

Religion and politics

A brief definition of “politics” by John Stott in his book *Issues Facing Christians Today* suggests that it is “...the art of living together in community”.

If such a definition is to be embraced, then it is not possible for us to divorce religion from politics.

We have become adept at compartmentalising our lives – a practice which is often based on personal expediency. It enables us to make the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. This is not a Biblical notion.

If one is to embrace the Stott definition, then it behoves us to take both our Christian vocation and responsible citizenship seriously. How do we do this?

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter five Jesus exhorts us to be the light and salt of the world. Light overcomes darkness and salt trumps blandness.

Therefore, it is a pity that politics South Africa has become associated with the corruption that undermines the people of our country, as is being highlighted by the various commissions of enquiry.

Sadly, it has been used far too often as justification for not voting in an election.

The Church is part of the community that is South Africa. But, as the Body of Christ, we have seemingly lost the ability to be the conscience of society because we have compromised that which we hold dear.

I am, of course, referring to those enduring virtues of truth, honesty and integrity. Upholding those values is devoid if it is not premised on the sacrificial love of Jesus – a love we need to incarnate in a world that is becoming increasingly individualistic and narcissistic (self-loving).

Is the church still relevant to being God’s agent for moral regeneration in our country? I ask this question because far too often we simply seem to mirror what is happening in the world.

If every person who professes to be Christian exercised their right to vote it can be one of the greatest waves of change that could put our beloved South Africa on the path of good clean governance for all citizens.

So, as God’s Church – and remember the church comprises people – we have an advantage over the politicians that no one could have – the opportunities to teach, guide and be patient. How do we do it? By being responsible citizens. And here are some of the virtues we bring into the citizenship arena:

Honesty

Modern society seemingly operates by the adage, “Never tell the truth when a lie will do as well”. This is playing itself out on our television screens like a never-ending soap opera. In entertainment parlance new seasons of corruption and dishonesty are constantly emerging.

Compassion

The root meaning of the word “compassion” rests in the understanding of “feeling with or suffering with others”. It is ironic that the duality between poverty and riches in our metro is so stark.

Would it not be wonderful if we all banded together to overcome poverty side by side with each other? We can, I believe, if we truly commit to the Biblical understanding that we are our brother and sister’s keeper.

Responsibility

Implicit to responsibility is accountability. However, our citizenry has seemingly turned this on its head by redefining responsibility as duplicity. It is also apparent in us having relegated our responsibility and elevated our rights. They are in fact opposite sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other. The same can be said about freedom and authority.

Respect

This starts from understanding that each and every person bears the God-image. Self-respect and respect for others is fundamental to good citizenry.

Far too often we have placed a value on our differences. This colour is better than that colour. Perhaps it is reminiscent of the Janis Joplin song, "O Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz. My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends".

Value judgements are made on the basis of what people have or do not have. Gone are the days where we can disagree with each other yet understand that we can still embrace one another because of our shared humanity.

Courage

Implied in this virtue is going against the tide, no matter how unpopular this may be in order to help another person. Citizens have an obligation to make wise choices; participating in the upcoming General Election on the 8th May 2019 will be your courageous stand.

I want to exhort every citizen to exercise your right and privilege to vote.

Remember the power of one?

God's only Son triumphed over the grave to set us right with God.

Let's be responsible citizens and make our mark for the sake of those who cannot speak up for themselves and, of course, our children. After all, we do leave a legacy for them. Happy voting!

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