Religion as Political Instrument: The Case of Japan and South Africa

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Abstract

Religion can be an effective instrument in politics. This has been a phenomenon all over the ages and different political contexts. Politicians utilise religion in order to gain political goals. This paper wants to investigate the reasons why religion is such an effective instrument within politics. The investigation is as much a historical investigation as it is descriptive. After careful analysis of contexts, a deduction is made to reach an understanding of the reasons for the political use of religion. The author identified through investigating two examples (i.e. politics in South Africa and Japan) several elements to consider when discussing religion within politics: (a.) no separation between spheres of existence, (b.) culture of religious participation in politics, (c.) politics and religion touch emotional and sentimental chords, (d.) religion contributes to national identity, (e.) religion can provide a claim to divine approval of political decisions, (f.) religious communities are effective partners in implementing government policies. The author consciously decided not to investigate the relationship between Islam and politics as different elements play a role in such considerations.

Keywords: religion, politics, culture, tradition, Africa, Japan, Shinto, nationalism

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion and politics have had an ambivalent history. At times there was a total separation between the two. At times the interconnectedness caused the two spheres to be inseparable. In cases of inseparability the hierarchy of the

two was interchangeable. This relationship between religion and politics should however be understood contextually. Religious considerations have been part of political decisions ever since humans governed themselves. At times political decisions were based on consultations and advice received from the (H)holy via the words of prophets and priests. At times religious leaders would oppose decisions taken by political leaders.

Extensive research has been done by Fox (2008) as to the different ways in which government and religion engage. Fox (2008:4-5) identified 62 variables each indicating a way in which politics and religion can engage. Moyser (1991:13) indicates that the relationship between religion and politics can play out in three different forms: (a.) political authorities control religious institutions, (b.) religious leaders prescribe to political authorities and/or (c.) a symbiotic co-existence of politics and religion. Over centuries there have been examples of all three possibilities.

The dualistic understanding of human existence might have contributed to the disparity between religion and politics. Humans are in nature created matter. But humans are of dual nature: part matter and part spirit, thus indicating a connection to a spiritual dimension. Humans are not only matter, but spirit as well. Plato pointed to this dual human existence: the body is matter and belongs to this earth, but the soul is spirit and belongs to a different dimension (Russell 2010:134). Socrates explored this idea further and suggested (compare in *Phaedo*) that the body is of lesser value. The soul is of superior value and worth engaging with (Russell 2010:134). This anti-material position created an aversion for anything encountered through the senses. All material matter is there only to sustain the human body. There is no intrinsic value in matter. The spirit is of superior value.

Religion belongs to the domain of spiritual activities and politics are relegated to earthly and material existence. Since Socrates' division of human existence in spiritual and material spheres, with the spiritual as being the superior faculty, a struggle for dominance between religion and politics ensued, causing politics and religion to alternate as dominant power, as Moyser (1991:13) indicates.

1.1 What is Politics?

A clear understanding of what is meant by politics and religion is necessary.

Politics refer to the collective decision making process to the benefit of a large group of people (mostly a nation) that reside in a particular environment (Moyser 1991:4). Politics therefore refer to a process and not an entity. In order for the process to proceed, the mechanism of politics requires certain components. These components contribute to the peaceful functioning of a society. A letter of agreement, such as a constitution, determines the basis on which the society agrees to function. To enforce the responsibilities and rights of all members of society, an independent judicial system sees to the application of the regulations. One of the elective components contributing to the process of politics can be religion. Religion is part of the heritage of a people. A nation is a group of people sharing the same history and culture (Moyser 1991:4). Part of the communal identity of a nation is religion. Religion can become a way in which a nation expresses its identity (Moyser 1991:4).

1.2 What is Religion?
A definition of religion is difficult. The phenomenon religion existed long before the category 'religion' was created during the Enlightenment period in order to study the human behaviour indicated as religion. Religion consists of several constituting elements. Religion is a social, psychological and material concept relating man to transcendence (Moyser 1991:9).

The nature of religion is to connect man to the sacred. Compare in this regard the position taken by Durkheim (1912), Berger (1967) and Eliade (1957). The sacred is elevated qualitatively above the profane. This brings about the understanding that the sacred is the higher authority to be called upon in moments of despair and uncertainty. The sacred is perceived to be of autonomous and sovereign nature subjecting politics to the domain of the profane. A political system can even be portrayed as existing based on sacred selection (compare a sovereign reigning based on divine decree). In extreme cases the state can be presented as existing autonomously, sanctioned by a divine power). Religion is perceived to present the core values of society (Moyser 1991:10), governing human actions and decisions. Politics once again becomes relative to religion (Moyser 1991:10). Politics however can become the superior institution exercising power even over religion. Political policies can for example govern the extent of influence religion can exercise

over society. Religion as social and communal activity causes religion as well as politics to be viewed as possessing a communal character.

It is necessary to clearly state in the onset of this research what element of religion will be the focus. As Fox (2008:2) indicates, religion consists of many elements, where some elements are easier to study. Religion consists of behaviour as well as convictions (Fox 2008:2). As it is difficult to determine what it is that people believe, it is easier to investigate the expressions (i.e. actions and words) of their convictions. This study then focusses on the religious words and actions of politicians. The true quest will be to determine the reasons behind such actions and words. Fox (2008:2) identifies the complexity of this issue as follows: '… many government activities in the realm of religion have a potential set of motivations that are arguably far more complex and difficult to discern …'.

In Africa in particular, religion as such is an uncommon concept. No separation between the sacred (transcendence) and profane spheres exists. Holism implies a connection of everything[1]. Everything has to do with what is known as religion (compare Moyser 1991:12 indicating this as a characteristic of pre-modern societies). Culture and religion in Africa are intertwined. Moyser's conclusion is that religion and politics in a pre-modern society served the same goal. Political considerations were based on religious considerations (Moyser 1991:12). The position of religion in an African context, represents that of a pre-modern society.

1.3 The Relationship between Religion and Politics

The separation of spheres of existence as has been the case since the Enlightenment, caused religion to be seen as acting either in a supporting or opposing role to other spheres such as politics, economics, science or law. Religion and politics have had a long history of reciprocal collaboration and/or disagreement.

The relationship between religion and politics in pre-modern society can be described as follows (Moyser 1991:12):

- The sacred is present in social institutions

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[1] Compare the concept of 'conditionality' as presented by Krüger (1995:34).

- Laws are divine commands
- Social classes are arranged hierarchically, as determined by divine order
- Education is religious
- Economic behaviour is regulated by the sacred
- Government is sacral
- Religion and government is an integrated system

The communal aspect brings about the feeling of group solidarity. It then is obvious that religion can contribute to the nationalistic ideals of leaders. This will be expounded on later in this study.

Religion is a system of beliefs with leaders maintaining and governing the body of those affiliated to the religion. The domains of religion and politics share this similarity that it consists of a group of people making decisions based on certain considerations. The decisions are enforced by the leaders of the communities. At times the decisions overlap and at times the decisions may diverge, resulting in conflict. Thus, two domains exist, each with its own agenda, system, decisions and leaders. A struggle for power between politics and religion seems inevitable.

Asking to the relationship between religion and politics is determined by whom you ask. The politician and religious leader will give different answers as will the secularist. Secularisation has had an effect on the prominence of religion in society. Religion has experienced a loss of power in society due to the increase of secularisation. This study subscribes to Casanova's (1994) definitions of secularisation. According to Casanova there are several theories of secularisation: (a.) Secularisation as differentiation refers to the dualistic understanding of a separate domain for the secular and a separate domain for the sacred. Historically within a Western tradition the church as the mediator between the two spheres had the social power. During the process of secularization the state as the secular power started dominating the scene and resulted in religion being reduced to only one sphere subordinate to the power of the state. (b.) Secularisation as the decline of the presence of religion is an indication of the subsiding presence of religiosity in society. This is however difficult to measure as it differs from contexts as well as the measuring criteria may differ. It is however clear that sociologists identified that in Europe people gradually grew less interested in religion. (c.)

Secularisation as privatisation refers to the process whereby religion is relinquished to a private matter in the individual's life having no significance in the public sphere. This scenario is changing in current times as the discussion on the growing social role of religion in Japan and South Africa will illustrate.

The loss of influence by religion on society caused a change in relationship between religion and politics. The effect of religion on society however did not disappear completely (Berger 1999:3). Religion has lately become a growing phenomenon in the private sphere (Luckmann 1967), or among disadvantaged communities[2]. The effect of secularisation on religion cannot be denied, but there are still instances of growth and renewed influence on politics (Moyser 1991:16). Religious orientations can be linked to ideologies present in politics (i.e. nationalism, fundamentalism, Liberation theology) (Moyser 1991:8).

1.4 Methodology

Why in our current times do religious considerations influence and determine political outcomes? In order to understand the relationship between religion and politics a thorough investigation into world politics would be necessary. Fox (2008:1) indicates that a study focussing on one context is more possible than the entire global context. This research focusses on the context of Japan and South Africa in order to arrive deductively at reasons for the renewed political interest in religion.

Japan and South Africa present two different contexts although the contexts show some similarities (i.e. democracy, religious freedom, influenced by western concepts etc.). Any context where Islam plays a political role has been ignored in this study. The way in which Islam presents itself as political power have unique elements which need to be understood without comparison to other religions.

The study undertaken here is historical as well as descriptive with an evaluative element to it. There is however no prescriptive or judgmental consideration. The fact of religious involvement in politics is taken for granted. Compare in this regard Moyser's (1991:1) statement. This study does not have the intention to either prove the participation of religion in

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[2] Compare the report by Norris and Inglehart (2004).

politics or judge the appropriateness thereof. This study is concerned with the meta-question as to the effect of religious involvement in politics. To illustrate the effect of religion on politics two examples are investigated: that of South Africa and that of Japan. There are many similarities and differences between the two countries. The reason for investigating Japan and South Africa is that both countries pride themselves in constitutional guaranteed religious freedom although it is clear government favours one particular religion (Japan Shinto and South Africa Christianity). Japan presents the classic case of state endorsed religion with nationalistic goals. This is compared to the South African context with a fairly new democracy. Both Japan and South Africa have been influenced by Western concepts and religions once foreign to the countries. The current resurgence of religious awareness in Japan and South Africa forms the impetus for investigating these two examples.

Gathering information on political actions and decisions is problematic. Fox (2008:3) indicates that information on government actions is 'often imperfect'. One can easily be confused by the political rhetoric smoothing out rough edges of a sensitive religious related statement. This obscures the true motivation for the original statements or actions. This study relies on the public reporting on events, acknowledging that such reporting could be biased either supporting or opposing government. This study is not concerned with judgment on correct reporting, but wants to determine what lies beneath the issue being reported.

2. RELIGION IN JAPAN

On December, 26 2013 Shinzo Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister visited the Shinto shrine at Yasukuni (as reported by Hannah Beech in *Time Magazine* 28 April, 2014). This visit seems to be part of the regular official itinerary of a Prime Minister. This however has been an exceptional visit[3] as the shrine at Yasukuni has been consciously avoided by the six previous Japanese Prime Ministers.

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[3] Dorman (2006) indicates another exceptional visit. Since 2001, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid repeated visits to Yasukuni in the face of strong foreign opposition, particularly from China.

The Shinto shrine at Yasukuni is renowned for honouring Japanese war officials guilty of war crimes in the past. In spite of the condemnation locally as well as abroad (China, Korea and U.S.A.), Abe defended his visit as a sign not of condoning war crimes, but an expression of nationalism. Abe's visit to Yasukuni was in remembrance of the sacrifice by many Japanese soldiers in order to safeguard the future of the Japanese nation.

This apparent innocent visit to a Shinto shrine must be interpreted against the backdrop of Abe's efforts to 'Restore Japan', as his official campaign slogan in 2012 stated. Since the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) took power in 2012 Abe made no secret of his attempt at returning Japan to its former (economic, social and political) greatness during the 1990's. As a professional politician Abe is aware that he needs to produce the goods in order to be re-elected again in the elections scheduled for 2016. His economic reform package, now fondly called Abenomics, is an attempt at restoring Japan to be an economic powerhouse. In order to appeal to public recognition, Abe is aware that restoring Japan will need more than just economic input. Using religion as a political instrument proved to be a powerful tool to appeal to society for support.

2.1 Historic Overview of Religion in Japan

The history of the presence of religion in Japan can be divided into several phases (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:271). Shinto religion probably started around 500 BCE and seems to have been present and indigenous to Japan until the influence of Buddhism during the sixth century. Shinto myths indicate a continuous line from the Sun Goddess to the Yamamoto tribe from which the imperial family descended. A later phase of Shinto religion emphasised racial purity and superiority of the Japanese people. A period of syncretism between Buddhism and the indigenous Shinto religion ensued. Buddhism proved to be more accommodating to new religious forms which enabled the emperor to unite the Japanese people as one nation, facilitating political centralization (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:273). After the relative peaceful rule of the Tokugawa shogunate for 250 years, a turn came with the opening up of Japan to Western trade in 1854. This period is followed by a period of formal ties between religion, nationalism and emperor worship after the Meiji Restoration leading

up to the Second World War.

In 1868 the so-called Meiji Restoration took place. Rebel forces took over from the Tokugawa shogun and appointed a young emperor. The Meiji leadership realised that to install national pride among the Japanese people, religion was needed as a powerful tool. The introduction of a divine emperor as benevolent ruler became an effective method of nation building. During this period Shinto religion reappeared in society. Fridell (1983:160-161) indicates how the Meiji government tried to establish Shinto as the official religion of Japan while the emperor became the symbol of national loyalties. Strong opposition however halted this process. There were now two forms of Shinto belief: the syncretistic form mixed with Buddhism and the shrine-based Shinto maintaining the traditional form of worship. In the case of the latter, the clergy had close ties with the state. This second form of Shinto became the driving force behind a nationalistic and militaristic Japan (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:276).

In 1889 Shinto was declared the official state religion, although religious freedom was still guaranteed in the constitution. Shinto clergy received the task to glorify the emperor and the state (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:276). The effect of Shinto as vehicle for state propaganda led to a religious lethargy among the ordinary people. Many became Christian and others became less religiously active. The state however continued to support the Shinto shrines, to such an extent that Toyoda *et al.* (2002:277) identifies the ensuing result: 'Through official edict, then, nationalism and religion were interwoven'. Fridell (1983:164) identifies a second phase in Japanese history to introduce Shinto as state religion. During the period 1920-1945 Shinto was introduced not as a religion, as was the case during the Meiji period (1868-1870), but now as 'nonreligious patriotic cult'. Government officials motivated the introduction of Shinto into public life not as a religion but as national ethic (Fridell 1983:165). Shinto played an increasing role as driving force behind patriotic loyalties in the light of increasing Japanese military activities in Asia leading up to the Second World War. The Shinto cult supported nationalistic ideology (Fridell 1983:166)

Juergensmeyer (2008:179) attests to this when he states that 'religious nationalism in Japan figured prominently during the Second World War'. When the Second World War broke out religious symbolism (i.e. kamikaze fighters) was utilised in motivating people to participate in the war

effort. The close ties during this period between Shinto and militarism, caused Shinto to have a negative stigma that still persists today.

The post-war period is characterised by the decline of religious belief and decline of patriotism. A distinct break between Shinto and nationalism and militarism ensued. Under the U.S. occupation force, religious freedom was enforced as well as state funding for Shinto shrines was prohibited. Part of the process was that the emperor in 1946 renounced his claim to divinity (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:278). The new Japanese constitution promulgated in 1947 emphasised religious freedom but also prohibited any religion from receiving privileged treatment (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:278). Toyoda *et al.* (2002:278) is of the opinion that the Japanese public rejected militarism and nationalism although a section of the Japanese society still maintained nationalistic feelings. The post-war period was characterised by an orchestrated effort to rebuild Japan economically and socially, closely linked to the U.S.A.. The result was that Japan successfully adapted to a Western-style of democracy. In 1955 the Liberal and Democratic Parties merged to become the Liberal Democratic party, ruling till today in Japan, currently under the leadership of Shinzo Abe. Toyoda *et al.* (2002:279) is of the opinion that religious conservatism always played a role in the LDP policies. Policies however focussed mainly on economic factors and not ideological elements.

Only during the 1980's and 1990's a new nationalistic and religious resurgence in Japan became apparent. This was due to a growing confidence in Japan based on its economic success. This might have spurred a new nationalistic awareness in Japan. Japan however has not yet dealt sufficiently with its history during the war period (Toyoda 2002:281). This seems to be a policy created by the governing LDP based on the economic nationalism that is again based on religion (Toyoda 2002:281).

A new nationalism among the LDP was forming during the 1990's; a nationalism drawing from concepts such as racial purity and divine origin. The LDP also attempted to nationalize the Yasukuni Shrine. These attempts were heavily opposed by other parties and religions in the parliament. The LDP however managed to institute an annual visit to the shrine by the prime minister. The visit was to take place annually on 15 August, marking the end of the Second World War (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:282). After the economic meltdown in Japan in 1993, the LDP nationalistic enthusiasm was tempered.

2.2 Role of Shinto in Japan Today

Religion currently plays an ambiguous role in Japanese society. Shinto rituals are still part of everyday life. Construction projects are for example opened with Shinto purification rites (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:282). Weddings are performed according to the Shinto tradition; funerals are more Buddhistic. The political aspirations of Buddhism as well as Shinto, seems to have disappeared. The dwindling effects of religion on society, Toyoda (2002:282) indicates, is due to the processes of mobility and urbanization. The smaller community surrounding a shrine is now broken up.

Globalization has opened up the Japanese society for the influence of new religious movements, undermining the traditional belief systems (Hardacre 1986). Many new religious movements are nothing else than Buddhist sects forming around a charismatic leader. Some religious movements have international connections. These new religious movements are free from any nationalist or militaristic associations. Juergensmeyer (2008:178) is of the opinion that the upsurge in religious nationalism in Japan during the postwar period is expressed in the revival of veneration of the emperor and in new religious movements '… that carry strongly nationalist overtones'.

2.3 Nature of Religion in Japan

Toyoda indicates that the very nature of Shinto and Buddhism in Japan creates an openness to apply religious ideas in politics. Shinto and Buddhism have no fixed canon and are quite flexible and allows for divergent interpretations (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:285). The result is that Shinto can easily be moulded to support political goals. Toyoda (2002:285) states that it is clear that political leaders in Japan utilise religious appeal to support nationalistic claims and bolster political power. This has been the case in the past for Japan. It happens to a lesser degree in contemporary Japan, although religion does matter in the politics of contemporary Japan (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:285). Juergensmeyer (2008:178) indicates how religious nationalism which was prominent during the Second World War in Japan is resurging in postwar Japan. With Abe's success in the 2012 elections taking control of government through the LDP, it might just be a return to the nationalistic sentiments supported by the LDP in the 1990's, utilising Shinto religion to

strengthen political support.

Shinto religion has traditionally been closely tied to the national identity of Japan (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:267). In the period preceding the Second World War religious ideas influenced politics in Japan to a great extent (Toyoda *et al.* 2002:271). This situation however changed in a post-war context. With the current presence of a variety of religions, ranging from Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity, Confucianism, Taoism and new religious movements, religion no longer plays a unifying role in Japanese politics. The step by Abe to visit a Shinto shrine and so acknowledge the religious importance of a particular religion must have some significance. This political decision by Abe to utilise religion as political tool may be to appeal to the restoration of the national identity of Japan.

3. RELIGION IN AFRICA

The very nature of religion in Africa creates the perception that religion can be utilised in politics. The matter is however more complex. The very question as to what particular religions in Africa we are talking about illustrates half of the problem. There are currently three major religions in Africa: Christianity, Islam and Traditional African Religion. When discussing Traditional African Religion, the standard question of whether this is a singular or plural matter, arises (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn 2009:35). Mbiti (1989:xiii) provides the standard answer by indicating that there are certainly a wide variety of rituals and myths and believes in Africa, making it difficult to identify one singular form of religion. This variety of forms however exhibit similarities which enable scholars to group the traditional ways of belief in Africa together in what is called Traditional African Religion. Krüger *et al.* (2009:35) indicates the main similarities among all forms of religion in Africa as the belief in a Supreme Being, the sanctity of a unified community and the belief in a realm of spirits. Based on these similarities a discussion on religion in Africa is possible.

As to the nature of religion in Africa, it is important to emphasise the inseparability of religion from everyday life (Sundermeier 1999:11). The word 'religion' is a stranger in Africa. There are no boundaries between ordinary existence and religious expressions. Everything in life has a religious undertone. Religion is the overarching dimension encompassing all

existence. The concept of culture and religion has become indivisible in an African context. This becomes the first primary element to consider when discussing the role of religion in politics in a South African context.

The second element to bear in mind is the political demarcation between major religions in South Africa. The presence of different religions in South Africa is the result of political development over centuries. Christianity was considered (and in some cases still is) to be the religion of the European colonists (Hastings 1991:162), although through effective missionary work Christianity spread to become the religion of Africa as well. Islam is the religion of the once slave traders. Hinduism and Buddhism are the religions of the imported Asian labourers. Judaism is the religion of the outsider (although some African tribes claim a connection to a Jewish origin, compare the Lemba and Ethiopians). Traditional African Religion was considered, according to some, the religion of the inferior, uncultivated Africans (*The RDP of the Soul* 2007:4). This caricature of religions let to stigmatization. The setting of borders between religions has become a politicised matter.

3.1 The ANC and Religion

There is a close historical connection between Christianity and the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC was founded in Bloemfontein in 1912 in a church. Of its first members were clergy. The values of the ANC was based on Christian and religious principles. The ANC anthem, Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica, was originally intended as a hymn written by a lay preacher, Enoch Santonga. During the Apartheid struggle, churches provided shelter for freedom fighters. Many clergy acted as chaplains for the fighters (Munusamy 2013).

Religious leaders played a pivotal role in the process of leading South Africa to a democratic country. Hastings (1991:166) describes the way in which leaders from Christian churches played a role in opposing political policies which created an oppressive environment for many of the inhabitants of South Africa. Simultaneously mostly white Afrikaans speaking Christian churches supported the then apartheid policies of government (Hastings 1991:168). This created the ambiguity that Christians simultaneously supported and opposed the same political policies, begging the question as to the disguised role of religion within politics.

In 1994 the ANC became the democratically elected political ruling party of South Africa. Since 1994 political discussions have never been expressed in religious terms to the extent witnessed now under the leadership of Jacob Zuma, president of South Africa since his election on 6 May 2009.[4] In a democratic South Africa official government policy protects the free expression of and affiliation with religion. The ruling ANC led government proposed religious tolerance as well as acceptance and promotion of diversity in a pluralistic society. A more current development in South African politics is the utilisation of religious jargon within the political discourse and also the utilisation of religious gatherings as political platforms. By attending religious gatherings, politicians create the impression that such affiliations endorse their political positions. [5]

Over the past couple of years several incidents occurred where politicians appealed to religious sentiments in order to reach a political goal. Examples of this would include the following:[6]

2007: Jacob Zuma was ordained as honorary pastor of the Full Gospel Church at a meeting of the independent charismatic churches (Munusamy 2013).

5 May 2008: At a political rally in Khayelitsha (Western Cape Province), Jacob Zuma was recorded as making the statement that his party (the ANC) will 'rule until Jesus comes back' (Mkhhwanazi 2008).

February 2011: Zuma promises a place in heaven for ANC voters. The incident took place in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape during a voter registration

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[4] Compare in this regard Mandy de Waal's (2012) analysis of religious references in politics in South Africa.

[5] Compare in this regard Munusamy (2013).

[6] Although journalists reporting in newspapers have the responsibility of reporting news objectively they can at times provide commentary to events which seem to be biased. When utilising newspaper reports by journalists in this article, an attempt is made to emphasise the event being reported on without focusing on the biased comments by journalists. The personal views of the journalists are indicated.

campaign preparing for the 2011 local government elections. According to reporters, Zuma said in a speech before ANC supporters:

> When you vote for the ANC, you are also choosing to go to heaven. When you do not vote for the ANC you should know that you are choosing that man who carries a fork … who cooks people. … When you are carrying an ANC membership card, you are blessed. When you get up there, there are different cards used but when you have an ANC card, you will be let through to go to heaven.

Upon objections by other political parties, the ANC responded with statements such as 'it is figurative and metaphoric speech', 'reactions to Zuma's heaven comments are 'childish'', 'the statement of Zuma must be understood in context', 'statements were not blasphemous and were not meant to intimidate' (Reporter unknown 2011. *Mail & Guardian*).

December 2011: Zuma blamed Christianity for South Africa's problems. According to Zuma Christianity introduced orphanages and old-age homes as Christianity destroyed Africa's traditional ways of caring for those in need. Christians objected to this statement and the presidential spokesman responded by deflecting attention: 'Zuma is encouraging Africans not to neglect their African culture' (Henderson 2011). This is a peculiar incident as Zuma seems to contradict his strong affiliation to Christianity with such a remark.

8 January 2014: Zuma made the statement that the ANC will rule 'forvever' during an impromptu door-to-door campaign in Mbombela in Mpumalanga province (Reporter unknown 2014. Mail & Guardian).

Munusamy (2013) summarizes these events as follows:

> Zuma has invoked religion very effectively to make political points and vow eternal damnation on his opponents. He has also found receptive audiences at church gatherings and religious leaders who quite enjoy the prestige and attention of the president coming to visit. Zuma obviously has no qualms about misinterpreting scripture and invoking God's name in vain, as long as there are crowds to lap it up.

De Waal (2012) evaluates these events as follows:

> Zuma himself is cast as a metaphorical messiah, a Christ-like figure who suffered persecution but was redeemed by a populist resurrection. When Zuma was in the wilderness – in the middle of a rape case and facing fraud charges – he'd tell the *Sowetan* that like Christ, his enemies were trying to crucify him. It is an image that is frequently mirrored of him to his supporters and allies. 'He (Zuma) is Jesus Christ. They spit at him, they throw stones at him, they swear at him ... but he never left the ANC', Free State ANC leader Ace Magashule told party loyalists in a show of support for Zuma when he was facing corruption charges brought by the National Prosecuting Authority (De Waal 2012).

De Waal (2012) evaluates the current relationship between politics and religion in South Africa as a change in policy. Under the two previous presidents, Mandela and Mbeki, religion played almost no role in public life. The resurgence of religion under Zuma, is deemed as a resurgence of 'right-wing fundamentalism', according to the ANC discussion document originating under the rule of Mbeki, *The RDP of the Soul* (2007). Under fundamentalism

> faith is replaced by superstition; theology shrinks to a few 'proof texts'; the salvation of the world is replaced by the salvation of individuals; health and wealth will be provided in response to the faith shown in supporting the church through donations; concern for goodness in this life is eclipsed by concern for life after death; the world will shortly end when Christ will come again to gather his followers into a rapturous after life, and destroy his enemies (*The RDP of the Soul* 2007:6).

This kind of fundamentalism is seen as hampering transformation (*The RDP of the Soul* 2007:7).

The rule of Zuma brought about a change in the way in which religion is allowed to influence public life. West (2007:22) summarizes the change as follows:

> Both the erudite and somewhat bookish religion of Thabo Mbeki and the ecumenical secular spirituality of 'The RDP of the Soul' have been relegated to the backseat since Polokwane. Popular religion is now firmly in the front seat … Zuma is robustly Christian in his religious discourse, favouring the more Pentecostal and 'fundamentalist' (in terms of the 'The RDP of the Soul' Policy Discussion Document) forms of Christianity ….

Of course there is not one homogenous view on religion within the ANC. De Waal (2012) identifies the two main factions within the ANC: the evangelists, a more conservative Pentecostal movement manifested in Contralesa and traditional leaders. They want the Constitution to be applied according to their understanding of the Bible. The second group consists of the more orthodox and irreligious within the ANC, which are the silent majority endeavouring the maintenance of the Constitution.

The long term result of these factions opposing one another in parliament, De Waal (2012) points out, might be that

> as the ANC moves from being a revolutionary organism infused with communism, to a more conservative Christian populist organisation with a Biblical prosperity doctrine, the danger of religious morality influencing our Constitution becomes very real.

Religion according to De Waal (2012), will play the role of moral watchdog within South African politics. Religion will increasingly be permitted to determine political decisions. West (2007:27) indicates that Zuma brought religion back into the public realm, but now positioning the ANC within the prophetic liberation religious tradition.

4. REASONS FOR UTILISING RELIGION IN POLITICS

Several conclusions are to be drawn from the examples of Japan and South Africa explained above. Religion and politics seem to have had an ambivalent relation over centuries: at times close bed-fellows and at times crude opponents and on occasion even oblivious about the existence of the other. The reasons for the type of relationships are however more important. What

follows is an attempt at identifying the reasons why religion is at times utilised as political instrument.

The most obvious reason for politicians to make an appeal on religion is that religious gatherings are excellent platforms for political meetings. By addressing religious gatherings politicians might create the impression that they are religious themselves, creating the image of a moral, trustworthy, religious person. By utilising religious jargon and attending religious gatherings, politicians create the impression that they are making an appeal on affiliates to religions that the followers of the religion willingly become supporters of the political party based on the assumption that the politicians are 'one of us'. Giving religious recognition is gaining political support. There are however various other reasons for utilising religion as political instrument.

a.) In some contexts, especially contexts subscribing to the African worldview, a holistic understanding of reality causes that no separation is drawn between the different spheres of existence. Everything has to do with everything. The interconnectedness of spheres makes it acceptable and even desirable for religious considerations to be part of politic decisions. It seems the obvious method: religious considerations should form part of political decisions.

b.) People in different contexts have different histories of tolerance of religion influencing political decisions. The South African and even Japanese contexts exhibit a long tradition of acceptable use of religion within political discourse. Society seems to be content and use to this phenomenon. In Japan Shinto religion ensured a connection to the past enforcing nationalism. In South Africa religion has played a pivotal role in political decisions.

c.) Religious and political discourses touch upon deep human concerns. From a psychological point of view religious and political decisions tend to be emotionally and sentimentally driven. The reason behind this is that religion as well as politics become a core identity marker of human existence. Through following a certain political trajectory, the continuation of the tradition of the ancestors is emphasised. In Japan the national identity is closely connected to Shinto religion. In South Africa Zuma is making

religious references in the political domain recognizable to fundamentalists, causing them to support the political decisions to follow[7].

d.) The interconnectedness of spheres causes religion to be a key identity marker in human existence. Religion can be a cultural as well as political identifier. Nationalistic sentiments are re-enforced through religion. By invoking religious elements, the collective memory of society is triggered to call in remembrance the unity of all that belong to the particular tradition. Japan is currently experiencing uncertainty about the future; a nervousness about Japanese identity in a global society (Juergensmeyer 2008:181). These elements contribute to a resurgence of religion in order to search and establish a nationalistic identity.

e.) By utilising religious jargon within the political discourse a subtle claim to divine approval of political decisions is made. Opposing political ideas are discredited by indicating the opposite through religious traditions. Divine wrath or evil upon the political opposition is invoked. Moyser (1991:15) indicates how some politicians still legitimize their rule in religious terms, even in a pluralistic society by giving preference to one religion. Politicians can also utilise religion in order to combat political threats and opposition (Moyser 1991:15). Zuma illustrates this concept by enforcing the idea that to vote for the ANC is to vote against Satan and his followers.

f.) Religious communities are effective partners in the implementation of political policies. Religious communities are seen as fixed and stable entities, already present and trusted in society. Religious communities have an effective network of communication and has functional infrastructure (i.e. buildings, vehicles, etc.) within the local community. According to West (2007:25) the reasons for Zuma's references to religion, is to appeal to religious communities as partners for co-operating in applying government policies. Several levels of partnership between religious communities and government are identified by West (2007:25): health, education, rural development, fighting against crime and job creation.

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[7] De Waal has already been quoted as indicating that the new religious tendency in South African politics is to lean towards fundamentalism.

Juergensmeyer (2008:3) formulates his theory as to why religion is taking on a growing prominence in political matters as follows: worldwide secular nationalism is defective. The Western models of nationhood have failed society. Religion is presented as the 'hopeful alternative'. A growing despair of the state of society sets society in motion to try and restore a new political and moral order through religion. In this regard Juergensmeyer (2008:3) refers to a situation in the Punjab during the 1980's. Religious leaders tried to restore hope to the community by making use of religion. This community was suffering at the hands of an immoral government filled with corrupt politicians. This echoes what De Waal (2012) has already pointed out in the South African context.

Politicians may view religion as an extremely effective tool to bring about social change, as may be the case in Japan. But religion may also prove not to be an effective tool to restore moral order, as may be the case in South Africa.

5. CONCLUSION

It needs to be kept in mind that a political system utilising religion for political gains can only function within a society receptive to religious allusions. A community where religion does not play any role, will not tolerate or understand religious jargon. Religious references within a political sphere require a religious attuned society. It is often the case that the question needs to be asked whether it is the religious convictions of the politician or the religiosity of the audience that matter? The way in which a society accepts references to religion in the public domain testifies to the level of secularization.

Political usage of religious elements is as old as humankind. It seems unavoidable and in some contexts even desirable. To evaluate the occurrence thereof as positive or negative cannot change the phenomenon. The reasons underlying the usage of religious jargon within the political domain is open to scrutiny and critique. This study does not presume to present a final answer to this matter, but merely highlighting a perspective by presenting in a descriptive manner several motivations for employing religion in politics.

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