

The Mzwandile Roddy Nunes Memorial Lecture 2010
Ujamaa Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg

**Religion and the Economy in the Public Realm:
from the RDP of the economy to the RDP of the soul?**

Clint Le Bruyns

Stellenbosch University

The Mzwandile Memorial Lecture is about the connection between faith, work and the economy. It reminds us of the socio-economic injustices in our context and the fundamental need for a prophetic theology. I am indeed humbled by the opportunity to deliver the third Annual Mzwandile R Nunes Memorial Lecture tonight. My gratitude to the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and congratulations, too, as we celebrate with you your 21st anniversary. May these reflections and discussions do justice to your work and to Mzwandile's legacy. The title of my lecture, as given to me, is the following: "*Religion and the Economy in the Public Realm: from the RDP of the economy to the RDP of the soul?*"

What is the relationship between religion and economy in the public realm? The question is important for any number of reasons. The question could also be answered in any number of ways. In this lecture I shall attempt to respond to this question as follows: In the first place, I refer to the insights of Mzwandile himself as he talked about faith, work and economy. In the second place, I look at the ways in which the South African kairos documents intersect with economic dimensions of our life together. And thirdly, I conclude with a proposal for an ethic of prophetic solidarity and its practical implications for the churches in the globalising world of work today.

Mzwandile and his prophetic intelligence

In celebrating the life and contribution of Mzwandile Roddy Nunes, it behoves us to recognise how he might approach this question. I cannot vouch for precisely what he would have said, how he would have said it, and what he would not have said, since I did not have the honour of knowing him personally. However, I did learn about the kind of person he was, about the issues that were important to him, and about the impact he was making on those he served. In this regard, I am hopefully on target if I ventured to say that Mzwandile's rationale would have been to talk about the world of work as the public face of the globalising economy along with the workers and their existential struggles to live a life of dignity and freedom within this world of work.

Mwandile was ‘a walking encyclopedia’, not a writer. His ideas and perspectives rest with his students, colleagues, friends, donors and networks. This notwithstanding, there are two published pieces of his, one of which appeared in the collection of essays titled *A Threefold Cord: Theology, Work and Labour* which was edited by James Cochrane and Gerald West in 1991. His chapter, “Models of ministry for workers: Experiences and reflections” (1991: 193-200), albeit brief, contains several insightful arguments of vital importance still today.

First of all, is his understanding of *contextual theology* in the world of work. He demanded that pastoral ministers and theologians cannot talk for the workers. They can talk for themselves. We needed to have ongoing personal contact with workers, to pay attention to their lives and experiences, to identify with their struggles and needs, and to empower them to talk for themselves (1991: 193-194). “The temptation is great,” he contended, “to be the mouthpiece of the exploited and oppressed workers rather than the person who allows workers to be formed in such a way that they articulate for themselves their demands” (1991: 195). We would do well to keep this in mind in our pastoral and theological service, failing which we might be accused of what I refer to as ‘prophetic gossip’. That is, speaking behind their backs, in their absence, on their behalf – rather than with them. He shares with us the importance of *prophetic story-telling*.

Second is his analysis of the *neo-liberal capitalist economy* as inherently exploitative for workers. He detested the fact that it betrayed their experience of democracy, human rights, and freedom (1991: 195). It underlined the reality of economic injustice for the majority of people in South Africa (1991: 199). In its stead, he advanced the claim of socialism as the world-view closest to the thinking and manifesto of Jesus (1991: 198). People of faith are divided in their economic ideologies, but what Mzwandile emphasises here is the need to assess the impact of any economic system on the most ordinary workers. If an economic system, regardless of how sophisticated it is articulated, rationalised and defended by the most good-intentioned people, is impacting negatively on others within the world of work in regard to their human dignity, equality and freedom, then there must be something wrong and indeed unacceptable about its credibility. It’s not good enough to say, as I often hear, “Well, the neo-liberal capitalist system is not perfect, but it’s the best that we have”. A cowardly surrender to fatalism, if ever there was one. He shares with us the importance of *prophetic critique*.

In the third place, is his view of the *non-neutrality* of the industrial minister or theologian. We do not enter the workplaces innocently or without preconceived ideas and interests. On the contrary, by virtue of the fact that we are dependent on management for workplace access as well as on our churches for financial support lends itself to our support of the status quo (1991: 191). We need to take sides, what we well know as ‘the preferential option for the poor’, but we inevitably struggle to take sides in the light of these aforementioned factors coupled with our theological upbringing through which we think about our calling to minister to all (1991: 199). We thus find difficulty in condemning capitalism and taking a stand on economic justice (1991: 199). The struggle, however, demands the taking of sides, leaving no room for neutrality (1991: 198). He shares with us the importance of *prophetic solidarity*.

A fourth point has to do with his concerns about the *disconnect* between the church and work, between the church's activities and the world of work. The sermons, for example, make no connection with the daily existence of workers; it's as if virtually no-one in the churches have anything meaningful and relevant to communicate to the workers (1991: 199). And yet, Mzwandile asserts the need workers have to connect their faith and work, to explore what it means to integrate their world of faith with their world of work, and vice-versa (1991: 197). He is cognisant not only of the challenges they experience at work, but also of the personal and social problems they wrestle with, including marriage breakdowns and militancy as just two cases in point (1991: 198). This should concern us. He draws attention to Jesus as an important leader in the liberation struggle, who lived and worked in solidarity with others (1991: 198). And yet, he laments: "Churches behave on Sundays as if workers and their struggles did not exist" (1991: 198). He shares with us the importance of *prophetic integration*.

And finally, in the fifth place, is his plea for the churches to *partner* with solidarity movements. Mzwandile criticises industrial mission organisations and initiatives as being too individualistic and pastor-dependent (1991: 200). He advocates for critical partnership with trade unions (1991: 200). Not only does the church benefit from such collaboration and solidarity towards the enhancement of its industrial witness, but there is also the value of its theological capital that might benefit these social movements. Trade unions, he says, cannot do theology; there is thus the need for the churches to help build movements that can express itself theologically (1991: 200). What he means by this, I think, has to do with the theological-ethical ideals churches can possibly share with and nurture among these movements that potentially contributes to a more humanising world of work through the agency of groups and individuals. He shares with us the importance of *prophetic partnership*.

Hereby we learn something about the relation between religion and economy through the methodological avenues of the world of work and the workers. *Religion has a prophetic role to fulfill in regard to economic life in the public realm in terms of story-telling, critique, solidarity, integration and partnership.*

Economic types and realities in the South African kairos documents

First, some general remarks:

Not unlike the 1985/1986 South African Kairos Document, one can readily discern three types of theological undercurrents or impulses behind the perspectives and engagements of churches regarding the economy – a status-quo theology (cf. State theology; constantinianism), a sitting-on-the-fence theology (cf. Church theology; sectarianism), and a struggle theology (cf. Prophetic theology; protest – against and for).

I don't think I would be off the mark if I advanced the idea that we are increasingly expected to fit into the 'church theology' mould: 'The struggle for liberation is over,' they say, 'so just get on with being the church'. 'Leave the business of running the economy and

the nation to the experts,' they tell us. 'Don't involve yourself with the RDP of the economy; focus on the RDP of the soul.' So, 'back off!' We should step back and leave the state and the corporations to get on with the business of economy and work. We should occupy ourselves with issues of spirituality. We should withdraw. Unfortunately many if not most churches are heeding this call to 'prophetic silence', believing the dispensation of prophetic engagement has ceased for the time being, that there is no crisis demanding prophetic engagement right now, that we should simply get on with our priestly ministry. So, we try to bind wounds, encourage, support. We are at the mercy of the political and economic powers, practising once again the 'ja baas' syndrome, agreeing with or at least accepting what others say and do. We become 'prophetic fools' (Gr. 'idios' – self-preoccupied, not involved in public affairs), indifferent, or 'lukewarm' as Revelation 3 talks about the Laodicean church, nauseating to Christ.

At the same time, many other churches really do care about prophetic engagement in the economic domain, but we don't have a clue what this means. We lack the kind of 'prophetic intelligence' Mzwandile possessed. We feel ill-equipped and overwhelmed by the utter complexities and ambiguities of economic life ('complexity paralysis'; we can be conscientised to be paralysed; 'econophobia'). Or we downplay the importance of economic realities in the church and society ('econotrivia'). This econophobia preserves the status quo.

For others seeking to take this public responsibility seriously, the 'state theology' might be the appropriate camp. They go public with their faith by reading the Bible and employing the theological symbols and rituals to strengthen the capitalistic and ideological components of the economy. There is this uncritical solidarity with the powers (constantinianism), therefore uncritical justification of and uncritical support for the economic realities and relations as they presently exist ('economania'). Ted Peters in *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (1994) defines blasphemy with reference to how theological symbols are used for sinful ends, and thereby cultivates evil rather than good.

Be this as it may, the call is to be a prophetic church within a context of economic globalisation with all its challenges of increasing individualism, political imperialism, casualisation, informalisation and contractualisation of labour, alarming insecurity and criminality, worsening poverty and unemployment, and so on.

So, *more specific remarks* then with respect to the kairos tradition:

There are more than 200 references to the economy in one sense or another within the total collection of kairos documents. In referring to the South African kairos theological tradition, I have in mind those documents concerned with the crises and struggles confronting South Africa itself. These are as follows: *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church – A Theological Commentary on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (1985, 1986); *Evangelical Witness in South Africa: South African Evangelicals Critique their own Theology and Practice* (1986); *A Relevant Pentecostal Witness* (1988); *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion* (1989); and *Violence: The New Kairos* (1990). [note: also *The Belhar Confession*, etc.]

While several other kairos documents discuss economic matters to a greater or lesser extent (e.g. Kenya, Zimbabwe, Europe), none of these South Africa-oriented texts dealt with the economy in any substantial way, other than comprising fragments of economically-textured insights. There are just over 20 economic references to be found. Each of these texts, we must remember, were penned during the apartheid years at which time political oppression was the primary focus of attention. This notwithstanding, these insights are instructive for the relevance of the question at hand, the relation between religion and economy in the public realm. Let me briefly draw your attention to *six questions* emerging from the texts:

Economic situations can influence theological interpretation?

The only reference to the economy out of two instances in the South African Kairos Document itself is found in the Preface to the revised second edition, which makes the following statement (in Leonard 2010: 42):

It might be interesting to study the relationship between the various individuals and groups who viciously attacked the document and those who welcomed it. For example, how does the theological stance relate to the class position or the social, economic, racial and political interests of these groups or individuals? What is clear is that most of those who attacked the document failed to appreciate the *concerns* of those who participated in producing the document. They looked at the document from their own situation or context which is completely different from that of the participants whose experience and ministry come from the townships. Most of the critics simply took the document out of its context and analyzed it in the realm of abstraction.

Economic structural inequalities can facilitate rebellion, conflict, war?

The only other reference in the South African Kairos Document of 1986 is found in the section on social analysis under the rubric of prophetic theology. It refers to the embodiment of “structural inequality (political, social and economic)” within “discriminatory laws, institutions and practices” which “has led the people of South Africa into a virtual civil war and rebellion against tyranny” (2010: 67).

Economic life as part of spiritual life?

Several texts highlight the problem of theological dualism, separating economic matters from spirituality matters. The Evangelical Witness singles out dualism as a notable theological problem in evangelicalism (2010: 94-95), and specifically declares economic life as being a spiritual life (2010: 95, 117). In the Pentecostal Witness it refers to the “high spirituality” within Pentecostalism as a reaction against nominalism, which led to a “other-worldly” theology (2010: 133): “A person was seen as having a body, a soul and a spirit, and the greatest appeal was made to the soul. The social, political and economic conditions did not

matter; what mattered was that the soul be saved. This is not the scriptural view of personhood”. This had certain consequences, they point out: “Because we have not attended holistically to the needs of people, many have seen the Christian gospel as irrelevant and have turned to other ideologies that can fulfil these needs” (2010: 133). According to the Violence text, this dualism “has been of no help at all in preventing violence” (2010: 202).

In similar vein, the Damascus text states in its section on heresy under the rubric of prophetic mission the heretical nature of such dichotomous thinking (2010: 186-187). Moreover, it makes an intriguing link between the dualistic mentality and economic interests (2010: 187):

It is not without reason that right-wing Christians believe in antagonistic dualisms. It prevents the spiritual from influencing their material lives, it keeps God out of their political and economic interests. They say that they are only interested in the soul, but in fact they are very concerned about the political and economic status quo. They want to preserve it at all costs because it benefits them. They say we must keep religion out of politics but invoke a kind of religion that supports the status quo. They reduce salvation to that of the soul only.

Economic ideologies and the Christian faith?

In the Evangelical Witness a section on evangelicalism and conservatism bemoans how many evangelical groups equate capitalist ideologies with Christian faith (2010: 107):

To these groups and churches what is called western Christian civilization or the western capitalist culture is seen as identical with the Christian faith or the demands of the gospel. Any other system (especially economic) which is not necessarily capitalist is taken as being atheistic and therefore anti-Christian. In their understanding of their faith they cannot see a possibility of being socialist and also Christian. Tragically, these Christians miss the biblical obligation to measure and critique all systems, capitalist, socialist, Marxist, etc., on the basis of biblical norms.

They proceed to label the western capitalist culture as idolatrous and beneficial in regard to these groups: “We believe that it is the class interest of these people, their position of dominance in our society, their being beneficiaries of this racist apartheid system, which moves them, rather than the gospel” (2010: 108). For this reason, “They are quiet about the oppression and exploitation of millions of South African blacks and are not moved by the pain, misery and suffering, blacks are subjected to” – and yet, “if the victims of this system raise their voices to resist this system, the voices of condemnation from these conservative evangelical groups become the loudest” (2010: 108; cf. 2010: 117; Pentecostal Witness 2010: 127-128).

The Damascus text refers to western imperialism as one of the major roots of the conflict (2010: 174-176). Economic oppression is clearly part of the crisis for South African

and other Two-Thirds World nations at this time, with reference specifically being made to the negative impact of economic globalisation within these contexts (2010: 174):

Today, most Third World countries are no longer colonies, but we are still dominated by one or more imperial power – the United States, Japan and Western Europe. Their web of economic control includes an unfair international trade system, multinational companies that monopolise strategic sections of our economy, economic policies dictated by lending banks and governments together with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Even technology is used as a tool for domination. The staggering size of Third World debt is only one dramatic sign of our subordination to imperialism.

Economic division and sin?

Whereas each of the kairós documents refer to the scandal of division among the churches, it is (ironically) the Evangelical Witness and the Pentecostal Witness which emphatically points to economic division as spiritually problematic. In its section on the gifts of the Spirit – which “can be a powerful instrument for witness” when all are in harmonious rather than hostile operation (2010: 130) in serving “the common good of the whole church” (2010: 131) – the Pentecostal Witness concludes (2010: 131):

In South Africa the body of Christ is not united but politically and economically divided. While Scripture teaches that the dividing wall of hostility has been broken whereby we are no longer foreigners and aliens (Eph. 2:14, 19), apartheid has reconstructed this wall separating us one from the other. For the most part, the Pentecostal church has thrived under the Group Areas Act. It has no qualms about having separate so-called Indian, Coloured, African and White sections within the church. Is this a true testimony to the one Spirit who unites us? (1 Cor. 12:13).

Furthermore, it concedes that they have neglected to point out “economic exploitation and oppression” as sins (2010: 129). The Evangelical Witness builds on this acknowledgement with the implication that economic exploitation must therefore be included in the scope of God’s redemptive action (2010: 109):

We believe that salvation and social change cannot be separated from one another. We believe that God loved the world as a whole when he gave his only begotten son, Jesus Christ. We believe that the saving act of God is directed not only at individuals but at the whole creation. If the sin of Adam is responsible for corruption and evil in the world, if this original sin is responsible for the chaos in the world, for the wars and rumours of wars, for injustices and oppressive systems, for economic exploitation, then the saving act of Jesus must deal with this whole spectrum of the consequences of the original sin. It must deal with both the spiritual and the political socio-economic realities of the world in which we live.

Economic suffering and the call to conversion?

Last, but certainly quite importantly, the Damascus text contends for the need of self-critical reflection and conversion (2010: 171, 191-192). It states in the Preamble: “We are all in continuous need of self-criticism and conversion. But now the time has come for a decisive turnabout on the part of those groups and individuals who have consciously or unconsciously compromised their Christian faith for political, economic and selfish reasons” (2010: 171). More specifically, “We must be converted again and again from the idol of Mammon to the worship of the true God. We cannot serve two masters, we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Matt. 6:24)” (2010: 191). They then point out how scapegoating can be used to cover up our sin, referring to “the practice of using communism as a scapegoat” (2010: 192). They conclude with the need for us all to continuously be converted and to reject such sins as idolatry, heresy, hypocrisy, and complacency (2010: 192).

A way forward – exploring a prophetic solidarity?

I am mindful that this lecture takes place in the context of two celebrations this week, viz. the 21st anniversary of the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, as well as the 25th anniversary of the South African Kairos Document. I am of the view that we would not be able to reflect meaningfully and engage constructively around the theme of religion and economy without the distinctive contributions of both Kairos and Ujamaa traditions coupled with the contribution of Mzwandile as well. In addition to the various insights already gained during this consultation, I wish to discuss two issues in particular. The first issue concerns the question of a prophetic theology within a globalising economy; the second issue has to do with the question of solidarity with one another within a globalising world of work. What I shall advocate in this final section of the lecture is for *a prophetic solidarity* in response to the economic challenges we are confronting in and beyond South Africa today.

Solidarity in the economic realm is simply an abstract idea – not a practice, not a reality. It is not necessary to convince ourselves of this statement by referring to any statistical information and related scientific literature. We know, whether through experience or observation, that extreme poverty exists. We know that serious unemployment exists. We know that aggravating wage disparities exist. We know that racial inequalities exist. We know that life as we presently experience and observe it is not the abundant life for which Jesus came (Jn 10:10). Albert Nolan in *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (2006: 202-203) presents the challenge to explore this virtue anew, as follows:

Today more than ever ... we need to find ways of reviving Jesus’ spirit of sharing. It is not always easy to see how and where we might begin to share today, but true empathy with others will compel us to search for the best ways to do so in our circumstances. Our solidarity and love for one another cannot remain an abstract idea or a warm feeling. In practice it will have to become, however gradually, an *economic reality*. [italics mine]

So how do we rejuvenate our sense of prophetic solidarity?

No solidarity without social analysis!

In *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change* (2000), which is certainly the most insightful study on the nature of economic suffering I have ever come across, development specialists facilitated an enquiry among more than 20,000 women and men who were defined by economic poverty from 23 countries to voice their own views and experiences of economic hardship. They eventually identified 10 dimensions of powerlessness and illbeing as follows (2000: 2):

- Livelihoods and assets are precarious, seasonal and inadequate.
- Places of the poor are isolated, risky, unserved and stigmatized.
- The body is hungry, exhausted, sick and poor in appearance.
- Gender relations are troubled and unequal.
- Social relations are discriminating and isolating.
- Security is lacking in the sense of both protection and peace of mind.
- Behaviors of those more powerful are marked by disregard and abuse.
- Institutions are disempowering and excluding.
- Organizations of the poor are weak and disconnected.
- Capabilities are weak because of the lack of information, education, skills and confidence.

These aspects of economic suffering reflect in obvious ways the opposite of social solidarity with other persons, groups and institutions. Moreover, participants underlined three main dimensions of social illbeing: “the process of alienation and isolation (social exclusion); strained social relations and diminishing social cohesion; and unequal gender relations at the community level” (2000: 134). Mzwandile demonstrated sharp insight into the nature of economic realities in South Africa.

What role such social analysis serves is also important. Do we analyse to simply analyse? Or do we analyse to paralyse? Or maybe we might analyse to empathise?

No solidarity without personal sadness!

No solidarity without sadness! This is the point Rubem Alves makes in an internet posting on “Teaching the Blues” (2009). He refers to a personality type known as ‘the alegrinho’. This is an ever-joyful, cheerful, light-hearted character. The alegrinho is happy and funny all the time. People don’t have the freedom to be sad, but in this person’s presence people must laugh. According to Alves, such a person actually squanders the possibility of authentic joy because they are unable to deal with the reality of sadness.

In a way the alegrinho might be a personality type of our church and theology [cf. PKBC student – ‘blessed, brother, blessed’]. The alegrinho is a dangerous person for our economic witness. Our theology and church tradition can reflect an unreality, an ignoring or trivialising of the harsh

realities of economic life within our communities and among our nations. We can spiritualise economic suffering, rather than feel deep agonising sorrow. No wonder the church can be numbed, no wonder rich and powerful Christians can worship in the same room as the poor and unemployed without any real involvement in the lives of the poor or will to changing the status quo. There is pity rather than sorrow.

Kathleen Norris in *Acedia and Me* (2008) laments the absence of care in public life. Throughout her reflection she underlines acedia as something public and inter-related with others.

Leonardo Boff in *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature* (2008: 1-13) sees carelessness as a sign of our times, and refers to various symptoms of a crisis in civilization, and with special reference to negative impact of economic ideologies. A materialist realism is more often to blame for this negative consciousness. He contends for a recovery of an ethics of care as a fundamental mode of being and of responsibility (2008: 14-26). He is critical of ‘the way-of-being through work’ that dominates our consciousness and activity with its leitmotifs of domination, control, rationalisation, competition, efficiency, order and utility (2008: 60-62). People and institutions find themselves “increasingly less concerned with the human being and more preoccupied with the economy” (2008: 71). His preference for ‘the way-of-being through care’ emphasises relationship, solidarity, intrinsic value, love and reverence for life (2008: 63-64).

Boff urges responsibility for (the recovery of) an ethic of care. It starts “with bonds of affection”. The church as a community of care can nurture responsibility by recovering a theology of pathos and embodying an ethics of care in its way of being in the economic world (2008: 67, 70):

It is here that we find the evidence that the original fact is not the logos, rationality and the structures of understanding, but the pathos, sentiment, the capacity for sympathy and empathy, dedication, care and communion with the other. Everything starts with feeling. Feeling is that which makes us sensitive to what is around us; it is that which makes us like and dislike. It is feeling that unites us with things and that gets us involved with people.

It is important to put care into everything. For this we must develop the anima that is within us. This means granting rights of citizenship to our capacity of feeling the other; the empathy towards all beings who suffer, human or non-human; obeying more the logic of the heart, of cordiality, of kindness than the logic of conquest and of the utilitarian use of things.

To what extent does economic suffering really disturb and sadden us? The etymology of ‘sadness’ is quite interesting, as shown by C S Lewis in a study of some classic words. Sadness initially indicated fullness, thus heaviness, and over time took on negative connotations of being weighed down and burdened. Alves talks about the need for ‘a pedagogy of sadness’. Before we can feel compassion, we must share in the sadness of the other. No solidarity without being heavy. Mzwandile took this pedagogy seriously.

No solidarity without a different consciousness!

We analyse to empathise, and we empathise to conscientise? As Nolan rightly stresses, “What is required is a fundamental change of consciousness – how we *see* our fellow human beings” (2006: 193).

In *The Other* (2008: 7), Polish historian and journalist Ryszard Kapuściński [RE-SHAARD KA-PU-TSIN-SKI] concerns himself with “the way in which Otherness is manufactured, experienced and understood in the world” based on a lifetime of travel and encounters in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He helps us understand how much of a “settled creature” we really are, for whom “the world outside is a source of anxiety” (2009: 16). To encounter the other brings both recognition and responsibility, either of which we are unable to appropriately deal with, hence our hesitation to be exposed to the other. He explains how entire civilisations demonstrated no interest at all in the world beyond, with the exception of Europe, yet an interest that would be shared by other empires eventually as one of conquering, colonising, mastering, and making depending (2009: 23).

Kapuściński later discusses three ways of relating to the other in history – starting a war, isolating oneself, and hospitality (2009: 82). By hospitality he means a friendly and open and approachable attitude, a dialogical encounter (2009: 85). In the end, literally his closing words, he associates this sense of hospitality with the other as an ethic of solidarity, but poses the question to us (2009: 92):

Will we jointly wish to refer to what ... ‘speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation – and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts: to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn’?

Then there are the insights from Nolan regarding the nature of our solidarity. I refer to his recent book *Hope in an Age of Despair* (2009: 107-109) in which he discusses solidarity as a gospel value against the worldly value of social groupings, an issue he picked up very critically in *Jesus Today* (2006: 192-203) but especially in *Jesus Before Christianity* (1976, 1992, 2001: 73-88). We have a problem with group selfishness according to nations, tribes, clans, families, cultures, classes, races, religions, and church denominations (2009: 107). “These social conformations give us a sense of belonging,” he notes, “and often enough we develop strong feelings of loyalty and group solidarity” (2009: 107). There is nothing wrong with this *per se*; “The sinful, worldly value here is the selfishness and exclusiveness of group solidarity” (2009: 108). Group solidarity must be subordinate to human solidarity, for “In the very first place I am a member of the human race, made in the image and likeness of God. My first loyalty is to the human family. Everything else is secondary” (2009: 108, 109). It is this

different consciousness of those beyond his class, race, and faith which Mzwandile demonstrated in his solidarity with the ‘discarded’ of society.

No solidarity without social mobilisation!

We analyse to empathise. We empathise to conscientise. We must now organise and mobilise. Mzwandile’s example of engagement with trade unions is a good place to start. I am of the opinion that this partnering might serve as a litmus test for our will to empathise, encounter, be changed, and to take seriously the practical engagement a prophetic theology demands. I can refer here to my own experience of conducting many training workshops for various trade unions in South Africa (e.g. on ethical leadership in and through labour) as well as my own research (e.g. my first postdoctoral research project on ‘globalisation and labour in South Africa’; publications on poverty, collective bargaining, church-labour collaboration, economic justice, etc.).

Labour needs the churches, the churches need labour – if we are going to take prophetic solidarity seriously. I have found a number of interesting articles referring to initiatives in the 1960s and so on on church-labour solidarity movements. I am yet to see this happening in my own sphere of life in the Western Cape. A course I recently taught, “Economic Ethics”, challenged my 3rd-year students to make contact with church and union people to explore somewhat this question and possibility. While extremely reluctant, moreso opposed, to this assignment, the students nevertheless learned that religion and labour might very well be on a similar quest for dignity, equality and justice within our globalising world of work.

In *A Paradox of Victory: COSATU and the Democratic Transformation in South Africa* (2010), Sakhela Buhlungu makes as his central argument the fact that a distinctive of African trade unions is “that in addition to resisting the economic exploitation of their members, unions in Africa have also been agents of liberation and development” (2010: 1-2). In this regard, Buhlungu does not overlook religion as a critical role-player in his account of South African unionism during the apartheid and democratic dispensations.

In the first place, there is the *institutional* contribution of religion towards organisational building (2010: 27-28). He refers to the roles of certain Christian denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa and its contribution through the Young Christian Workers (YCW) in building a democratic ethos by means of education and training programmes under apartheid and capitalism (2010: 28, 44-45). Many workers belong to religious associations, especially churches, with the result that institutional connections were made with unions by some denominations.

Secondly, there is a *paradigmatic* contribution that should be appreciated about religious groups. Religion “imbued many with a sense of justice and provided them with a rationale for challenging oppressive and exploitative relations in society” (2010: 28). Keeping in mind Paul Tillich’s argument about theology as an ideological tradition both complementing but especially critiquing other ideologies, ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ spiritual

communities contribute significantly in paradigmatic ways towards addressing life and its ambiguities within the world of work.

Thirdly, there is its *ecumenical* contribution. Religious rituals and activities have served “as a unifying force” in new trade unions (2010: 28). Religious actions can be seen in many situations as bringing workers together while also attributing “legitimacy and respectability to the struggle” (2010: 29).

A fourth contribution, while seemingly minor or insignificant, has been of a *hymnodical* nature. Here “religious hymns were adapted to the struggle context” by which “the unions learned to use the power of singing to mobilise workers into action” (2010: 29). Both lyrical content and rhythmic energy are noteworthy.

In the fifth place, there is its *leadership* contribution. Many union leaders attest to leadership capital attained previously in different religious organisations, including that of “public speaking, negotiation and organising skills” (2010: 29).

A sixth contribution of religion rests with its *communicational* or networking contribution. For groupings such as Christian churches and organisations, there is discernibly “an extensive national [and indeed, international] network of people, facilities and resource bases” which fulfill critical and strategic roles throughout the world of work (2010: 29).

Conclusion

“Religion and the Economy in the Public Realm: from the RDP of the economy to the RDP of the soul?” *True in what is affirmed, false in what is denied.*

- (1) Mzwandile and his prophetic intelligence: *Religion has a prophetic role to fulfill in regard to economic life in the public realm in terms of story-telling, critique, solidarity, integration and partnership.*
- (2) Economic types and realities in the South African kairos documents: Church theology – State theology – Prophetic theology. *Economic situations can influence theological interpretation? Economic structural inequalities can facilitate rebellion, conflict, war? Economic life as part of spiritual life? Economic ideologies and the Christian faith? Economic division and sin? Economic suffering and the call to conversion?*
- (3) A way forward – exploring a prophetic solidarity? *No solidarity without social analysis! No solidarity without personal sadness! No solidarity without a different consciousness! No solidarity without social mobilisation!*

Discussion