

The Effect of our Primordial Beliefs on our Voting

The advent of yet another party is a wake-up call. Its founder Kanthan Pillay argues that South Africa is a capitalist country where politicians have made it shameful to admit that you are a capitalist. Whereas capitalism in his view has unleashed unprecedented prosperity on earth over the past two centuries.

The acronym ZACP positions it at the opposite pole from the SACP. The South Africa capitalist's party's logo is a purple bull. Why not a pink elephant, you may ask? Well maybe a bull from Wall Street got loose? These are bullish capitalists... For example:

"In recognition of the fact that 34 percent of our taxes go to the public service wage bill, the first piece of legislation we will table in parliament, will call for a 34 percent reduction in salaries across the board for all members of parliament, ministers, and the president as a show of our resolve to cut government expenditure and rebuild the economy."

Adam Smith published his famous book the Wealth of Nations in 1776, only 250 years ago. There is no question that world-wide, capitalism as he called it has become the predominant economic system. Capitalism's core doctrine of private property ownership is enshrined in South Africa's Constitution.

Karl Marx wrote his famous book Das Capital in 1865, only 150 years ago. Many of the countries that experimented with his ideas have struggled economically in a world dominated by capitalism. Socialists believe that ultimately the State owns the land and thus it can expropriate land without compensating any private owners.

In a Constitutional Democracy, these two dominant systems are still vying for the upper hand – that is, for a majority of seats in the National Assembly after the 2019 elections. For the first time, this prospect may only be achieved by a coalition of parties, should the liberation-movement-turned-political-party fail to gain a majority in Parliament once again.

One of the key questions is whether the ANC would form a coalition with socialist parties like the EFF? (The SACP and the trade union movement COSATU are already in the ruling congress.) Or whether it would turn to more capitalist partners like COPE, UDM, Agang – and now the ZACP?

But there is another way to categorize voters. The dominant forces in today's world seem to be Humanism and Marxism. These are distinct from one another, with some overlap. We get our "human rights ethos" from Humanism. This is a big emphasis in South Africa, where most public policies are now "rights-based". Marxism pushed that agenda even further to the Left, believing in a "planned economy" driven by a "vanguard party".

Let's be honest, both Humanism and Marxism are secular religions. That is, they each have their diagnosis of the human condition, their saviour, their road to salvation, and their eschatology (i.e. their take on the "end times").

Going back even more centuries, Humanism emerged from the Renaissance in Europe. It is very very rational, and basically parted ways from Christianity around the time of the Protestant Reformation. Erasmus was one of the pioneer Humanists, a contemporary of Luther, the great church reformer. One followed the path of reason into the Renaissance, the other followed the path of faith into the Reformation. This same divide separates Humanism and its grand-child Marxism from those who still believe in God, deities, or spirits. In other words, of religious citizens.

Historian Noah Yuval Harari tracks three "sects" of Humanism that have evolved. First came liberal humanism, in which Man replaced God at the centre of existence. He writes: *"The liberal belief in the free and sacred nature of each individual is a direct legacy of the traditional Christian belief in free and eternal individual souls. Without recourse to eternal souls and a Creator God, it becomes embarrassingly difficult for liberals to explain what is so special about individual Sapiens."*

Second came the sect of socialist humanism which puts the collective ahead of the individual. For this reason, inequality is the worst blasphemy against the sanctity of humanity. Harari writes: *"Like liberal humanism, socialist humanism is built on monotheist foundations. The idea that all humans are equal is a revamped version of the monotheist conviction that all souls are equal before God."*

Third came the sect of evolutionary humanism, which led to the Nazi notion of a super-race and is still lurking there behind populism and racial supremacy (white of black). In the racist rants that are reported on regularly in the South Africa media, this is still a near and present danger.

On the other side of this primordial divide are the faiths. Christianity is more prevalent in South Africa, but not to the exclusion of Islam, Judaism and Hinduism. Then you have the traditional animist religions, which are still there. Even good Christians often have one foot in each tradition – consulting both the priest and the shaman sincerely.

We have to note that religion and African tradition are enshrined in the Constitution, which also contains the Bill of Rights. So one cannot ever displace the other, and at election time this will have a profound effect on voting. One example is the ANC's Integrity Commission. Religious people feel uncomfortable with the cadre deployment of people implicated in corruption and patronage. But that is only one side of the coin. Along comes the Integrity Commission and asks anyone who is implicated to please stand aside – for the sake of the party.

You also get this tension between fatalism, which assumes that the “rot” just cannot ever be arrested, and “idealism” which believes in redemption and cleansing. To some extent there you have the rationalists versus the faithful.

As March 8th draws nearer, voters need to ask themselves deeper questions that who they will vote for. They need to introspect and ask, what kind of a country do we want for our children and grandchildren? It is always true that our beliefs and values translate into practice and then policy. So an election is to some extent a clash of Renaissance thinking with Reformation thinking. Put another way, do we want an African Renaissance? Or would we prefer an African Revival? Even your views of the “end times” will affect the way that you vote.