

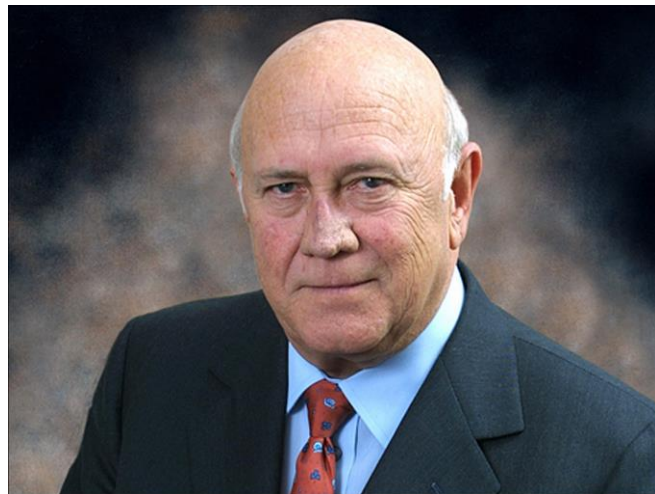
F. W. De Klerk, the last white president of South Africa, and the Logic of Apartheid.

Text of a podcast in Stocktonafterclass, January, 2022 by Ron Stockton January, 2022

F. W De Klerk died on November 11, 2021. He was the last white president of South Africa. This was during the time of apartheid. Power during that time was vested in the National Party, which in turn was controlled by the Broederbund, a secret society of the most powerful Afrikaaners in the country.

By way of terminology, the Afrikaaners were those people of Dutch heritage. They called themselves Afrikaaners – Africans – because they did not see themselves as immigrants but, after 400 years, as people of the land. They often said they were just another South African “tribe,” a white tribe but a tribe.

Membership in the Broederbund was by invitation only. Sometime in the 1980s someone came up with a list of members of this society. It contained everyone who was anyone in terms of power. All top political leaders, all top university presidents, all top security officials, all top military officers, all top professors. Well, all top anything.



Back in 1980, at the peak of white power, I spent a month of my sabbatical in South Africa. I was talking to a very easy going member of parliament when he said to me, “You need to go to Stellenbosch and talk to Professor Jeppe,” as I will call him. Stellenbosch was the Afrikaaner university just east of Cape Town. It is a beautiful place, the place where all the BEST Afrikaaner families wanted to send their aspiring children. I did what I was told and set up my appointment. We chatted for a while about being a professor in South Africa. He was in public administration. At a certain point, he stopped and looked at me and said, “I am a devoted Afrikaaner nationalist.”

I was stunned. I suddenly realized that I was talking to someone at the very center of the South African power structure. For him, being a professor was just his day job. After the sun went down, he got off to his real business of controlling the country. The Professor explained to me that there were changes needed, and changes were coming, but the Afrikaaners would never give up power.

I tell you this story because De Klerk was devoted Afrikaaner nationalist, a member of the Broederbund and everything that went with it. He had been vetted throughout his whole career and was trustworthy. In fact, his hard-line uncle had led the country before him. If bloodlines counted for anything, De Klerk was the bluest of the blue. But the

Afrikaaners were not uniform in their thinking. The *verligtes*, the enlightened or progressive ones, were plunging into creative thinking about how the whole system could be restructured to make it work on a long term basis. But restructured in a way that would leave the Afrikaaners in power.

The other wing of thinking was called *verkrampste*. How would we translate that? Pig Headed? Narrow minded? Unreflective? Unreconstructed? We have such people in our own country so it should not be a hard concept to understand.

Most of the previous leaders of South Africa had been *verkrampste*. De Klerk's predecessor, P. W. Botha, was one. Talk about pig headed. Well, let's not speak ill of the dead. But Botha's predecessor Connie Mulder, had been more open to new thinking. I once talked to a person who was very knowledgeable about South African politics. I asked him if he thought that had Mulder stayed in power, it would have made a difference.

He looked at me as if I had suddenly pushed the right button. He said he had been head of the student union at Stellenbosch when Mulder visited the campus. They had confronted him and told him that by refusing to change they were putting South Africa at risk and the Afrikaaners at risk. Mulder was stunned to hear such words coming from the sons of the Afrikaaner elite. After the event, he invited my friend and some other student leaders to a retreat. They spent several days discussing what had to be done to salvage the situation. Wait. Did I just say HAD to be done. Indeed, had to be done. Mulder listened. The situation was very similar to what happened in Canada in 1967 when the prime minister, an Anglophone, realized that he needed to bring Francophones into power. He recruited four top young men out of Quebec and brought them into his cabinet. One was Pierre Eliot Trudeau, one of the great men of his age. And Canada was changed.

Mulder was planning something similar. He was going to bring a team of young *verligte* Afrikaaners into power and transform the country. Alas, there was what was called Muldergate. Mulder got caught in some financial problems and was pushed aside. Was that a coup? I guess we'll never know, but he was replaced by his most *verkrampste* rival, P. W Botha.

But when Botha had a stroke and was replaced by De Klerk, there was a new sheriff in town. De Klerk knew that the system was not working.

Up until then, South Africa had relied upon the system of apartheid. That is the Afrikaaner word for separation. In English it was often called Separate Development. The South African Information Department was really good at making this sound reasonable. Well, reasonable if you happened to be either naïve or a racist. The apartheid system operated at two levels. Let's call them grand apartheid and petty apartheid. Petty apartheid was the type of thing that really offended white liberals. If you went to the parks you would see benches that had signs saying Whites or Non Whites *Blankes* or *nie blankes*. If you wanted to take a bus somewhere. You had to find a white bus or a non white bus. Teachers with equal qualifications got different salaries and coal

miners who were white got paid more than those who were Black. I once went to a post office in a small town to get some stamps. When I walked in, there were two clerks behind the desk to wait on me. I was the only person in the post office so we had a nice chat about who I was and how my visit was going. But over at the side was a window. Outside there was a long line of Africans waiting for service, and it was a really hot day. That was petty apartheid. We Americans would call it segregation. We knew it well from the Jim Crow South. Many *verligte* Afrikaners thought such things should be Gone with the Wind.

But then there was Grand Apartheid. That was a different ball game. This was what initially appealed to *verligtes* such as De Klerk. Let me explain their logic. They said there were ten tribes in South Africa. One was the Afrikaners. The other nine were the Bantu tribes: Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, Ndebele, Swazi, and so forth. Each of those tribes had its own culture, language, identity, traditions. And why should Africans be required to compete against whites who had several hundred years of civilization ahead of them? And why should whites, 15% of the population, have to compete in elections with Africans, with their vast numbers?

It would be “racist,” not to mention unfair, so the argument went, to put them all into one system. Not only would valuable African traditions be marginalized or even suppressed, but it would never work. Not only were there different levels of civilization but there were different understandings of civilization. And consider the practical issues. How would language be handled? Why should Afrikaans and English (about 40 percent of whites were Anglophones) be the official languages in places where those were foreign languages?

Let’s pause for a minute: English is an international language so obviously it should be taught in the schools. Afrikaans is a tribal language of the Dutch people so it falls into a different category but one that must be protected. Should we define one of these European languages as official in the tribal areas, which would marginalize, for example, the Zulu language? Such a thing would be unfair, and culturally racist.

So they came up with a plan, Grand Apartheid. We will create nine separate homelands so each of these African tribal groups can have its own territory and political system and school system and military system and tax system and even parliament and prime minister. As these homelands developed, with careful and generous support and guidance from the national government, controlled by the whites, they would be given their independence. Then they could take their place in the world community.

Of course, there was a complication. There is always a complication. There were millions of Africans in the white homeland, i.e., South Africa. What is to be done with those people? Well, Separate Development and the Homeland system provided an answer. Those people were citizens of their homelands. If they wanted to work in South Africa, they had to have a work permit. Of course, a work permit is not a strange concept. When I taught in Kenya, I had a work permit. At the end of two years, I had to

leave. After all, I was a foreigner. But my permit was based in rational policy making, and respect I might add. And my wife was with me.

But in South Africa, the situation was different. If someone wanted to bring their family with them, that was ordinarily not allowed. A Zulu woman working as a nanny for a white woman in Johannesburg could come as an individual but could not bring her children with her. She would be given an annual leave of maybe two weeks when she could visit her home. Of course, if she came back pregnant she would lose her job.

Then there was the issue of political rights. South Africa was a democracy with regular elections. But under the logic of apartheid, Africans would not be allowed to vote in South African elections. So was the very term “democracy” not a fraud? Well, there was also an answer for that. (Have you noticed that ideologues always have an answer?) All Zulus had full political rights in Zululand where there were elections and a parliament and a prime minister. Just the way it was in South Africa. Zulus could vote in Zululand elections, the Xhosa could vote in Transkei. And so forth. Some analysts called this *herrnvolk* democracy, democracy for the ethnic ruling group. We Americans knew this very well during Jim Crow times in the South when there were vigorous elections but only whites had universal suffrage. There was no fraud at all, if you understood the system.

And with a wave of the hand, -- or maybe we should say a signature on a piece of paper - - the non-white population of the Republic of South Africa would drop from 85% to around 50%.

But this is obviously racist you might say. Those rules about how Black people could not spend the night in South Africa without a permit were very discriminatory. Well, again there was an answer. Just as “citizens” of Zululand could not live or work in South Africa without permission, likewise, whites could not live or work in Zululand or Transkei without permission. On this point, I have an anecdote. I was driving through South Africa in December of 1965 and was passing through Transkei on my way to Durban. The helpful person in our hotel told us to be certain to be out of Transkei before the day ended or else I would have to have a permit to spend the night. I have no doubt that such a permit would have been granted, but the point was, this is a race neutral policy that restricts whites and blacks alike. But I suspect it’s like that old saying that the law does not discriminate on the basis of wealth. The rich and the poor alike are forbidden to sleep under bridges.

Let me give you an example of something I observed when I visited Zululand in 1980. I knew in advance that I was going to visit universities and that I would contact the political science faculty. So before I left, I went to our campus library and made a note about the collection of books we had on African politics. The Dewey Decimal System is universal so I went to that section and wrote down how many books there were, especially in political science. We had shelves and shelves of books. When I got to Zululand I went to the University of Zululand library and followed up on my investigation. There was a very small shelf of books, perhaps a few dozen. I realized

that I had more books on African politics in my personal collection than they had in their whole library. And when I met the head of the Political Science program, I learned more. There were four political science faculty members. Three had master's degrees, two were in public administration. There was only one with a Ph.D. And yet they awarded a doctorate to their students. Those graduates were going to become future professors.

When I got back to Dearborn and discussed this with my students, I called it education for mediocrity. It was like Separate But Equal education in the south. It sounded good if you said it fast. But no one really believed that it was equal in any conceivable way. Had Mississippi had equal school buildings, and equal teacher quality and salaries, and equally recent textbooks then the whole debate over separate but equal would have been different. And in South Africa, if Separate Development had not just been an ideological cover for white domination and continuing Black inferiority that whole debate might have been different. But in the American south "equal" was never in the equation any more than it was in apartheid South Africa.

By 1976 Transkei was an "independent" state. They had a parliament, a prime minister, a flag, a national anthem. Everything you could want. In fact, the South African government provided military and economic assistance and once even sent in troops to insure "order." They even had a State Visit in which the President of South Africa visited the President of Transkei. And other homelands were just behind Transkei. Including Zululand, Bophutatswana and others.

"Citizens" of Transkei who were living in South Africa (you notice how Transkei is no longer a part of the Republic), had full political rights, *within their homeland*. The issue of voting is now solved. You can vote in your own homeland. And the Black population of South Africa dropped as all of those "citizens" of Transkei were now visitors to South Africa. As each of these Homelands would become "independent" the Republic would become more white. Little pockets of Black population within the Republic, called Black spots, would be transferred legally to the homeland. With absolutely nothing changing, South Africa was becoming more white, and the issues of discrimination were being resolved. There was even a plan to create a Confederation of independent states that would have regular meetings to regulate their shared interests. Of course, those meetings would be chaired by the President of the Republic, and all decisions would have to be made by consensus, i. e., white South Africa could veto any action they did not like.

South Africa was on the verge of a new era, in which their problems were solved.

Well, la de da.

Ok, let's step back for a minute.

During those days, I was active in support of the ANC. My podcast on *Thoughts of a Former Terrorist* discusses those times. But I was also sympathetic to the Afrikaners – From a humanitarian perspective, not a political perspective. They were in a pickle, and I

did not want to see a blood letting with hundreds of thousands of refugees. I struggled to think of how they could get out of this mess.

When I taught my course on non-western political systems, I had a unit on what I called protracted ethnic conflict. The focus was on those societies which had very different populations within their borders. Often these were places which brought together regions that had been historically distinct so that they had different languages or cultures or religions or identities. What happens in the modern age, as states come into existence, often through colonialism or conquest by European regimes, is that those disparate regions or groups were thrown into a common political system. Often it was a disaster. But is there any way to resolve these conflicts? I outlined several outcomes for my students. Some were better and some were worse.

Obviously, these outcomes depended upon what we might call the objective circumstances. For example what were the relative number of the competing groups? If the oppressed group is 10%, you can probably keep that up forever. If it is 25% it may constitute a security threat. And if there are two groups that approach parity – as with the Israelis and Palestinians – that constitutes a permanent civil war. But if the ruling group is 15%? I don't even know how to analyze that.

Anyway, let's look at some possible outcomes.

One outcome is eternal war. You can fight forever. But no one likes that. And it tends to destabilize both the country and those around it over time as neighbors take sides, to protect or to advance their own interests.

A second solution is to create a unified political system with a common language and culture, often imposed on a least part of the population. That is what we Americans did. We have taken people from around the world and told them, you can be an American if you will learn English and identify with America as your home. That has worked pretty well over the past four hundred years. Of course, there are those pesky footnotes: the Africans brought to our country by force and violence, and the native peoples, who were conquered. They did not do this by consent but by coercion.

You can also expel minority populations. Sometimes borders get drawn so that a cluster of people from country A get stuck in country B and now constitute a security threat. For example the Germans of Eastern Europe who were expelled after World War II. Or those populations that arrived as a result of conquest but now history has turned against them. Consider the whites of Algeria, 800,000 of whom fled within a month when Algeria became independent in 1962; or the Portuguese in Angola, perhaps 400,000, who left after Independence. Or the Asians of Uganda, expelled by Idi Amin. Or, in a different circumstance, the Palestinians of 1948.

A fourth solution – this is getting nasty – is to massacre or exterminate populations. Think of the Jews of Europe, or the Armenians of Turkey, or the Tutsis of Rwanda. Of course, this would be hard to do if the out group were large in numbers. And in South

Africa, whites were only 15% of the population. And that 15% needed Black labor for their economic enterprises. Expulsion or extermination were not options.

But is there an alternative to these drastic outcomes? Indeed there is, and several countries have sought this solution. It is sometimes called pluralism. What do we mean by this? Well, let's imagine that the leaders of a territory reach a point where they say, "We have interests and you have interests. Not just individual interests but group interests. This fighting is getting very destructive. It does not seem to be solving anything, and it is obvious that very soon it is going to become even worse. Maybe we should try to work out something. I'll tell you what. Let's each have our own zone that we will control. Let's agree that each of us can decide what happens within our own zone. And let us create a central government that will be regulated by certain rules and limitations. And let's go a step further and agree that power will be shared. Each of us will get a piece of the action."

Let's be honest. No one will like this because they are giving up so much but they may well accept it because the alternative is so bad that no one wants to consider it. You do what you hate to avoid what you hate even more. Put differently, the choice is not between good and bad. It is between bad and Gawd Awful.

And the fact is that this has worked in some places.

In Ireland, for example, the Good Friday Accord of 1998 fell short of unification, as demanded by the IRA, and fell short of having Northern Ireland fused with Britain, as the Ulster Defense League demanded, but it gave both sides enough of what they wanted so that the lengthy civil war, The Troubles as it was called, ended. Northern Ireland was an entity with its own parliament. The border between the North and the Republic of Ireland was erased, Full rights were guaranteed to Catholics and Protestants. And any change in the arrangement had to be approved by Britain, the Irish parliament, and the parliament of Northern Ireland.

And consider Switzerland. They have several language cultural groups that were historically independent cantons but are now part of a common country. So how do they handle the language problem, which could easily tear the country apart? It's easy. The Cantons determine their own language. In Geneva it is French, in Zurich it is German. So suppose you are a German speaking person in Geneva and you want the city to have German language schools so your children can have their language and culture affirmed. Do you know what you will be told? "You want your kids to go to German language schools. What a wonderful idea. German is a really important language and you should make sure your children can grow up within an educational system that is rooted in German. They do that in Zurich."

Or what about Nigeria? It is a country created by the British. It was a cluster of colonies that didn't even have a name until the British governor's wife suggested it be called Nigeria in honor of the Niger river. Of course, the different tribes each had their own zone where their own customs and political systems and languages prevailed. But now

they were in one country. Anyone who knows anything about Nigeria knows about the terrible war in the 1960s that came close to breaking the country into pieces. Today Nigeria is united, with a federalism that allows a lot of local autonomy. (And of course, a lot of corruption). But what is the national language? I was at an academic conference once when there was a panel on Nigeria. Out of the blue, someone said that Hausa should be the national language because more people speak Hausa than Yoruba or Ibo. Which is true. But there was almost a battle as the Nigerians argued with each other, each having an argument better than anyone else. So how did Nigeria resolve this problem? They made English the official national language, with the different regions having whatever language they want in their schools. And of course everyone studies English. English, as they say, is equally obnoxious to everyone since it is not the mother tongue of any tribe.

And consider Lebanon? That country had a terrible civil war in 1860. They did not want to repeat that tragedy. So in the 1930s the elite got together and worked out a deal. It is called confessionalism. They did not have regional governments so they agreed to divide up central power. Everything would be done by proportion of the population. Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, Maronite Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Druze. Seats in the parliament would be proportional. Key cabinet posts would be divided up, with the President and the head of the military always a Maronite Catholic, the prime minister always a Sunni Muslim, the Speaker of the parliament always a Shia Muslim, the foreign minister always a Greek Orthodox Christian, and so forth. This left power in the hands of religio-ethnic power brokers, which was not always good, but at least it reduced tensions between groups. But over time as Christians dropped from 52% of the population to around 25%, with Christians still being in a favored political position, the system became destabilized. And when Palestinian refugees poured into the country after 1948 and made up over 10% of the population, and when they began to arm themselves in the struggle to recover their lost lands, and when outside groups began to support one faction or another, all hell broke loose.

Well, let's be more scholarly about how we describe what happened: The previous system, imperfect as it was, provided a certain stability, but when external and internal circumstances began to change, that stability could not be sustained and serious destabilization occurred. And it did not help that the Israelis invaded more than once, especially in 1982, so that by the end of that chaos, which lasted roughly 26 years, there were perhaps 144,000 Lebanese who had died.

So let's go back to F. W. De Klerk and the situation in South Africa. De Klerk was a *verligte* who realized as a young man that the apartheid system could not last. Leave aside for the time being the injustice of the whole thing. It simply was not stable. There were organized protests and demonstrations within. There was armed struggle based on the borders of the Republic. There was open fighting in Southwest Africa, today called Namibia. There were sabotage and attacks within the country itself. There was an international boycott of South Africa, which got stronger each year. White people were leaving the country. White people with skills. And in the United States, with its



powerful economy and its large Black population, there was a growing anti-apartheid, pro-boycott movement that was very ominous to the current system.

De Klerk's thinking went through all the phases that you might anticipate. Perhaps we could have a constellation of independent states? Perhaps we could have a confederation of racial groups in which each group would have its rights guaranteed. Perhaps we could have a central government with two presidents, both of whom had to agree to a policy before it could be implemented.

All of these were white fantasies. And they did not deal with the core issues.

Sometimes it helps to step away and think of an entirely different situation. Let's think of our own country for a minute. Suppose we created a Federation of American States. That federation would have several members: The US, Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Columbia, and Canada. I know. This is bizarre, but stranger things have happened in world history. And anyway, this is an example to help us think through a situation.

The question at the convention in which these six countries draft their constitution, becomes, what would the Americans be demanding? What our core interests would we like to protect? And what do we fear? Well, I see two things. First, we would want to protect the primacy of the English language. I know. I know. Spanish is a nice language, but it is not *our* language and we don't want it to be the official language of the federation. And of course the Francophones in Quebec would want to promote French. In protecting English, we would have a natural ally in Anglophone Canada. But then the Mexicans, Cubans, Columbians, and Venezuelans would make an equally strong push for Spanish. If we are going to have a country, we are going to have to work out something that allows both English and Spanish to have their status protected. And French. I have a solution. Let's have three recognized languages: English, Spanish, and French. Each state will determine its own language, to be used in its courts, its Congress, its schools, but the schools will teach the second language of their choice as a required subject from grade one. I would predict that we Americans would teach Spanish as our second language, but I can see some American states opting for French, just to be contrary.

The second big issue to us, at least to our powerful corporations, would be that we want a guarantee of property rights. We don't want some damn fool communist nationalizing Dairy Queen or General Motors. For us, that would be non-negotiable.

And we would want some kind of guarantee of individual rights. What if an alliance of Catholic members in our new national parliament pushed through a law prohibiting divorce, as the Catholic church teaches? Or what if a caucus of Marginalized Peoples, including Hispanics and even Francophones, pushed through an Affirmative Action policy to compensate for past injustice. There will be favoritism -- oops, excuse me, compensatory adjustments -- for the next 25 years in all public decisions such as university admissions and scholarships, judicial appointments, contracts, police hirings, and so forth, until parity has been achieved. Or maybe even a quota system.

Ok. No. No. No. We are not going to sit there while people from Southern Mexico or Quebec get pushed to the front of the line because of some injustice that occurred 400 years ago when Spain conquered Mexico in the 1700s when Britain conquered Quebec.

We would insist on a “liberal” provision in the constitution that would guarantee individual rights and would allow the Supreme Court to strike down laws that violated those rights.

This scenario, outlined above, was how De Klerk’s thinking went. He was following the logic of pluralist thinking. “We have a problem. A serious problem. It is not solving itself, and our current policies are obviously not working. The situation is escalating so that there is a real danger of destabilization. Resistance Groups have interests that they feel are not being protected. And they are not going to go away just because we call them terrorists. We also have interests that we want to protect. The question is, how do we prevent some future disaster?”

De Klerk asked himself, what exactly is the issue and what is NOT? We know that in the end there will have to be a majority rule election, and Nelson Mandela will be elected. But what will be the constitution? The good news was that Mandela had always said, way back in the 1960s before he was imprisoned for 28 years, that he favored full rights for all South Africans, and opposed any retaliation against the white population. And he was an attorney, with a sense of the law and how important it was. So what could be worked out?

First, there had to be a guarantee of Afrikaans, the language of the Afrikaner people. Language rights had to be written into the constitution.

Second, the white population owned land, perhaps 90% of all farmland within the Republic, not counting the homelands. And they owned mines, industry, and major businesses. Property rights had to be an integral element of the constitution.

Third, there had to be a liberal provision in the constitution guaranteeing individual rights.

This was a reality-based way of thinking, almost devoid of fantasy. I had encountered that way of thinking once before. Do you remember Professor Jeppe at Stellenbosch University? In our conversation, he said something that I found stunning. Just a few weeks before, there had been a universal suffrage election in Zimbabwe that had brought Robert Mugabe to power. There had been a fifteen year civil war in Zimbabwe in which Mugabe was seen as a terrorist murderer, a serious threat to South Africa. What Jeppe said to me was that “we” met with him before the election and worked out an understanding that he would protect our interests. Whoa! WE? That was unexpected. And what would those interests be, I thought to myself? No nationalization of white property and no support for South African resistance forces. I suddenly realized that the Broederbund was responding to reality in a way I did not anticipate.

Fortunately, for De Klerk Mandela was in agreement with his key points.

Protect Afrikaans: Check

Protect property rights: Check

Protect individual rights through a “liberal” constitution: Check

The two men worked arm in arm for a time. The first majority rule election specified that the highest vote getter would be President and the second highest vote getter would be Vice President. That meant Mandela and De Klerk.

But tension between the two men emerged. I think it was inevitable. De Klerk had to fight for the rights of his constituents, just as Mandela had his own fight. For a time the two were estranged, but they never broke ties. When De Klerk’s role in national government was over, he would always stop by the Presidential Mansion with his wife when he was in town. Those meetings were always cordial.

When De Klerk died in November, he issued a posthumous video making a statement of exceptional power. He looked very frail as he spoke. Here is what he said.

First, he apologized for apartheid. He had been criticized for never making a strong enough renunciation of the system that had initially brought him to power. I always thought those criticisms were unfair, but he did not want to go to his grave with doubts about exactly what he thought of the apartheid system. Here is what he said:



“I, without qualification, apologise for the pain and the hurt and the indignity and the damage that apartheid has done to black, brown and Indians in South Africa. I do so not only as the former leader of the National Party, but in terms of my individual conscience...”

But there was a second part to his final statement. It had to do with the 1996 constitution, which he and Mandela had worked out: “I’m deeply concerned about the undermining of many aspects of the constitution, which we perceive almost day to day.”

He finished with a statement of hope, that South Africa is a great country that can be even greater if the people of good will put their heads together and address what needs to be done.

It was a very patriotic statement, filled with realism, regret, honor, and hope.

These concerns about the political system and the constitution were almost identical to the concerns expressed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who had died just a month before De Klerk.

These three great men – Mandela, Tutu and De Klerk. All three were Nobel Peace Prize winners. All three saw similar problems and similar solutions, including corruption I might add. They were the three indispensable men who orchestrated South Africa's rescue from destruction.

Thank you for listening.

(And note that I have separate podcasts in Stocktonafterclass on Mandela and Tutu).