

Violence against women shows that South African society is at war with itself

The violation of women is violence that is bodily, psychological, and spiritual. Any violence against women is an attack on the image and likeness of God.

The attack on women is a clear sign of a society that is undermining God as a creator. Women have a special place in the plan of God.

They have a responsibility of nurturing life in the womb, give birth and care for that life. This is an enormous responsibility that had be entrusted to women.

They take this responsibility with love and pride. Women are happy to offer themselves to God as instruments of bringing life and co-create with God.

Whenever an infant or any child is raped there is a possibility of destroying her ability to bring life into the world.

Rape leaves bodily, psychological and spiritual wounds.

There are many emotional and psychological reactions that victims of rape and sexual assault can experience and the most common of these is depression.

Depression can affect one's behaviour and relationship with other people. The survivors will often have feelings of sadness, unhappiness and hopelessness.

These effects can contribute in making a women incapable of have children. That would be taking something of value from her.

That would be disturbing or interrupting God's plan.

Society has a responsibility of protecting women from any kind of violence. A society that protects women is a society that protects its future.

Any attack on women from society is an attack on its pillars and roots.

A society that allows attack on women is a society that is at war with itself. South African society is at war with itself, as shown by the ongoing attacks and violence against women.

Many of the social structures that are supposed to help and protect the dignity of women are failing women. I am talking about government, culture, NGOs and some women sodalities or groups, as well as religious formations.

It has been reported many times that some of the government departments that are expected to defend and protect women have let them down. These departments have failed to make sure that the rights of women are respected and protected.

There are many cases where women go to the police station to report a crime and are turned away. In court, women are subjected to humiliating questions that undermine their dignity.

As a result, some women prefer to suffer in silence because they believe that there is no justice for them but humiliation and trauma.

In some of the rural areas women are abused in the name of cultural practises.

We still have cultures that are forcing women into marriage. You will find that the woman has no say in the matter.

In some instances, a woman will be raped and the family members would suggest that this is a family matter the police are not needed.

According to my understanding culture is meant to promote justice, protect life and the dignity of the people.

In South Africa it is not unusual to find women's organisations supporting a person accused of violence against women. In some instances members of these organisations intimidate victims who want to testify in court.

It is discouraging to see women failing to support one another. Sometimes I ask myself if this behaviour reflects some kind of self-hate.

Women also turn to religious formations or churches for spiritual fulfilment and protection. Unfortunately, in our country we have heard of many cases where women have been victimised and sexually assaulted while they are seeking help.

Sadly, these acts of cruelty against women in our churches are performed in the name of God. In Matthew 11:28-30 we hear Christ's invitation, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light".

After so many acts of violence against women from our churches, do women of our country have reason to trust this invitation?

If the women of our country have no place to go find refuge, what lies in the future for them and our country?

I firmly believe that women should come together and create a support base for themselves. Let me make few suggestions for the way forward:

- They should empower themselves through education. They should use education to break the stereotypes that are in our society. Education would help give them independence and present a true image of a woman.
- Women who are specialising in scripture should deal with whether scripture verses are seen to be undermining the dignity of women. They should work towards developing a narrative that reflects the scriptural message that women are favoured by God and possess His image and attributes.
- They should organise themselves and to transform the justice system and police services that seem to be undermining the rights of women.
- Women should make their voice heard and break the silence that perpetuates their abuse.

I wish all women would echo the words of Madeleine Albright, "It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent".

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