

Crime as a new oppressor

It is God's divine plan for all human beings to be free.

Freedom is a gift meant to bring joy and life to God's people.

Anyone who interferes with another person's freedom and access to justice is offending God.

When God is offended by the oppression of his people, He appoints individuals to lead the people to freedom and justice.

The Bible details how God appointed prophets and leaders to fight for the liberation of His people.

Religion, by its nature, is meant to liberate.

Whether it liberates people physically or spiritually, its bottom line is to grant God's freedom and justice to His people.

In John 10:10 Jesus told his followers that "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full".

The ministry of Jesus was centred around liberating people spiritually.

Any kind of oppression undermines the mission of Jesus Christ. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2Cor 3:17).

If we are faithful in preaching the word and live according to his word, we stand a better chance of liberating ourselves and the people around us.

Let us take the Biblical background of liberation closer to home.

Pre-1994 many religious leaders were active in revolution against oppression.

Since the start of the 20th century, history tell us about the initiatives that were taken by many religious leaders in order to fight oppression.

Matters reached a climax after the elections of 1948. Leaders of all the white South African Churches (except the Dutch Reformed church) issued statements criticizing apartheid.

They took a stand in solidarity with the black clergy.

In the following years many clergy came into conflict with the government.

Clergy were sent to prison and some went into exile because of their opposition to oppression.

Unbowed, in 1968, the South African Council of Churches labelled apartheid a pseudo-gospel in conflict with Christian principles.

Many churches raised funds and offered a place of refuge to people from all political parties.

But, the time has come to ask some hard questions about our liberation:

- If people in our communities are living in fear, is the work of salvation accomplished?
- If violent crimes such as assault and armed robbery are high, is the work of salvation accomplished?
- If the violence against women and children is very high, is the work of salvation accomplished?
- If the crimes such as vandalism and theft are high; is the work of salvation accomplished?
- If our young people are experiencing a high rate of unemployment because of the power struggle between private sector and the government, is the work of salvation accomplished?
- If you have an extremely high rate of corruption, is the work of salvation accomplished?
- Can we really claim that our people have been truly liberated from oppression?

The reality is that people are living in fear because of the high rate of crime.

Looking at the crime rate of our country, we need men and women inspired by God to work towards the salvation of our people.

Faith-based organisations should take time and reflect on whether or not we are fulfilling our purpose of salvation of souls.

We are called to come together as different faith-based organisations and work on the programme of liberating the people of our country.

This is how we can achieve the second liberation:

- We need to find ways of gaining back our moral voice. Some churches have lost their moral voice. There should be an awareness campaign against the abuse of power by certain members of the clergy.
- One of the legacies of apartheid is broken families. Most families were headed by mothers as the fathers were forced into the migrant labour system. Sons had no proper mentoring. Angry young men grew up fighting for survival. Our society still lacks proper mentoring for young men. Family ministry should be developed to help in healing broken families. We should establish a mentoring programme for the next generation of men.
- An inter-denominational youth renewal is needed to bring awareness to young people about the evils of crime. As church leaders we should work together to guide and motivate young people spiritually. Renewal celebrations should be organised.

The church has a responsibility of leading the people of God to repentance, and also invite them to join hands to fight crime, that is taking away our freedom.

Thomas Aquinas says, "Salvation comes totally from God and totally from human beings".

The responsibility of saving our country is totally our responsibility.

We can never be passive as prophets.

The call we should make, is to call all South Africans to salvation.

They are called to experience the true meaning of being the children of God.

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