had a limited approach to Jesus' Good News of the RPG.

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It is not the teaching of Jesus, but the subsequent teaching of the Church, which affronts many other religions and liberated followers of Jesus.²⁶ The political decision of Constantine to support the doctrine that Jesus was God came 300 years after Jesus.

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This ecclesiastical captivity can be traced through the various "Christ" pictures which the Church promoted to endorse its programmes, whenever it was subjected to political, economic, or ecclesiastical pressures. Constantine dressed Jesus in the panoply of Trinity and Creed, and ignored his actual teachings - including the RPG. The Holy Roman Empire, the Roman and Greek churches, the Crusades and the Middle Ages all magnified their own versions of "Christ", and the process continued through the Renaissance, and the Reformation. The tumultuous emergence of protestant denominations,

²³ Privatising the gospel has been a great victory for Mammon but a disastrous play for Christianity because the gospel is community oriented.

²⁴ See The Africans, Ali A Mazrui. BBC Publications. 1986.

²⁵ Both Luke and Matthew quote from other sources revealed by their use of the same words. Some are from Mark's Gospel. The unknown author of their other major source is known as Q, These are sayings of Jesus, not narrative.

²⁶ i.e. those who wish to follow Jesus but find the Church a major problem.

each with its own particular emphasis, has culminated in the distortions of modern right wing fundamentalists - all in the name of Christ.

Thus the inspiration of Jesus was often choked by the institutions of the Church. Ecclesiastical beliefs and practices, increasingly related to national and colonial structures, frequently became caricatures of God in the world – as we saw in apartheid, which was devised by the Church not the Government. Christianity must be born again, and the development of Religious Socialism is part of the process.²⁷

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But neither God nor Gospel could be locked in a box called 'Church'. From under the surface, time and again, the RPG emerges.

Mosque

The general generic mosque has equally emanated as contested terrain with notable exceptions all over the world. Teachings which flow today in ways which say: "We are chosen and you are frozen" are evidently contrary to the 7th century experience of Prophet Muhammad.²⁸

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3.2 The problem of Mammon

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Churches and mosques have frequently supported the oppressive status quo of capitalist and political dictatorships. The obsession with wealth and the dangers of affluence, have always been a major temptation and led directly to the capitalist captivity of religion. The Old Testament prophets denounce

those who have sold the virtuous for silver, and the poor man for a pair of sandals, because they trample on the heads of ordinary people, and push the poor out of their path.²⁹

Those are the people who have sold guidance for misguidance
Their trade has brought no profit; they are not guided. (Qur'an, 2:15)

Woe to every fault finding backbiter
Who has amassed wealth and hoarded it!
He thinks his wealth will make him live for ever. (Qur'an, 104:1-2)

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Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field until
everywhere belongs to them, and they are the sole inhabitants of the
land.³⁰

Jesus identifies himself with the words of Isaiah:

²⁷ John 3.3

²⁸ The world renewal of the Sufi interpretation of Islam has been regularly challenged by the Saudi interpretation of Wahhabism. The mainstream Sufi interpretation has always promoted self-knowledge for joyful submission to the ever prevailing RPG, taste of the vast ocean of Oneness via human diversity, joyful meditative practises, singing of diwans, for an internal realisation of God's effulgent light and service to humanity via patient struggle.

²⁹ Amos 2.6ff

³⁰ Isaiah 5.8

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to the blind new sight, to set the oppressed free, and to announce the day when the Lord will save his people. ³¹

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He is unequivocal about riches:

Jesus looked round and said to his disciples: 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!'...it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' ³²

Professor RH Tawney commented on the wealth quest of Churches and British landowners which formulated the rise of capitalism:

The quality in modern society which is most sharply opposed to the teaching ascribed to the Founder of the Christian Faith...consists in the assumption...that the attainment of material riches is the supreme object of human endeavour and the final criterion of human success. Such a philosophy...is a negation of any system of thought or morals which can...be described as Christian. Compromise is as impossible between the Church of Christ and the idolatry of wealth, which is the practical religion of capitalist societies, as it was between the Church and State idolatry in the Roman Empire.³³

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Christians are not the only ones to see it. Fr Aloysius Pieris writes: "It is a principle revealed in all religion, biblical and non-biblical, that God is irreconcilably opposed to mammon or wealth accumulation, the source of human slavery." ³⁴

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The Holy Qur'an says: " Man is most extravagant in wickedness when he sees himself possessed of wealth."

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The teaching is clear: defeating poverty is a blessing: the selfish accumulation of wealth is cursed. Religions require resources, but when this becomes an obeisance to wealth it prevents them from seeing the RPG, and from promoting unselfish community concern as the Way of life for successful humanity. ³⁵

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Jesus always saw the major challenge to his RPG mission came from Mammon, not from Pharisees, Priests, Pilate or Caesar. It still does. But the worship of Mammon has now become respectable. Mammon has been made into the god we worship and undermines the RPG. President Thabo Mbeki understands this very well:

³¹ Luke 4.18-19

³² Mark 10.23ff

³³ Tawney. Religion and the rise of Capitalism. Pelican. 1922.280

³⁴ Pieris. 'An Asian Theology of Liberation' T and T Clarke. 1988. 120

³⁵ 'Prosperity religions' are making major inroads in South Africa today.

These forces of privilege want to be strong so that they can control the national agenda...they want us to be weak so that we are unable to bring about the fundamental social transformation of our country.³⁶

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3.3 The problem of Fundamentalists

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Heresy is an occupational disease of believers, not atheists. Right wing fundamentalism has infected much of the US, Europe and the Middle East today and is romping through Africa. In its twisted theology, reaction to science, the worship of wealth, and opposition to progressive government the fundamentalists are barriers to God.

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Insights from Copernicus to Darwin and modern theologians have necessitated a major review of the pre-scientific, right wing approach to the Bible which fundamentalists reject. Their absolutist tradition regarding their interpretation of scripture makes mockery of the Word of God.³⁷

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The approach of most fundamentalists (not all) to wealth is revealing. Many identify with the capitalist world and give *charity* to those in need. The RPG frees people from *systems* which condemn them to perpetual poverty. In many sermons and tv programmes, in the jingles that have ousted hymns, in casual conversation and contemporary concepts of religion in the media, the heresies of fundamentalism are heard. It is a type of casino religion, where faith is a slot machine for producing wealth and health. It is a major challenge for religious socialists proclaiming the RPG.

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3.4 The problem of faith-less-ness.

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The crucial experience of the liberation struggle in South Africa was the ability to believe in it. Oppressed, tortured, imprisoned, with no hope or vision except our own, we had a vivid living powerful experience of faith that liberation was on the way and power was in the people. Amandla!

Out of that crucible emerged refreshing prophetic experiences such as the Christian Institute, the SA Council of Churches, Contextual Theology, the Call of Islam and Jews for Social Justice.

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Many people today are faith-less. Religion is considered irrelevant and is largely misunderstood by many socialists, and socialism is considered irrelevant and is largely misunderstood by many religious people. Christian socialists have made a brave and bold witness in recent centuries but their time was not ripe, and conservative religious leadership has manipulated them out of influence.

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The reluctance of the Church to endorse a theological and spiritual content to socialism has been a major betrayal. Socialist insights required the explicit explications of the RPG, and the commitment of local congregations, but the Church invariably aligned itself with the ruling classes or sat on the fence.³⁸

³⁶ COSATU Conference 2000

³⁷ Mark 7.13

³⁸ As much of it did in the struggle against apartheid. Church was always 'a site of struggle'.

The great adventures of the UK Labour Government in 1945, and the SA Democratic Government of 1994, both lacked any major religious involvement. They preferred to be critics rather than participants, and the RPG did not figure in their thinking. Dr WE Sangster wrote in 1947:

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How to get God's order on earth! – there is the problem. And it isn't a problem only of feeble will. It has to be thought out before it can be wrought out. Many Christians haven't seen it yet. Religion, they think, is individual goodness. Wrestling with social and political theories, even though it is undertaken in the Name and to the glory of God, seems hardly a spiritual occupation to them. So far from seeing that religion and politics belong at a deep level together, they dread the contact lest it contaminate the things of God.^{39[33]}

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Most Christians are simply not on Jesus' wavelength. This experience of faith is not belief in a creed or ecclesiastical institution, but the vision and energy inspired by the RPG in our own circumstances. Such faith is seldom found in the US or Europe or the Middle East. It wavers in Africa. And without the driving empowering vision of faith the people perish, the RPG is denied, and Religious Socialism falters.

So we have a world wide problem. Many people who want to play a role are misled by the dictators of capital and fundamentalism, choking to death on materialism, poisoning themselves and their children with the heresies of false religious teaching, and suffering a fatal intellectual indigestion from over-fed self-indulgent individualism which is destroying human community.

We have produced a junk generation, stuffed on junk food, junk theologies, and junk objectives. So ...

4 What is to be done?

4.1 The ILRS 'Hand to Hand' project suggests that communities of faith highlight 5 Common Principles (peace; poverty; women; social justice; environment) and proposes 5 Common Actions (visiting places of faith; uniting to promote the Principles; combining their social outreach; common international work on some specific issues; inter faith women's activity.)

South Africans have supported such endeavours from different frameworks including the SA Chapter of WCRP (World Conference on Religion and Peace), and religious, academic or political initiatives. It is a necessary step, but religious socialism goes much further.

4.2 Whilst such initiatives do make an impact (like repeated taps of hammer on nail) they also reveal major resistance. The leadership of religious institutions will endorse such programmes but do nothing about them.⁴⁰ People must be involved at the grass roots - but many religious communities

³⁹ WE Sangster. 'Methodism: her Unfinished Task'. Epworth.1947.61

⁴⁰ eg The Moral Summit process of 1997, or any number of religious or other initiatives.

are too busy running their congregations to wonder what they are running them for.

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The RPG requires an inter-faith revolution of vision, faith and commitment, currently beyond the grasp of much organised religion. 'The Church has been scared to do any theology for over a decade' said a prominent Christian leader recently in Johannesburg. Muslims have quietly moved away from the mosques to smaller groups of progressive action and reflection. Some have challenged the status quo but are unable to sustain the public momentum.

4.3 The conventional recipes for religion and socialism are of little help in Africa. Centuries of oppressive colonial and neo-colonial exploitation, the continued rape of the continents resources (often with the connivance of anti-progressive governments), and the failure of religious vision and nerve limit our options.

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It was not possible for South Africa to redistribute wealth overnight by legislating a 20th century type socialist revolution in 1994, and that was before Bush.⁴¹ The problem is not how to deal with poverty but how to deal with riches: not how to destroy the rich but how to domesticate them: to make them fit for human habitation. How do we tackle that?

The end of the Cold War closed the Soviet approach to socialism, and made room for new thinking, recognising phenomenal advances had been made. Within one life time, Russia moved into the forefront of the world and resourced many smaller countries. The removal of deadly Stalinist distortions, and the rejection of global war, came from within the socialist societies, and should not be buried in the rubble of Stalinism. What can be learnt there?

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The (so-called) Cold War also closed the benevolent view of capitalism. Millions now know that capitalism means violence: Amritsars and gas chambers, Vietnams and Angolas, Apartheid and Iraqs. Can we from within 'the West' expose the evil face of capitalism and the spiritual face of socialism?

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4.4 Both socialism and theology require a focus for the struggle against oppressive religion and oppressive capitalism, in which the essential factor is faith. Many religious leaders (especially Christians) lack the political will and faith to lead the world. But what is this? Where are we going? What form of society? What form of religion? There seem to be four priorities.

4.5.1 Believe in it! The Good News of the Ruling Power of God on Earth, spiritual strength and socialism, a transformed world – this is the vision of religious socialism empowered by faith. We need to review the basis of our faith and preach it loud and clear with its full inter-faith and political dimensions.

⁴¹ A few taps on a computer would vanish the resources.

'Communities of faith have far more in common than the things that divide them' says Bishop Buti Thlagale.⁴² 'We should meet regularly with the participation of people of all faiths to promote Salaam, Shanti, peace, ukuthula' writes Shishupal Rambharos.⁴³ It needs the insights and pressures of the primal religious experience focused in African Indigenous Churches⁴⁴ and traditional spirituality. Religious Socialists need to consult on the scope of sanctity, and the Islamic cosmology of the lower self and how it veils the divine spirit within. This software for our computers, so to speak, is imperative to drive the RPG.

4.6 People have to be challenged to leave both their religious bunkers and their agnostic bunkers if the world is to be transformed. Rev Frank Chikane, formerly leader of the SA Council of Churches and now heading President Thabo Mbeki's office, puts one aspect:

'Religious institutions need to accompany the process of reconstruction and rebuilding of a new society through the stages of defining vision about the issues we must deal with, and involvement in the formulation of policy perspectives. This requires a capacity to analyse and make an intelligent contribution. We must not allow ourselves to be reduced to traditional debates concerning homosexuality, abortion and the like ... but engage with the government on a reconstruction of the totality of society'.⁴⁵

□

Rev. Mvume Dandala, newly appointed General Secretary of the All Africa Council of Churches sets out another aspect:

We require more than a political framework to survive and to serve Africa. The answer must be in the religion-cultural framework, within which all disciplines must be located: political, sociological, economic, environmental and even religious. What is needed is a spiritual base to guide and inform the life of Africa.⁴⁶

□

The intention of inter-faith dialogue in Africa must be to work towards an authentic African community ... In this process our religions will move from being competitors building religious edifices, to being channels of a spirituality that is life-giving, community building, socially relevant, offering real hope not pious promises'.⁴⁷

Muslims point to the same needs: Say, "People of the Book" let us come to an agreement on that which is common between us (Qur'an, 3:63); Help each other to goodness and the development of the internal compass (Qur'an, 5:2); So race each other to the good (Qur'an, 2:147)

4.7 Joe Slovo concluded his pamphlet 'Has Socialism failed?' with 'complete faith that socialism represents the most rational, just and democratic way for human beings to relate to one another.'⁴⁸

⁴² At the Parliament of World Religions, Cape Town.

⁴³ WCRP Chatsworth, KwazuluNatal

⁴⁴ 'African Christian Witness: African Indigenous Churches': Ngada and Mofokeng. Cluster. 2001

⁴⁵ The Cape Town 'Multi Event' report p.61.

⁴⁶ All Africa Methodist Leaders Conference, Nairobi

⁴⁷ At the Parliament of World Religions, Cape Town.

⁴⁸ 'Has Socialism failed?' Inkululeko Publications. January 1990

- Humankind can never attain real freedom until a society has been built in which no person has the freedom to exploit another person.
- The bulk of humanity's resources will never be used for the good of humanity until they are in public ownership and under democratic control.
- The ultimate aim of socialism, to eliminate all class inequalities, occupied a prime place in the body of civilised ethics before Marx.
- The all-round development of the individual and the creation of opportunities for every person to express his or her talents to the full can only find ultimate expression in a society which dedicates itself to people rather than profit.

□

Can Religious Socialists spell out their belief in a new spirituality and political economy from the insights and initiatives of the RPG?

4.8 Proclaim it ! The first task of religious socialists⁴⁹ is to offer faith in terms of a secular spirituality in this post-religious age. Proclamation requires a Communication Strategy embracing books, print media, video, TV, radio, and internet at different levels, the re-training of preachers, and Lay Training schools. What else?

□

The Proclamation requires a new vision and understanding of the goal of the political economy (as the South African struggle focussed on the Freedom Charter.) We need a consultative world Charter written in the expectation of liberating ourselves from the globalised dictatorship of capital.⁵⁰ What can ILRS do to proclaim its faith to the world?

□

4.9 Struggle for it! Concern about the 'colour bar' and apartheid matured through years of analysis and commitment, until it finally became a struggle. It discovered the courage first to confront the sufferers, and then to confront the oppressors. By the 1980s we learnt the meaning of a Kairos time, a time ripe for the struggle to come to a head, a forward movement for harvest, for victory.

□

Has the time come for Religious Socialism to move from concern to struggle? Can we isolate the specific factors which inhibit the RPG on the one hand, and advance it on the other? Can we develop our strategies to tackle the right wing religions and capitalists?

□

Faith is the fruit of struggle. What is the focus of our struggle, today, now? How can the rich, the religious and the politicians be challenged to a new way of life? How can neo-colonialists be led away from the worship of Mammon and the heretical theologies of western and eastern fundamentalism?

□

4.10 Enact it! Go for new wine skins!

⁴⁹ Mk 1.14, and see para 2.1

⁵⁰ Elements have been written already.

Jesus, Muhammad, and many others realised the religious structures of their day could not re-invent themselves.⁵¹ The gospel of the RPG required new ways of faith and practice, of *tajdeed*, renewal. This does not mean writing off existing religious and political structures, but extending them by pursuing the human endeavour for cooperation, confidence and commitment (especially amongst youth, women, the poor, and agnostics.)

We are trying in South Africa. Whilst some religious leaders at different levels are clearly committed to the transformation of our country, they are often inhibited by their institutions, and political leadership has had to take the gap.

President Mandela led the call for people to unite on common issues:

The transformation of our country requires the greatest possible cooperation between religious and political bodies, critically and wisely serving our people together. Neither political nor religious objectives can be achieved in isolation. They are held in a creative tension with common commitments. We are partners in the building of our society.⁵²

Government initiated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Some people in the West still find difficulty with South Africa's approach to the perpetrators of apartheid: that justice (*adl*) builds on reconciliation (*sulh*) and forgiveness (*maghfira*), not punishment and retribution, and that the past must be past. Our new Religion Education policy celebrates unity in diversity and promotes the values of all religion. The National Religious Leaders Forum includes twice yearly meetings with the President, and many Provincial Legislatures hold annual 'Religious Parliaments'. Forums for economic transformation are moving from lamenting the lot of the poor to engaging the concern of the rich. Through NEPAD and the AU South Africa is seeking a new approach to our country, our continent, and our world.□

Many sectors of SA civil society have combined with government and formed a Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM) to seek to turn the country round, and bring a new spirituality into the human community experience. It's focus is not on running an organisation, but on regenerating and networking the thousands of people in every section of society who want to turn the world upside down.

□

How can Religious Socialism seek ways of compassion, consultation and commitment to answer the question: Who is our God? Or, in Jesus terms, how can we fill the skins of secular society with the new wine of the RPG?

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⁵¹ Mk.2.22 Qur'an 11:109.

⁵² To a meeting of religious leaders in 1997, initiating the National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF).