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# The Road to Democracy

Democratic Elections in South Africa  
A Christian Perspective



A Publication of the Institute for Contextual Theology

# Introduction

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The Education for Democracy Campaign is one of the most ambitious co-operative programmes ever undertaken by South African Church Organisations as a whole. Plans for the campaign include conferences, workshops, booklets, poster, cassettes, voter education, and the recruitment and training of monitors, and more suggestions are being put forward every day.

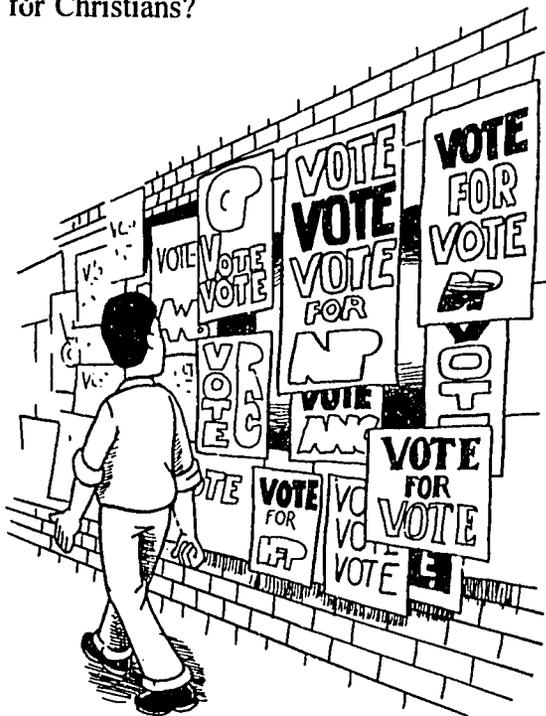
This campaign is generating a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm amongst Christians in South Africa, but it has also raised a number of questions about the role of Christianity and South African Christian Organisations in the upcoming election:

- **Does democracy have anything to do with the Christian faith?**
- **Should the churches be involved in education for democracy?**
- **What kind of democracy should the churches be promoting?**

These are important questions for the churches to be asking, and this publication is intended to help answer some of them.

A Christian approach to the upcoming elections and democracy in a future South Africa is not an easy or obvious thing to come up with. There are Christians who view democracy and elections as purely political matters that the church should not interfere with. There are those who think that the churches are merely jumping on the latest bandwagon to prove that they are still relevant in this changing situation. Others are seriously asking whether we should allow the political context to dictate our theological agenda.

Even those who are pleased to see the church lend a hand with the mammoth task of educating people for democracy are not always able to say why the churches as churches should be involved. Does the Bible have anything to say about democracy? Is democracy a matter of faith for Christians?



Even more important is the issue of which democracy or whose democracy we are talking about. Democracy is being defined as “government of the people, by the people and for the people.” What does this mean in practice?

Democracy has meant different things to different people in different historical circumstances. If the church has an Education for Democracy Campaign, what kind of democracy is the church promoting and in whose interests is it being promoted? We need to consider the movement towards democracy in South Africa within our own circumstances, our colonial history and the broader context of the struggle for democracy in Africa.

Churches must aim to be neutral towards different political parties, but the role of the churches is not simply neutrality. We need to reach clarity on this point too.

Finally, if we are going to define a Christian perspective on democracy, Christians need to ask themselves, do we live up to our own democratic principles in the way that we organise our churches and Christian organisations?

**This publication is divided into three parts:**

- 1. A Theology of Democracy**
- 2. The South African Context**
- 3. An Agenda for the Churches**

**Men and women were born  
to be free and equal.**



# 1. A Theology of Democracy

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An agenda for theology and the churches needs to answer people's problems in the world today. Traditionally, Christians have looked to the Bible to find solutions to their problems. Not that the Bible should be regarded merely as a book of answers and solutions, which we can consult like some kind of dictionary. Texts and verses have often been used to justify trends old and new. Some people think that if you can find a "proof" text or two, you can call any idea Biblical. In this way it has been possible to justify slavery and later the emancipation of slaves, colonialism and later anti-colonialism, apartheid, male domination as well as feminism, and so on.

To avoid this arbitrary use of Biblical texts, we must recognise that the Bible does not only provide answers, it also raises questions. We must allow the Bible to question our assumptions and our political systems. Democracy can be put on the agenda for theology and the churches not only because we have questions about democracy for the Bible, but also because the Bible has questions for us about what we mean by democracy.

Either way, we cannot separate the "secular" and the "spiritual" in such a way that Christian faith has nothing to do with the way we live our everyday lives.

Democracy is not a Biblical word. It arose to describe a form of government that emerged gradually out of the struggle against political injustice. It is therefore not possible to find Biblical texts or verses that are either for or against democracy as such.

However, the concept of democracy is based on certain values which can be found in the Bible: justice, equality, freedom and accountability. These we might call the four pillars upon which the modern political concept of democracy is, or should, be built. In a theology of democracy we must allow the Bible to question us about these principles. We also need to look at the changing attitudes of the church to the absence of democracy in social organizations, for example, attitudes to monarchy in the bible and attitudes to hierarchies in churches today.

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# Justice

In South African churches today hardly anyone would deny that injustice is a sin and that the promotion of social justice is a Christian obligation. It has taken us a long time to reach this consensus.

For decades many Christians argued that social justice was a matter of politics and had nothing to do with belief in God. Today we are all, or almost all, convinced that our God is a God of justice and peace who expects us to work for justice and peace. It is a matter of faith.

Justice is a matter of fundamental concern in the Bible. In fact, God's salvation is closely linked to justice for Israel and the world. We have a very important role to play in the pursuit of justice in our situation, but ultimately it is God who brings justice to the world.

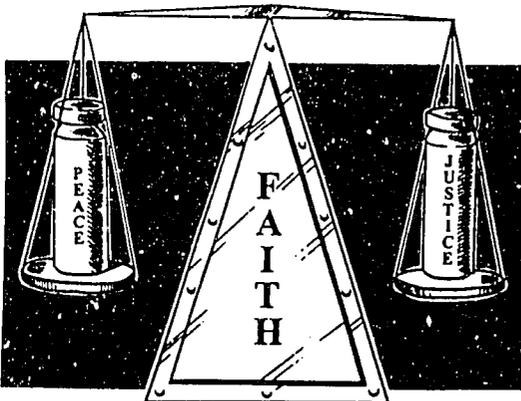
God's justice covers many things: murder, theft, fraud, corruption, exploitation of the poor, prejudice, special privileges for some people and the destruction of the environment. God's justice is about fairness to all and the sustenance of life. It touches our personal life, political life, economic life and the integrity of creation (ecology).

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God's justice is about fairness to all and the sustenance of life

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Democracy is the appropriate vehicle for our times through which Christians should strive to further God's concern for justice.



*If you want peace,  
work for justice.*

Democracy is the new name and dimension for justice in South Africa. For a long time the struggle for justice meant a political and military struggle against apartheid and racism. Today the struggle for justice means a struggle for free and fair elections, for majority rule, for economic justice and for a healthy environment and a responsible use of natural resources. In other words, a christian approach to democracy must encompass the democratisation of politics, economics and ecology.

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## Equality

Equality is implied in the concept of justice, but because some people speak about justice and fairness without treating everyone as equal, it is necessary to emphasise the Biblical perspective on equality.

- **We are all equal because we are all created in the image and likeness of God.**

What is new here is not the idea that a human being or some human beings might be like God. The Egyptians, for example, believed that their king, the Pharaoh, was made in the image of God.

What is new here is the idea that all human beings are like God. This includes groups of people who have, throughout history, been treated as inferiors, such as slaves, women and the poor. The bible says every woman, man and child. This is the basis of our belief in equality and justice. In the eyes of God we all have equal dignity and our dignity comes from the simple fact that we are all human beings created by God in the image and likeness of God. In other words, our fundamental dignity does not come from our status, our noble ancestry, our education, our race, our wealth or our achievements. It comes from our God-given humanity.

This is the basis of the great commandment to love one another, that is to say, to show respect for the dignity of all human beings. It is also the basis of democracy. Democracy means "government of the people by the people and for the people" (*Abraham Lincoln*). The people here means all the people and not just a select few. The opposite of democracy is government by one

person (a king or dictator) or government by one group (by the aristocracy or by whites or by men) or by only one political party.

Democracy means equality - equality before the law, equal opportunities in health, education and pensions, equal pay for equal work and so on. In government it means that we all have a say in who governs and how they govern. In other words, if some people have authority it is not because they are superior human beings, but because they represent the people.

The equality of all human beings, one of the founding principles of democracy, is a biblical principle. But respecting the equal dignity of all people is easier said than done. In the Bible we find many examples of people who don't treat others with equality and justice, just as we find governments that profess to be democratic but do not really treat all citizens equally. However, the Bible tells us about one person who did live the principle of equality without compromise and that was Jesus Christ.

Jesus stands out as one person who treated men and women, adults and children, rich and poor, people of high and low social status, the blind, the lame, the sick, lepers and beggars with equal dignity and respect. Jesus really lived the basic principles upon which all ideas of democracy are based. In Christ, as Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians, there are no longer masters and slaves, Jews and Gentiles, male and female (3.28).



*We all have equal dignity because we are all created in the image of God.*

# Freedom

A country becomes democratic when it moves from a situation of domination, oppression or authoritarianism towards a situation of greater freedom. Countries that have been dominated by one political party might become more democratic by allowing for many parties (multi-partyism). Countries that have been dominated and oppressed by one race group, like South Africa's white minority regime, achieve liberation when everyone is able to vote. In other places the freedom of democracy comes about when a particular dictator is ousted and the people are free to choose their own government.

Freedom means different things to different people depending upon which freedoms have been denied to them. This has led to defining freedom in terms of human rights. Thus we say that everyone has the right to freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of religion, the right to a vote, the right to housing, health-care and education, the right to a fair trial, and so on.

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The whole history of Israel is the history of a struggle for freedom from oppressors.

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Democracy is based upon these freedoms or human rights, generally written into a democratic constitution or a bill of rights.

Freedom is also a Biblical principle. The whole history of Israel is the history of a struggle for freedom from oppressors: the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. In the experience of the Exodus, the Israelites were liberated from slavery in Egypt. They believed in a God of freedom who had delivered them from the house of bondage and who always wanted them to be saved or redeemed from someone or something that might oppress, imprison or enslave them.

When they were not being enslaved by outsiders they suffered under the domination of their own kings, while the poor were oppressed and exploited by the rich. In all of this the great champion of their freedom or liberation was their God - Yahweh.

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With the coming of Jesus new dimensions of freedom were revealed: freedom from sin, freedom from the law, freedom from fear and freedom from guilt. For as Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, "we were born to be free" (5:13) and "Christ has set us free" (5:1).

This understanding of freedom includes a respect for the rights and freedoms of others. Tolerance towards different religions and opinions and the right to express them without intimidation or censorship, forms part of a commitment to freedom. It should be noted that this kind of political tolerance implies intolerance towards injustice, inequality, bondage, oppression and exploitation.

Freedom, like equality, is the intention of God's word. The concept of democracy is a modern attempt to introduce these Biblical principles into political life.

## Accountability

A democracy is not a society in which each individual fights for himself and against everyone else with the ultimate aim of assuming power - absolute power with no accountability to anyone except the powerful. Absolute power "corrupts absolutely", and does not lead to the creation of a just society - even



*"Let my people go." (Exodus)*

though this kind of individualism, competition and free enterprise is often thought to be essential to democracy.

True democracy must be based on some sense of responsibility for one another. Democratic government is not only government by the people it is also government for the people. If I want people to respect my rights, I must respect theirs. If I want others to be accountable for how they treat me, then I must take responsibility for how I treat them. If I want others to trust me, then my actions should be clear (transparent) to those whom I serve.

- **Accountability is a very important word in any true democracy. Those who represent the people in government must always be accountable to the people.**

This principle of responsibility and accountability is fundamentally Biblical. I am my brothers' and sisters' keeper. We are not only expected to love one another, we are expected to serve one another. Those in authority, Jesus says, must not "lord it over" others and "make their authority felt". They must be "the slave or servant of all", not wanting 'to be served but to serve' (Mark 10:41-45).

The democratic ideal of civil service is based on the Christian ideal of service or ministry. Jesus, again, was the supreme example of one who came to serve rather than be served. (Mark 10:45).

If justice, equality, freedom and accountability are principles and ideals fundamental to the Biblical ideal of how a society should function, how do we explain the Biblical emphasis on monarchy?

## Monarchy in the Bible

Read superficially, the Bible appears to show a preference for monarchical types of government (the rule of a king or someone of royal blood). Israel was ruled by kings, the Messiah is a king like David, God is the king of kings, and what we long for is called God's kingdom. This widespread and persistent use of the language of monarchy has led people to believe that democracy is not biblical. The issue of monarchy in the Bible, therefore, needs closer examination.

For the first two hundred years of its existence Israel did not have a king. Israel was a federation of twelve tribes with no king, no princes, no chiefs, no slaves, no rich and no poor. The land was divided equally amongst families or clans. It was the closest thing the ancient world had to an egalitarian society, or a democracy. The people of Israel did this intentionally because they wanted to avoid the inequality, domination, slavery and exploitation of the monarchies and dictatorships around them. They believed that equality, freedom and responsibility were God-given values.

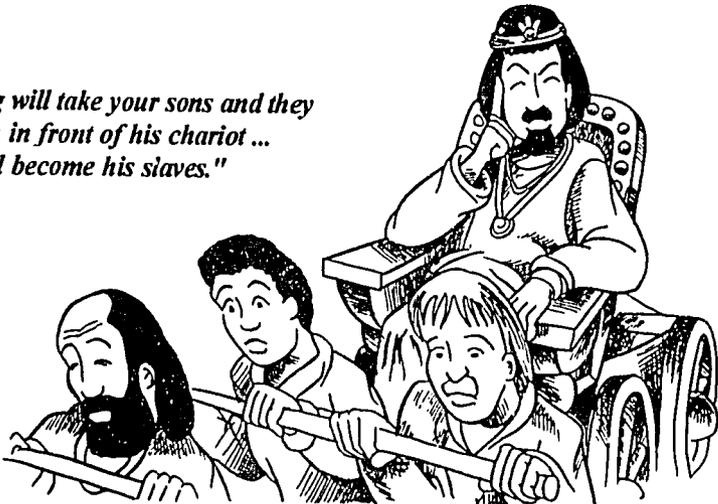
It is true that they sometimes spoke of God as their king. But that was a way of saying that they recognised no human as their ruler nor owed ultimate loyalty to a human institution.

It is also true that they did not have full equality (women were not equal to men in the family). But there is no doubt about their genuine attempt to move beyond inequality and domination.

Nor did they have voting, general elections, political parties, secret ballots and parliaments. Such things were not practical in those days. But they did have the idea that the heads of families shared equal responsibility for how Israel was ruled.

The people of Israel did eventually appoint kings to rule over them like other nations. But the Bible makes it quite clear that this was not God's will and that God warned them about the consequences. He "democratically" allowed a king, because the majority of the people wanted one.

*"A king will take your sons and they will run in front of his chariot ... You will become his slaves."*



Much of this can be found in chapter 8 of Samuel.

The elders of Israel assembled, went to Samuel and said,  
"Give us a king to rule us like the other nations...."

Samuel prayed to God and God said to him, "Do what they ask. It is not you they have rejected but me, not wishing me to reign over them anymore...."

*But give them a solemn warning and tell them what a king will do.*

*He will take your sons and they will run in front of his chariot ... He will make them plough his fields and gather in his harvest and make his weapons of war ... He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields, your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his officials ... He will tithe your crops and your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves.*

This is the opposite of all that is meant in the Bible by justice, democracy, equality, freedom and accountability. The Bible is critical of such kings, usually concluding descriptions of them by saying, "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord".

The kings of Israel were not the heroes of Israel. The prophets, who criticised the kings, were the heroes. Ultimately, God is the only real hero in the Bible.

It is true that King David was highly revered and that the Messiah was regarded as a descendant of David. But even David is criticised for his sins, especially his use of his power to eliminate Uriah and take Uriah's wife, Bathsheba (II Sam 11, 12).

- **Jesus went to a great deal of trouble to show that the Messiah would be the very opposite of the usual high and mighty kings. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and he washed the feet of his disciples.**

Finally, when we speak of the "kingdom" of God, it would be more accurate to speak of the reign of God. We should remember that God reigns when goodness, love, justice and peace reign supreme, and when equality, freedom and responsibility have become the ruling principles in our lives and in society.

# Democracy in the Church

There has always been a difference between the principles, or high ideals we believe in and the actual practice of believers. To this day Christian churches preaching human equality, freedom, salvation, love of neighbour and humble service find it difficult to embody these values in their own structures and practices.

Some theologians have excused the hierarchical and undemocratic practices of the churches by saying that the church's power and authority come from God and not from the people. But there is no reason to believe that decisions made at the top are more likely to be from God than decisions made from below. God's Spirit and the Bible were given to the congregation.

However, there have always been Churches who have tried to organise themselves more democratically. The Friars were the first religious order to try to introduce democratic elections and equality of status for all as brothers and sisters. At the heart of the Reformation was a rebellion against the authoritarianism of Rome and an attempt to return to "the priesthood of all the faithful".

The Reformed Churches did away with bishops and introduced a Presbyterian structure, that is to say, vesting authority in synods of ministers and elders. The Congregational Churches went one step further, vesting all power in the congregation or community of believers. To be a follower of Jesus Christ has always meant striving for democracy, in the sense in which we have defined these ideals. The question is, are these ideals effective in practice?

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South African churches today face the problem of undemocratic practices and structures. Catholic, Protestant and African Indigenous Churches alike reveal tensions between the desire to be more democratic and existing structures that are, in fact, undemocratic. There are attempts to be more accountable, to consult more per-

sons and to listen to the voice of the people, But entrenched “top-down” structures are difficult to move aside.

No Church is perfect. But then no democratic government is perfect either. The great value of a theology of democracy is to articulate and remind us of the principles and ideals which we should be striving for - even if we are unlikely to be fully successful. Democracy is a process that we need to encourage, promote and pursue. With God’s grace we can make progress in furthering democracy both in our churches and our society.

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*God's spirit and the bible were given to the whole congregation - not just priests and church leaders.*



## 2. The South African Context

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*“Democracy, if it is to be more than a facade for special interest groups manoeuvring and indirect control by elites, requires that each and all have substantially equal capacity to participate. When there are vast differences in income, wealth, education, free time, and personal security, citizens with low incomes are fundamentally disadvantaged. They do not have the money to influence politics; their education does not give them as many skills; they don't have the time; and often, even fearful of losing their jobs, they prefer silence to speaking their minds.” (Alperovit)*

The meaning of democracy at any particular time and place needs to be understood in terms of the history of that place. Participating in an election in the USA, for example, with an established choice between Democrats, Republicans and sometimes Independents, is quite different from participating in the first non-racial election in South Africa.

We can only understand our own situation and the political choices facing our country from within our own historical context. But before we examine the South African context we need to examine the history of democracy in other African countries. There are important similarities and differences which should be noted. Finally, there are a number of lessons to be learnt, since we have the advantage of hindsight.

# Democracy in Africa

Ironically, democracy was not introduced to Africa by those fighting for justice. It was introduced by colonisers, in pursuit of injustice. Gradually some forms of elected local governments were established by the colonists and for the colonists. But these were controlled by European powers and excluded the "local people". This mockery of justice sparked the quest for real democracy and the ongoing struggle for liberation and independence, which has dominated modern African history.

But in the first generation of independent African governments, the quest for democracy did not go much further than the achievement of formal independence from colonial rule. The result was military coups, violence and the establishment of one-party states.

The need to deal with the imbalances and inequalities of colonial rule has often been used to explain the tendency of the new African leadership to govern undemocratically. Another key factor was that modern Western democratic government was a new political culture and practice.

Today injustices are being more rigorously opposed across the continent. The current move towards democracy in independent Africa is a critical second-generation reaction against most first generation leaderships. It represents opposition to undemocratic practices and structures that developed in the name of liberation from colonial rule. This movement for democracy has been influenced and facilitated by internal pressures from national movements and churches, and external pressures, such as exiles, financial partners, and the democratisation of Europe.

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The current move towards democracy in independent Africa is a rejection of the undemocratic practices that developed in the name of liberation from colonial rule.

one-party state. Under a military regime the pursuit of democracy would mean "civilian rule", i.e. a government through popular elections. The reason for this drive towards democracy is the misuse of power by the military rulers who are not accountable to anyone by themselves.

In cases of one party states the goal of democratic movements is to achieve a multi-party government. This means that although people already have the right to vote, they now aspire to the freedom to form different political parties or movements and the freedom to vote for the candidate and party of their choice.

## South Africa's two views of democracy

The drive towards democracy in South Africa - while certainly related to the drive for democracy throughout Africa and in other parts of the world - has its own unique profile.

Unlike the rest of Africa, South Africa has not yet gained political liberation from its colonial past. The current discussions about democracy should be seen within the context of the struggle to liberate the country and all its people from the heritage of colonialism, particularly the development of colonialism towards apartheid during the last 50 years. There is also concern to avoid, as far as possible, the errors of independent Africa, since we have the benefit of hindsight.

Our own history of democracy is deeply divided between two fundamentally incompatible views on democracy: the colonial view and the liberation view.

The choice between these 2 options is a moral one. We cannot sidestep this by arguing that all political parties enjoy the same moral status. They don't, and this has far-reaching implications for any campaign for democracy in South Africa.

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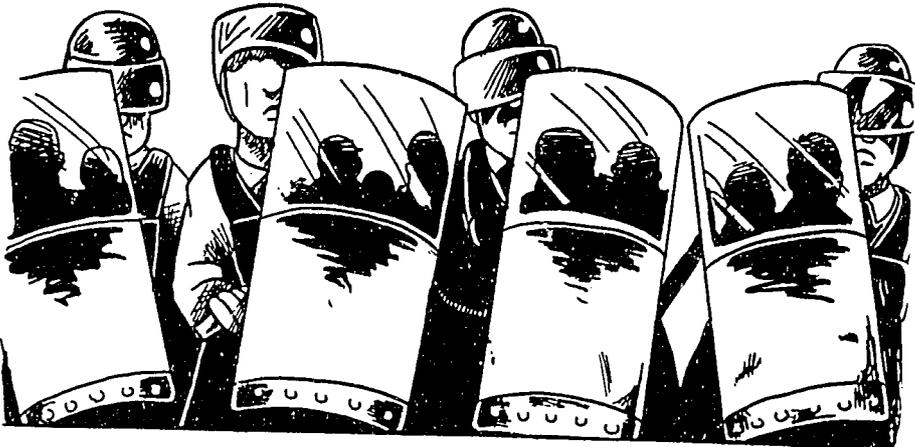
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# The Colonial View

According to this view, South Africa has been an independent democratic country since 1910. Democracy meant that all persons classified as “white” and above the age of 18 years were allowed to vote for a whites-only parliament. The limited political rights of all other South Africans were removed and “relocated”. Eventually, Africans were granted political rights in ethnic homelands, created and financed by the white government. These were intended as independent and sovereign states. So-called coloured and Asians were granted limited political rights in “ethnic” representative councils under the auspices and ultimate control of the white government. Whites therefore maintained colonial rule through a policy of divide and rule.

Internal and external pressure on the National Party Government led to alterations to this policy of colonial democracy. The “reform” policy that resulted allowed people classified as “coloured and “Asian” the right to organise and vote for representatives to Parliament, but to three racially separated houses, the Tricameral Parliament. The size of the three Houses was determined by the size of the three “population groups”. This meant that the white chamber, representing the largest group, continued to dominate.

*Under Apartheid, repression  
and reform were 2 sides of  
the same coin.*



This form of democracy was further "broadened" by a reform process started in February 1990. Liberation movements were unbanned and race barriers to membership of political parties abolished. "Coloureds", Asians and Blacks could now become members of the ruling party and other parties - even co-opted as ministers and deputy ministers, but with no vote in the white chamber of parliament.

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The unbanning of liberation movements was supposed to facilitate the "further broadening of democracy" with the aim of promoting "power sharing and regionalism". Under such a dispensation everyone would have the vote but the emphasis would be on regions, as created under apartheid, and a weak central government. The current negotiations are supposed to facilitate this outcome, to be formalised in the upcoming elections.

More conservative groups within this view are demanding a sovereign homeland for whites. Also many "right-wingers" do not support negotiations or non-racial elections at all.

The most important position within this "colonial" view is that of white, liberal movements, political parties, individuals and big business. Their public criticism of apartheid policies and laws in the past deserves commendation. But their approach has tended to be academic, often condescending, and, overall, fallen short of a complete commitment to the fundamental liberation of South Africa. In particular, they failed to join in the mobilisation of economic forces against apartheid and colonialism. After all, the staying power of colonialism and apartheid was ultimately made possible by an exploitative form of capitalism. Liberal movements, parties and individuals never challenged this. Though critical of the system, liberal movements in South Africa have remained within the colonial view and its benefits.

It remains to be seen if the more enlightened parts of the National Party and the liberal opposition will embrace the liberation view and, in so doing, cross the great (moral) divide.

# The Liberation View

The liberation view maintains that, since the coming of Western colonialism, there has been no democratic government in South Africa. It emphasises the fact that the indigenous people of South Africa were robbed of their land and subjected to foreign colonial rule. The Boer Republics were equally destructive of indigenous societies, using military power to seize control over land and granting political rights to Boers only.

The Union of South Africa was a compromise between two settler societies, the Boers and the British, which left the majority of people dispossessed, disenfranchised and with almost no significant political power. That is simply not democracy.

The Republic of South Africa was proclaimed without any attempt to consult the Black people of the Country. What little representation black people had continued to be eroded, and legitimate opposition to these injustices, violently crushed. It was in this context of political oppression that the tricameral parliament was formed, again without consulting the majority of the people. It should be noted that violent oppression continued, in a more surreptitious form, long after the unbanning of liberation movements.



These movements represent the political and economic struggles and aspirations of the majority of people in South Africa. As such these movements formally represent the 350 year old struggle against political and economic injustice since the arrival of Western colonialism. They also represent the fundamental rejection of the moral, political and legal legitimacy of the colonial powers and, in particular, the apartheid government.

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# The South African Churches and Democracy

One of the most serious problems we face in our Education for Democracy Campaign is the historical support the mainline churches have given to the colonial view of democracy. These churches gave legitimacy to successive white minority governments, thereby justifying the colonial practice and demonising the liberation process.

- **Even when mainline churches opposed apartheid, they often did not condemn the white minority government as illegitimate, merely supporting the demand for some kind of broadening of colonial democracy. For these reasons some of our churches bear at least partially responsible for the undemocratic society we inherit.**

Attitudes in the churches are changing, but there is often confusion between the colonial view of sharing power and broadening "democracy" and the liberation view of majority rule. Furthermore, the difference in moral status of these two positions is often down-played or bluntly obscured - so successfully that many churches do not realise the serious differences between these positions and the extent to which they divide Christians and churches. In order to forge unity amongst Christians these differences need to be acknowledged and attempts made to reach a true consensus.

On the other hand there have always been significant sections of the Christian community, including several courageous church leaders, who have supported the liberation movements in their demand for genuine democracy.

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Many people who have recently jumped on the bandwagon fail to understand the Liberation Movement's call for full participatory democracy.

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The stance of the Prophetic Movement within the churches of South Africa has been vindicated. Its struggle against apartheid and social injustice has now been recognised as the truly Christian approach. But many who have recently jumped on the bandwagon do not really understand, or do not want to understand, what is meant by the liberation movement's call for full participatory democracy.

But the prophetic movement bears responsibility for not speaking out about undemocratic tendencies and practices in the liberation movements, trade unions, and mass democratic movements themselves. Whilst there were occasional criticisms and sometimes strategic reasons for not publicising criticism, it is regrettable that we did not speak out more frequently. This is now beginning to happen, but our silence in the past was most unfortunate.

Finally, South African churches have themselves inherited a long tradition of undemocratic tendencies, practices and structures. We have not only been extraordinarily autocratic and authoritarian in our structures and practices, but also practised gender discrimination, clerical discrimination, prejudice against the poor and a general lack of concern about justice and the environment.



All of this needs to be considered when we try to define the church's role in the present stage of the struggle for democracy in South Africa. For the church to be silent on these issues or to withdraw in the name of neutrality, would be to repeat the mistakes of many churches in the apartheid era.

*Political freedom without economic empowerment and the protection of workers' rights, is an empty victory.*

# Neutrality

The church is not a political party and has no political policy for South Africa. No church should be expected to support or show loyalty to any particular party, nor should any church be prejudiced or biased in favour of any political party. In this sense the church might be described as neutral.

**The church is not, and can never be, neutral as far as the Gospel and the values of the Gospel are concerned. The church does not have a political policy but it does have a message of its own. It stands for certain values and principles. As far as justice and injustice, peace and violence, equality and inequality, freedom and domination, truth and falsehood are concerned, the church should not be neutral. The church has an obligation to uphold its principles at all costs.**

In South Africa where two different views of democracy oppose each other, the church cannot be neutral. When we remember the historical reasons for these two views and when we recognise that the one side is striving to establish justice for all and especially for those who have been victims of apartheid's injustice, while the other side is striving to preserve the unjust privileges and benefits of the past, neutrality is not possible for the churches.

The drive for liberation and the establishment of true democracy could be distorted and compromised by acceding to undemocratic tendencies, false compromises and superficial efforts for peace.

In the past, churches tended to uphold the position that the church should be politically uninvolved and neutral. But individuals within the church (church leaders, clergy, "lay people", etc) have political affiliations which influence us in one way or another. Furthermore, non-involvement

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In situations of fundamental injustice, neutrality means putting the integrity of the Gospel at stake.

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and being apathetic towards the process of democratisation, breeds ignorance about the injustices of apartheid, and amounts to little more a vote in favour of the status quo.

For a reconciliation between government and society to become possible we need actively to oppose the injustices of apartheid and colonialism more generally, and to support the movement for liberation.

Complete political neutrality is an illusion. In situations of fundamental injustice, neutrality means putting the integrity of the Gospel at stake. Christians should not hide from this.

Some may argue that everybody now wants genuine democracy for all South Africans, therefore the moral divide does not exist anymore. We have moved into a "normal" situation of politics. The church cannot just accept this at face value, or be forced into silence and neutrality because everyone says or thinks that their policy or position is not racist.

During the preparation for elections, the election campaign, the voting and afterwards, the church will have to be a vigilant watchdog. Undemocratic policies and tactics, unfair propoganda, racial prejudice and lies should be unmasked. The buying of votes through actions like food handouts, promises of promotion to positions of authority and a sudden interest in the material welfare of poor people by any party should be brought to public attention.

It is also the task of the church to facilitate the spread of information about different political parties. But churches should be critical of policies which, either explicitly or implicitly, serve to promote existing injustices - even coming from parties who might position themselves within the liberation view.

- **Demanding complete neutrality from the churches could silence churches when they should speak out and stand for the truth. Churches must proclaim the moral issues involved in the current circumstances. Although the church should not owe loyalty to any political party, we must speak out for our own principles of justice, equality, freedom and accountability.**

# 3. An Agenda for the Churches

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Education for democracy should be seen as education for justice. The church's involvement in transforming South Africa into a democracy should be regarded as a continuation of its long struggle for justice in South Africa. Since justice is fundamental to Christian faith, the church's programmes to promote genuine democracy should be undertaken as part of its broad evangelisation project within the context of South Africa today.

Voter education has already been put on the agenda of most churches and church organisations. This is not simply a matter of calling in the churches to help because they are perceived to be neutral. Ensuring that every eligible voter has an ID book and knows how to fill in the ballot paper is a way of ensuring that people have not been excluded from the election. Similarly the provision of monitors will help ensure that the election is free and fair.

The church also has a role to play in encouraging people eligible to vote to cast their ballots. As discussed before, churches will have to facilitate authentic information on different policies and programmes. Also the church will have to help voters make an informed choice between political parties in terms of Biblical values and principles, such as justice, equality, freedom and accountability. Sometimes there might be no moral difference between one party and another, but if there is, people might need some advice about the principles that are involved for a Christian.



*The churches need to promote an attitude of tolerance amongst South Africans.*

Another item for the church's agenda is the development of a culture of democracy. **Democracy is not just a matter of voting and making a choice between different political parties. Democracy is an ongoing process of changing all our practices in all our organisations and institutions in terms of the Biblical principles of justice, equality, freedom and accountability.**

The democratisation of South Africa goes beyond politics. It also includes economics and ecology. Areas of special concern are the democratisation of business and labour practices, health services, marriage and the family and last but not least, of the church itself.

The moral underpinning of a whole new culture of democracy must be placed high on the agenda of the churches. Sermons, discussions, Bible studies, pastoral work and other ways of developing the christian perspective on democracy will be needed.

The Churches need to foster an attitude of tolerance. South Africans need to learn to allow other people to have views that are different, and even hostile to their own. Even while they are trying to persuade others that their policies are best, South Africans must develop the patience to listen and allow others to argue their case as well. Furthermore, should they lose the election they must be willing to accept the results. After all, it is the people who shall govern. This is part of the democratic principle of freedom.

Many people in South Africa need to be educated in this aspect of democracy. Whole political parties need to be challenged in this regard. Will they allow others to canvas in "their" areas, and will they accept the results of free and fair elections.

Last but not least, an agenda for the churches is the responsibility of all christians, not just leaders in the church. Every christian has a responsibility for promoting justice, and therefore democracy, in all areas of life.

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Individuals should start internalising democratic values as personal "possessions" and transmit them to others, particularly our families and children. Churches must assist families in developing and fostering a democratic culture and a spirituality for democracy.



*Democracy is based on certain values which can be found in the Bible: justice, equality, freedom and accountability.*

