

The Moral Regeneration Initiative and Human Flourishing: A Theological Analysis of the Morality of Some Sections of the “Rainbow Nation”

Abraham Modisa Mkhondo Mzondi, Senior Academic, South African Theological Seminary

Abstract

This article posits that the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (known as the CRL Commission) and the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (known as the Zondo Commission) provide a plausible theological basis to analyse the morality of some sections of the post-apartheid South African nation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu called the post-apartheid South African nation the “Rainbow People of God,” hereafter called the “Rainbow Nation.” More so, the ANC-led government adopted to advocate for the “RDP of the soul” through the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM) to address the new nation’s moral challenges as it was embarking on the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) to address the socio-economic-political conditions of the “Rainbow Nation.” The article uses literature analysis as a framework to provide an analysis of how the moral regeneration initiative placed alongside the quest to attain human flourishing permeated some sections of the “Rainbow Nation.” The analysis points out that the Moral Regeneration Initiative did not aim to stir some sections of the “Rainbow Nation” to internalise the moral values the Moral Regeneration Movement promotes.

1. Introduction

Archbishop Desmond Tutu enthusiastically promoted the spirituality of the new democratic nation and christened it the “Rainbow People of God” (Tutu 1994; Tutu & Allen 1999). As a Christian leader, it seemed natural for him to place God at the centre of the new democratic state and make God the moral compass of the “Rainbow Nation.” All sections of the new nation seemingly embraced the idea that God was their moral compass, as they used the name “Rainbow Nation” to describe the new democratic dispensation. Efforts to place God as the moral compass culminated in the establishment of a multi-sectoral body called the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM), which aims at promoting the “RDP of the soul” (Mandela 1999; Mkhathshwa 2005:5). West (n.d.:4) mentions

that the “RDP of the soul” is a national moral initiative that begins with an individual. Hence, this article argues that it is plausible to use the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL commission) and the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (known as the Zondo commission) as a basis to analyse the morality of some sections of the “Rainbow Nation.” The article applies literature analysis to achieve the intended objective (Cooper 1998). It is thus divided into six main sections, namely, (1) human flourishing, morality and Ubuntu; (2) the moral regeneration initiative and human flourishing; (3) the poor, black elite and human flourishing; (4) the CRL commission, morality and human flourishing; (5) the Zondo commission, morality and human flourishing; and (6) the church and human flourishing.

2. Human Flourishing, Morality and Ubuntu

Rasmussen (1999:1,2,3) states that “human flourishing” is associated with Aristotle’s worldview and mentions a neo-Aristotle version that “offers a view of the human good that is (1) objective, (2) inclusive, (3) individualised, (4) agent-relative, (5) self-directed, and (6) social.” Thus, human flourishing elevates the idea that human beings seek to flourish in all aspects of human life. Hence, this article analyses the quest for human flourishing in the “Rainbow Nation.” Two South African Christian leaders and theologians helped to view morality and human flourishing in the “Rainbow Nation,” namely, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and a Professor of Philosophy, Augustine Shutte. They both argue that God should be the moral compass of the “Rainbow Nation” for it to flourish. Archbishop Desmond Tutu epitomised making God the moral compass of the “Rainbow Nation” through his unwavering commitment to Ubuntu to achieve the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) objective. This is so as he had opted to ground his theology on the notion of Ubuntu by advocating for forgiveness and reconciliation (Tutu 1999; cf Meiring 2015:2) to attain human flourishing for the “Rainbow People of God” (Tutu & Allen 1999). His position flowed from his commitment to answer people’s existential questions and helping the poor and suffering to experience God within the Ubuntu worldview rather than answering theoretical theological questions (Maluleke 2019).

Shutte (2001:204) also introduces the metaphysical in his advocacy for Ubuntu and maintains that:

in a religion with Ubuntu the unlimited transcendent power that is the ground of my being is present in all I am or do, in my life as a whole and each particular part of it

He also (2001:30) links Ubuntu with human flourishing by saying that:

[t]he morality of Ubuntu is intrinsically related to human happiness and fulfilment. It derives from our nature as human persons, not merely conventional or simple obedience to society’s arbitrary norms. Our most profound moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So, although the goal is personal, selfishness is excluded.

Interestingly, Banda later echoed the same sentiments, arguing that Ubuntu promotes human flourishing. He (2019:218) writes:

ubuntu should be conceptualised as human flourishing can also be discerned from the fact that at an individual personal level, the African quest for ubuntu is often a quest for dignified human existence.

To this end, it is noticed that one cannot talk about morality without addressing the quest to attain a flourishing “Rainbow Nation” in the context of Ubuntu.

3. The Moral Regeneration Initiative and Human Flourishing

The ANC’s quest to seek a flourishing “Rainbow Nation” is noticed in connecting its spirituality with the socio-economic-political spheres of the country. This connection occurred when Nelson Mandela visited the grave of the first president of the African National Congress, Langalibalele Dube, on 27 April 1994, before casting his first democratic vote in Ohlange Institute in Inanda, northern KwaZulu-Natal. Mandela is reported to have said “Mr President, I have come to report to you that South Africa is free today” (Khumalo 2015). As the first democratically elected president of a new democratic government, he instituted the process of the “RDP of the soul” (Mandela 1999) and later created space for the establishment of the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM) to address the nation’s moral issues. The Moral Regeneration Movement “is a networking platform that facilitates and coordinates all processes and initiatives to combat moral degeneration.” (MRM n.d.). A few years later, the founding leader and patron of the MRM, Fr Smagalis Mkhatswha, described Shutte’s book “Ubuntu: An ethic for a New South Africa” as “a contribution for

overcoming what our President (then Thabo Mbeki) has called the ‘moral vacuum’ that presently threatens South Africa” (Shutte, 2001).

Mandela’s successor, the former president Thabo Mbeki, later requested the church to be part of efforts to assist the ANC in attaining a flourishing “Rainbow Nation” (Battersby 2015). Following the recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 2002), he allowed a project that would invoke the presence of the ancestors in the “Rainbow Nation.” The Department of Arts and Culture led by former minister, Pallo Jordan, was tasked to build the Freedom Park Memorial in Salvokop, Tshwane. Ngaka Wali wa Serote oversaw the construction of the first phase of the memorial precinct called “isivivane” (Young & Prinsloo 2020:96) in 2003 and its opening in 2004. The precinct is a resting place for the spirits of those who died during the struggle for freedom in South Africa. Completing the first phase coincided with celebrating a decade of political freedom and democracy. The park also fulfils Nelson Mandela’s 1999 dream that:

the day should not be far off, when we shall have a people’s shrine, a freedom park, where we shall honour those who endured pain with all the dignity they deserve, so we should experience the joy of freedom (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2009).

Nelson Mandela’s desire to have a shrine and the appointment of ngaka Wally wa Serote to oversee the “isivivane” phase directly reflects the influence of the aspect of appealing to the supernatural for intervention to attain a flourishing “Rainbow Nation.” This development echoes Banda’s (2019:218) view that Ubuntu promotes human flourishing. Hence, Mothibe and Sibanda (2019: section 8, par 4) summarise the spirituality of the park as follows:

[i]n SA, the government has erected a memorial, the Freedom Park in Pretoria [sic] (current Tshwane) in recognition of the role of ancestors to the living. Within the park, several sacred sites are assigned the meaning and importance of the park

4. The Poor, Black Elite and Human Flourishing

The “Rainbow Nation” is a new non-racial, non-sexist and secular democratic country founded on the new 1996 constitution (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). This country is in a socio-economic-religious transition that aims to disassociate itself from

apartheid South Africa. One of its challenges is that STATS SA has rated the “Rainbow Nation” as one of the most unequal societies in the world (STATS SA 2017; 2018, 2020) with a huge rich-poor gap with a high youth unemployment rate accompanied by a shrinking economy (STATS SA 2023).

Living in a country with the world’s highest gap between the rich and the poor, challenges the internalisation of the moral values, the Moral Regeneration Movement promotes among the poor. The poor find promises of a better life elusive and opt to seek to attain human flourishing in the religious practices of the New Prophetic Movement leaders (Banda 2019a:35,37).

A different picture emerges among the middle class, the elite, the rich, and politicians as several moral scandals also point out that they also need to show an attempt to internalise the moral values promoted by the Moral Regeneration Movement. An example is Schwella’s (2013: 78) work identifying corruption in sports and political circles. Additionally, several commissions were established to investigate some of these scandals. Scandals associated with the black elite caused Boesak (2004:69) to lament that:

The gap between the new black elite and the poor black masses is as wide as any gap that ever existed, only more pain-filled. And in the impoverished rural areas and the teeming squatter camps, where the pain was always greatest, they still hear that they must ‘tighten their belts’ while parliamentarians voted in by the loyalty and hopes of the poor, vote themselves two salary increases in one year.

The black elite were also mentioned in allegations of corrupt practices and actions mentioned at the Zondo commission. The recent Special Investigating Unit’s (SIU) revelation of disturbing and extremely shocking corruption identified in some PPE COVID-19 tenders (Sedimba 2021) depicts how corruption scandals are eating away at the moral fibre of the “Rainbow Nation.” Voster (2012) correctly states:

While South Africa is in the nation-building process, the corruption culture endangers society’s social fibre and inhibits moral renewal. Corruption promotes a general lack of trust in institutions and leadership and stimulates a perpetual culture of corruption that invades all spheres of life.

Sadly, this trend has also found its way among some section of African township Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (Banda 2019a; CRL 2017; Kgatle 2017).

Accordingly, the author opts to focus only on two commissions, namely, the CRL commission and the Zondo commission because they suit the intended theological moral analysis of some sections of the “Rainbow Nation” as its citizens attempt to attain human flourishing. This attempt is placed alongside the initiatives to internalise the moral values the Moral Regeneration Movement promotes. The first commission involves the conduct of some leaders of a section of the Christian faith, the New Prophetic Movement. The second commission involves the conduct of some leaders of the private and public sectors.

5. The CRL Commission, Morality and Human Flourishing

Padayachy (2014:53) mentions moral decay as one of the scourges that face the South African church, and says:

Today’s church in South Africa is characterised by modernity and post-modernity, the scourge of unemployment, a young and fragile democracy, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, moral decay and poverty.

The church is expected to reflect ideal moral standards and practises by being the salt and light of the earth (Matthew 5:14) and seek to promote the prosperity of its members. Instead, between 2010 and 2022, the South African media reported disturbing praxis of some Pentecostal-Charismatic Church leaders that ended in the CRL commission conducting a formal investigation into the commercialisation of religion (CRL 2017; Kgatle 2017:1). These leaders are criticised for promoting their interest instead of those of church members (Mashau & Kgatle 2019:6-8). Kgatle (2020:26-27) classifies them into a group he calls New Prophetic Movement and explains that they:

idolise the miraculous, healing, deliverance, success and the enactment of bizarre church performances often performed by charismatic and highly influential spiritual leaders.” (Kgatle 2021:1)

Resane (2018:348) lists some Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders outside Kgatle’s category.

These leaders include South Africans and foreign nationals (Mashau

& Kgatle 2019:3, 8; Kgatle 2017:6) whom Ramatshwana (2019:6-8) argues that they are preying on people. Resane (2021) critique them for promoting a celebrity cult, lacking basic theological training, displaying poor management abilities and not complying with the Non-Profit Organisation Act (Resane 2018:356–357).

The moral behaviour of some New Prophetic Movement leaders caused Resane (2020:4) to lament that “secular culture” has affected the church instead of the church affecting “secular culture.” He further argues that they do not demonstrate accountability (Resane 2018:349–350). Although professing to be prophetic, these leaders do not come near the praxis of anti-apartheid church leaders who challenged the injustices and oppression the apartheid regime perpetuated. For them, being prophetic mainly involves predicting the future, ministering healing and deliverance to church members (cf Resane 2017:8-9), and ignoring the socio-economic plight of church members (Mashau & Kgatle 2019). In their work, “The abuse of the Spirit in some New Prophetic Churches in South African Pentecostalism,” Kgatle and Anderson (2020), details how these leaders abuse their religious standing to exploit and abuse church members. These developments in these churches show that some of the leaders seem not to have a moral compass as they opt to pursue financial gain and popularity by any available means; instead of making God their moral compass and ensuring their members flourish. These developments led Mashau and Kgatle (2019:6) to point out that “[o]ne of the causalities of the prosperity gospel is economic justice. Instead of fighting the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality, prosperity gospel perpetrates such challenges.” because only the pastor benefits (Mashau & Kgatle 2019: 5). Banda (2020:3) laments the commercialisation of religion by pointing that some of these leaders promote strange practices to syphon money from church members and non-members attending these churches; practice tax evasion, flout banking laws and using the names of church members to acquire property (cf. CRL 2017). Some of these leaders reflect poor marriage moral standing (Resane 2018: 348,358-359). Others are accused of sexual violation (Maviya 2018), others have displayed a share lack of adherence to basic human rights (Mokhoathi & Rembe 2017:7) and basic health practice by convincing congregants to eat grass, drink petrol and detergents as well as eating rodents (Resane 2017:6-7). Some fake miracles to prove their unique spiritual abilities so that church members return to the church (Ramatshwana 2019:7).

The praxis of some New Prophetic Movement leaders reflects that church members (poor and middle class) do not engage in a critical reflection and application of the Scriptures (cf Mashau & Kgatle 2019:8) and are willing to pay for the perceived spiritual service the leaders provide (Ramatshwana 2019:6). What matters is attaining personal human flourishing even in dubious and life-threatening environments. They deliberately follow some New Prophetic Movement leaders who seem not to care about the ethics of their actions (Kgatle 2020:137-145). Above all, the poor trust them and are desperate to find solutions to unemployment, poverty and hunger (Banda 2019a:8); and view them as mediators between them and God (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:236–237).

In his work, Maluleke (2015:36-39) paints a picture of the questionable actions of some Christian leaders Christ would find should he have returned a few years ago. He mentions the ordination of Jacob Zuma as a pastor by a group of some leaders from the New Prophetic Movement and further questions Paseka Motsoeneng's ethics of one of the leaders from New Prophetic Movement.

On the contrary Banda (2020: 3) construes some of Motsoeneng's actions to pray for God's intervention in a married couple experiencing sexual problems as attempts to assist church members to flourish. Banda (2019a:10) also introduces the quest for human flourishing among people experiencing poverty by saying the poor live in:

context riddled with high economic inequality and powerlessness, religion is a powerful tool for the poor and powerless. The high levels of poverty, corruption, crime and violence, high costs of living and medical care and poor service delivery mean that many poor people turn to religion as a strategy of survival and existence.

Arguably, the actions of some leaders of the New Prophetic Movement are blatant corruption. Hence, the author presents Voster's (2012:140-144) three steps to fight corruption in all spheres including the church. These are to: raise awareness of the problem and its effects, deal with self-interest, and call for social justice. The first step builds on the view that the church is a moral agent, the second step advocates that the interest of others comes first, and the third step reiterates the view that the church must be the voice of the poor, marginalised and the oppressed. The above steps show that Voster's approach promotes the quest to assist the poor to

attain human flourishing.

Additionally, Mashau and Kgatle (2019:6-8) show the efforts of some theologians who advocate for promoting human flourishing among the New Prophetic Movement. They apply Ubuntu to propose a practical antithesis to malpractices identified among some New Prophetic Movement leaders; and list five key practices, they called theologies: (a) theology of life, (b) theology of care, (c) theology of solidarity, (d) theology of economic justice, and (e) theology of hope and accompaniment. The first encapsulates the promotion of good human life (human flourishing in this article), the second emphasises the promotion of care of the church members to enable other to reach a state of happiness, the third elevates the notion of promoting community so that church members benefit instead of the only pastor benefiting, the fourth advocate for the promotion of seeking economic emancipation and justice that benefit the church members and the fifth underscore the promotion of hope and flourishing of church members by pastors considering the need of church members.

6.The Zondo Commission, Morality and Human Flourishing

The ANC’s wish to improve the lives and conditions of the poor is emphasised in the resolution of its Mangaung 2012 conference that states:

We are boldly entering the second phase of the transition from apartheid colonialism to a national democratic society. This phase will be characterised by decisive action to effect economic transformation and democratic consolidation, critical to improving all South Africans’ quality of life and promoting nation-building and social cohesion.

The objective to improve all South Africans’ quality of life and promote nation-building and social cohesion implies the desire to attain a flourishing “Rainbow Nation.” This resolution formed the basis to conceptualise and development state that promotes an inclusive economic growth (ANC 2017) as expressed in the National Development Plan (NDP), that set to reduce poverty and inequality by 2030 (NDP 2011:14). To achieve this objective, the ANC introduced and used a preferential system through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) initiatives to fast track a flourishing “Rainbow Nation” (cf Madonsela 2018:118). Later, the black elite and political elite, consisting of connected politicians and senior managers at State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), became part of a complex network

that ensured procurement processes at SOEs like SAA, Eskom, Denel, Transnet and Prasa benefited those connected to them instead of the intended target groups (Khambule 2021:6). Freidman (2019:12) explains that this development set the stage for the political elite and black elite and business to control access to the resources of SOEs and from the business sector; thus, resulting patronage between these two groups of elites and business (Khambule 2021:8).

The manifestation of this patronage ended in members of the civil society beginning to question the ethics of the former president of the country and the ANC, Jacob Zuma; further pressed that he be held accountable and demanded that he be removed as the president of the ANC and the country (Khambule 2021:8-9). Subsequently, a formal complaint was made to the Public Protector (PP) to investigate irregularities in Jacob Zuma's administration (Madonsela 2016; Public Protector 2016). The PP found violations of the Code of Ethics and recommended establishing a formal judicial inquiry to investigate the allegations (Public Protector 2016). Accordingly, the Zondo commission was established in 2018 to investigate allegations of state occupation during the administration of former president and African National Congress (ANC), Jacob Zuma (Bohler-Muller *et al.*, 2022: ii).

State capture occurs where an individual or family exerts influence on running the state and its economy through a complex network (Martins & Solomon 2016, 21). Corruptions benefit a few connected individuals who want to flourish by any means and rob the poor to attain human flourishing. It manifests through nepotism, bribery, and fraud among others (Webb 2009:9).

The Zondo commission unearthed sophisticated forms of corruption in the private and public sectors. A senior official at the national Treasury testified at the Zondo commission that signs of state capture emerged at Eskom (Van Niekerk, Valiquette L'Heureux & Holtzhausen 2022:5). The first politicians, Barbara Horgan and Pravin Gordan, testified and explained at the Zondo commission that the emergence of an illegal procurement process was used to weaken state institutions and to loot state funds (Van Niekerk, Valiquette L'Heureux & Holtzhausen 2022:5).

The findings of the Zondo commission established that:

The evidence shows that goods and services were often procured

when they were not needed, and often in duplication of work already done (Bohler-Muller *et al.*, 2022 :165).

The evidence received by the Commission demonstrates that in many cases, and fundamental respects, the Boards of many SOEs have shirked their responsibilities, or worse, used their powers to corrupt the SOEs that they have been appointed to protect. (Bohler-Muller, et al., 2022:173

The abuse of centralised procurement processes often evidenced this collective misconduct, so the approval authority for high-value tenders became concentrated in the hands of a small group of top executives and Board members. (Bohler-Muller *et al.*, 2022:173).

The conduct of the black elites, black politicians, and business cited by the Zondo Commission demonstrates that all three groups have lost their moral compass, depriving the poor of the opportunity for the prosperity that the NDP wants. They (a) are an antithesis to Desmond Tutu’s and Augustine Shutte’s flourishing “Rainbow Nation” influenced by Ubuntu; and (b) display self-interest.

Worse, they display no sign of internalising the moral values of the Moral Regeneration Movement. They stooped too low to amass large sums of money.

7. The Church and Human Flourishing

The Zondo commission’s final report presents an opportunity for the church to challenge corruption (Theron & Lotter 2012:98) and to collaborate with civil society to fight it so that the poor may attain human flourishing. This view implies that the church should embrace a hermeneutic that advocates for transforming human lives in contemporary contexts of the “Rainbow nation” (*cf* Nürnberger 2004:7).

Such collaboration will enable local churches to promote leadership centred on people instead of self-interest (Koegelenberg 1992:343). Manila (2010:524) adds that such leadership “needs to manifest God’s will in the world, and the Church must warn authorities and government officials against corruption.” While Vorster (2012:139) avers and states that local churches should support the government’s efforts to combat corruption and provide alternative measures to fight in the public and private sectors. Finally, this collaboration requires that church leaders and

congregants to be role models (Kruger and de Klerk 2016:156) and to commit to Myers's (2000:65) concept of transformational development that promotes just and peaceful relationships within the community and with God, reconciliation, sharing and embracing others as well caring for creation.

Embracing collaboration, transformation development and challenging corruption is noticed in du Plessis and Breed's (2013:1-6) work investigating corruption in the Aurora Group of Mines and developing the "Touching Africa" model based on I Corinthians. The model proposes five principles to address corruption in the private and public sectors: changing minute settings, unifying vision, integrating roles, and focusing on the ultimate user and identity as a starting point (du Plessis & Breed 2013: 7-8). In addition, they recommend establishing a well-coordinated programme to combat corruption in the country (2013:9).

8. Conclusion

As noticed in this article, Desmond Tutu and Augustine Shutte envisaged a flourishing "Rainbow Nation" grounded on God as its moral campus and promoting Ubuntu. The new administration of the ANC wished to assist the "Rainbow Nation" to flourish by promoting the "RDP of the soul" project with the Moral Regeneration Movement leading the initiative to stir citizens of the "Rainbow Nation" to internalise its moral values. However, the CRL and the Zondo Commission show that some sections of the church, the public and private sectors have not been influenced to internalise the moral values of the Moral Regeneration Movement. Thus, reflecting that these sections of the "Rainbow Nation" are morally deficient as their actions promoted self interest instead of promoting that the poor attain human flourishing. Furthermore, the Zondo commission report creates an opportunity for the church to challenge corruption in the public and private sectors and to work with civil society to fight it so that the poor may attain human flourishing instead of a section of the nation.

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Author’s Declaration

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

Email: modisa@sats.ac.za