The Normative Promise of Religious Organizations in Global Civil Society

KEVIN WARR

Democracy and democratization have been the linchpins of political science since its modern inception in the 1950s. While the discipline has produced a number of theoretical approaches to political behavior, underlying many of these approaches have been themes of self-determination, civil rights, freedom, and representative government. In other words, democracy has been a consistent theme for nearly forty years. However, the 1960s and 1970s saw almost every nascent democracy in newly independent Africa fall to dictatorship. A similar fate befell much of Latin America and Asia. With the fall of communism, however, democracies have begun to burgeon once again and with them, a renewed discourse on the requisites of long-term and successful democracy.

The complementary notions of civil society and social capital and their necessity in the establishment and maintenance of democracy have been at the forefront of this debate. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato define civil society as “a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication.” The role of civil society in the political system is the creation of influence through the life of democratic associations and “unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere.”

Social capital refers to “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve efficiency of society by facilitat-

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1. Democratization refers to the process of instituting democratic principles and practices. It is characterized by effective participation, equality in voting, enlightened understanding, and citizen control of the agenda. See Robert A. Dahl, Democracy and Its Critics (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 108-12.
3. Ibid., x.
ing coordinated actions, In other words, social capital is necessary for the smooth functioning of politics within a democratic polity. Social capital is generated, among other things, by civil society.

Two questions arise from this premise. First, do all organs of civil society produce social capital of a type beneficial to democracy? Second, in an international system characterized by increasing globalization, can social capital be fostered across national and cultural boundaries? Particularly important for the purposes of this study is whether religious organizations within civil society (and global civil society) produce social capital of a type that benefits democracy and if so, whether they can transmit this social capital transnationally.

The key argument is that organizations within civil society (and global civil society) that are characterized by values of pluralism and where divergent viewpoints are respected and tolerated foster the type of social capital useful for transitions to, and maintenance of, democracy. Moreover, religious institutions are uniquely positioned within global civil society to foster social capital transnationally because of their special ability to shape peoples' realities based on a shared belief system.

Specifically, this study focuses on the role of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the fall of the apartheid government in South Africa. It will show that the WCC, through its support of the liberation movements and the international sanctions campaign, has strengthened South African civil society by fostering mutual trust, imparting norms of ethical behavior, and encouraging social networks. In other words, it has generated social capital of a type that produces positive social products beneficial to democracy. The WCC, through its theological attack on the system of apartheid, has bolstered democracy in South Africa because it has changed peoples' reality.

5. I am not suggesting that social capital extends only from the branches of civil society. Features of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks may also be fostered by the family, by the state, or by other social groups outside of civil society.
6. I have attempted to take religion seriously in this study and to acknowledge the importance of people's beliefs—for those beliefs shape the way in which they view the world. Keeping this in mind, I have chosen to carry out my research using a hermeneutic methodology. Hermeneutics is a methodology of conducting research that pays attention to the significance of events from the perspective of those who were involved in them. See Richard Rorty, "Method, Social Science and Social Hope," in Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 195. It pays attention to the culture and the context of the episodes in question and tries to interpret those episodes within that context. A hermeneutic approach searches for the meaning of events, particularly what those events mean for the people involved in them. To that extent, hermeneutics draws
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THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE FALL OF APARTHEID

The World Council of Churches provides an enlightening example of how certain religious groups within the realm of global civil society can accentuate the normative promise of global civil society. The WCC has a long history of social activism. Founded in 1948, the WCC is an ecumenical association established to express greater unity among the many and diverse Protestant and Orthodox Christian denominations. At its founding, it was composed of 152 denominations in 42 countries. Today, it has over 330 member churches in 100 countries, and represents more than 400 million Christians.

Since its founding, the WCC has dealt with a host of social issues, including war and peace, liberation and revolution, poverty and hunger. All along, the WCC has taken a firm stance against racism and in 1970, it established its Program to Combat Racism (PCR). In that same year, a Special Fund was set up to aid indigenous organizations combating racism. Among the groups that received funds from the WCC in southern Africa was the African National Congress (ANC), the Southwest African People’s Organization (SWAPO), the Pan Afri-


My research has taken essentially two routes: archival research and one-on-one interviews with religious elites. I have focused on my primary source analysis on the examination of the WCC’s efforts to influence the government of South Africa by empowering the South African opposition. I also trace the WCC’s efforts to force political change through its international sanctions campaign leveled at the apartheid government, thus effectively using international capitalism to its advantage. In the interview portion of the research, I examine the WCC’s efforts to change South African society through consciousness raising and how the various WCC-affiliated churches in South Africa played out its action-oriented theology of social change.

7. In light of the controversy among many of the more conservative Christian denominations concerning the WCC and its efficacy, its original goal of greater Christian unity is questionable; many of the more conservative North American denominations eschew membership in the WCC.


9. The African National Congress was established in 1912 as a non-violent political organization whose mandate was to promote the interests of black South Africans. The ANC was at the forefront of the struggle against the apartheid regime. Its leader, Nelson Mandela, who was jailed for twenty-six years by the apartheid government, is now the president of South Africa.

10. SWAPO is the political party in power in Namibia, which was formerly called South West Africa. SWAPO fought a prolonged guerrilla war against the South African-supported white regime in South West Africa. In 1990, Namibia gained its independence and SWAPO’s president, Sam Nujoma, became Namibia’s first democratically elected president.
canist Congress (PAC),\textsuperscript{11} and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).\textsuperscript{12}

The establishment of the PCR caused a considerable amount of controversy among some of the more conservative member churches of the WCC. They were uneasy with the notion that their dues to the World Council could find their way to liberation movements whom many church people believed to be communist-backed, communist-influenced, and whose methods, more often than not, included violence. This was especially true in the case of South Africa. The PCR was very clear that any and all funds were donated for humanitarian purposes only, but this guarantee was not sufficient for many churches. Therefore, the Special Fund of the PCR was established to channel funds to these liberation movements. Regular World Council dues were not included in the Special Fund.

When the Special Fund was established, there was an understanding that, while the Special Fund was to be used for the liberation of all people, fully half of those funds each year would go to fighting apartheid in South Africa and southern Africa.\textsuperscript{14} Given the PCR's concern with white racism as well as the institutional forms of racism, this appeared to be a logical choice.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, a good portion of the Special Fund went to organizations fighting for liberation in South Africa and southern Africa (See Table 1 below).

\textsuperscript{11} PAC, or the Pan-Africanist Congress, is one of the major political parties in South Africa. It, like the ANC, was on the forefront of the struggle against apartheid, although its approach was more radical than the ANC's. It was founded in 1959 as a rival to the ANC and focused on the role of blacks only in the fight against apartheid.

\textsuperscript{12} The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formed in 1985 by Cyril Ramaphosa and was the first South African union group to carry out legal strikes by black miners. COSATU is the largest union federation in South African history with well over 500,000 members; see Thomas G. Karis, "Black Politics and the Road to Revolution," in Apartheid in Crisis, ed. Mark A. Ullig (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 129.


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} "It is the coincidence, however, of an accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of the white peoples, following upon their historical and economic progress during the past 400 years, which is the reason for a focus on the various forms of white racism in the different parts of the world. People of different colour suffer from this racism in all continents . . . while many formerly colonial people have become independent, they still suffer from the aftermath of colonialism"; see World Council of Churches 1973, 3.
Churches, organizations and governments in some cases, could contribute money to the Special Fund for the express purpose of supporting the liberation movements. However, these funds were quite small in most cases and therefore, their purpose was largely symbolic (See Table 2). They were meant to be a concrete expression of the Church's solidarity with the cause of liberation from oppression.


No Special Fund Grants were given in 1972.

This symbolic support was, from the very beginning, widely felt in South Africa, both in a positive sense and a negative sense. However, more than the actual money (which was negligible), the moral support that the WCC offered the people of South Africa was significant.

Peter Storey, former bishop of the Methodist Church in South Africa and former president of the South African Council of Churches, noted that the Special Fund provided a psychological boost for the liberation movements in that they were recognized by a world body that was not affiliated with any ideological camp:
It was probably the most radical step taken by any religious body in terms of—to use a hackneyed phrase—an option for the poor and oppressed. . . . [The WCC could have provided] moral support—even statements asking that the South African government negotiate—all that stuff would have been OK. But to actually put money behind it—I think [that] gave it its significance. . . . It was the primary act that produced a real turmoil of debate here. And one of the spin-offs was that the churches, such as my own, who felt that that was perhaps going too far, were challenged for the first time by their black constituency to answer the question, “Well, what are you doing—not saying, but doing—about apartheid? If you think they may be implicitly supporting violence, what are you doing non-violently?” So it turned into a moral challenge of some significance.16

It was significant for Bishop Storey because, by his own account, the World Council was putting its money where its mouth was. It had become dissatisfied with mere words and statements and had decided to fight apartheid with the power of the purse. The fact that the WCC was willing to support the liberation movements financially may have had special resonance in South Africa since South Africans, especially white South Africans, enjoy the highest standard of living on the continent. Indeed, white South Africans’ standard of living has traditionally been exponentially higher than the majority. What is interesting in this case is that when the WCC chose to involve itself in South Africa’s affairs from a financial standpoint, South African elites, both religious and secular, took special notice.

Moreover, the fact that a world Christian body would donate money to the armed struggle gave black South Africans hope. It also gave them the courage to make their voices heard within their own churches. This was, evidently, something new and presented a distinct kind of challenge to the complacency of the white-governed churches. In the discourse of paradigm shifts, the WCC’s action provided an anomaly for which some South Africans churches were unprepared and which caused them to rethink their own actions and beliefs.

Not only did the Special Fund call into question the action—or lack of action—on behalf of the white South African church leadership, it also posed a special kind of legitimacy problem for the South African government. Dr. John de Gruchy of the University of Cape Town noted that, given the South African regime’s self-perception as a Christian government ruling a Christian nation, the PCR—as the organ of a world Christian body—loudly called into question the legitimacy of the apartheid regime:

That fund was in many ways a drop in the ocean in terms of what liberation movements actually needed for their work. But it provided, apart from the funds, a

moral legitimacy that was very important for the liberation movements outside the country and for related organizations within the country. So I think that the Program to Combat Racism had very definite symbolic and moral clout. And it was that really annoyed the South African Government at the time. They weren’t so worried too much about the money: although, they kept on talking about money going to guns and things, but the real problem for them was the question of legitimacy. 17

The government was not acutely concerned about the actual amount of money, but of what the money represented. Dr. de Gruchy clearly believes that the WCC provided a well-needed challenge to the legitimacy of the South African government. From his perspective, the actions of the South African government were inherently anti-Christian; however, for a world Christian body to echo that sentiment not only gave strength to those within civil society who questioned the legitimacy of the government, but also gave the government itself pause. Whether this is objectively the case is relatively unimportant. What is important is that de Gruchy and those like him believed that the WCC cast the government in a questionable light, which, in turn, afforded the South African opposition—particularly the Christian opposition—a level of moral legitimacy. The second major action the World Council took with regard to South Africa was its endorsement of an international sanctions campaign leveled against South Africa. 18 Like the Special Fund Grants, the

17. John deGruchy, Faculty of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, interview by author, 29 January 1997, tape recorded, in his office, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, RSA.
18. Sanctions are a device to change the policies of an obstinate government. “According to this viewpoint, sanctions affect the economy of the target country so severely that there is a high probability of that country’s following a more ‘sensible’ policy”; see Haider Ali Khan, *The Political Economy of Sanctions Against Apartheid* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1989), 23. South Africa was particularly vulnerable to international sanctions because it conducted 80 percent of its trade and received all of its capital from six Western nations and had extensive political and cultural ties to them; see Ivan Eland, “Economic Sanctions as Tools of Foreign Policy,” in *Economic Sanctions: Panacea or Peacebuilding in a Post-Cold War World?*, eds. David Cortright and George A. Lopez (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), 35. Those state and non-state actors who called for sanctions did so with five goals in mind. They wanted to force South Africa to revoke the state of emergency, release all political prisoners, unban the ANC and all other political parties, eliminate apartheid laws and enter into negotiations for a new political system; see Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle Against Apartheid* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), 156. Both state and non-state actors may carry out sanctions. Most often, sanctions are used by states as a tool of foreign policy and as a last resort before the use of force. However, with the birth of the United Nations non-state actors have increasingly used their influence to advocate states’ imposition of sanctions; see Cortright and Lopez, eds., *Economic Sanctions*, 4-5. The impact of non-state actors on international sanctions is significant. Martin has demonstrated through her statistical analysis of four sanctions events that international institutions have a disproportionately large impact on cooperation with sanctions; see Lisa A. Martin, *Coercive Cooperation: Explaining Multilateral Economic Sanctions*
WCC's decision to press for sanctions caused quite a stir within the South African church community. However, like the Special Fund Grants, it also elevated the level of dialogue within South African civil society.

The call for international sanctions was heeded by individual churches the world over. Many churches reworked their investment portfolios so as not to support any company doing business in South Africa. Many others withdrew funds from banks operating in South Africa. The call for disinvestment came from pulpits the world over and church people acted. The apartheid government could not help but feel the pressure of sanctions.

By the end of 1986 many large companies such as GM, IBM, Coca-Cola, Prudential, General Electric, AT&T, Sara Lee, Warner Communications, Kodak, Dun & Bradstreet, Revlon, and Exxon had pulled out of South Africa. De Villiers reports that, according to the Investor Responsibility Research Center (IRRC), almost four hundred companies had left South Africa by 1989. Disinvestment cost South Africa almost $10 billion from 1984-1989.

As in the case of the Special Fund Grants, the issue of sanctions served as a catalyst for dialogue and debate within South Africa, especially since it provided an alternative to violent action. Just as the international community's reaction to sanctions was, to say the least, mixed, the reaction of South African Christians was equally diverse. The differences of opinion about the issue of sanctions were, not surprisingly, often divided by racial group. However, the issue of sanctions forced black and white South Africans to face their differences and to listen to each other, thus opening the door for tolerance and diversity of opinion. This is, perhaps, the greatest contribution of the sanctions campaign within South Africa.

However, the road to real dialogue was, as is the case with most worthwhile endeavors, long and sometimes arduous. Those who were in favor of sanctions argued that they were the only alternative to a violent solution. Those opposed claimed sanctions would do nothing but hurt black people. Rev. Beyers Naudé contends that the reason the issue of sanctions was so hotly contested was simply because of the

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(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 244. Her analysis found a much higher level of cooperation when a formal international organization called for sanctions. Rather than states using international institutions to ratify their own decisions—thus negating the direct impact of the institutions—Martin's analysis shows clear links between institutional and state decisions; Ibid., 244-45. It also points to the importance of global civil society as an actor within the international system.

20. Ibid., 146.
emotions it elicited. After all, the issue of sanctions is an issue of money and therefore, for many people, an emotional issue. He told me:

Look, for those of us who supported the need for sanctions, we did that because we used the argument that said: “if you are against violence, then find decent forms of pressure that could be applied to South Africa to force the government to let go and to drop apartheid.” And we said that sanctions was one of the most effective, non-violent methods of applying pressure and forcing the government to change its policy. But even then, I mean, the reaction, the anger on the part of many, many whites against, for instance, a man like Desmond Tutu and myself and others who pleaded for sanctions. I mean, they could have killed us! Although we constantly used the argument and we said, “But its exactly because we are against violence that we want to find a peaceful form of pressure in order to force this government, in order to eventually drop apartheid.” But emotion, the problem was not in the first place, a theological one. The problem was not in the first place one of a lack of understanding of what was going on. The problem was an emotional one. . . .

Dr. Naudé makes an interesting point about the sanctions campaign. He notes that the issue of sanctions caused an emotional uproar on the part of many South Africans. What he did not say, but what was certainly the implication, was that the issue was emotional for two primary reasons: money and prestige. First, the sanctions issue dealt with peoples’ money. If sanctions were imposed, South Africans of all races would suffer (although, as Kahn notes, the owners of capital would undoubtedly suffer more). It is one thing to support equality and freedom, but when the price of that freedom comes directly from the pocketbook, peoples’ support may be more tenuous.

The second reason why the issue was particularly wrought-up was, it seems, because the issue of international sanctions would not only harm South Africans financially, but also, thanks to cultural and sports boycotts, South Africa’s image abroad would be further tainted. The extent of many white South Africans’ reaction to international sanctions is clear in Rev. Naudé’s claim that some people wanted him dead because (among other things) he supported the need for international sanctions.

The issue of sanctions also highlighted differences between blacks and whites in South Africa, with blacks generally being in favor of sanctions and whites generally against. Father Terry Lester, of St. George’s Church, Silverton, noted:

It certainly brought the differences in our society to the fore, because by and large, the white block represented in the synodical meetings would be anti, and the blacks—you know this is the body of Christ, divided down sort of economic lines—the big debate from the white side was, you know, blacks would suffer. And blacks were saying, “You’ve had so many years to do something about our suffering and you haven’t done anything about it. In fact, if anything you’ve made it worse, and so now we’re saying what we want to have done to alleviate that and now you’re telling us that you don’t think its good for us!” And there were certainly pretty heated debates, not in terms of trying to initiate sanctions on our end, but just in terms of passing resolutions affirming decisions made by countries and churches abroad. There certainly was quite a bit of bruha. . . .

Therefore, according to Father Lester, one of the key byproducts of the international sanctions campaign was the fact that it forced South African Christians to confront the vast chasm between the races in South Africa. In the past, people of goodwill would perhaps overlook their differences using the argument that they all share the same faith and therefore, agree on matters of real importance. The debate surrounding the sanctions campaign, however, brought this fallacy to the fore and caused South African Christians to confront their very real differences based simply on the fact that they lived under a system of institutionalized racism. The issue of sanctions worked toward establishing new norms of behavior and thought, a development brought about through dialogue.

The bruha, as Rev. Lester deemed it, was exacerbated by the fact that many Colored South Africans did not support sanctions. This is perhaps because the mixed-race population in South Africa shares not only the Afrikaans language but also tends to share some of the cultural characteristics of the Afrikaners. Moreover, at least in the past, Colored people have generally held a more elevated economic position than black people did. Rev. Abe Maart, of Bethel Congregational Church, Paarl, provides some enlightenment on the issue of Colored support—or lack thereof—for sanctions:

I think that there were some radical people in this [predominately Colored] community who said, “We’ve already suffered enough, and to suffer more was not going to make any material difference to us.” They were for supporting sanctions. But I think there were quite a substantial number of people who said, “We are going to lose our jobs,” and so on. One difficulty about this community of course is that the so-called Coloreds have often, in the past, aligned themselves with white thinking. I don’t know whether you’ve found that out. I think its because many of them work in town [where the economy is good] so that the thinking that goes on in town is often carried over to others. So sanctions was an issue that they had aligned themselves over to white thinking.  

23. Father Terry Lester, Rector, St. George’s Church (Anglican), Interview by author, 19 February 1997, tape recorded, St. George’s Church, Silverton, RSA.
24. Rev. Abe Maart, Pastor, Bethel Congregational Church, Paarl, interview by author, 10 February 1997, tape recorded, in his office, Paarl, RSA.

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It is interesting to note that Rev. Maart refers to the supporters of sanctions as “radical people” on the one hand, but on the other hand, believes that the lack of Colored support for sanctions is the result of their alignment with “white thinking.” His referral to sanctions supporters as “radical” ought not to be taken as derogatory. Indeed, Rev. Maart himself could be grouped with the “radicals.” As a result of his political activities and his outspoken sermons, he has been the target of smear campaigns, has been jailed, has been followed, has constantly had informers in his congregation and has had his car blown up. His narrative points to the deep divisions among South African society even among members of the same racial group. Simple generalizations are almost always elusive; in the case of South Africa, they are virtually impossible.  

Adding to the debate was that fact that the government was seriously threatened by the specter of international sanctions and took whatever measures it felt necessary to quell domestic support for sanctions. One would expect that government opposition to sanctions would make the matter more attractive to the black majority; however, the government’s propaganda efforts did not stop with the white population, but extended to South African blacks as well. Rev. Trevor Steyn, of St. Paul’s Church, Cape Town, relates one story in which the government actually paid a black bishop to speak against sanctions:

The ZCC [Zionist Community Church] had a bishop, Mkwena, that the state paid for and he was supposed to be the counter to Tutu.  He wore a purple robe and went all over the world to say that blacks don’t want sanctions. The ZCC said, for instance—the bishop was given half an hour interview on television—and he kept on saying we must not interfere politics with the church. The next thing was they have their annual meeting of the ZCC where thousands upon thousands of people come, and who opens the thing and who is the main speaker? P.W. Botha! It’s crazy. And so they opposed sanctions and you can understand why because, you know, we used to call it, you know, “your master’s voice.” They had to do what the master said, otherwise, the master takes the money away. Then of course, your white church, be that any church, even in our church, the Anglican Church, they would oppose it. . . . I think for people to say generally people were opposed—that’s not true. . . . You have to understand that if 20 million blacks were in favor of sanctions, then it was a majority. We know the majority of black people in

25. Indeed, to apply this generalization to Colored people as a whole would be a mistake. It is, based on my research, probably fair to say that a greater percentage of mixed-race people over black people were opposed to sanctions. However, the vast majority of the mixed-race people with whom I spoke (both formally and informally) had clearly been in favor of sanctions and had supported them vigorously. Nevertheless, Rev. Maart’s narrative sheds light not only on the potential divisiveness of the sanctions issue, but on the general dissonance of South African society.

26. The Zionist Christian Church is an indigenous Pentecostal church with a heavy Zulu membership.
South Africa were in favor of sanctions. So hear the voice of the majority and you will know that we were in favor of sanctions. And it did work. . .27

Father Steyn's narrative highlights the extent to which the apartheid regime went to garner support. Moreover, it exposes the belief of the government that religion and religious belief are effective tools in the manipulation of a population's worldview. Given this, it is not surprising that the South African government felt threatened by the actions of the World Council. Rev. Steyn's story also points to the fact that some South Africans, despite the government's best efforts to manipulate the Church for its own purposes, saw the government's propaganda efforts for what they were. However, the logic of international sanctions was, according to Steyn, unmistakable to the majority of black South Africans.

Clearly though, international sanctions would eventually hurt the South African economy. If the economy of South Africa was damaged, naturally lower income people would suffer as businesses folded and workers were unable to keep their jobs. In other words, sanctions would eventually hurt black people. Why therefore, did blacks, by and large, support sanctions? When asked about black support for sanctions, Professor Lionel Louw, of the University of Cape Town, provides a plausible explanation:

The question was simply a very simple question. That's what the oppressed people in the country felt. Because people spoke about that a great deal. They were not benefiting from the economy in the way that they should have. So, that was one issue. They had just about nothing to lose. So there were no losses that were being incurred.

I think the biggest issue was that people wanted to establish that they are humans, they are citizens, that they need recognition, and until such time that you can lay full claim to your humanity no degree of economic investment would mean anything. And so, people on the whole, supported sanctions simply because they recognized that there is no other way in which [people] would be able to gain their humanity except through increasing pressure on government.

That was the view that was taken. Let us establish our citizenship, our humanity. You know, what does it mean if you participate in the economy but you're still in slavery? Then immediately your priority becomes establishing your humanity and being recognized as such. And as I say, people had very, very little to lose.28

As Rev. Louw so eloquently explains, the issue of sanctions was, for some, a matter of human dignity. Perhaps people did not put their beliefs in those terms; however, it appears that people commonly held the belief that when one has nothing, the specter of nothing holds no

27. Father Trevor Steyn, St. Paul's Church (Anglican), interview by author, 3 February 1997, tape recorded, St. Paul's Church, Cape Town, RSA.
28. Dr. Lionel Louw, Senior Lecturer, School of Social Work, University of Cape Town, interview by author, 21 February 1997, tape recorded, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, RSA.
power. After years of inequality, it appears that black people were prepared to make whatever sacrifices were necessary in order to secure their freedom. In the end, it worked.

The issue of sanctions was obviously a touchy one for South Africans of all races and to speak out in support of sanctions was sometimes jeopardous. Brigalia Bam, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, explained that some people were simply too afraid to speak out:

Peoples’ lives were at risk. And so people found it very hard to act, even on things they believed in. There was a limit to what you could expect human beings to do because of the risk. . . . You could be jailed and the laws were such that you couldn’t count on your rights. Even the judicial system got trapped into [the apartheid system]. And so people were frightened. Really, people of integrity . . . it became too difficult for them to act on what they believed in and so some people had to hide behind their own faith, you know: “I will not do this because it is against my faith.” Or some, I suppose, genuinely believed that. I believe some of the people who spoke against sanctions, I believe it was fear, because in those days if you spoke and you supported sanctions, you were in great danger.29

Ms. Bam’s story highlights just how difficult it was for people to stand up for their beliefs in the face of government oppression. While she was active in the struggle and eventually had to go into exile, she appears to understand the reasons why other people were not active. Fear was a reality and not something to be taken lightly or regarded flippantly. Fear was real and some people simply were too afraid to speak out because, as Ms. Bam noted, “if you spoke and you supported sanctions, you were in great danger.”

Yet many did speak out. Many people, for the sake of justice and freedom, took the risk of engaging others on the issue of sanctions. The sanctions issue also forced church people to seriously consider what it means for them to put words into action. The actions of other churches and other governments challenged their complacency and compelled them to look at the issue of justice in a new way. Brigalia Bam emphasized this aspect:

Many churches, as you know, felt that that was an area for economists and politicians and the church should not begin to meddle around with that. But then it also brought the whole debate on the way that we—lay people—talk about the division—the lack of looking at the gospel in a holistic manner. That has been—is still—a debate now: how do we integrate the issues of justice to a total understanding of the full gospel? And I think questions have not been resolved, but I think the economic sanctions was [one way] that helped the churches to not necessarily to find the solution, not necessarily to be able to agree theologically, but to engage in a very, very serious way now. And the whole understanding and the

29. Brigalia Bam, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches and member of the ANC Religious Commission, interview by author, 24 January 1997, tape recorded, South African Council of Churches offices, Johannesburg, RSA.
criticism of what some of the churches were referring to as social gospel, which to me is a challenge of the churches today even after apartheid. I mean, how do we look at the issues of justice? 30

Again, there is an understanding that, while people disagreed on matters of substance and still do, the act of debating those issues, the simple act of talking, reasoning, and listening was and is valuable. For Ms. Bam, it appears that the only way to reach common ground on what she calls issues of justice is through dialogue. To some extent, the WCC’s sanctions campaign fostered that dialogue and was an issue around which people of similar beliefs could discuss matters about which there were serious disagreements.

Perhaps part of the reason that the issue of international sanctions was such a contentious topic is because South Africans living in South Africa could not actually participate in sanctions, one way or the other. Their only choice was to either affirm or reject the international effort and after that, to see which way the die fell. Their hands were tied. Given that, why was the issue worth debating? After all, South Africans were not the ones imposing the sanctions, they were simply the recipients of the effects of sanctions. There are, however, two key reasons why the sanctions issue was worth talking about.

In the first instance, it was worth debating because everyone knew that sanctions would have a profound effect on South Africa and on each person individually. Therefore, they felt, or hoped, that the world would take into account the beliefs of South Africans themselves when they debated whether or not to initiate sanctions. No country, South Africa included, exists in a vacuum. Today’s world is characterized by increased interdependence in trade, politics, and culture. An increasingly globalized mass media makes isolation impossible. Therefore, South Africans rightly believed that, since they would be the ones to either benefit or be harmed by sanctions, the world should take into account their opinions on the matter.

In the second instance, the issue of sanctions was worth debating because it reminded people that they were not alone in the struggle against apartheid. After all, one could easily point to concrete efforts internationally to bring the apartheid regime to its knees. There were people and organizations all over the world that supported South Africans who were working for liberation. This international moral support gave hope to South Africans when hope seemed a rare commodity. The fact that those within South Africa who were fighting against the apartheid system had, at the very least, moral support from abroad

30. Ibid.
made a great deal of difference in the morale of those South Africans concerned with eradicating the apartheid regime.\textsuperscript{31}

The key benefit the WCC's actions and statements had on some South African churches was that they caused church people to begin dialoguing with each other and, through those discussions, to change their views of reality as they joined together in social networks aimed at toppling apartheid. Essentially, the WCC was able to transmit components of social capital, such as mutual tolerance and norms of ethical behavior, which led to social networks dedicated to fighting apartheid.

**Civil Society, Social Capital, and Democracy**

Within the realm of civil society, participation in civil associations fosters what Putnam calls social capital. Social capital refers to "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."\textsuperscript{32} In other words, social capital is necessary in order to get things done in a democratic polity. James Coleman, in his study of social capital, likens it to other forms of capital. He asserts, "Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain goals that in its absence would not be possible."\textsuperscript{33} Therefore, according to Kenneth Newton, social capital is important because it constitutes a force that helps to bind society together by transforming individuals from self-seeking and egocentric calculators, with little social conscience or sense of mutual obligation, into members of a community with shared interests, shared assumptions about social relations, and a sense of the common good.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus, participation in civil associations, within the context of civil society, plays a considerable role in the development of a democratic political culture (and, according to Francis Fukuyama, in the development of a successful, liberal economic system). It is because of social capital that citizens learn to value equality of opportunity, which is the foundation of democratic processes.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Putnam, Making Democracy Work, 167.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Kenneth Newton, "Social Capital and Democracy," American Behavioral Scientist 40 (March/April, 1997): 576.
\item \textsuperscript{35} True democracy is, according to Dahl, found in the practice of government through democratic procedures. These criteria are based on the equality of opportunity. For the democratic processes to work, however, citizens must agree on the right of every other citizen to the equality of opportunity. At the root of the value of equal opportunity, one will find tolerance for others' beliefs, even when they differ from one's own. See Robert Dahl.
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I am not arguing here that social capital leads to democracy, but rather, that social capital contributes to the smooth functioning of democracy. I expect that, in addition to social capital, state structure and civil capacity are both influential in the way democracy functions. My argument is that social capital is necessary, but not sufficient, for a procedural democracy to function as it ought and that social capital is the outgrowth of people joining together in voluntary associations within the realm of civil society.

Another feature of social capital is that it is value neutral. Greeley notes, "Where social capital is present it facilitates the goals of actors, whether the goals be morally and socially desirable or not. It is, therefore, not always a 'good thing'. . . ." 37 Indeed, Putnam's definition of social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions," does not postulate about the end results of these coordinated actions. 38 The end result could be ethically and morally positive or negative, depending on one's point of view. However, in a democratic polity, if a given action was agreed upon and executed in a democratic manner, then social capital has done what it is supposed to do. It has fostered collective action—action that would not have been possible without the mutual toleration of its executors, without a shared sense of norms among the group members, and without the social resources (networks) to complete the action. Social capital is, therefore, a necessary component for both transitions to and maintenance of democracy. However, the products of social capital may be viewed as positive or negative. Without social capital, democracy would not (and does not) work well.

Social Capital and Value of Discourse

While social capital is necessary and, as an analytical concept, value neutral, we should be concerned with the products of social capital. There are certain actions and behaviors that are conducive to the long-term health of democracy, and certain actions and behaviors that are not. For instance, collective action by one group that excludes another

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Democracy and Its Critics (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 108-12. One way in which the belief in equality of opportunity is fostered is through participation in civil society.


group on the basis of arbitrary bias does not benefit a democratic polity. It strips one group of its equality of opportunity. Morals do have a place in a democratic polity and specifically, the value of moral discourse is important for democracy.

Robert Wuthnow argues that morality cannot be separated from democracy.39 However, his arguments do not presuppose the existence of moral absolutes or assume that discussing moral absolutes is a human responsibility. Rather, he notes that deliberation about morals is important for the maintenance of democracy. Drawing from John Dewey’s notion of philosophical pragmatism, Wuthnow asserts “that democracy and moral deliberation have much in common because both require faith that human betterment can be approximated through an experimental process of working together and engaging one’s own faculties to the fullest.”40 Therefore, talking about matters of moral significance reinforces the notion that, as individuals and as a society, we can grow.

He further supports his argument utilizing Rawlsian deontological liberalism as well as Taylor’s notion of ontological communitarianism, which:

contains that there is a complementary relationship between the cultural diversity that democracy aims to uphold and moral reasoning. On the one hand, democracy that ensures freedom of thought and that imposes only standards of fair treatment on diverse subcultures permits a free market of ideas and values to prevail, and this very pluralism forces people to think through their moral positions to a greater extent than if only one totalistic world view were present. On the other hand, moral deliberation contributes to the maintenance of democracy because it, in itself, is a form of civil participation, and it connects considerations of virtue with public policy, among which are concerns about the very democratic structures that ensure freedom to engage in moral deliberation.41

A pluralistic political system, therefore, encourages people to think about matters of ethics. When they discuss these matters, they reinforce the political system through their own civic engagement.

The act of talking to each other, freely and openly is morally significant and vitally important for the maintenance of democracy. This type of discourse occurs within the realm of civil society. A civil society that fosters a strong democracy is a civil society that fosters free public discussion where people learn to appreciate differences and engage in open discourse. Through discourse, people begin to have confidence their voice will be heard. They also learn tolerance for others’ beliefs and values. Cohen and Arato demonstrate this when they claim,

40. Ibid., 39.
41. Ibid.
it is on this terrain that we learn how to compromise, take reflective distance from our own perspective so as to entertain others, learn to value difference, recognize or create anew what we have in common, and come to see which dimensions of our traditions are worth preserving and which ought to be abandoned.\textsuperscript{42}

In the first instance, the social value of free discussion fosters an environment in which democracy is most likely to flourish. In the second instance, the act of unfettered discourse itself contributes to democracy's entrenchment in the minds of society and thus, in its institutions.

Within civil society, people talk. They talk freely. This—the act of talking—fosters tolerance among group members. It also establishes norms of behavior, which is a key component of social capital. According to Jürgen Habermas, discourse coordinates the actions of different actors in social interaction and socializes members of the community so that there is a common interpretation of needs.\textsuperscript{43} When people talk to each other and listen to each other, they can begin to agree on common grounds for the way things ought to be. Until they craft some type of agreement, they cannot implement social policies. Societies cannot get along very well without these essential functions. Civil society, through its production of social capital, contributes to the overall health of a society.

\textbf{Religious Groups and Civil Society}

Although the members of civil society produce social capital, the end results of this capital are not always positive. This is where the question of the proper place of religious organizations within the realm of civil society arises. Some, like Cohen and Arato, include churches as a category in their definition of civil society.\textsuperscript{44} Others, like Putnam, do not.\textsuperscript{45} The disagreement may be clarified, I believe, by focusing on whether a given religious organization within the context of civil society fosters social capital of a type that has positive social benefits.

It might be suggested that some religious organizations within civil society are well suited to foster the type of social capital whose products serve democracy well. Others are not. Scholars, like Cohen and Arato, who include the church in their definition of civil society, are well justified in doing so. Certainly, when one talks of the transition to


\textsuperscript{44} Cohen and Arato, \textit{Civil Society and Political Theory}, 23.

\textsuperscript{45} Putnam, \textit{Making Democracy Work}, 107-09.
democracy in Eastern Europe, Latin America, or Africa, one almost always includes the church as an important institution of civil society.\textsuperscript{46}

For other reasons, Robert Putnam excludes the Roman Catholic Church in Italy from the realm of civil society. He notes that the Catholic church is an alternative to civil society, not a part of it. Where the Catholic church is concerned, "vertical bonds of authority are more characteristic of the Italian Church than horizontal bonds of fellowship."\textsuperscript{47} He notes that all manifestations of religiosity and clericalism in Italy are negatively correlated with civic engagement. In Italy, at least, the Roman Catholic Church does not engender social capital and therefore, Italians whose only extra-familial social involvement is church-related are disinclined to participate in civic practices (this is not to say, however, that they are necessarily disinclined to participate in church-related activities).

I am not comfortable with the wholehearted rejection of the church as a positive member of civil society, nor do I endorse its uncritical inclusion. Church groups (like other types of social groups) that do not advocate tolerance of others' beliefs, do not advance the values of pluralism and that do not encourage free discussion are unlikely to engender social capital of a type whose products are beneficial to a democratic polity. This is not to say that they are unhelpful or socially valueless. Rather, those types of religious organizations do not foster the kinds of values that make a democracy effective, efficient, and long-lived.

Other religious groups clearly do have a place in civil society and do give rise to social capital. Those Christian churches that are members of the ecumenical movement are notable for their difference from less pluralistically minded churches.

The ecumenical movement began at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. Those in attendance believed that disunity among churches at home had hindered the Christian missionary movement in the nineteenth century. Because of this belief, cooperation and unity were strong themes among the mission movements of the


early twentieth century. Today, cooperation and unity remain the overarching themes of the ecumenical movement, coupled with a belief in diverse opinions and characterized by a democratic structure. Moreover, Paul Bock notes that in the aftermath of World War I, it became apparent to socially minded Christians that if the church was to be a "conscience of nations, classes and races" it must cast aside the issues that divide denominations and focus on a "more universal and historical perspective." The ecumenical movement thus strives to minimize theological differences among denominations and to seek common ground on issues of doctrine and religious practice. It also seeks to broaden the notion of Christian responsibility in society by striving to view social crises from the perspective of the people involved in them. In these ways, the ecumenical movement is a notable exception to the denominational isolation and theological rigidity of many fundamentalist and evangelical sects. In these ways too, churches and church organizations with an ecumenical perspective fit well within the realm of civil society. These churches teach the value of pluralism, which includes a belief in tolerance and cooperation. They teach social responsibility. They strive for conciliation, not separateness, which is accomplished through the free discussion of ideas and issues. Finally, they are organized in a non-hierarchical manner, giving equal voice to each member, regardless of gender or social standing.

The ecumenical values of tolerance, cooperation, social responsibility, and open debate provide an ethos in which groups may interact with each other, the state, and the economy. In other words, they are examples of social capital whose products are useful in a democratic system. This interaction within the context of civil society is beneficial and indeed essential to the health of democracy. Having said that, the question about a global civil society arises. Do these useful institutions of civil society apply only in the case of domestic politics? In a world increasingly characterized by interdependent economic markets and the shortening of cultural and religious gaps thanks to the constant acceleration of mass communications, is it possible to talk about a global civil society? If so, can the organs of global civil society foster social capital like their domestic counterparts? What does this mean for democracy?

GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY

Paul Wapner notes that the political importance of non-governmental organizations has been under-appreciated because of a one-dimensional focus on the state as the locus of power in the international system. However, when international non-governmental organizations turn, "the realms of transnational social, cultural, and economic life into levers of power that can be used to affect world public affairs," then the emergence of a global civil society may be evidenced. Wapner demonstrates the effective use of alternative notions of agency in his documentation of the activities of three transnational environmental activist groups and their success at changing state behavior by influencing civil society, not the state directly. These efforts included consciousness raising, local empowerment, and exploitation of the weaknesses of global interdependence.

According to Shaw, civil society is not an actor, but a context in which a number of collectives are formed and interact. "Civil society comprises formal organizations of a representative kind . . . and more informal social and political networks, ranging from local voluntary groups and ad hoc activist coalitions to nationally or internationally coordinated social movements." He notes that one may speak of a global civil society to the extent that "society increasingly represents itself globally across nation-state boundaries, through the formation of global institutions," of which there are three major types:

- formal organizations linking national institutions (organizations of parties, churches, unions professions educational bodies, media, etc.);
- linkages of informal networks and movements (e.g., of women's, gay and peace group movements);
- and globalist organizations (e.g., Amnesty, Greenpeace, Médecins sans Frontières), which are established with a specifically global orientation, global membership and activity of global scope.

This definition of global civil society is quite broad and has as its unifying function non-governmental social groups that are organized across state boundaries. Global civil society, for Shaw, encompasses both formal and informal organizations.

52. Ibid., 650.
53. This is a marked difference from Paul Ghils's concept of global civil society. Ghils's idea of global civil society encompasses only formal organizations, i.e., international non-governmental organizations. See Paul Ghils, "International Civil Society: International Non-Governmental Organizations in the International System," International Social Science Journal 44 (August 1992): 421. While Shaw seems to make space for groups bound by affinity, not formal organization, Ghils focuses on the formal aspects of global civil society. His concern is to show the ways in which international non-governmental organizations affect
The question remains, however, whether religious organizations are different from any other organs of global civil society. Paul Ghils would claim that organizations such as the World Council of Churches, while clearly part of international civil society, are not qualitatively different than other INGOs. Indeed, he claims that religious organizations fit the definition of INGOs in many respects:

They have their international networks and play a part in various aspects of international relations. Unlike states, and whatever may be their geographical coverage, universally minded religious communities disdain any territorial character and are distinct from the state order in that regard, even if they can be thought of in terms of geopolitical entities . . . Whether their relations with states are regulated by the prevailing state legislation or stand in open opposition to it, their avowed spiritual and hence political aims place some of them in a position of actual or potential antagonism towards states, while demonstrating that they predate them historically.\(^{54}\)

I would argue, however, that while religious organizations may fairly be viewed as INGOs, they are qualitatively different than other members of international civil society. This is an important distinction, both theoretically and for the purposes of this study, as will shown below.

**The Exceptionalism of Religious Organizations**

Religious organizations are different from other organs of civil society (and global civil society) because of the claims that religious beliefs make on peoples’ view of themselves, society, and the world around them. Theologian Frederick Buechner notes that religion points to that area of human experience where one way or another man comes upon Mystery as a summons to pilgrimage; where he senses beyond and beneath the realities of every day a Reality no less real because it can only be hinted at in myths and rituals; where he glimpses a destination that he can never fully know until he reaches it.\(^{55}\)

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Politics at the state level as well as the transnational level. He posits three ways in which INGOs may exercise their agency. First, INGOs may tend to focus on encouraging governments to “act in ways that public opinion perceives to be morally justified or on challenging the conduct of states when the legitimacy of their action is in doubt,” 421. Second, INGOs may “intervene directly at the transnational level for the benefit of the members of the INGO or for the benefit of specific social groups,” 421. Finally, INGOs may act in the international system by “questioning the functioning of state or inter-state institutions, proposing structural changes or even the creation of new institutions . . . . [or,] at the most extreme, directly challenging the foundations and legitimacy of states and their organizations,” 425.

In other words, religion is a structure that, for many, gives meaning to life—a way of looking at the world and the individual’s place in it. Religious belief makes sense out of bewilderment.

Certainly other ideologies may make similar claims, but the difference is religion’s appeal to a deity or deities. This is different because it appeals to an invisible force, greater than oneself, which has transcendent importance. Moreover, because of the appeal to a deity or deities, action and non-action have ultimate consequences. For example, a Buddhist person may be a member of an environmental group. That person, because of her environmental sensibility, which has been fostered by her involvement with the environmental group, probably would not choose to litter. However, her Buddhist beliefs add another dimension to her action (or non-action). Not only is littering relegated to the realm of “shouldn’t” because it is bad for the environment, but the act of littering also has karmic effects that she will eventually have to face. If it were not for her religion, her environmental actions may have no immediate consequences. She may litter and indeed feel bad about it, but that is all. As a Buddhist, her actions have ultimate consequences and take on a moral significance. The realm of “shouldn’t” has added weight for the religious person. For many believers, their faith has ultimate importance. It is part of what shapes who they are and how they behave.

Given the fact that religious belief has the power to shape the way a person views the world, it is not surprising that appeals to religious belief have been a common tool of governments and rulers. To maintain social control, rulers have often claimed transcendental authority, that is to say, they have justified their superordination by claiming divine authorization. This justification of temporal authority based on divine sanction can be seen throughout history, from the ancient Israelites to the Caesars’ claims of divinity; from the Holy Roman Empire to the establishment of the Church of England; from the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the justification of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Across time, rulers have appealed to religious beliefs in order to justify their rule.

In the modern age, rationality is said to have replaced religion. In so-called modern societies, relationships between ruler and ruled are justified on the basis of rationality and religion is consigned to the category of myth. As Sheldon Wolin states, in the modern world, “myth occupies the status of a residual category that justifies whatever intui-
tive, nonrational, poetic, religious, or other fugitive experiences we happen upon in a world orchestrated by postmythic powers.  

However, the promise of "rational" government devoid of appeals to religion (i.e., "myth") has not been realized. Even a cursory glance at the current conflicts around the world points to the importance of religious belief in peoples' lives and how that is played out in the arena of the state. The continued strife in Northern Ireland, the challenges by Islamists to the secular state and its role in the strife in the Middle East, the antagonism between Hindus and Muslims in India, and the continued strife over Chinese control of Tibet all point to the importance people place on religion.

Religion has also been involved with matters of social justice. It has been a catalyst for democratic transformation. Notable examples are the role of liberation theology in Latin America's move from authoritarianism, the role of the Catholic church in Poland's opening, and the role of the Christian church in the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Whether its outgrowth is violence or peace, religious belief is clearly an important part of many peoples' lives. According to Huntington, "religion is a central, perhaps the central, force that motivates and mobilizes people." Its politicized form is significant because it seeks to cast society in its image, while the state itself similarly seeks to shape society. To the extent that they both seek to shape society, the stage is set for a struggle between the state and organized religion.

CONCLUSION

The key argument of this study has been that religious organizations within civil society (and global civil society) that are characterized by values of pluralism (either implicit or explicit) and where divergent viewpoints are respected and tolerated foster the type of social capital useful for transitions to and maintenance of democracy. They encourage in their members mutual tolerance and ethical norms of behavior, which are manifested in socially beneficial activities. Moreover, religious organizations within global civil society are qualitatively different than their secular counterparts because they have the ability to change peoples' worldviews, based on a shared version of ultimate  

truth. Therefore, these organs of global civil society are able to foster social capital transnationally in a manner that travels well. That is to say, their normative promise as members of a global civil society is augmented by the fact that they can propagate key values and facilitate coordinated action across national boundaries. They are able to accomplish this precisely because of their religious sensibility.

The WCC challenged the hegemony that the apartheid regime had over the minds of many South Africans and spurred some South African Christians to action. I have shown that, through the Special Fund grants and the Sanctions Campaign, and because people had begun to change their worldview, the World Council’s actions promoted dialogue within South African civil society. It brought to the fore the issue of violence and whether or not the status quo was an acceptable option for South African Christians. It also highlighted the racial divisions within the South African churches and encouraged the white minority to view the situation from the perspective of the black majority. Implicit and explicit in the World Council’s statements and actions was a commitment to pluralism, as evidenced in its governing style of consultation and consensus. These pluralistic values, embodied in an ecumenical sensibility, found a voice in South Africa as church people began to talk to each other about apartheid and to listen to each other about the effects the apartheid system had had on them. In the end, the social capital fostered by the World Council was manifested in concrete actions taken by church people in their efforts to overturn apartheid.