

## Time for the church to get practical

In our fledgling democracy we South Africans continued our journey towards maturing as a democratic nation when we voted on Wednesday, May 8.

The people of South Africa have spoken. Now it is time to get down to work.

In this column I examine the different roles that the church and government need to play.

History has shown how the Church loses its distinctiveness when governments are allowed to capture the Church's role in society. The opposite is true when the Church tries to run the affairs of state.

The distinctiveness of any organisation or institution is defined by the purpose it serves. When this purpose is eroded the institution loses its distinctiveness. So, it is essential to revisit the original purposes of church and the state.

We need to understand the different roles. Both government and church have tremendous responsibilities due to their influence over the masses of people under their authority.

Our government is built and founded on the principles of the Freedom Charter. These are the pillars of our democracy.

The Freedom Charter states that government is “based on the will of the people”. Democracy is, literally, rule by the people. The term is derived from the Greek “*dēmokratiā*” – “the *people* [*demos*]”...“*govern* [*kratos*].” In Latin, democracy was defined as *vox populi vox Dei*: “*the voice of the people is as the voice of God.*”

However, the Church’s rule of law is the will of God for all humanity as revealed in the scriptures. It is a theocracy.

This the distinct line that separates the church from the State. The State is governed by a democracy that is determined by the will of the people. The Church is governed by a theocracy established by the will of God to focus on different matters in society – some of which overlap with the responsibilities of government.

The distinctiveness of both church and state define their roles, as well as their parameters for participation.

I am not inferring that there should be no involvement by the Church in the state, but rather a separation based on our distinct roles and responsibilities.

An example of the overlap is that one presumes that both church and state agree to the values of integrity, equality and accountability. Together, as church and state we work to ensure the welfare of our nation when we live these values.

*“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; But when a wicked man rules, the people groan.”* (Proverbs 29:2 NKJV)

At a more basic level the role of the state is to provide an enabling environment in which all citizens can function to their highest potential. In South Africa, as in other democracies, this simply means that government must focus on meeting the primary needs of all its citizens.

The Church’s role is defined by Jesus the Christ. *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”* (Matthew 16:18-19 NKJV)

In the scripture, Jesus mentions two distinct realms of governance, namely the Church and the Kingdom of Heaven. The Church’s mandate is to preach the gospel of salvation as well as the gospel of the Kingdom.

The word “gospel” means “good news”. The Church is known for the gospel of salvation. It is the good news of the King and His Kingdom that must be revealed to the city and our nation through practical works.

Communities are transformed through the evidence of the Kingdom. What is the Kingdom? It is the place where the sovereign rule of government is upheld. The kingdom comprises different initiatives that affect and transform civil society.

In a municipal or parliamentary setting strategies are debated with the intention of providing solutions to the problems of humanity. These strategies are implemented in society to secure a better life for all.

It is in the cities and towns of South Africa that you find the implementation of different departments where they address the needs of civil society. There are no school buildings in parliament or city hall. The institutions of learning are found in the suburbs and townships.

In like fashion the Church's parliament gathers on Sundays and every other day of the week to strategize and equip people on how to best reveal the Kingdom of God to humanity. In the Kingdom of God, we have different departments that address the needs of civil society.

It is time for the Church to reveal the Kingdom to humanity in practical ways – to turn strategy and prayer into practice.

An excellent example of the effectiveness of the Kingdom of God is our former president, the late honourable Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. It is at the Healdtown Wesleyan (Christian) school in the Eastern Cape that one of the greatest statesmen of the world was prepared for the political arena.

Education is implemented in the kingdom.

The Church is more than a religious institution. The Church must leave the buildings and the state must leave chambers of governance, and both should become more visible in the nation.

The Church must demonstrate the Kingdom through its initiatives. Let us become known for our Kingdom initiatives which make a real difference in people's lives.

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