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Christian nationalism in post-apartheid South Africa: from the white broederbond to the transracial Neo/Pentecostals

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ABSTRACT

This article sheds light on two extremely important processes of the rise of Christian Nationalism and Christian New Right ideology that are currently underway in post-apartheid South Africa and situates these processes in relation to other regions of the world. In particular, the article calls attention to a creeping religious orientation in post-apartheid South Africa towards Christian Nationalism by insisting on the ideological centrality of Christianity and argues that to fully understand how Christian Nationalism is taking root in South Africa, we have to frame it through the language of the New Religious Right, and specifically its instantiation in Neo/Pentecostalism. In making its argument, the article first makes the definitional link between Christian Nationalism and the New Religious Right and; second, clarifies the explicit ways to interpret electoral and civil liberties spaces as exemplifying the conservative encroachment of democratic South Africa by a specifically transracial form of Neo/Pentecostalism.

KEYWORDS

African Neo/Pentecostalism; Christian Nationalism; Christian political parties; New Right; post-apartheid

Introduction[1]

This article examines the creeping religious orientation in South Africa towards what Gillian Hart, drawing on a number of scholars, has referred to as Christian Nationalism.[2] That is, as Annie Leatt argues, despite South Africa showing 'no evidence of the emergence of a political religion [...] that would seek to wrest government power away', there is indeed the continued perseverance of a 'public religion that seeks to contest the terms of social life.'[3] However, as this article argues, there is actually a push to go beyond social life into the political through the religious. Which means, we should

[1]I would like to thank the Special Issue editor, John Pazdziora for the invitation to submit this article, as well as the peer reviewers and editors of the *IJSCC* for their invaluable insight in the development of this article. Special thanks to Gillian Hart who read the first drafts of the article with a keen eye and provided helpful insights and conversations. I would also like to thank colleagues at the UCSIA Summer School (Antwerp) and at the Political Theology Network Conference (Philadelphia) for invaluable conversations about parts of the arguments of the article. In addition, I would like to thank The Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA), University of Ghana, for the fellowship that provided me with the space to focus on research and writing in 2022. Last, thanks to Elina Hankela for her support, always.

[2]Gillian Hart, 'Why Did It Take so Long? Trump-Bannonism in a Global Conjunctural Frame', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 102, no. 3 (2020): 239–66; Gillian Hart, 'Book Review of *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*', *Contemporary Sociology* 50, no.6 (2021a): 525–6; Gillian Hart, 'Decoding "the base": white evangelicals or Christian nationalists?' Alternatives, *Studies in Political Economy* 102, no. 1 (2021b): 61–76.

[3]Dhammamegha Annie Leatt, *The State of Secularism: Religion, Tradition and Democracy in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 187.

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look beyond the formalistic institutional contexts such as the Constitution and mainline Churches that do not really reflect the reality on the ground in terms of how ideologically central religion is in post-apartheid South Africa. To that end, the article explores the extent to which we can speak of Christian Nationalism in the post-apartheid context, including purporting that it is important to pay attention to this phenomenon in view of a global context, and a specifically African one of rising conservatism on the continent.

As Enyinna Nwauche has observed, 'even though Africa's second and third wave of democratisation entrenched secularity as a governing ethic, the idea that secularity means the absence of religion from the public sphere is not a feature of African states.'[4] In fact, according to Nwauche, what African states are grappling with is the question of how to manage the de facto state religions of Islam and Christianity that 'dominate and structure the public sphere. The challenge faced by secular African states is that of neutrality to enable all religions a fair access to the public sphere.'[5] Therefore, as one mechanism of mediating the de facto religious public sphere of African states, elections form an important site on which religion in Africa has an effect. This African context, in my view, is one where the foregrounding of the political through the religious continues to challenge not only the arrogance of political liberalism, but also the proscription of academic analyses which still hold on to the notion of the religious as possessing 'false consciousness' or espousing what Hart calls 'a snooty liberal version of [referring to the religious community as] a "basket of deplorables."'[6]

Consequently, in what follows, I argue that in order to fully understand how Christian Nationalism is taking root in South Africa, we have to frame it through the language of the New Religious Right, and specifically its instantiation in Neo/Pentecostalism in the country. Several scholars of religion make a distinction between Pentecostals (Classical) and Neo-Pentecostals (Neo-Charismatic) – referred to together as Neo/Pentecostals in my work. According to this distinction, Classical Pentecostalism foregrounds baptism with/by the Holy Spirit, whilst Neo-Pentecostalism foregrounds the living out of the fruit of this baptism through activities such as deliverance and healing. This distinction is usually made by those who like to read Neo/Pentecostalism as an aberration of the pure 'Baptism.' I think this distinction ignores the continuity inherent within the Pentecostal tradition, including its dynamism and contextualisation throughout the movement's history. To this end, I concur with Mookgo Kgatle and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu that Neo-Pentecostalism is essentially a revival movement within the confessional and traditional churches and part of the third or fourth wave (depending on your reading) of Pentecostal Christianity currently enjoying enormous growth and influence in Africa.[7] In making this claim, the understanding is that the expression 'neo-Pentecostal' is used here as an umbrella term to encompass Pentecostal renewal phenomena associated with trans-denominational fellowships, prayer groups,

[4]Enyinna S. Nwauche, 'To Be Secular and Neutral: The Challenge of Religion in South Africa', in *Religion in the Era of Postsecularism*, ed. Uchenna Okeja (London: Routledge, 2019), 64.
[5]Ibid.
[6]Hart, 'Decoding the base,' 62.
[7]Mookgo. S. Kgatle, 'The Unusual Practices within Some Neo-Pentecostal Churches in South Africa: Reflections and Recommendations', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017). http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4656; Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

ministries and independent churches, which came into existence or prominence from about the last three decades of the twentieth century."[8] In my view, the tendency to read Pentecostalism in supposedly distinctive waves misses out on the continuity inherent within this religious tradition, especially within the context of Africa where the relation between indigenous practices that emphasise engagement with the supernatural and Christianity has been central to the religious tapestry of the continent for a long time.

Moreover, whilst the New Religious Right and Christian Nationalism are seemingly different things, they are nonetheless part of the same register of conservative Christianity that is manifesting itself globally. From this perspective, New Right ideology is not possible without Christian Nationalism which gives it its divine invocation that hearkens back to the colonial and imperial projects of missionary Christianity, complete with its narrative of bringing light into the world and ensuring that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Making the definitional link between Christian Nationalism and the New Religious Right is the first task of the article. From this definitional concern, I then move on to discussing the specific ways in which we might interpret the electoral space as well as contestations in the civil liberties space as two instances in which we observe the conservative encroachment of democratic South Africa by a specifically *transracial* form of Christian Nationalism.

By transracial I am not referring to the American sense of transracial that focuses on people being able to choose their 'race' through reassignment of their birth race, whether physical or ideological. Instead, I am referring to transracialism as used in South Africa, where it is synonymous with non-racialism. In both senses, American transracialism and South African non-racialism point to a desire to transcend race. Both forms also recognise the social construction of race and seek to overcome it by pointing to the centrality of individual choice in either being able to reassign one's race or being colour-blind in the name of a non-descript individual. The problem, however, is that transracialism wants to disavow history and context (or at least use them differently in proposing a new form of identity politics premised on not seeing race). Consequently, for the South African context, such disavowal has meant an ahistorical criticism of affirmative action, for example, in preference for individual self-making, thus playing straight into New Right discourse. The ideological call to transcend race, so to speak, places the onus on previously racialised and marginalised communities to move on (from history) and get on with the present that only recognises atomic selves. In transcending race, the rainbow nation becomes the primary mode of identification, especially in its Christian form that needs to be reaffirmed in the face of socio-political moral crisis.

The Christian right, moral crisis, and the Neo/Pentecostal impetus

While primarily a phenomenon associated with the US and the UK in the 1980s and, most recently, with the Alternative Right in these countries, as well as parts of the European Union, Brazil, Turkey and India, amongst others, South Africa is not shielded from the New Right discourse. In other words, there is a comparative dimension to the article with respect to how the processes underway in South Africa should not be seen as

[8]Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 26.

a separate case, but, rather as both historically specific and as interconnected with forces underway in other regions of the world. As I have argued elsewhere, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of scholars in the US and the UK, such as Harvey Kaye, Peter Kallaway, and Michael Apple demonstrated how post-1970s' America and Britain fused the neo-liberal discourse of free markets with the neo-conservative Christian discourse of moral rightness to found the New Right.[9] Kallaway, in particular, observes that '[t]he emergence of the politics of the New Right in Britain and the USA, associated with the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism, has frequently been represented as the politics of crisis.'[10]

Furthermore, Sara Diamond, writing specifically with respect to the American Christian Right, notes its key elements.

> Typically, the Right favors a strong government role as enforcer of order at home and abroad, by means of religiously inspired codes of conduct, police power, and the military. The Right usually opposes the government in its role as distributor of wealth, power, and legal rights more equitably throughout society. There are exceptions to these general patterns. But, more often than not, the Christian Right, in particular, favors government policies that would enforce traditional hierarchical relations between men and women, parents and children.[11]

Which is to say, right-wing politics is about endorsing some government functions whilst opposing others, as Diamond further observes.[12] Diamond's observation highlights the contradictory logic of certain forms of conservative politics that pursue limited government intervention on the one hand, whilst demanding more government intervention on the other hand. Consequently, and normatively speaking, then, struggling in various arenas of social policy, including education, the economy, sex health, religious rights, and international diplomacy through the language of righting a crisis is part of the Christian Right ethos.

In the American context of which Diamond writes, this means specifically protecting the free market, promoting US hegemony, and preserving the traditional morality of the white American nuclear family in pursuit of the idealised Christian nation. Whilst this arrangement has changed in various ways over the years, thus making the direct reading of free-trade and US hegemony complex, I hearken back to the 1980s context of which Diamond writes because it gives a sense in which the South African roots of New Right ideology can be traced even further in its history. Specifically, in the South African context, New Right politics translates into pro-neoliberalism and preserving the Christian moral order for citizens and the state. In particular, the use of crisis language in South Africa highlights the hijacking of current global crises in general through the language of the New Right.

[9]Siphiwe I. Dube, 'The New Religious Political Right in Neo-Apartheid South Africa', *Religion & Theology* 28 (2021): 158; Michael W. Apple, 'Ideology, Equality, and the New Right', *Phenomenology + Pedagogy* 8 (1990): 293–314; Peter Kallaway, 'Privatization as an Aspect of the Educational Politics of the New Right: Critical Signposts for Understanding Shifts in Educational Policy in South Africa during the Eighties?' *British Journal of Educational Studies* 37, no. 3 (1989) : 253–78; Harvey J. Kaye, 'The Use and Abuse of the Past: The New Right and the Crisis of History', *Socialist Register*, Conservatism in Britain and America. Rhetoric and Reality 23 (1987): 332–64.

[10]Kallaway, Privatisation as an Aspect, 256.

[11]Sara Diamond, *Not By Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York & London: The Guilford Press, 1998), 7.

[12]Ibid.

The educationist Apple highlights the specific ways in which crisis discourse is foregrounded in New Right discursive praxes. Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, Apple argues that the use of this crisis language is to justify 'an increasingly close relationship between government and the capitalist economy'[13] In particular, according to Apple, '[t]he movement away from social democratic principles and an acceptance of more right-wing positions in social and educational policy occur precisely because conservative groups have been able to work on popular sentiments; to reorganize genuine feelings; and, in the process, to win adherents.'[14] What makes the New Right particularly attractive is the ability to skilfully manipulate feelings of predicament.[15] Consequently, it is under the guise of righting an economy in crisis (socio-economic well-being) that, for these scholars, persons rights won over long periods of struggle are subsumed under 'rightist restoration politics.'[16]

Moreover, writing in the context of the rise of New Right in the 1970s and 1980s in America, Jeffrey Marishane traces the role played by American Pentecostalism in this process. Marishane argues that:

> The New Right's efforts to co-opt the fundamentalist and Pentecostal movements' leadership into its hidden political agenda can be traced to 1976. In that year, New Right pollsters identified 'born again' Christians as the single largest bloc of unregistered voters and set themselves the task of tapping this potential."[17]

Fast forward to current day America and the link persists. One of the points arising from Diamond's analysis is that the admixtural nature of New Right discourse with specific reference to the mixing of conservative Christian morality in terms of social policy and overtly conservative and protectionist economic policies results in a particular construction of possessive individualism. The kind of individualism that favours possession in terms of rights that centre ownership and consumption. In other words, as noted through the activities of religiously conservative lobby organisations such as the Family Policy Institute (FPI) and Freedom of Religion South Africa (FORSA) discussed below, Christian Right groups in South Africa are demonstrating similar practices. This demonstration is in relation to opposing the extension of civil liberties in terms of sexualities and abortion, and the limitations of parental prowess over children through the introduction of the South African Schools Act on corporal punishment and the recent introduction of Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

As Diamond further concludes, and rather importantly for the South African context as well,

> "Were the Christian Right to achieve its wish list of policy goals, things would be different. For starters, abortion would be illegal. Homosexuals would be, if not invisible, then certainly unprotected from all types of discrimination. Children would pray in the schools, which would be run privately or by local school districts, with no government-mandated curricula."[18]

[13]Apple, Ideology, 299.
[14]Ibid., 298.
[15]Jeffrey Marishane, 'Prayer, Profit and Power: US Religious Right and Foreign Policy', *Review of African Political Economy* 18, no. 52 (1991): 86.
[16]Apple, Ideology, 300.
[17]Marishane, Prayer, Profit and Power, 82.
[18]Diamond, *Not By Politics Alone*, 7.

Therefore, it makes sense that conservative religious groups in South Africa would also demonstrate such foci. When one looks at the discourse of conservative religious groups in light of their policy contestations that are influenced by Neo/Pentecostalism, it is clear that they are preoccupied with the three principal foci of New Right discourse: the economy, the nation-state, and the moral order of behavioural norms.[19]

The South African Neo/Pentecostal context

In the current literature on Neo/Pentecostals in South Africa we can also observe that there is a general location of the rise of these churches within the 'crisis' discourse of the global New Right. For instance, in her article analysing the political rhetoric of Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelical Churches in the lead up to the 2014 general elections in South Africa, Frahm-Arp directly links the rise of these churches in the public sphere to the broad political landscape. According to Frahm-Arp, this landscape is one beset by a set of ongoing challenges that have 'the potential to threaten the stability of the democratic process.'[20] She continues to list these challenges as, 'growing unemployment, poor and underperforming service delivery, education and medical care, labour unrest, particularly with regard to ongoing strikes and wage disputes, an ever widening income gap, one-party political dominance, corruption within the country's fiscal management and fragile political institutions.'[21] Therefore, it is in light of speaking to these challenges that for Frahm-Arp the Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelical Churches' leaders see 'their roles as changing the moral behaviour and legislation of government to come in line with conservative Evangelical principles'[22]

In addition, Tiffany Mugo has argued, for example, how Christian Right Groups such as the FPI are using the crisis language to be on the moral offensive. The FPI describes itself in classical New Right language of family protection by noting that the 'Family Policy Institute was founded with the single minded objective of making the restoration of marriage and the family the cornerstone of South African social policy.'[23] In critiquing the organisation, Mugo observes specifically that, 'Christian right groups are adding to an already dangerous environment for women and LGBTQI individuals, by pushing "family values" – but not for everyone.'[24] For Mugo, this perspective of the FPI is nothing but hate masked as morality; by appealing to the language of family crisis, the FPI is able to position itself 'as a "moral" force in public spaces and institutions while pushing ultra-conservative and hateful rhetoric.'[25] Whilst small in scale, the FPI's work in South Africa is undergirded by a broader global network of like-minded organisations such as the World Congress of Families and the Family Rights Caucus at the United Nations, whose

[19]Sara Diamond, *Roads to dominion: Right-wing movements and political power in the United States* (New York & London: Guilford Press, 1995), 6.
[20]M. Frahm-Arp, 'The Political Rhetoric in Sermons and Select Social Media in Three Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelical Churches Leading up to the 2014 South African Election', *Journal for the Study of Religion* 28, no. 1 (2015): 126.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid., 117.
[23]Tiffany K. Mugo, 'Evangelicals in South Africa are "Broadcasting Hate Masked as Morality"', *Open Democracy*, 2018, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/evangelicals-south-africa-broadcasting-hate-masked-as-morality/ (accessed January, 2020).
[24]Ibid.
[25]Ibid.

primary aim is to *nuclearise* and *heteronormativise* the family accordingly to conservative Christian values.

In further support of Frahm-Arp and Mugo regarding the concurrent framing of the crisis of national loss of social control in South Africa through both the economic framework and the parallel discourse of the moral side of the New Right arsenal, Benjamin Fogel also foregrounds the language of crisis as central to the rise of right-wing populism. He notes bluntly that, 'There can be no doubt that South Africa is [in] the midst of its worst political and economic crisis since the end of apartheid – from six-hour blackouts to the deliberate destruction of our public transport system and the collapse of local government, things appear bleak.'.[26] As he further points out, 'Any country with over 25% unemployment, declining wages, rising inflation and the rising cost of living in the context of mass unemployment is always at the risk of the political instability.'[27] Consequently, at least according to Fogel, this situation has created a ripe moment for right-wing populist movements such that, 'The hope for social change is dying and, in its place, predatory prophets, micro lenders, gangsters and other low lives and snake oil salesmen prey on the poor and vulnerable.'[28] However, as Fogel concludes, in similar fashion to the observation put forth by this article – 'there is a different type of far-right politics emerging in South Africa. This is not a politics of the white minority, whose own right-wing organisations remain relatively marginal. This is a politics that has mass appeal in both the townships and suburbs.'[29] Elsewhere, I have made the argument that this far right politics constitutes the New Right in South Africa and, in this article, I am contending that this New Right ideology is foundational to the type of Christian Nationalism observed in today's South Africa. To better understand the appeal of South Africa's form of Christian Nationalism, including its *transracial* character, it is important to trace its broader racialised historical context.

Christian nationalism

In defining American Christian Nationalism, Katherine Stewart puts forth that,

> Christian nationalism … promotes the myth that the American republic was founded as a Christian nation … Its defining fear is that the nation has strayed from the truths that once made it great … It looks forward to a future in which its versions of the Christian religion and its adherents, along with their political allies, enjoy positions of exceptional privilege and power in government and in law. Christian nationalism is also a device for mobilizing (and often manipulating) large segments of the population and concentrating power in the hands of a new elite.[30]

In other words, American Christian nationalists decry the supposed changed nature of American society that has reneged on its status as a Christian nation. As Amanda Tyler further contends in this regard, and also echoing Diamond's observation noted earlier concerning the conservative role of government in Christian Right discourse, 'Christian

[26]B. Fogel, 'South Africa is Ripe for Right-wing Populist Movements', *The Mail & Guardian*, May 1, 2019, https://mg.co.za/article/2019-05-01-00-south-africa-is-ripe-for-right-wing-populist-movements/ (accessed November, 2019).
[27]Ibid.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 4.

nationalism demands a privileged place for Christianity in public life, buttressed by the active support of government at all levels.'[31] This is a point echoed in an earlier book by Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, written during the presidency of George W. Bush.[32] In this book, Goldberg observes that Christian Nationalism is 'based on the conviction that true Christianity must govern every aspect of public and private life, and that all – government, science, history, culture, and relationships – must be understood according to the dictates of scripture. There are biblically correct positions on every issue, from gay marriage to income tax rates, and only those with the right worldview can discern them.'[33] In critically reflecting on this general literature on Christian Nationalism, Hart observes that the general scholarly focus on Christian Nationalism tends to centre the United States, including being primarily about white Christian Nationalism.[34] In taking seriously the deep reach of American Christian Nationalism, Hart seeks to move beyond the whiteness of it all in pursuit of a global register that also decentres American exceptionalism. This is an important point on which I wish to build by demonstrating how we can also read a similar shift in the South African context.

To put it differently, to continue to read Christian Nationalism only through the register of whiteness misses out the ways in which its logics and cartographies are being palimpsestically taken up elsewhere, especially by black Christians. This is an argument I have made elsewhere regarding the related discourse of New Religious Political Right in South Africa.[35] A point which further drives home Hart's observation that whilst compelling, the literature on Christian nationalism is 'in urgent need of further development.'[36] In the context of South Africa, Hart explicitly observes that the most obvious case of Christian Nationalism is the apartheid system, including its most clear articulation in the Broederbond, a secret society in which every apartheid-era leader (Prime Minister or President) was a member.

In highlighting the importance of Christian Nationalism to apartheid politics, Hart foregrounds the central role of the neo-Calvinist theologian and former Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). She writes that,

> the influential ideas of Kuyper's politicotheological claims of divinely ordained nations helped to drive the redefinition of white Afrikaner nationalism to Christian nationalism in the early 1930s. Spearheaded by the extremely powerful Broederbond (Band of Brothers), which described itself as "born out of the deep conviction that the Afrikaner nation has been planted in this country by the Hand of God," white Christian nationalism was closely linked with the project of volkskapitalisme (people's capitalism), and together they aimed to contain class struggle. White Christian nationalism, in turn, formed the moral justification for the apartheid regime (1948–1990), while also providing a target of moral outrage to the anti-apartheid movement, an important component of which was framed in religious terms.[37]

[31]Amanda Tyler, 'Introduction in *Christian Nationalism and the 6 January 2021 Insurrection*', Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, 2022, https://bjconline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Christian_Nationalism_and_the_Jan6_Insurrection-2-9-22.pdf, (accessed July 12, 2022), n.p.
[32]Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).
[33]Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming*, 5–6.
[34]Hart, 'Decoding "the base"'; Hart, 'Book Review of Taking America'.
[35]Siphiwe I. Dube, 'The New Religious Political Right in Neo-Apartheid South Africa', *Religion and Theology* 28, no. 3–4 (2021): 153–78.
[36]Hart, 'Decoding the base', 63.
[37]Hart, 'Decoding the base', 63.

The significance of the Broederbond to apartheid's Christian Nationalism is a focus of many other studies as well that seek to not only foreground its Christianness, but also point to its embeddedness in whiteness.

For example, in a paper that examines what he calls the failure of Christian-National [*sic*] trade unionism within the context of white labour trade unionism, Dan O'Meara highlights the centrality of the Broederbond to the emergence of Afrikaner trade unions. He observes that,

> after 1936 the organization of Afrikaner workers on Christian-National lines became one of the three major policy thrusts of the secret Afrikaner Broederbond (A.B.-Afrikaner Brotherhood) [...] All the various Christian-Nationalist worker organizations (including Spoorbond) were initiated, inspired and run by AB members.[38]

In making this assessment regarding the importance of the Afrikaner Broederbond, O'Meara disavows appeals to Afrikaner nationalism in terms of the *volk* as providing enough explanatory power for the failure of Christian-National trade unionism. Instead, he is in favour of a labour and class analysis approach, which does not completely dismiss the fact that the Broederbond manipulated Afrikaner Christian Nationalism towards a petty-bourgeois aim of leveraging their own position at the behest of the general Afrikaans working class. The point is that O'Meara's concern with class analysis shifts the foreground from the whiteness and Christianness of the Broederbond as central to its disingenuous project, to the hidden but obvious economic interest. That is, to anyone familiar with South African apartheid politics, O'Meara offers an important intervention in the scholarship that foregrounds the *volk* as a purely mystical element or, a Saul Dubow maintains, 'the idealist conception which portrays "Afrikanerdom" as a unified, immanent, ethnic category'[39]

Regardless, in another account of the Broederbond in the book *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa*, copyedited posthumously by Dubow, Charles Bloomberg points out the centrality of the Broederbond to Afrikaner nationalism in general and Christian Nationalism in particular. He notes that it was 'a tightly-knit secret brotherhood of Afrikaner Nationalists, formed in 1918 to "promote all the interests of the Afrikaners" and to fight for the Afrikanerisation of South Africa's state on Christian National lines. As the champion of Afrikaner autonomy, the Broederbond worked to consolidate all Afrikaners into a single laager (encampment).'[40] Moreover, and importantly so, Bloomberg continues to observe that:

> The AB has played the role of Afrikanerdom's elite vanguard. It has been the invisible cement holding the structure together; the central arterial core of the Christian-Nationalist movement and the agency par excellence for propagating the Christian-Nationalist creed in South Africa. This doctrine blends the theology of orthodox, classical seventeenth-century Calvinism with the Afrikaner's racial and Nationalist consciousness, and has attempted to reconcile the Bible

[38]Dan O'Meara, 'Analysing Afrikaner Nationalism: The "Christian-National" Assault on White Trade Unionism in South Africa, 1934–1948', *African Affairs* 77, no. 306 (1978): 52.
[39]Saul Dubow in Charles Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa*, ed. Saul Dubow (London: Macmillan, 1990), xv.
[40]Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism*, xxii.

> with apartheid. Largely as a result of the Broederbond's tireless propaganda, Christian-Nationalist ideas permeate Nationalist thinking and constitute the ideological basis of the Republican state and the theology of the Dutch Reformed Churches (DRCs).[41]

Meaning that, in similar fashion observed above in the context of the United States of America, the coming together of Christianity, ethnoracialsm, and capitalism is a central aspect of not only the type of American Christian Nationalism observed today, but can in fact, as Hart puts forward, be said to be its progenitor.[42]

Consequently, for Bloomberg, the centrality of Christianity in the then ruling National Party needs to be understood as not merely ornamental, but fundamental to how the Broederbond and the National Party understood their role in politics in very confessional terms premised on Christian normative terms. Indeed, to this end, Bloomberg observes that,

> The N[ational] P[arty] of D.F. Malan, established in 1934, formally embraced Christian-Nationalism. Article 1 of its Constitution states: 'The Party acknowledges the sovereignty and guidance of God in the destiny of countries and seeks the development of our nation's life along Christian-National lines.' [*sic*] in education (according to Article 24), 'the Christian-National basis of the state should be taken fully into account'. Furthermore, all black people must be kept 'under the Christian trusteeship of the European race.[43]

That is to say, the Christian-Nationalism of the National Party and the Broederbond, which later finds consonance in the Dutch Reformed Church's State Theology is primarily a 'theological defence of Afrikaner Nationalism, and of Afrikaner hegemony in politics.'[44] Moreover, its precepts are those of chosenness, sacred mission, stress on 'authority, hierarchy, discipline, privilege and elitist leadership', as well as the foregrounding of 'nation, family, blood and the cult of force.'[45]

Furthermore, in a refrain familiar to much of contemporary New Right ideology, the 'rejection of liberalism, Marxism, "sickly sentimental humanism" and the equality of humankind regardless of race' are also part of its key features.[46] That is, the marrying of nationalism, understood as the civilisational apex of belonging to which colonialism and its civilisational mission should lead to, and Christianity, understood as the paramount revelation of Truth, is what makes this apartheid era Christian-Nationalism interesting to examine in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. That is, given the supposed dismantling of the racial order of apartheid in post-apartheid South Africa on the one hand, which I've argued is central to apartheid era Christian-Nationalism, and the centrality of ethnoracism for Christian-Nationalism, how does one account for the continuation of Christian Nationalism in the post-apartheid era with its avowed *rainbowism*? Even in the American context, the colour line is still very much present despite

[41]Ibid.
[42]Hart, 'Decoding the base', 62.
[43]Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism*, xxiii.
[44]Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism*, 1.
[45]Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism*, 1.
[46]Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism*, 1.

the support that former President Donald Trump received from so-called minorities in his presidential campaigns.[47]

For my context, South Africa, I argue that conservative Christianity, and in particular its New Right form, is very central to the resurgence of Christian Nationalism in the post-apartheid era. Such an argument foregrounds conservative Christianity as pivotal in the current fight for the soul of the nation. More pointedly, it is the religious key features outlined above that are foregrounded in the contemporary context of Christian Nationalism, which are the importance of chosenness, sacred mission, Godly authority, discipline, and family, including the rejection of socially progressive political ideologies. Furthermore, the contemporary form of Christian Nationalism is observable particularly in the proliferation of Neo/Pentecostal organisations and political parties.

Civil liberties space

In a 2008 report that defends the view that Pentecostalism is dormant capital that, if tapped properly, has the potential to change the economic outlook of South Africa, The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) aligns post-1994 Neo/Pentecostalism with a conservative discourse of 'opposition to South Africa's socially "progressive" constitution.'[48] A constitution that has been challenged 'because it is seen to encourage rights above obligations, challenge the authority of God, and contradict the moral values commonly associated with Christianity.'[49] That is to say, in a similar trend to the American context of the rise of Christian Nationalism described earlier, research in the South African context demonstrates that, 'Most Pentecostals fear that the new freedom of expression in South Africa encourages pornography, abortion on demand, alternative sexual preferences, and idolatry.'[50] As such, the entry of Neo/Pentecostals into the public sphere seems to be centred on either influencing or encouraging and strengthening the moral character of those in power towards a conservative Christian mooring.[51]

However, it is important to also note that there is some contestation around how significant the impact of Pentecostals in this regard is, despite the accepted view of their proliferation in the post-apartheid public sphere. That is to say, such a centring of Neo/Pentecostalism in the political arena of South African contemporary politics may seem far-fetched given the general assumptions regarding Pentecostalism's primary concern

[47]See, for example: Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead, 'Christian nationalism and white racial boundaries: Examining whites' opposition to interracial marriage', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 10 (2015): 1671–89; Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead, 'Christian nationalism, racial separatism, and family formation: Attitudes toward transracial adoption as a test case', *Race and Social Problems* 7, no. 2 (2015): 123–34; Ramsey Dahab and Marisa Omori, 'Homegrown foreigners: how Christian nationalism and nativist attitudes impact Muslim civil liberties', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 10 (2019): 1727–46. Samuel L. Perry, Ryon J. Cobb, Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua B. Grubbs, 'Divided by faith (in Christian America): Christian nationalism, race, and divergent perceptions of racial injustice', *Social Forces* soab134 (2021): 1–30, https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soab134; Samuel L. Perry, Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua B. Grubbs, 'Prejudice and pandemic in the promised land: how white Christian nationalism shapes Americans' racist and xenophobic views of COVID-19', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44, no. 5 (2021): 759–72; Samuel L. Perry, Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua B. Grubbs, '"I Don't Want Everybody to Vote": Christian Nationalism and Restricting Voter Access in the United States', *Sociological Forum* 37, no. 1 (2022): 4–26.

[48]Centre for Development and Enterprise, *Under the Radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and its Potential Social and Economic Role*, 2008, https://www.cde.org.za/under-the-radar-pentecostalism-in-south-africa-and-its-potential-social-and-economic-role/ (accessed January, 2019), 19.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Frahm-Arp, 'The Political Rhetoric', 135.

being solipsistic piety. However, this archaic view needs to be tempered by the proliferation of a larger literature that frames this discussion within an earlier timeline of Neo/Pentecostal involvement in politics immediately following the legal end of apartheid. As Frahm-Arp indicates, amongst others, 'During apartheid most Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelical-style churches were politically neutral and uninvolved in politics . . . In the new dispensation after 1994, this changed drastically.'[52] Other scholars, including those cited by Frahm-Arp in her argument, also corroborate this perspective.[53]

The CDE, for example, also highlights that 'Although Pentecostals were generally politically inactive before the first democratic elections in April 1994, since then a few prominent leaders have aligned themselves with the spirit and goals of liberation from apartheid.'[54] Nonetheless, the view that Pentecostals are only now entering the public sphere can also be challenged from the perspective of the work of scholars such as Dean Curry and Ove Gustafsson, who in the early 1990s already point to the observation that South Africa was ripe for religious rightness.[55] For my purpose though, the view of Neo/Pentecostalism as apolitical needs to be challenged especially now because of how limited it is in providing us with a map of how to navigate Christian Nationalism at work in contemporary South Africa. This is because, from such an apolitical view, there is really no connection to be made between the racist Christian Nationalism of the Broederbond during the apartheid era and the moral concerns of Neo/Pentecostals in post-apartheid South Africa. Such a reading misses out on the significance of Christian morality as a *transracial* form of social and economic capital that unites apartheid religiously nostalgic white bigots with their neoliberal black co-religionists.

In fact, as I have maintained so far, it is the concern with the so-called moral regeneration of the South African nation, including its affirmation as a Christian nation that brings together black and white South Africans in cahoots on the project of exclusionary Christian Nationalism. From both sides of the proverbial racial fence, the argument is that the liberal constitution is too porous and has allowed all kinds of ills to enter the pure, idealised, Christian post-apartheid South Africa. There is too much fluidity in sexuality, in morality, and in the diversity of who counts as a South African and, therefore, there is a need to moor the ship back to Godly ground.

As Dubow observes in an article analysing the intersection of Afrikaner nationalism, race, and apartheid in the logic of Broederbond Christian Nationalism:

> As an ideology, Christian-nationalism was not restricted to whites. The Dutch Reformed mission church, which played a vital role in the conception of apartheid, insisted that Christian-nationalism was intended to apply to all nations - whether or not they wished it. This mission tradition rested heavily on a deep paternalism which spoke of the Afrikaner's 'calling as guardian over the weaker peoples.'[56]

[52]Frahm-Arp, 'The Political Rhetoric', 116.
[53]Kuperus, Tracy, 'The Political Role and Democratic Contribution of Churches in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Journal of Church and State* 53, no. 2 (2011): 278–306; Kelebogile Thomas Resane, '"And they shall make you eat grass like oxen" (Daniel 4: 24): Reflections on Recent Practices in Some New Charismatic Churches', *Pharos Journal of Theology* 98, no. 1 (2017): 1–17.
[54]CDE, *Under the Radar*, 19.
[55]Dean C. Curry, 'Religion and the New South Africa', *First Things*, October, 1990, https://www.firstthings.com/article/1990/10/religion-and-the-new-south-africa; Ove Gustafsson, 'A New Religious Political Right', in *Religion and Politics in Southern Africa*, eds. Carl Fredrik Hallencreutz and Mai Palmberg (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1991), 109–22.
[56]Saul Dubow, 'Afrikaner nationalism, apartheid and the conceptualization of "race"', *The Journal of African History* 33, no. 2 (1992): 224.

Whilst Dubow correctly argues that such a view was meant to 'disguise racial superiority in terms of divine destiny and an ethical code of rights and obligations,' the ideological view that Christian Nationalism is for everyone remains in post-apartheid South Africa and has also been *rainbowised*.[57] That is, the deep racialised paternalism has been transformed into a non-racial paternalism of conservative Christianity that has the correct version of the truth, including the divine calling to assert and exert this truth.

For example, in one of their most public campaigns, the FPI challenged the implementation of the highly controversial Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the Life Orientation curriculum of public schools in South Africa in 2019.[58] While not big itself in terms of numbers and public reach, the organisation had signatories to its challenge from a wide-range of Pentecostal churches across racial lines. These included the Baptist Union of South Africa, Full Gospel Church of South Africa, Assemblies of God of South Africa (AOG), Vineyard Fellowship of Churches South Africa, Christian Family Churches of South Africa, United Apostolic Faith Churches of South Africa, Every Nation Family of Churches South Africa, and Fellowship of Community Churches in South Africa (FCC). In its promotional material, the FPI labels CSE as sexual indoctrination that promotes 'dangerous sexual practices that are contrary to South Africa's tradition, culture, and morals.'[59] This campaign is also taken up in the American context by Family Watch International under the aegis of protecting South Africa's children.[60] In its stead, the FPI proposes what it calls Common Sense Sexuality Education, thus appealing to a key notion in conservative ideology that conservative values are common-sense.[61]

Other than the churches mentioned above, amongst its slew of supporters, the FPI has been supported by another conservative Christian rights group, Freedom of Religion South Africa (FORSA). Whilst the organisation claims to be neutral and representative of all 'faith traditions' in its defence of freedom of religion, it is led completely by a Christian leadership team and espouses the idea of threat to the Christian way due to the adoption of a secular constitution.[62] Although FORSA is non-denominational and non-confessional in its self-representation, its ideological and legal position is clear. It is an organisation founded on defending the

> Joshua Generation Church (a well-known evangelical church in the Western and Southern Cape) [which was] being targeted by an atheist couple for its Biblical teachings on parental discipline. The Church was investigated by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), who recommended that the Church no longer teach the 'offensive' Scriptures, remove them from its teaching manuals and that the Church's pastors should undergo 'sensitisation training.'"[63]

[57] Ibid.
[58] https://familypolicyinstitute.com/take-action/.
[59] Ibid.
[60] https://www.comprehensivesexualityeducation.org/international-map/southafrica/.
[61] https://familypolicyinstitute.com/pcsa/; https://www.facebook.com/csse.smartchoices; formerly on this now defunct page: https://familypolicyinstitute.com/common-sense-sexuality-education/; for general literature on common-sense and Conservatism see, for example: Fulvio Cammarano, *'To Save England from Decline': The National Party of Common Sense: British Conservatism and the Challenge of Democracy (1885–1892)* (Lanham, MD & Oxford: University Press of America, 2001); Rose Capdevila and Jane Callaghan, '"It's not racist. It's common sense": A critical analysis of political discourse around asylum and immigration in the UK', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2008): 1–16; Antii Lepistö, *The Rise of Common-Sense Conservatism: The American Right and the Reinvention of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).
[62] https://forsa.org.za/.
[63] https://www.forsa.org.za/about/our-story.

I highlight this one recent issue on sexual health education for children in order to draw attention to the fact that Neo/Pentecostal Christians in South Africa are engaging in the process of using highly contested moral issues to argue for why South Africa is in moral crisis and how that moral crisis inevitably leads to other crises such as economic and political. In engaging with this moralised religious line of inquiry, this particular discursive line is taken up largely though the proliferation of a particular form of Christianity that continues the apartheid era Christian Nationalism claim that South Africa is a Christian nation. And, losing this Christian mooring has only led to the current crisis mode.

In fact, their 2022 campaign called #SAMustRise is in obvious counter-narrative response to protest action calling for the fall of fees #FeesMustFall and the fall of coloniality #RhodesMustFall, collectively referred to as the Fallist Movement. The Fallist Movement, active in 2015 and 2016 at various university campuses in South Africa, called for the fall of coloniality as a system that continued to embolden white privilege not only in academic spaces like universities, but the country as a whole. Its narrative stood counter to the imagination of South Africa as the rainbow nation, and one that has afforded freedom to everyone. Instead, according to this movement, anti-black racism continued unabated in South Africa despite a progressive constitution and the culture of rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights. Consequently, and in opposition to this call, the conservative counter-narrative is that the Fallist discourse has led the country on a downward spiral of falling morality – that is, a crisis.

In response to not only this protest culture but also what they deem to be the moral failure of leaders, the FPI calls for the following: 'Family Policy Institute launches the #SAMustRise Campaign. #SAMustRise above petty and destructive politics. #SAMustRise above self-enrichment & entitlement. #SAMustRise above corruption & maladministration. #SAMustRise above racial polarisation & conflict.'[64] While identifying problems that no one will dispute as needing attention and possibly a multiple and intersectional approach, the FPI only proclaims a singular line of approach. In saying, 'You and I and every Christian citizen must declare SA's God-given destiny. We must resist negative and destructive campaigns. When everything we dislike must fall – the nation will eventually fall,' they directly invoke the language of Christian Nationalism.[65] In particular, as the FPI further remarks, 'Righteousness exalts a nation. There are enough righteous people in South Africa to make a significant difference in this nation. Do not speak death over South Africa. God commands you and I to speak life!'[66] Meaning that South Africa is God's chosen country and all it needs are the Christians, who are assumed to all share the same conservative values, to declare authority of God over the country and reclaim God's special mission and destiny for South Africa.

In further supporting the centrality of Neo/Pentecostal moral crisis context argument, including the positive role that this group can play in reviving the country Terry Tastard, writing for a conservative American Christian magazine (*Providence*), also highlights how '[p]ossibly the newer, independent charismatic churches will encourage renewal at the personal level' in response to what Tastard identifies as a spiritual crisis."[67] For

[64]https://familypolicyinstitute.com/take-action/; https://www.facebook.com/SAMustRise/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel.
[65]Ibid.
[66]Ibid.
[67]Terry Tastard, 'Christianity & Crisis in South Africa', Providence, February, 2017, https://providencemag.com/2017/02/christianity-crisis-in-south-africa-today/ (accessed January, 2019).

Tastard, this spiritual crisis consists of 'a vacuum at the place where morality, family life, and social conscience all interact. This means that South Africans live in a society scarred by corruption, precarious healthcare, and widespread violence – in other words, they are living a spiritual crisis, indeed.'[68] However, in the manner of New Right discourse, the spiritual crisis is foregrounded by an economic crisis, most observable in 'protests over what is called "service delivery."'[69] Therefore, at least according to Tastard, the material crisis has a spiritual dimension to it that cannot be ignored if the strains on South African society are not to reach an explosive level.[70] This strained context, then, is one wherein the Charismatic churches can encourage renewal as per Tastard's argument.

Additionally, in further solidifying this self-perceived role of moral saviour of South Africa by the Neo/Pentecostal churches, Tastard points to Ray McCauley's key role in forming an interfaith group of religious leaders called the National Interfaith Council of South Africa (NICSA) with the blessing of former president Jacob Zuma. Nothing, in particular, that, 'Its ambition to bring together social development and a renewal of personal and moral values has not been realized. This would seem to be exactly what South Africa needs, given the interlocking problems of fatherless families, violence, poverty, and political corruption.'[71] To anyone familiar with the language of intersectionality, especially the notion of interlocking oppressions, the use of such language in a context of justifying the pursuance of conservative religious ideology as Tastard clearly does is jarring. In particular, FORSA best demonstrates the interesting ways in which conservative religious groups and political parties use the freedom language of the constitution, including references to interlocking suppression of religious freedoms, to bolster their conservative agenda.

For example, FORSA declares that it is an 'organisation dedicated to upholding the rights to religious freedom conferred by the South African Constitution, including parental rights and the autonomy of religious organisations to determine their own doctrines and regulate their own internal affairs free from interference by the State or anyone else.'[72] Meaning that, actually the constitution which celebrates diversity and freedom in the most open manner is not the final word for this organisation. Why? Because they 'have a single-minded and unwavering commitment to ensure that we continue to live in a nation where all people remain free to celebrate, speak about and live out their religious convictions, beliefs and opinions.'[73] These convictions involve allowing the corporal discipline of children at home; the proscription on marriage only meaning heterosexual marriage (using the language of conscientious objection); reinforcing parental control over children's education (with particular reference to sexual education and prayer in public schools); questioning the reach of hate speech (with specific reference to LGBTQI+ communities as well as race); including issues of gender equality and what counts as domestic violence.

For Ivor Chipkin, what makes such hijacking of left discourse by the conservative religious bloc possible (and not just Christian) is that 'far-right groups occupy positions

[68]Ibid.
[69]Ibid.
[70]Ibid
[71]Ibid.
[72]https://forsa.org.za/.
[73]Ibid.

traditionally held by the left.'[74] Moreover, '[t]he reason that the far right has been able to capture this terrain is that the left has largely abandoned it,' and left the space open to contestation and co-option through the language of saving the nation.[75] However, the assumption that the left in post-apartheid South Africa remains homogenous and intact ignores the ways in which we have observed the shifting of left-leaning organisations into the right, especially in the form of the rise of Black Conservatism in South Africa and the transformation of traditionally liberal think tanks such as the Institute of Race Relations into new bastions of conservative ideologies.[76] In a kind of Lefortian nightmare, the radical indeterminacy of democracy has led us back to the pursuit of the utmost sovereign through Christian Nationalism.[77] As such, one understanding of what FORSA is doing, for example, is using the constitutional language of diversity and protecting a minority view in the service of Christian Nationalism.

However, statistically speaking, Christians are not a minority in South Africa, but conservative Christian groups are using the language of the constitution to claim such a view by declaring that there is an assault on Christian values.[78] Furthermore, they are doing so by declaring that the restoration of these supposed minority values is not only important for Christians, but for everyone because, indeed, this is a Christian country after all, and *transracially* so. That is to say, at the same time that conservative Christian New Rightist or Christian Nationalist propound a separation of spheres argument that seeks to protect that sanctuary of religious freedom, the core belief that this is a Christian nation means that their opposition to liberal policies is not only meant to apply to Christians but also everyone who doesn't know what is good for them. Goldberg refers to this as 'Christianity as a total ideology' that should inform every aspect of our reality.[79] This reality also includes who *should* be elected to power.

Elections

As noted earlier, in addition to assault on civil liberties discussed above, another area where we can observe the solidification of the discourse of Christian Nationalism is in the electoral space. In fact, the electoral space is changing in South Africa and, in particular for the ruling African National Congress (ANC), moving from certainty to greater susceptibility to voter grievance expressed at the polls through declining support for the ruling party and diminishing voter turn-out. That is, the dwindling support is reflective of general voter apathy in the country, which has seen a decline in voter registration and turn-out consecutively since the first general election of 1994, which had the highest numbers owing to the euphoria of the dawn of democracy after apartheid. Then (1994), there were only two overtly religious parties:

[74]Ivor Chipkin, 'State of the Nation: The New Right in South Africa', *The Daily Maverick*, February 10, 2017, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2017-02-10-state-of-the-nation-the-new-right-in-south-africa/ (accessed December, 2019).
[75]Ibid.
[76]Dube, 'The New Religious Political Right', 159, 167.
[77]Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 1986); Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1988).
[78]For a deeper examination of this phenomenon in contemporary South Africa see, for example, Haley McEwan, 'South African radical-right groups are mobilising against anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns', The Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), 2021, https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2021/07/09/south-african-radical-right-groups-are-mobilising-against-anti-lgbtiq-campaigns/.
[79]Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming*, 6.

the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), established in 1993 and the Africa Muslim Party (AMP), established in 1994), with many others espousing a general religious affirmation of sorts. By 2022, the list of religious political parties had increased to include, the African Covenant (AC), established in 2018, African Transformation Movement (ATM), established in 2018, Al Jama-ah, established in 2007, Christian Political Movement (CPM), established in 2014, Economic Emancipation Forum (EEF), established in 2017, International Revelation Congress (IRC), established in 2014, and South African Christian Movement (SACM), established in 2010.

Other political parties who do not claim to be religious per se, but clearly champion conservative Christian values in the public sphere, include the Patriotic Alliance. A party that campaigned in the local government election of 2022 on bringing prayer back to public schools.[80] In particular, at one campaigning event held at an Assemblies of God Church, its leader Gayton Mackenzie is quoted saying:

> The other thing that we are going to do once we take over we are going to bring back God in our schools, homes and government institutions. This government has removed God from our constitution by doing so isolating the majority of South Africans who are Christians with what they believe in. How can we be blessed if we are not allowed to pray to our God. That is why this country is full of drugs, corrupt people, poverty and many other bad things."[81]

Mackenzie's speech is rife with the New Right language of social and political failure due to moral failure, and demonstrates the extent to which conservative political leaders in South Africa draw from the well of crisis discourse to promote their vision of change based on restoring Christian National values.

While it is possible to make the case that focusing on the increased number of religious parties is, perhaps, overdetermining their impact because just as many non-religious political parties have also emerged, such an argument ignores the context within which these religious political parties have emerged. This is a context, as I have described above, concerned with the language of crisis and informed by a global New Right movement that is seeking to put God back in control by curbing what are deemed to be problematic liberal encroachments on the moral fabric of society. This restorative project is what I term Christian Nationalism. In fact, given that a significant part of the voter base in South Africa is religious (94.8% counting all religious affiliations, according to the 2015 General Household Survey), this must have some impact on how political parties frame their campaigns, policies and strategies in light of the values of this large constituency.[82]

In fact, Rebecca Davis makes interesting observations about the flocking of political leaders to places of worship on the Easter Weekend leading up to the 2019 elections.[83] Of

[80] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-1XXciu9D8.

[81] Andile Nomabhunga, 'Patriotic Front Will Bring Back God in Schools Once They Win November Elections', The Informer, October 7, 2021. https://informer.africa/politics/patriotic-front-will-bring-back-god-in-schools-once-they-win-november-elections/.

[82] Statistics South Africa, *General Household Survey 2015*, 2016, https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182015.pdf (accessed July 2, 2021). Also, for an in-depth discussion of how what values matter for voters and how these are informed particularly by a religious orientation in the context of South African local elections of 2021 see, Siphiwe I. Dube, 'A Religiously Motivated Electorate in South Africa?' *The Midpoint Paper Series* N°8. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2021, https://www.kas.de/en/web/suedafrika/single-title/-/content/a-religiously-motivated-electorate-in-south-africa.

[83] Rebecca Davis, 'God and Elections: Religion and Politics Meet Behind – and in Front of – the Pulpits this Easter', *Daily Maverick*, April 23, 2019, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-04-23-god-and-elections-religion-and-politics-meet-behind-and-in-front-of-the-pulpits-this-easter/.

significance for my argument is the observation that 'the 2019 national elections are unique in the unprecedented number of religiously-flavoured parties contesting the polls, and the unprecedented number of party leaders who have held positions in the church.'[84] Davis cites political analyst Ongama Mtimka when she writes that 'the formation of small Christian parties in the run-up to the 2019 polls is informed by the sense of "moral crisis" in South Africa after a decade of State Capture, with religious individuals seeking to "influence the political system with good values."'[85] Further drawing on Ferial Haffajee's (2019) observations, Davis writes that churches in South Africa continue to command a high level of public trust: 'An electorate which is increasingly fed up with corrupt or disengaged politicians may choose to put their trust in men or women of the cloth rather than career politicians, in the hope that the former will be more likely to act in accordance with the best interests of the people.'[86] Although Davis is not completely convinced that voters are ready to abandon their big political parties, and they did not in practice, the 2019 election results certainly proved fruitful for some of the religious parties as further noted below.

That said, however, the conclusion should not be that religious orientation has no bearing on voter choice. My contention is that a long time has passed since the prevalence of this view, and the proliferation of a high number of religiously based parties since the last national election (2019), coupled with the increasing public voice of conservative Christian religious organisation, and including the general discontent with the powers that be constitute the right mixture for a greater propagation of Christian Nationalism. Such propagation is likely because of a new configuration of the relationship between religion and politics in the last few years of the post-apartheid era that has been brought about by an increased link to the global processes of change articulated specifically through the language of Christian religious discontent with the current global political order.

Christian political parties and independent candidates as the new road

One of these new configurations in the electoral space recently is the alignment of conservative moral discourse with the crisis discourse of a failing state that needs religious moral regeneration, articulated through the contestations of elections by conservative religious parties. In particular, the 2019 national elections saw the Christian-based party, the ATM, with its 'South Africans First' motto manage to secure an eighth position nationally on its first try. The ATM believes in the return of capital punishment, building a 'society founded on Divine-based Values', promoting 'Moral Regeneration', and reinvigorating the role of traditional leadership in governance.[87] As is clear from its list, this party espouses ideas found commonly in conservative and New Right discourse. In fact, in expanding the reach of ATM's discourse beyond the black block, we can observe that its discourse aligns very well with the Democratic Alliance's conservative stances and policies on immigration, crime, and rights of sexual minorities. Such an

[84]Ibid.
[85]Ibid.
[86]Ibid.
[87]African Transformation Movement (ATM), 2019, https://www.atmovement.org/.

alignment points to a broader conservative alliance between the white right-centred bloc and their black co-religionists.

In addition, another conservative Christian organisation garnered enough votes for a sixth place in the 2019 elections, namely, the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), founded in 1993. Whilst its electoral performance has basically remained flat, it has, nonetheless, remained competitive in all the elections since 1994. Its highly positive 2019 elections performance indicates its continued relevance, especially in light of the argument of this article regarding the rise of Christian Nationalism. In fact, the ACDP performed well in the three major provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Western Cape. Led by Reverend Kenneth Moshoe, the ACDP promises a fresh start based on Christian and family values.[88] Moreover, the ACDP proclaims that: 'We adhere to a moral philosophy that is based upon the Word of God, and measure the interpretation of our policies against the prerequisites of biblical standards.'[89]

More importantly, the ACDP economic policy foregrounds traditional Right economic principles. It does so by advocating for commitment to: 'reducing government debt and spending; job creation and economic growth through an open-market policy with as little government interference as possible; becoming competitive in the global economy and global markets; lowering inflation; state enterprises operating in open competition with private providers; and doing away with complicated tax forms, laws and expensive monitoring.'[90] In other words, there is much conservative rightist discourse to be found in the specifically evangelical Christian orientation of this political organisation, including the fact of their primarily black constituency also advocating for its New Right orientation.

To that end, Davis further argues that, 'There are signs that the major political parties are alive to the potential allure of religious principles for conservative voters at this point.'[91] That is, given the country's ongoing crisis mode since the global economic crunch of 2008, as well as the incremental number of religious political parties on the ballot paper in recent elections either led by religious individuals or affiliated with a religious community, attention needs to be paid to how these two elements speak specifically to the increasing tendency towards a post-apartheid form of Christian Nationalism.[92] In particular, the recent parliamentary decision to allow independent candidates to contest provincial and national elections provides an interesting space in which to examine the potential for further influence of Christian Nationalism.[93] The decision has been taken up in positive ways within conservative religious organisations and political parties. Whereas before, only political parties could stand for national

[88]African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), 2019, https://www.acdp.org.za/.
[89]Ibid.
[90]Ibid.
[91]Ibid.
[92]On the ongoing economic crunch see: Ann Bernstein, 'Forget the Fiscal Cliff – Try Economic Swamp', *BizNews*, September 3, 2019, https://www.biznews.com/thought-leaders/2019/09/03/bernstein-fiscal-cliff-economic-swamp; Richard William Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive? The Looming Crisis* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015); Moeletsi Mbeki, Jannie Rossouw, Fanie Joubert and Adèle Breytenbach, 'South Africa's Fiscal Cliff Barometer', *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy* 70 (2018): 29–33; South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), *The Rise of the New Right: South Africa's Road to 2024*, 2016, https://irr.org.za/reports/occasional-reports/the-rise-of-the-new-right-south-africas-road-to-2024.
[93]Electoral Commission of South Africa, 'Electoral Commission welcomes the signing of the Electoral Amendment Bill into law by President Cyril Ramaphosa', 2023, https://www.elections.org.za/content/About-Us/News/Electoral-Commission-welcomes-the-signing-of-the-Electoral-Amendment-Bill-into-law-by-President-Cyril-Ramaphosa/.

elections, through closed party lists, under the new law citizens can vote for their choice candidate directly.[94]

Errol Naidoo, founder and CEO of the FPI, has come out strong in support of independent candidates standing for national elections. Nothing, in particular that, 'A morally delinquent ANC knows a constituency-based system in which competent and skilled men and women of integrity are able to compete fairly against the corrupt and incompetent cadres within its ranks will spell disaster for its future political/criminal prospects.'[95] Clearly, Naidoo counts himself as one of these skilled men and women of integrity since he indicates at the end of the posting that he is standing for office, even though he does not indicate in what capacity. Regardless, the point is that while the electoral reform, originally pursued by a largely liberal movement, has the potential to upend the autocracy of political parties, it also has the potential to bring into power conservative leaders such as Naidoo who believe that South Africa needs to shore up its Christian Nationalism.

Moreover, it is not just Naidoo, as there is also the ACDP (referred to earlier when discussing the resurgence of religious political parties), which has proclaimed its support for the proposed electoral reform. In a media statement issued on 23 June 2022, Deputy President of ACDP, Wayne Thring, writes glowingly of the reform. He maintains that, 'we support the electoral reform recommendation to scrap the system which sees the party that wins elections select the country's President. Hence, we support the recommendation which would give voters the right to choose the President directly.'[96] Thring hones in on the matter of presidency and avers that what the electoral reform recommendation seeks to do is 'to prevent a compromised President of a political party, that wins the majority vote in a national/provincial election, from being elected as President over the nation. The ACDP sees this recommendation as a step in the right direction.'[97] Indeed, the positive value of this proposed reform is something that is also praised by non-religious political parties. However, in the case of the ACDP and the FPI, it is clear they see such reform as an opportunity for direct representation of Neo/Pentecostal Christians on the highest power table; thus giving confidence to the belief that it might actually be possible to steer the moral campus of the country 'back' to its Christian Nationalism roots.

Whilst not much public discourse currently abounds (at least at the time of the writing of this article) on how religious leaders will take up the opportunity of independent candidacy, it is not unlikely that once the election fervour begins, we may see a larger proliferation of individuals running on the ticket of restoring the moral integrity of South Africa as a Christian nation. That is if the local government elections of 2021 are anything to go by, where we saw religious leaders overtly direct voters to not vote for the ANC and that having an impact on the percentage of the vote garnered by the ruling party, which was less than 50% for the first time in the history of democratic South African elections,

[94]William Gumede, 'OLICY BRIEF 35: SOUTH AFRICA NEEDS ELECTORAL SYSTEM OVERHAUL', Democracy Works Foundation, 2020, https://democracyworks.org.za/south-africa-needs-electoral-system-overhaul/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=south-africa-needs-electoral-system-overhaul.
[95]Ibid.
[96]https://www.acdp.org.za/?s=Electoral+Act&post_type=post.
[97]Ibid.

we may see many come forward in the name of Jesus to institute the Righteous leadership grounded in Christian Nationalism.

Since the current ANC representatives at the local, provincial, and national levels are read through the lens of the main political party, and this party has been found wanting in moral and political character, the time might be ripe for religiously based political parties and non-religious political parties that take religion seriously to perform well at the national level as well, including as independent candidates. Indeed, while South Africans might not traditionally vote along religious lines, this does not mean that religious values carry no meaning or weight in the adjudication of which party best represents the values deemed important by a large majority. In other words, to assume that people sovereignty is not informed by divine sovereignty or that the two can be separated is not to take seriously the conservative advocacy that has been shored up in the language of religious freedom in the country. A freedom that has opened up the political space to the possibilities of Christian Nationalism contestation.

To reiterate, the contemporary South African national electoral space provides an opportunity to think more critically about the changing nature of the South African political context in general, including the corollary argument regarding the contested nature of the political as such. Therefore, if we pay attention only to election numbers as an indication of the moral campus of society (i.e. how many religious parties are part of the government, for example), we will miss a lot in terms of the contested nature of the political. What we need to also pay attention to is the relevant ideological mood evident in the greater proclamation of conservative religious discourse. In fact, the proliferation of conservative public religion is not only a reflection of the robustness of democracy, but also a clarion call to check conservative religion's implication for said democracy.

Conclusion

As Bloomberg once observed, hiding in plain sight was key to the success of the Broederbond's pursuit of Christian Nationalism. In fact, 'The AB has played the role of Afrikanerdom's elite vanguard. It has been the invisible cement holding the structure together; the central arterial core of the Christian-Nationalist movement and the agency par excellence for propagating the Christian-Nationalist creed in South Africa.'[98] In the post-apartheid context, the Neo/Pentecostal Christian bloc (comprised of both civil society organisations and official political parties) constitutes the new vanguard of Christian Nationalism in South Africa. Moreover, as McEwan writes,

> At first glance, organisations like Family Policy Institute and FOR SA [*sic*] may appear to be relatively small and ineffectual in their local contexts, or as representing a radical-Right minority perspective. However, it is imperative to recognise the ideological and financial constellations of power from which these groups have sprouted, and which provide the deeper levels of sustenance to continue and embolden their anti-rights agendas.[99]

[98]Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism*, xxii.
[99]Haley McEwan, 'South African radical-Right groups are mobilising against anti-LGBTIQ+ campaigns', *openDemoracy*, 2021, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/south-african-radical-right-groups-are-mobilising-against-anti-lgbtiq-campaigns/.

Consequently, it is imperative that the deeper implications of a conservative Christian ideology that seeks to take back South Africa for God are taken seriously. Otherwise, the country might find itself in the stranglehold of another version of Christian Nationalism – a position buttressed by a network of *transracial* Evangelicals in pursuit of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is not to say that South Africa is America, but to continue to ignore the signposts of creeping conservatism might well see South Africa renege on some of the hard-won constitutional rights of liberty in the name of Christian Nationalism.

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