

The church as the conscience of a corrupt society

Covid-19 has opened a new window in the way we interact as religious leaders. It has forced us to collaborate to help people during these challenging times. It has brought the spirit of brotherhood among us as believers.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 is not our only societal challenge. We also have:

- Inequality in our society
- Government corruption
- Violence against women and children
- Substance abuse
- Crime in general
- Poverty
- Racism
- Xenophobia
- Poor health infrastructure

The common theme is morality – or the lack thereof. According to Gustafson; “morals are concerned with giving direction to human behaviour in light of what one believes to be right or good.”

Morals help us to answer the practical question: “what should I do?”

It is evident that moral decline is behind our problems, and that it is threatening the future of our country.

There is a hopelessness among the people of our country.

The sad reality is that no-one wants to take responsibility for the moral decline. Maybe the government is correct not to take full responsibility.

South African society is failing to recognise that it is responsible for the moral decline.

Government has become a handy scapegoat of a society that fails to take full responsibility for the state of affairs in the country.

The fact is that the leaders and officials who serve in government are all part of our society.

The quality of our government depends on the quality of our society. The corruption that we see in our government structures reflects the corruption that is in our society.

It can be argued that only government has the means to lead in the process of healing and rehabilitation. But, we know government cannot succeed without social partners.

Religious leaders should be the champions of morality. It is time for the religious leaders to take a high moral ground and start to form and shape the morality of our society.

Are the Church and the religious leaders ready to take up this task?

When I listen to religious leaders speaking, they sound like opposition parties in parliament.

The story that is being followed is the corruption of the government. It is a fact that the government is corrupt, but is that all? Is the government corrupt alone?

Maybe the corruption we see within the government is like a drop of water in the ocean.

I want to believe that the private sector and our society are more corrupt.

As religious leaders we are not taking an organic approach in dealing with the issue of corruption.

The key to open the organic approach to our ministry is to follow the words of Jesus Christ in John 13:34

“A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another”.

I want to reflect on love as the unifying principle that brings and gives purpose to everything we do.

If our leadership is centred on love, we would approach the challenges of our time without taking sides but stick in doing what is right and just. At times we religious leaders fall into a trap of choosing one over the other.

We denounce the government as corrupt, but we fail to do the same to the private sector that is also corrupt.

Is it because we benefit from the side we don't condemn?

Other religious leaders defend the government, maybe because of the benefits they receive from some government officials.

As religious leaders we are called to love everyone and fight for justice. When we approach our ministry, we should be guided by love and even challenge those whom we love.

Some of the people whom we love are corrupt, and we are forced to speak to their conscience and call them to conversion.

What is needed in our country is the proclamation of Good News. The Good News should be proclaimed to the poor, rape victims, to the victims of crime, to the corrupt, xenophobic and the racist.

South Africa is in need of hearing the Word of Hope from the proclamation of the Good News. The proclamation of the Good News will help in the formation of a South African society. It is through embracing the Word of God that our conscience is formed.

As religious leaders we should push for the introduction of religious studies in our schools. We can never expect a society to be upright without forming its children, the future of the country.

What weight do we give each in the formation of conscience?

Conscience is the whole person's commitment to values and considered judgement of what "I must do" in light of that commitment to apply to those values. The forming takes place in society by appealing to various sources of moral wisdom. The sources of morality are the revelation of God and the scriptures.

Religion in its nature builds the moral fibre of society. When religion is not given a space to teach people values, then that society has no life and it is dead.

The religious leaders should join hands and claim their authority in South African society. As religious leaders let us aim at meaning what we say, and saying what we mean. Let us aim at knowing when we understand a truth and when we do not.

The call made to religious leaders is not to pay too much attention to the governments failings and in so doing fail to fulfil their own mission.

We should be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Our South African society is falling apart while religious leaders are petulant and not making any meaningful contribution to the problems of our society.

Religious leaders should join efforts in working towards building a society that is centred around the culture of Ubuntu. A society that isn't at war with itself. A society that is motivated, with a bright future.

Religious leaders have demonstrated during this difficult time of Covid-19 that we can work together to save lives.

Let our working together not end with Covid-19, but let's continue to hold hands and work together and build a New South Africa. Let us build together the Kingdom of God for all here earth.

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