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THE PROPHET VAN RENSBURG'S VISION OF NELSON MANDELA: WHITE POPULAR RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND RESPONSE TO DEMOCRATISATION.

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AFRICANA

THE PROPHET VAN RENSBURG'S VISION OF NELSON MANDELA: WHITE POPULAR RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND RESPONSE TO DEMOCRATISATION

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(My apologies to readers for the incomplete notation of this paper!).

An author of popular fiction claims that a Boer visionary who died in 1926 foresaw the release of Nelson Mandela. A South African Police lieutenant colonel who is a veteran of the security branch is visited by an angel, who commands him to organise a national day of prayer and peace. A member of the South African Defence Force general staff tells an Evangelical congregation that he and his soldiers successfully caused a drought in Namibia to be broken by organising a prayer meeting.

These are only some of the extraordinary manifestations of religious experience which marked white South African response to the upheaval of democratisation. This paper will argue that such phenomena need to be the subject of serious study if we are to come to grips with the way in which whites dealt with the end of the racial state. In recent years, secular South African critical intellectuals and social scientists have virtually ignored the socio-political significance of religion. This has left the oppositional study of religion in the hands of religiously affiliated intellectuals, whose apparently socially based studies of religion are really theological, ahistorical and lacking in sociological sophistication. Both of these groupings have little or nothing to say about the fundamentalist and apocalyptic variants of Christianity, despite the obvious significance of these strands of belief in contemporary South Africa. This paper sees religious discourse as having been a crucial framework within which white South Africa has tried to make sense of the dramatic social changes which have recently occurred. The very depth of these changes has given the more 'extreme' strands of religion a popularity as a language within which to discuss them. In the paper, I will present a framework of sociological analysis within which these phenomena can be understood. I will then provide a set of case studies of dramatic contemporary religious manifestation. I will also suggest that the common assumption of both secular and religious intellectuals that the fundamentalist and apocalyptic strands in South African religion are necessarily reactionary is wrong. The paper does look at one example of prophetic discourse aimed at opposing change. But it also looks at other cases in which religious 'extremism' has adapted to, or even actively encouraged, change. The suggestion is that the discourses of the same theology can be adapted to a wide range of social purposes. In this sense the debates of liberation theology against religious conservatism are sociologically literally pointless, insofar as both sides of the debate assume that a particular set of theological ideas lead automatically to a certain kind of social practice. This, I will argue, is far from being the case.

Social Science and the Myth of Secularisation

In South Africa, as elsewhere, secular intellectuals find enthusiastic religion an embarrassing topic to discuss. From the vantage points of the left party branch meeting, the Sociology common room or the editorial offices of the Weekly Mail it seems very difficult to take seriously people who believe that the Holy Ghost is causing them to speak in tongues, that the Virgin Mary or Archangel Gabriel has addressed them or that miraculous healings take place. But the reality is that multitudes of people do claim such experiences and that millions more base their conceptions of themselves on the veracity of such claims. Far more people find such ideas attractive than are drawn to Marxism - Leninism, Sociology, or radical journalism. Because of our scepticism toward religious experience, as secular intellectuals, we screen out the whole realm of irrational belief. Yet it is decisive for an understanding of the lives of people in contemporary society.

Behind the scepticism of the secular intellectual lies one of the great sociological myths - secularisation. Marx of course held that the development of class consciousness would free the working class from the ideological bondage of religion. Weber, despite his elegiac sadness at the prospect of bureaucratic rationality replacing the richness of spirituality and tradition, saw this process as ultimately inevitable. Even Durkheim, the Sociological founding father most attuned to the social centrality of religion, believed that the bonds of belief linking society together would come to take the form of a recognition of economic and civic inter-dependence, rather than any reliance on the supernatural. In this sense, all three theorists remained the heirs of the enlightenment: ultimately reason would be victorious.

But secularisation has been subject to massive empirical disconfirmation. (Thompson, 1992) While it is true that in fairly few societies a single faith grips the totality of society, beliefs based on the supernatural and the irrational have flourished. Protestant revivalism in the U.S., evangelisation by both Protestant Christians and Moslems, Islamic and Jewish fundamentalism are all major features of the contemporary world. So are new religious cults and occultism. Social theory and social theorists are ill-equipped to deal with these realities. At least superficially, current religious developments give comfort to post-modernist theoretical positions which dispute notions of direction in historical development, and the possibility of sociological explanation.

However, this paper does proceed from the perspective that sociological explanation of religious phenomena is in fact both possible and helpful. What secular sociologists and historians need to add to their approach, however, is a willingness to recognise the intensity and depth of religious beliefs and their importance in channelling people's actions in society. To a considerable extent this willingness to acknowledge the experience's social significance is found in Weber's work, especially his great book on the Protestant Ethic. Within such an approach the tools of classical sociological inquiry - a Marxist focus on class relations, Weberian attention to organisational and bureaucratic interests, Durkheimian concern with 'collective representations', remain central to the sociology of religion.

Durkheim's contribution to the study of religious extremes is particularly highlighted

in a fascinating study by Stepan Mestrovic of the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Medjugorje in Croatia during the 1980's, which he links the appearance to the social crisis associated with the impending disintegration of Yugoslavia. For Mestrovic, such events are a "typically fin de siecle phenomenon that binds the people who will live through the coming of the century with the previous century's revolt against modernity, and subsequent guest for faith."(140) Mestrovic reminds us of Durkheim's view of religion as a "well founded delirium" -" a reality that must be taken seriously". He praises Durkheim for recognising religion as a collective, social product. This points to the problem of the secular intellectual confronting enthusiastic religion - he or she tends to be interested in the question of whether a mystic is mad or sane, honest or lying. But, says Mestrovic, this deflects us from what is sociologically interesting in such phenomena. Religious 'experience' does impact on responses to social action. We need not necessarily pursue the rigid anti-psychologism of Durkheim's Rules of Sociological Method in order to adopt such a position. We may indeed legitimately investigate the motivations of particular individual seers - but that does not resolve the problem of why people respond to a particular religious message. Mestrovic urges us to apprehend religion as a system of representations that betray "something about the 'collective conscience' of a particular society". (160)

The psychological level of religious apparitions and miracles involves a much less clear cut distinction than straight forward sane/mad or true/lying distinctions would suggest. As Mestrovic argues, the whole burden of Freudian psychology points toward the constant crossing of boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious. Not only is it the case that in dream-states, schizophrenia and drug induced experiences we encounter unconscious phenomena as part of the consciously perceived world; many of our most minor daily behaviours represent the triumph of unconsciously rooted habits over reason.

William James great work 'The Variety of Religious Experience' points in an extremely perceptive way to why religious 'delusionary' experiences should be so powerful: "In the religious life.... control is felt as 'higher'; but since on our hypothesis it is primarily the hidden mind which are controlling, the sense of union with the power beyond us is a sense of something, not merely apparently, but literally true." (513) But James points out this can bring about actual, and not merely delusionary changes in the personality. The person who believes himself or herself supported by a divine force, may well become a stronger and more effective social actor as a result. The implication is that a religious idea needs to be in assessed in terms of its effect in action rather than in terms of fruitless speculation as to its ultimate truth. (Durkheim coincidentally, approvingly cites James in Elementary Forms of Religious Life (464-5), but indicates - fairly enough - that James has relatively little to say about the social foundation of religious belief.)

South African secular intellectuals have avoided the serious study of religion. Despite the massive following enjoyed by religious movements in the country, the assumption seems to be that they can't be as important as 'real' secular politics. Where they do bother to devote attention to such phenomena academic social scientists offer fairly unsubstantiated prejudice. A researcher sympathetic to Pentecostalism (Hexham) is perfectly entitled to point out that the few prominent social critiques of the

fundamentalist churches in South Africa are based on amazingly slight evidence. The result is that critical discussion of religious movements in South Africa has largely been abandoned by oppositional social scientists and left to radical religious intellectuals.

The Poverty of 'Religious Studies'

But oppositional religious intellectuals failure to provide adequate sociological accounts of religion in South Africa is just as great as that of their secular counterparts. It is true that over the last decade or so a considerable body of historically and socially orientated literature on churches has been produced by South African scholars of religion. The leading figures in this development have been John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio of the University of Cape Town's Religious Studies department. Two things do need to be said in favour of this work. Firstly it has played an important role in promoting and articulating criticism of social inequality and oppression within the mainstream churches. Secondly it has provided a useful documentation of debates over questions such as the need to resist apartheid, the armed struggle, economic justice within those churches, and of church initiatives in the political conflict in South Africa.

However, as historical sociology, this body of literature is woefully inadequate. This is partly because it is rather uneasily poised between Theology and the social sciences. The tendency of the religious studies literature is to articulate the Divine Party Line on a particular question and then to wade through historical material awarding points or demerits to religious leaders and churches on the basis of how close they have come to the correct position. This moralistic exercise tends to detract attention from detailed investigation of why particular religious social movements developed and why they were able to attract support. Cochrane's (1987) study of the 'English' churches in the early 20th Century, for example, seems to expend a great deal of energy in pointing out that priests and ministers in his period were not socialists. Obviously, they weren't - if they had been socialists they wouldn't have been likely to join the church at that time. This is not a terribly sociologically interesting point to establish.

This asociological moralism means as well that a great deal of attention is given in the religious studies literature to formal debates in the churches - particularly amongst their hierarchy and intellectuals. Little is done in the way of detailed studies on the activities of grass-roots congregations and the beliefs of their members. The result is that the literature tends to have the same faults as studies of trade unions or political parties that concentrate on leadership: inadequate investigation of how far the pronouncements at the top reflect opinion, activity and people's views of their interests at the base. Divisions which are noted are the racial segmentation of some churches and developments such as heresies. But the scrutiny of churches as bureaucracies exercising power would give much more interesting accounts of their development than those we now have. The literature tends to assume that the admirable political stands taken by some churches are the basis of their popular support - but is this so? The most popular church in South Africa, the Zion Christian Church of Bishop Lekganya, is relentlessly a-political. The relationship

between church support and church teaching can only be determined by the study of popular religious practice and belief, not from a priori theologizing.

The other problem which this literature faces is that its authors, erudite and sophisticated intellectuals as they are, have exactly the same problems as their secular counterparts with taking extreme, histrionic religious manifestations seriously. They tend to view the claims of Pentecostals and the like with the same kind of rationalist puzzlement as your average historical materialist would show. Yet this leads to an odd inequality in treatment of supernatural claims. Religious studies would tend to view askance the more spectacular claims of divine intervention by fundamentalist Protestants, while at the same time treating the mystical claims of mainstream churches with circumspection. There is after all nothing intrinsically less plausible about the Pentecostal's claim to be entered by the Holy Ghost and caused to speak in tongues than in Anglo-Catholic's and Catholic's belief that the communion bread literally becomes the body of Jesus Christ. The only difference is that the former position enjoys less social prestige than the latter.

The moralism and the aversion to the spectacularly deviant in religious behaviour combines to promote a most inadequate treatment of the kind of phenomena discussed in this paper in the religious studies literature. Firstly, despite the spectacular growth of fundamentalist Protestantism's influence, both outside and inside the mainstream churches, it is largely ignored. Secondly, insofar as it does get attention it tends to be censured as reactionary, and indeed racist. Yet this is an extremely simplistic picture of the fundamentalist churches, as we shall see. In the South African context there has not been any one-to-one relationship between religious fundamentalism and white political reaction. Some fundamentalist tendencies do support the extreme right, while others have gradually adapted to change or actually been quite critical of the apartheid legacy. The problem is that the religious studies scholars proceed as if you can extrapolate a clear set of political actions from a theological doctrine. The argument of this paper is that religion is a form of social action and thus just as multifaceted as any other social form. The same theology can have different consequences in different social settings. And again there has to be a suspicion that our religious intellectuals accord a double standard in dealing with reactionary aspects of the politics of the main-stream churches. The South African Catholic Bishops Conference seems to have avoided much flack despite its horrendous views on gender, sexuality and reproductive rights, presumably because the religious intellectuals like its views on (?) "more important" (?) political questions.

Thirdly, the religious studies literature, with its liberationist tendency, offers little explanation as to why fundamentalist and apocalyptic beliefs have grown so strong, not only amongst relatively privileged but also amongst racially oppressed South Africans. Racial oppression explains why about five million black South Africans organise themselves in separatist churches. It does not in any simple way however, explain why those churches are predominantly churches of withdrawal from the world and quasi-Pentecostal theology rather than adherents of the liberation theology advanced by the (actually smaller) mainstream denominations. And here perhaps the difficulty that religious intellectuals face is that they do not want to face the fact

that it is precisely the sort of secularly based erudition which people like them have which tends to drive a wedge into churches between the followers and the leaders. Through great internal struggles religious intellectuals can create religious schemes which reconcile their beliefs with their secular education. But this produces an intellectualised and non-mystical Christianity which has little popular appeal. As Gramsci points out, for any social movement, the key "problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and unify. The strength of religions ..... has lain ..... in the fact that they feel very strongly the need for the doctrinal unity of the whole mass of the faithful and strive to ensure that the higher intellectual stratum does not get separated from the lower." (328) A century of critical theology has allowed just such a threatening gap to open up between the popular faith and sophisticated theologians within mainstream denominations. The fundamentalist preachers may defy reason, but this is at least more consistent than traditional denominations' attempts to reconcile tradition and rationality. It is the breakdown of the link between intellectuals and masses which is key to the international decline of mainstream Protestants and the ascendancy of Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

Religious Change: The Fragmentation of Afrikaner Solidarity

Why should white religious experience be characterised by the 'extreme' phenomena discussed in this paper at this particular time? The answer needs to be sought in the impact of three social forces. These are: the fragmentation of Afrikaner social solidarity; cultural globalisation; and the crisis of the apartheid system in the 1980's and early 1990's.

During the 1950's and 1960's Afrikaner nationalism achieved a remarkable degree of hegemony over Afrikaans speakers. Seldom in the past had the fractious volk been so united. But the National Party leadership was now able to use the resources of state power to provide welfare and civil service employment for the white poor, business opportunities and senior civil service posts for the aspirant bourgeoisie, and educational expansion to guarantee upward social mobility and thus the expansion of a new white middle class. By providing for the needs of the whole Afrikaner social spectrum, the Nationalists constructed a class alliance of workers, farmers, civil servants and business people under the leadership of skilled nationalist ideologues. This alliance was further cemented by the elaboration of an extraordinary network of women's, youth and cultural organisations which created a life-world in which Afrikaner people's experience was constantly moulded by nationalist ideology and thus by Apartheid doctrine.

But by the late 1960's this apparently invincible block of social classes was beginning to break up. Afrikaner business leaders had made such strides in the boom of the 1960's that they were no longer as willing to subsidise scarce and expensive white labour through the job reservation system (which restricted certain categories of work to whites). They began to call for apartheid policy to be weakened in order to make greater use of black workers in skilled jobs. The National Party leadership, which had itself undergone a process of embourgeoisement, began to show sympathy to these calls. For the hard-core of the white working class this was a betrayal. By

1969 the Herstigte Nasionale Party had split off from the NP and during the 1970's it steadily gained support, especially from poorer whites, for its defence of classical Verwoerdian apartheid. By the early 1980's, discontent amongst the Afrikaner electorate had spread much further, especially as a result of the limited reforms of the early P.W. Botha era. White Labour was feeling threatened by the effective end of job reservation and the legalisation of black unions and permanent black urbanisation. Civil servants were concerned that their jobs would be threatened by the restructuring of apartheid policy. A new and more free market economic ideology in government began to erode the massive subsidies that white agriculture and white welfare services had enjoyed from the state, increasingly turning the less affluent farmers of the north and the urban white poor against PW Botha. On top of this, the slump of the 1980's generated large scale white unemployment for the first time since the Great Depression.

Expression was given to all these discontented forces by the emergence of the Conservative Party (CP) in 1982. It rapidly became the predominant party of the white right and by the late eighties its support stood consistently at about 30% of the white electorate, or about 50% of Afrikaans speaking voters.

Yet the decline of the NP's traditional base was not simply an economic, but also a cultural phenomenon. The Afrikaner yuppies who emerged in business, the media and the professions during the 1970's and 1980's were far less connected to the grass-roots than the previous generation of Afrikaner intellectuals. Better educated than their predecessors, they aspired to international acceptability and were mortified by the isolation that apartheid brought on them. They flirted with 'radical' cultural influences which challenged the doctrines of the Afrikaner cultural establishment. Integrated increasingly into the world of big business, they tended to be far more pro-capitalist than the old Afrikaner populists with their quasi-socialist rhetoric from the 1930's. These professional, managerial and capitalist strata were increasingly the key influences on the NP. They were the supporters of the verligtes (enlightened ones) who attempted to reform and restructure apartheid in the 1960s. Although (with the exception of a few brave intellectuals), they did not break with the NP and apartheid, they did tend to favour the ending of racial discrimination in the social and economic spheres. By and large they nevertheless supported the NP's maintenance of white political power through the 1980s.

This new social group was both unable to offer less affluent whites the economic goods they desired and also unable and unwilling to communicate with them in the language of traditional Afrikaner populism. Thus a cultural gap opened up, separating (in the way that the quote from Gramsci mentioned earlier suggests) the Afrikaner upper classes from the popular classes. The NP no longer talked the language of poor whites. In addition, the Afrikaner upper classes moving in a liberal direction met the English-speaking white upper classes moving in a reactionary direction as change became more threatening. The NP drew increasing English speaking support which its now 'enlightened' and thus less particularistic leadership felt quite comfortable to accept. But for the Afrikaner right this change was good material to work with - they could point out that the NP was diluting its Afrikaner

identity in order to hobnob with what they portrayed as the Anglo-Jewish business establishment.

In the religious sphere this had definite implications. For most of the century, Afrikaner religious allegiance had gone overwhelmingly to the three Calvinist churches, despite minor challenges from other Protestant denominations. But the social trends we have been discussing undermined this hegemony . To a limited extent, the Afrikaner upper classes became less dominated by the NGK and the other Calvinists, some splitting toward the more up-market end of the fundamentalist religious spectrum. More typically though, the affluent Afrikaners remained with the traditional churches, especially the NGK. The NGK came to be typified by its respectability. When I attended a service at an NGK church in a well-off suburb of Roodepoort in November 1993, I was struck by the relative opulence of the congregation. Several hundred people dressed in expensive suits and (mostly) stylish dresses packed the church which was entirely surrounded by their up-market motor cars. The church was extremely well appointed and fully carpeted. The minister delivered an extremely dry sermon. He discussed the crossing of the Red Sea, but explicitly refused to draw any contemporary message from it. He emphasised the importance of a believer's relation with God, but in a manner entirely lacking the fire and emotional excitement with which this topic is approached in fundamentalist churches. One was left with a strong impression of a local establishment reaffirming its respectability. This really was the National Party at prayer.

The NGK churches tended, then, to celebrate a status quo which was comfortable for Afrikaner yuppies but less and less so far poorer Afrikaners. More and more the BMWs and Mercedes parked outside the richer NGK churches on a Sunday morning contrasted with the beat up bakkies (pick-up trucks) parked outside the Pentecostal or Apostolic churches. The NGK became the church of the establishment, losing supporters to the Born-Again variety Christians. Furthermore, the NGK's attempts, at the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's, to bring about rapprochement with black Calvinists and other churches, and (retrospectively) to criticise Apartheid, precipitated splits within their ranks. This resulted in the creation of the Afrikaner Protestant Church, to which many CP activists subscribe. But it also meant that many disaffected people from Dutch Reform backgrounds were available for mobilisation by new religious forces.

Religious Change: Globalization

There have been Pentecostal and Evangelical Christian sects in South Africa for many years. But there is a strong case that they have been given a qualitative rise in popularity through the development of globalization of culture and the associated impact of electronic media. Up to the 1960's the hegemony of the Dutch Reformed Churches amongst Afrikaners prevented Protestant competitors from making great headway. The NGK NP leadership interpenetrated (e.g. Prime Minister Vorster's brother was NGK moderator), and reinforced one another's control. The gradual breakup of the NP meant however that there was less effective theocratic control of the Afrikaner electorate. And at the same time the new and more cosmopolitan Afrikaner intellectuals were subject to an international range of religious influences.

English speaking white Protestants had, historically, been loyal to the major British denominations, the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. (Although Anglo-South Africans did manage to generate one particularly extreme fundamentalist sect - the Church of England in South Africa). However by the 1960's the South African withdrawal from the Commonwealth began to erode the strength of Anglo-South African cultural identification with Britain. Increasingly the influence of American dominated film, records and print media swung the Anglo-South African mind in a north-westerly direction.

But it was the impact of television and video which really brought about the decisive cultural shift. The NP government had long resisted television on the grounds that it would subject South Africans to American liberal propaganda. When the medium was eventually introduced in the mid-1970's it rapidly became clear that local TV production could not generate many hours of programming, and (reinforced by a British boycott of South African TV), the SABC was obliged to fill the nation's television sets with the likes of Dallas and Bill Cosby. I would argue that this did have the effect of fundamentally reorientating white South Africa toward America as its cultural exemplar. Both the English speaker's construction of the world around Britain and Afrikaners self-imposed insularity (and incidentally Germanophilia) was swamped by the tidal wave of Transatlantic soapies and sitcoms. This contributed in a major way, I would argue, to an acceptance of American cultural styles and a glorification amongst white South Africans, of the US as the high point of human civilization. (South African troops in the Angola-Namibia was referred to South Africa as 'the States': this horror became a Vietnam movie). TV-based Americanophiliac culture particularly predisposed white South Africans to be a receptive to the 'Televangelist' wave of the 1970's and 1980s.

The 1970s and 1980s saw emergence of the extraordinary phenomenon of the linking of American Fundamentalist Protestantism with television as the basis of a new religious and social movement. (Wills 1990; Annerman 1991) There are two main strands within these movements. Evangelical churches stress 'rebirth' through personal commitment to Christ, extreme religious enthusiasm in worship, miraculous intervention by God such as healing of the sick, and prophecy pointing to the imminent second coming of Christ. The Pentecostals also see the world as we know it as coming to an end, but their particular emphasis is that the Holy Ghost will enter the faithful, especially during services, and cause them to speak in tongues. What to the outsider is a babble of noise is to the Pentecostal a miracle causing him or her to speak in tongues of men and angels. Both religious groups are rooted in the specifically American tradition: they emerged from a fusion of elements ranging from Methodist field preaching to black American devotional practices.

The American Protestant groupings had long waged campaigns of evangelisation at home and missionary work abroad. But none historically can have had as vast an impact as the emergence of 'televangelism' in the 1970s and 1980s. Sophisticated television productions and fund-raising techniques turned Pat Robertson into a quasi-plansible presidential candidate, and gave the likes of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim & Tammy Bakker first international fame and then international notoriety. A strength of American fundamentalism was its diversity: although there are larger scale

Pentecostal and Evangelical church organizations and federations, the Protestant focus on individual conscience makes for a great deal of splitting. But this in fact means that there is a great variety of churches. Televangelist programming is the equivalent of flexible specialisation in industry: specific religious product can be targeted to a specific audience.

Of course in the United States, the televised religious movement provided a massive platform for New Right politics which had an 'elective affirmity' with the authoritarian and patriarchal social attitudes propagated by the televangelists. To the alarm of the liberal-left in the US, a populace battered by stagnating living standards, the effects of the decline of US economic competitiveness, inadequate social services and high levels of crime and violence, and sceptical of a high handed liberal social platitudes, were highly receptive to these messages. The Televangelists can certainly be considered to have played a key role in firming up the ideological base for the Reagan-Bush years.

Abroad new television technologies - video, cable and satellite networks - together with massive marketing to local video and television industries, provided the channels for the dissemination of U.S. revivalism. In South Africa, (despite some resistance from NGK-aligned people in the SABC hierarchy), both U.S. produced Born-Again programming and local Fundamentalist preachers got a growing share of the religious broadcasting on SABC television. Even in non-denominational religious programmes, the rhetoric increasingly suggested the Pentecostal/Evangelical orientation of the presenters. There was a major trade in U.S. which produced religious videos ranging from the racist outpourings of sects from the North-West US to fairly mild and innocuous forms of Evangelicalism. Jimmy Swaggart became a regular fixture on Bophuthatswana T.V. A number of both famous and obscure US evangelists visited. Direct links between South African and U.S. Fundamentalists intensified; for example South Africa's most famous Pentecostal preacher, Ray McCauley, studied for the ministry in the late 1970's at the Rev. Kenneth Hagin Junior's Rhema Bible Training Centre in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The media impact of televangelism went far beyond fundamentalist churches. Through television and media the Pentecostals and Evangelicals appealed to the followers of mainstream denominations over the heads of their clergy. The result was that there was a notable tendency for mainstream denominations to become more enthusiastic in their style, and for motifs from Pentecostal and Evangelical traditions to surface amongst the adherents of the Dutch Reformed and other Protestant churches.

<u>Religious Change: The Crisis of Apartheid</u>

The third major factor which underpinned the emergence of flamboyant forms of religious experience amongst whites is to do with the intensity of the social crisis faced by them as the social fabric unravelled during the quasi-insurrectionary period of 1984-6, international isolation, economic decline and the violence-wracked transition of the early 1990s. It became increasingly apparent that apartheid was coming to an end and with it the social political and economic protection which all

whites, but especially the less affluent had enjoyed. For a large proportion of whites the transition seemed almost impossible to contemplate: the growing influence of apocalyptic theology is hardly surprising when one considers that for many it was (socially) literally the case that their world was coming to an end. The feeling of impending doom made a search for realignment of social and political beliefs. In a society where religious influences were powerful this process was as likely to be conducted in religious as in overtly political terms.

Here Mestrovic's discussion of Durkheim may be helpful. As Mestrovic suggests the religious apparition may well be a phenomenon that holds people together in a situation where they force drastic modernisation and change, while at the same time expressing their anti-modernist impulses. Such religious dramas, one might argue, enable old faiths to be reshaped to meet new circumstances. The interesting sociological question about contemporary where South African mystics is not whether they are personally sincere (although the ones discussed in this paper probably are). It is rather the question of how their religious visions relate to the adjustment to social change and why people find these visions attractive. As Mestrovic's work would imply, South African religious beliefs do indeed betray something about collective conscience. Or to look at it in Jamesian terms, religious experiences enable those facing change to fortify their personalities against the experience by re-arranging through 'twice-born' experiences their relation to the 'hidden faculties ' of their own 'hidden minds'.

At a political level this kind of reorientation could take two major forms: either whites could attempt to pursue an overtly racial separatist politics or they could attempt to adapt to a non-racial political order. The first option, advocated by the right wing itself required major social and psychological realignment. While the HNP and for a time the CP advocated essentially the maintenance of the homeland system of the exclusion of black residents from white areas, the sheer impracticality of this option became more and more apparent. It led to the emergence of support for a smaller 'volkstaat' for Afrikaners as the preferred right wing option. This relatively pragmatic variant of the right wing position was shown to be the most widely supported option amongst former CP supporters when Constand Viljoen's Freedom Front gained a majority of the potential rightist vote in the 1994 elections despite a Conservative Party boycott. The 'smaller Volksstraat' position is one that calls for major readjustments for right wingers. They have to face the facts that such a volkstraat (which in any case is unlikely to be feasible at all) would have to occupy a small area of the country and would involve upheaval and hardships for those wanting to move there. This is very different from the claims of the more hard-line minority to continued white control over the country. However, the position does mean that the white right still want to emphasise white identity and the idea that non-racial institutions are unviable.

On the other hand, the segment of white opinion which has supported - to a greater or lesser extent - the democratisation process has also had to make even bigger adjustments. Before the mid 1980's there was very limited support on the liberal end of the white political spectrum for a non-racial democracy, even if there was substantial opposition to apartheid social and economic policies. Even when De

Klerk did set about bringing a majority of whites along with a democratisation process, many shared the NP leader's tendency to paranoia about the Communist Party and nationalization, and (initial) partiality toward Inkartha. The massive crime and political violence of the 1990s was extremely disorientating to this 'liberal' wing of white opinion. However the relatively peaceful 1994 election and smoothness of the ANC entry into government was also shocking to NP supporters who generally expected events to take a much more dramatic turn.

These different problems of dealing with political change were to an important extent fought out culturally in religious terms. I will now turn my attention to some case studies in point.

Adriaan Snyman's Siener Van Rensburg

The book 'Stem van n' Profeet' (Voice of A Prophet) by Adriaan Snyman (1993) is a classic example of the application of fundamentalist Christian and apocalyptic discourses to support right wing resistance to current change. It deploys notions of the special divine favour enjoyed by the Afrikaner people, together with the imagery of the Book of Revelations, to reassure the white right that its eventual triumph is divinely ordained. In a situation where the rational grounds for hopes of victory on the part of the far right are exceedingly slim, such promises of a supernatural deliverance become, in a sense, far more plausible than more than the speeches of Ferdi Hartzenberg or Eugene Terreblanche as a basis for hope. It is perhaps not surprising then, that Snyman's mystical work enjoys great credibility in right wing circles.

The central figure in Snyman's book is a turn of the century Afrikaner 'holy man', Nicolaas van Rensburg, also known as 'Siener' (visionary) Van Rensburg. Van Rensburg came from the Wolmaransstad district of the Western Transvaal, where his parents farmed. He was reputed to be a visionary from an early age. But he made his reputation during the Boer war, when he convinced a member of important military figures, including Generals De La Rey and De Wet, of his ability to foresee the movements and ambushes of the British. He came to prominence again in the Rebellion of 1914, when Boer militants who refused to participate in the World War on the side of Britain, revolted against the government of Louis Botha. Van Rensburg has often been attributed a causal part in the Rebellion. A vision of his was interpreted as prophesying the defeat of Britain and the German triumph, and thus encouraged the rebels to believe they would be on the winning side. (The 'misinterpretation' of this prophecy seems to have done little to affect Van Rensburg's popularity amongst those who believed in him). Captured by government forces during the rebellion, Van Rensburg was briefly imprisoned. However he was soon allowed to return to his farm, where he remained until his death.

Since the rebellion there have been odd attempts to popularize the legend of the Seer. (Greeen 1956) But none can have been as thorough and determined as that of Adriaan Snyman. Snyman has done extensive research, contacting surviving descendants and acquaintances of Van Rensburg and carrying out interviews with them. His work was not very different from that of social historians, except for his

unshakeable belief in the prophetic meaning of the visions. Snyman's efforts were rewarded with the finding of a researcher's crock of gold - a record of the 700 visions which Siener claimed to have had between 1871 and his death in 1926. In the last ten years of his life Van Rensburg's accounts of his visions were written down by his daughter Anna, and it was these notes on which Snyman bases his interpretation of the prophecies (together with other written and verbally transmitted visions, which Snyman claims, 'remained alive in the mouths of the volk'). Much of the preservation of material relating to Van Rensburg seems to have been the work of one 'Oom' Boy Musmann, a friend of the Prophet who survived him until 1973.

Snyman is anxious to present Siener as inspired by God and needing to be understood clearly within the framework of Protestant fundamentalism. In his foreword to 'Stem' he insists that Siener was no mere fortune teller, but divinely inspired. "The Bible" Snyman tells us, "was the only book that [Siener] ever read; he believed that his visions came directly from God and he never..... concerned himself with occultism."(p.11) Snyman seeks to present Siener as a completely devout and simple-hearted man of God. And indeed, the evidence cited by Snyman makes a strong case that this was also the way that Siener appeared to his contempories. Certainly, in the remarkable collection of photographs assembled by Snyman, Siener looks very much the part of the Prophet; from above his vast square-cut beard (rather reminiscent of that sported by Friedrich Engels) his eyes stare out to a point far beyond the camera. His gifts seem to have commanded respect from his religious community; he became an elder of the local congregation of the strict Calvinist 'Herrormde Kerk' (p.20). Snyman is completely committed to the infallibility of Siener's visions: none of them 'has ever been shown to be wrong' (p11), and 'even learned persons at Cambridge University in England (who had insights into his visions) would not believe that [Nicholaas] was an ordinary and uneducated farmer.' (p.14).

Snyman presents Siener as the son of a sickly and devout mother and a tough aggressive father. (p.20-21) The father according to Snyman was disappointed in Nicholaas' lack of hardiness, and so Nicholaas was relegated to looking after the sheep. While undertaking these duties, he had time to study the bible and learnt much of it off by heart. (p.20-1) This presumably accounts not only for the biblical-prophetic language of Siener's statements, but also for his understanding of himself as the mouthpiece of God. Both Siener's self-image and Van Rensburg's presentation of him seem to be modelled on the notion that he was an Old Testament prophet-patriarch.

But Snyman also emphasises the strength of Siener's Afrikaner-Republican commitment: God was inspiring him to see into the future of the 'volk': "as a 12 year old he was already a fiery patriot to the core (in mung en been); and the older he grew, the more strongly the love of the fatherland burnt in his heart." (p.23) Most importantly for Snyman, the divine inspiration which van Rensburg received points toward the eventual triumph of Afrikaner nationalism. Snyman quotes Siener as having told a nephew that although there would yet be greater divisions and bloodshed than in the Rebellion '.... an unbelievable miracle will happen..... that which my volk has always striven for (own republic) will be brought to fruition (volgebring wees) and then the time of my visions will be passed.....'(p.23) This is the

basis of the appeal of Siener's prophecies for Snyman. They appear to offer a divine underwriting for the prospect of the eventual triumph of the Afrikaner right. Snyman's interpretation of Siener leans on the direction of what one might call Afrikaner-Israelitism. In other words he is keen to emphasise that the Afrikaners like the Israelites of old are in special relationship to God; a chosen people, through the pledge of the Blood River covenant. Snyman writes that "no other volk except Israel, besides the Boer Nation, which has made a covenant to God. It is then coincidental that it is precisely the Israelites and the Boers who are the two most hated peoples in the world?" (35) He enthusiastically quotes the popular English writer, Lawrence Green as pointing out that no where in the world except in Palestine are there as many places and towns with Biblical names and that the Afrikaner, more than any other people in the world command the gift of prophecy. (29)

In describing the nature of Siener's visions, Snyman refers to an account given by the Prophet to a fellow-rebel, Harm Oost, during their imprisonment. Siener described a pressure on the back of his head and diziness which forces him to lie down and close his eyes. After a cloudiness passed it began " to look as clear as if I was there myself.....". This description would seem to be consistent with the symptoms of an epileptic attack.

Personally, Nicholaas was clearly troubled. On occasion he thought himself confronted by personal appearances by Satan. At one point during a visit to his home during the Boer War, Siener claimed that the devil had appear to Nicholaas and attempted to drive him into the Wilderness, to kill himself. The devil told him that "all the people make fun of you over those visions which you see, and no one will ever believe you". According to Siener he engaged in days of wrestling with the devil, ending up hospitalized with a swollen hand. But he appears to have felt confident in his gift after that - a example perhaps of William James' favourable evaluation of the psychological effect of being 'twice born'. That the distracted Siener entertained deep self-doubts is understandable. What is more remarkable is that Snyman takes the devlish appearances completely at face value.

The visions appear to have taken the form of features of Siener's daily life-world; farm animals, household and farming implements, wagons, clothing items, guns and so on. The animals usually appeared in a variety of colours which his followers have taken to indicate different nations. Siener himself did not initially interpret his prophecies, but later in life took to doing so to a greater extent. Snyman, as his present day disciple, has no compunctions about making such interpretations. Indeed, a chapter of 'Stem' is given over to a table in which Snyman lays down the 'meaning' of each of the 'symbols' in Siener's dreams. Yet Snyman's method of interpretation seems little more than a projection of Afrikaner rightist political images onto the arbitrary images of the dreams. Thus a yellow dog with a white collar, is according to Snyman, 'An Englishman with a Boer name, or a Boer with English loyalty'.

A particularly clear example of how Snyman projects contemporary right wing phobias onto Siener's visions is provided by one 'Siener' vision. On 30th March 1918, Siener 'foresaw' this: "In Europe sits a little black with a dress on and dung runs off him on the Western side". Snyman has no doubt of what this means. The little black

is the 'Third World'; the dress signifies he is homosexual; the dung signifies infection and the western side that Western nations will be infected. Snyman holds that the 'prophecy' foresees the Aids epidemic and manages to condense rightist fears of blacks, gays and the decline of Western Civilization into a single image. Snyman leaves no doubt that he sees the epidemic as a purging of otherness. Similarly in Snyman's interpretation of the image of a great dung-heap' in another of the visions, is that 'Today the whole world is a dung heap - especially in Africa and the rest of the third world'. He also notes that the prophet saw a Great Broom which would clean the earth of 'filth' - hinting strongly that Aids is the Great Broom.

Probably the most entertainingly written section of 'Stem' is Snyman's account of Van Rensburg's participation in the Boer War, during which Nicolaas rode with Koos de la Rey's commando. Nicholaas did not participate in the fighting, but rather as a lay preacher. He predicted, according to Snyman both immediate British tactical threats to his unit, allowing them, to escape miraculously from the British. The most spectacular claim made in the Siener legend is that concerning the escape of Boer forces under General De Wet after being trapped against the confluence of the Orange Caledon River by British forces. At this point, Danie Theron, the Boer's chief scout, arrived with a letter from De la Rey to De Wet telling him that Siener had foreseen a place where a safe crossing of the water could take place. At the appointed spot, the Boers found that they could cross the waters on a sandbank. But the pursuing British were swept away when they attempted the crossing. Snyman does not miss the opportunity to point out parallels with the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea, citing a report that De la Rey himself had made this connection. Once more, Snyman underlines his Afrikaner -Israelitism.

The sceptic however might note that Pakenham's (1982) account of the Boer War emphasises the superb organisation of De Wet's scouts, who may have known a thing or two about drifts themselves. (p.447)

Siener was tragically affected by the war - two of his daughters died in a British concentration camp. Snyman credits him with forseeing the British concentration camp policy as a whole, as well as his own particular family tragedy. (40-50)

Snyman attributes to Siener vision which fortold virtually all the major events of the twentieth century; The World Wars; the Great Flue epidemic of 1918-19, and the Russian Revolution amongst other (54-5). He claims that Siener foresaw the death of his former commander, General De la Rey, at the beginning of the Great Rebellion. (56-61) During the Rebellion itself he again demonstrated the power to detect hostile troop movements, and his foretold his son's own death during the conflict. (62-81) According to the legend as recounted by Snyman, Judge Lang who presided over Siener's trial after the rebellion poured scorn of Siener's visions while sentencing him. A fellow prisoner commiserated with Siener saying 'The Englishman had his knife in you today," to which Siener is said to have responded "Ja ou Chris, but I see them burying him". Snyman adds, dedpan, that three days, the Judge died and was buried. Another score for divine intervention on behalf of Siener.

The powers of Siener continued into the post First World War era. Snyman even attributes the Nationalist election victory in 1924 to him. He claims that Smuts sought Siener's advice on whether or not to hold the election, because of his supposed prophetic powers. Siener, who of course regarded Smuts as a traitor, advised him to hold the election. According to the tale passed own by the Disciple Mussman, this was because he knew through his vision that Smuts would lose. (93-6)

Siener died in 1926: but Snyman sees his visions as predicting all the major subsequent events in South African history, whether it is the 1961 Republic, or the death of Dr. Verwoerd. (On the latter, Snyman follows rightist orthodoxy in claiming that the assassination was the result of a deep-laid plot) (111-3). In approaching the present Snyman makes a direct link between Siener and former President PW Botha. Two visions of the collapse of a house (140-1) are interpreted by Snyman as prophesying the role of treachery in the political demise of Botha. Botha is presented as the victim of the machinations of American imperialists without and liberals within. Interestingly, Snyman managed the solicit Botha's personal interest in his project (p16) and learnt from Botha that he had met Siener as a child and that he gave Botha the impression of being one who had a calling ("'n Geroepene").

This all culminates in a vision which Snyman holds to be of the release of Nelson Mandela. In order to understand why Snyman needs to make this type of interpretation, one needs to grasp the psychological devestation in right wing circles caused by the 1990 release of Nelson Mandela and unbanning of the ANC. A far rightist Conservative M.P. who himself turned to bombing actions in response, went to see Party leader Andries Treurnicht after De Klerk's announcement. Treurnicht wept, and read aloud to his visitors from the book of Joshua. The M.P. comments "I realised here is a man who does not understand the new rules of the game and is ever more reaching back to the Bible, because a person has the tendency, when you don't understand anymore what is going on, then you turn to a Higher Being almost in a cry for help and say: now I don't know." (Rapport 3.5.92) Snyman's attribution of a vision of Mandela to Siener reflects a similar sense of religious panic to that experienced by Treurnicht. In his vision of 8 September 1925, Siener saw an image of a black man "his mouth opens and a goose flies out of it to the East. Then comes another goose with the face of a person, with very long wings, its colour is white, but the feathers are grey..... Then a train comes from the West and blacks are sitting in it." This, Snyman asserts, refers to Mandela's release. The goose flying to the East represents links with Communism. The second goose, he says, represents a great increase in Mandela's power and influence. The grey in the wings shows that the peace which this bird brings is not real or to be trusted. The train symbolises the return of black exiles to South Africa. (117)

The Afrikaner nationalist and Biblical apocalyptic themes in Snyman's interpretation of Siener come together in the prediction of the final triumph of Afrikaner Nationalism. So detailed is the interpretation of Siener given by Snyman that he is able to compile a map of these 'final' events. The annotations to the map pull no punches: "The arrows from the coast show the flight of the English, Jingos, Jews, all enemies of the Afrikaner.....From the States to the North [blacks] fly Southward

.....At Vereeniging the enemy is finally defeated and they fly to Durban." (154) This then ushers in an era of racist utopia: Snyman says that Siener predicted "thousands of white Christians will leave Europe and stream to South Africa." However, it seems that the triumph of the volk makes an end of history. Snyman speculates that Siener's visions imply that the triumph of the volk will be followed by "the Second Coming of Christ and the Thousand Year Reign of Peace". (167) At this point the triumph of Afrikanerdom is totally identified with Christian fundamentalist readings of Revelations. Snyman's interpretation here seems to be influenced both by contemporary fundamentalist theology and the ideas of original Siener disciple Boy Mussman. Mussman, was keen to link Siener's prophecies to the Book of Revelations and its Apocalypse. Snyman quotes Mussman as saying 'Oom Nicholaas was a second St. John and the visions that he had are a second Revelation of what will happen to his beloved Afrikaner volk.' (27)

Snyman's revival of the Siener legend received a excited response in right wing circles. The Conservative Party paper, Patriot (23.6.93), published an enthusiastic review of 'Stem van n Profeet' by Elizabeth Botha. She writes that Siener's visions "are still of relevance today", and gives particular emphasis to aspects of his visions forseeing political divisions amongst Afrikaners - something naturally on the minds of CP supporters. The Patriot continues to promote Snyman's book, together with other apocalyptic literature produced by his publishers, Hugenote Publikasies of Mossel Bay.

Snyman's book does what one would expect religious extremism in South Africa to do; namely to provide a basis for wholesale rejection of change in the racial system. Yet the other three examples of relgious expression which I will look at go in a very different direction. In them fundamentalist and apocalyptic ideas are used by those who were politically or ideologically attached to the old order, but are shifting to encounter and even encourage the new. To some extent this may be seen as merely necessary political adaptation for reasons of survival. But in other instances one sees religious leaders from fundamenatalist backgrounds pushing reluctant congregants toward greater adaptation, and thus themselves furthering the change process. I will now discuss these case studies.

Divine Rain?

On 14th November 1993, I attended a sermon at a Volle Evangelie Kerk (Full Evangelical Church) congregation at Roodepoort on the West Rand. The lower middle class Afrikaans speaking congregation was captivated by the forceful and eloquent preacher - Colonel Eugene Enrico of the South African Defence Force General Staff. The billboard on the highway outside the church building advertised Enrico's topic as "The Onslaught against South Africa". It sounded from this as if the sermon would be devoted to Botha-era pronouncements about the Communist threat. But Enrico's message was much more complex than that. In fact the burden of it was the need to forsake existing racial and political divisions. Enrico shifted the 'Total Onslaught' concept in the course of his sermon, away from the identification of this onslaught with the ANC, Communist Party, and foreign regimes which military leaders like Magnus Malan had given it in the 1980s. Instead he identified the enemy

in religious terms - but terms which cross-cut existing racial political division: "It is not the black people that are the threat (bedreiging) for us in this land - it is Satan (dis die Satan)". He particularly assaulted racial thinking "..don't make the Cross of Jesus Christ cheap by saying that he died just for this race or this church..." In the context of Conservative Party orientated western Roodepoort this was a far more liberal message than the congregation were likely to receive elsewhere in their community.

Enrico began by establishing his military credentials - an important move in a community where most young men had been conscripted during the Angola/Namibia conflict: he had been involved in 14 combat missions over the border ('oor die grens'). Enrico then stressed the need for the congregation to see themselves - 'Kinders van die Here' (Children of God) - as those who should give the lead in a 'new South Africa'. He talked of the extent of crime and political violence in South Africa, tapping into the very real fears of his audience.

The core of the sermon involved the recounting of a number of 'miraculous' incidents in which Enrico had been involved. The underlying message was that the Evangelical Christian had an important mission to turn to God in moments of crisis, but also emphasised themes of racial and political reconciliation and change in attitudes.

In 1987 Enrico said he had been serving in an area near Pietermaritzburg in Natal, where there was a massive armed conflict between ANC and Inkatha supporters. As Enrico tells it, he was asked by his commander to make suggestions as to how to manage the situation. In response, he set up a prayer tent in the middle of the area in order to hold revival meetings. He summoned a meeting of black preachers and urged them to preach Jesus in their communities. In Enrico's account, the result was miraculous conversion. People streamed in. On the third night of the meetings 'a black man', 'a man as big as a bear', 'a gigantic man', stood up. Enrico recounts what he claims to be the man's speech: "I am a freedom fighter and I came here to destroy this meeting ... Comrades stand up". A hundred and thirty men armed with knives and pangas got to their feet. The man continues "But the freedom that I was looking for I have found in this tent this afternoon. His name is Jesus. I am finished with violence". And he throws down his knife. Enrico claims that peace then developed in the area. He claims that the same methods brought peace in seven different localities in Natal.

The message appears to be that the 'bear'-like and gigantic threat of black revolt can be managed through the right kind of ideological engagement. And Enrico is suggesting to the congregation that common religion can provide the basis for such intervention.

The second tale recounted by Enrico concerns the way in which a subordinate of his, a young soldier called Piet Buys, supposedly brought about the breaking of a drought in Namibia by the strength of his faith. The story is told humorously, with Enrico playing off Buys' extreme fervour against his own slight scepticism. Enrico's telling of the tale is directed somewhat against himself for having insufficient faith. Enrico was serving in the West Kavango, which was suffering under a drought of three and a half

year's duration. From Enrico's account there was a cluster of born-again Christians in his unit, of whom Buys was one. Buys convinced Enrico to hold a prayer meeting, saying that he was convinced that if they prayed God would give rain. A mass meeting of the local population - whom Enrico represents as deeply religious and hostile to the SWAPO guerillas - was held. The rain, of course, pours down. Buys then persuades Enrico to organise a thanksgiving meeting. Masses of people from the Kavango attend and Enrico represents this meeting as a test of the power of God in front of a curious audience, who can be swayed for or against the faith. Half an hour after they pray, it rains again.

The appeal of this tale lay, I would suggest , in its giving the congregation a sense of their ability to tackle apparently impossible tasks because of the divine support which they enjoy.
In Roodepoort at November 1993, this was certainly a message that many whites wanted to hear; those who were not fanatical rightists were realising the need to come to terms with an altered reality.

Enrico's final tale concerns reconciling with the former oppositional political movements. In this story he is at the Admiralty in Simonstown, on the national day for peace in 1993. He is hosting a very diverse group of politicians. Beforehand, Enrico makes it very clear that he is deeply troubled by having to work with Moslems. (For fundamentalist Christians it seems, other major religions, with the exception of Judaism, are to be regarded as of diabolic inspiration). Obviously too, as a former combat officer he must have been perturbed by the presence of MK fighters. When it is suggested that they all hold hands in a circle for peace, Enrico counters that he will do so only in the name of Jesus. The group agrees to this and a virtual conversion experience follows.

Of course at one level this is the worst kind of fundamentalist chauvinism. Yet in the context of the extremely right wing West Rand, Enrico's message is much more strikingly about reconciliation. Given the strength of black Christianity in the area, the message is in fact much more saliently for his audience about religious breaching of racial and ideological division than about anti-Moslem chauvinism. He is suggesting to his audience that it is possible to find grounds for living with the ANC. This is of course the direct opposite of the message which the SADF put out to the white public during the 1980s. The an ANC government was represented as a final doom. But now that the SADF hierarchy has cottoned on to the possibility that a considerable portion of their power can survive the transition, someone like Enrico feels able to urge the white populace to go along with this process of adaptation.

The Colonel's Angel

This particular shift in the religious-political discourse of the security forces is marked even more strikingly in another case. As South Africa slithered through blood toward the 1994 elections, a most extraordinary Revelation was vouchsafed to Police Colonel Johan Botha of the Eastern Transvaal town of Nelspruit. By his account, an angel appeared to him and instructed him to organise a national prayer chain. The 39-year old Colonel Botha had served for two decades in the South African police. He had

been in the security police and had operated in Soweto for many years. However in Nelspruit he was serving in the Community Relations department of the police. (Rapport 10 April 1994) Experiencing a sense of despair about the violence in the country, Botha prayed to God for guidance. According to interviews given by Botha to the press (Sunday Times 10 April 1994; Rapport IO April 1994), while his eyes were closed, a male figure appeared before his 'spiritual eye', surrounded by a background glow. The facial features of the apparition were not clearly visible, but he could see that the figure had long hair. The 'angel' spoke in a loving voice. He responded to Botha's questions as they formulated themselves in Botha's mind, without the Colonel having to speak out loud. The apparition told Botha that people must organise a national day of prayer. Botha responded that this was impossible. At this point a vast lighted sign appeared in front of the Colonel with the word "Gebedsdiensketting' (Prayer service chain). Feeling that too much was being demanded of him, Botha burst into tears. The angel then put his arm around him and said "What are a few tears compared with rivers of blood, my son". Botha describes an overwhelming feeling of love. Interestingly, although in an interview with the Sunday Times, Botha describes the messenger as an Angel, in an interview with the Afrikaans language Rapport he confides that he believes that the figure was Christ himself.

Botha wept for hours, and initially kept the secret to himself, feeling the task was beyond him. However after encountering initial scepticism Botha spread his message. He did in fact obtain a massive response. "I received nearly a thousand calls from every part of South Africa from believers wanting to stand up and fight evil spirits causing the violence". The national day of prayer did in fact take place and congregations in many parts of the country participated, across the widest range of Protestant denominations (Beeld 19 April 1994).

The Colonel's visions also seem to have had some appear for the secular Afrikaner intellegensia. Jungian ideas seem to have a particular attraction for white South African intellectuals, presumably because its absolutely nebulous concept of the 'collective unconscious' allows free reign to mystical speculations. A lecturer in communications strides at the Rand Afrikaans University told the Beeld newspaper that visions of the type experienced by Botha had enabled him to break though to a level of the psyche beyond the personal unconscious. This was the level of "the transpersonal psyche, the so-called 'big mind' or higher self" of which the collective unconscious is an aspect (Beeld 19 April 1994). So much for the superior rationality of the chattering classes.

it is hardly surprising that Botha was under a great deal of strain in the pre-election period. He had been placed in the position of attending to the public relations of a force whose credibility with the mass of the population was virtually non-existent, given its long time repressive role. He was having to make the transition from being on the political front line of defending the old order to marketing the new. And the police were taking enormous flack for their inability to control conflict. That a deep desire to resolve the conflict affected him, and that it should be expressed in religious terms, is understandable.

The Irresistible Rise of Ray McCauley

The established wisdom of both secular and religious intellectuals in South Africa has been that Fundamentalist churches are wholly reactionary forces. In their wrath has been particularly focused on the Rhema Church of Ray McCauley. The allegation has been that Rhema - the main congregation of which is based in an enormous church in the comfortably middle to upper middle class municipality of Randburg - truckled to the racism of their predominantly white following and promoted a 'prosperity cult' which assuaged the guilt of its followers by assuring that their well-being was a gift from God.

At first glance, this view seems quite plausible because Rhema has tended to espouse the apocalyptic theology of New Right aligned American Pentecostal fundamentalists. In a Tract 'Understanding End Time Prophecy', written by a Rhema minister Norman Robertson (1989) and endorsed in a foreword by McCauley, the imminent end of the world is proclaimed. Following the teaching of American 'Post-Millenial Dispensationalists', (Wills 1990) Robertson informs his readers that prophecy points to the imminence of the 'Rapture': all Born-Again Christians will be swept up in an instant to meeting Jesus in the sky (leaving only their clothes behind!) (c.f. Wills 1990). Christ will do this in order to spare the true believers the time of Tribulation in which the world will be wracked with war and suffering for seven years, the reign of the Anti-Christ (whose identity is a great source of theological speculation amongst the Born-Again). At the end of the seven years, Christ will return to Earth with the angels and the Born-Again, and will wipe out the Anti-Christ's forces at the battle of Armageddon. The 'Oriental'(!) Armies of the Anti-Christ will suffer 200 million casualties, causing a river of blood 200 miles long in Italy. Christ will establish a thousand year of reign of peace. The devil will be bound and cast into 'the abyss'. At the end of the millenium, Satan will escape and raise great armies against the faithful. But the devil and his armies will be crushed by God, and this will be followed by the Last Judgement and the Establishment of 'A New Heavan and A New Earth'.

In the US prophecy of this kind has had an extraordinarily strong right wing following, extending, as we now know, to Dan Quayle and Ronald Reagan. Cold Warriors puzzled over how war with Russia might be part of the Tribulation. Clearly one could argue that Rhema's adoption of such beliefs tended to underwrite the fears of its congregants and its broader public that the forces of social change in Southern Africa represented the anti-Christ, and discouraged political engagement because of its focus on being 'saved'. Fear of 'Oriental' armies certainly could have fitted with the Cold War 'Total Onslaught' paranoia of the 1980s.

However this would not be a fair assessment of the impact of Rhema on politics. Its bizarre theology did not translate in any simple way into right wing politics in South Africa. In fact it is arguable that during the transition from apartheid in the 1990s Rhema did in fact help move a large segment of the white middle class in the direction of an acceptance of change. It did not occupy the equivalent ultra-right end of the political spectrum as its American counterparts.

While during much of the 1980s Rhema was apolitical in its style, it was not segregationist. It played a large role in establishing a network of racially integrated religious schools, and McCauley quite forcefully defended these against attempts by white municipalities and rightist saboteurs to get them closed down. McCauley became increasingly willing to acknowledge that the church had failed in not more actively opposing apartheid, developing what one of his followers calls 'a strange hybrid' of "fundamentalist doctrine and ... broadening socio-political theology" (Steele 1992). This manifested itself in the Rustenburg Declaration meeting in November 1991 where McCauley played a quite prominent role in bringing together a wide range of churches to make a statement confessing guilt for failing to fight apartheid. McCauley also contributed - in cooperation with recognised 'liberation' church leader Frank Chikane - in promoting the peace initiatives aimed at overcoming IFP-ANC conflict.

Of course, it would be perfectly fair to point out that McCauley only became actively political at the time when apartheid was already unravelling. But it would not be true to say that he simply followed the lead of De Klerk's National Party (NP). His confession over apartheid and its results was much earlier and more far reaching than NP attempts to do the same thing. He did resist considerable pressure from other Pentecostal churches which object to involvement in the political sphere. In his involvement in peace initiatives he seems, from Steele's (1992) account to have been aware of the problems caused by Inkatha belligerency at a time when the NP was still blantantly favouring Ulundi, and mainstream church activists saw his role as constructive.

By and large there is a good case that McCauley influenced a large sector of the white middle classes and black conservatives towards greater acceptance of change. McCauley has an instinctive grasp of the post-modern world. Steele and he attributed the failure of other Pentecostal churches to 'act as a voice for the nation' to their lack of grasp of the media (Steele 1992: 105). McCauley waged an extremely skilled battle against the NGK interest in expanding Pentecostal access to television (Steele 1992: 183-199). And he was able to deliver a very large constituency - by the end of 1991 the federal group of independent churches called the 'International Fellowship of Christian Churches' in which Rhema is a major force. They have a membership of about 600 churches and ministries claiming half a million followers (Steele 1992: 102).

In sum, Mc Cauley's role in the 1990s transition was quite a progressive one. Certainly it was more so than that of many of the clergy in mainstream churches.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that threre are many aspects of fundamentalist teaching - especially in the sphere of gender relations - which pose dangerous threats to human rights. But if this threat is to be countered, it must be on the basis of a criticism of religious organisations which does not stop shortly of apparently trendy - but actually equally authoritarian and patriarchal - mainstream denominations.

Religion in south Africa is a central terrain of political conflict. And a person's politics is not an inevitable product of his or her theology. It is time that social scince took the study of religion out of the exclusive hands of the kind of person who, as Karl Marx brutally but justly said, 'makes a profession out of being a Christian'.

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