

## Setting God's People Free to live a Christian life

Mike Smith

The title of this column could quite easily be a reference to the account in Exodus when Moses was sent by God to argue for the release of the Israelites from bondage as illustrated so vividly, if inaccurately, in the 2014 film "Exodus: God and Kings".

No, as it happens, it is the title of "A Report from the Archbishops' Council" adopted in full by the Church of England in February 2017.

This report, prepared by members of the lay leadership task group, states in its introduction that "a great opportunity lies before us. It is the same opportunity that has presented itself to the Church in every decade for the last 100 years.

"It is an opportunity that arguably has not been fully grasped since the days of Wesley.

"Will we determine to empower, liberate and disciple the 98% of the Church of England who are not ordained and therefore set them free for fruitful, faithful mission and ministry, influence, leadership and, most importantly, vibrant relationship with Jesus in all of life?

"And will we do so not only in church-based ministry on a Sunday but in work and school, in gym and shop, in field and factory, Monday to Saturday?"

Of course, this vision is shared by other branches of the Christian Church.

But having a vision is not enough. It has to become a reality.

In previous columns on this page, I have made it clear that I advocate the full participation of women and men of God in the places they find themselves from Monday to Saturday.

What triggered me to write about it again is a recent chance remark made by a member of the clergy which appeared to reduce the role of the laity to being somewhat subordinate.

This may be the unintended consequence of the role the "church" seems to play in society especially when it comes to very topical happenings currently in our local government setup.

Following the recent local elections, the Nelson Mandela Bay Church Leaders Network, consisting of a group of bishops and other leaders of independent churches engaged – together with civil society groups such as business, labour and community groupings – with local politicians and councillors to encourage them to form a viable government structure.

Without negating the importance of church leaders (who probably represent more active members collectively than do the political parties), one can be left with the impression that they were the only representatives of God's Church in the discussions.

That would be blatantly incorrect.

The Church is found in business, labour, community groupings and yes, even in politics in the form of individuals who have given their lives over to following Jesus Christ.

Other believers were part of the discussions.

But of course, these members of the Church of Christ may not see themselves, primarily as believers.

The Archbishop Council's report warns: "until laity and clergy are convinced, based on their baptismal mutuality, that they are equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutually accountable in discipleship, and equal partners in mission, we will never form Christian communities that can evangelise the nation."

Why is it that Christians in the workplace do not see themselves as Christians first, accountants, lawyers, doctors, nurses, teachers etc., second?

They would in most part understand that missionaries who are sent out to foreign lands, who might also be doctors and engineers, would still be missionaries, and despite that, would serve communities as doctors and engineers.

So why not those of us who work in the greatest mission field in the world?

As a Christian, how do you conduct yourself at work?

Well, how would you conduct yourself at home amongst your family and friends. Whatever you have been taught in a church building can be applied outside of the building. In the recent history of the workplace and dare I say, up to now, the overarching action of a Christian at work is to do right and do it right now.

I recently had the privilege of joining a webinar addressing the subject of whistle blowers. Two people testified about their experiences, one is Cynthia Stimpel, a former SAA Group Treasurer, who in 2016 blew the whistle to the National Treasury about a dirty deal between the airline and BNP Capital.

The other is Themba Maseko, the former CEO of the Government Communications and Information Systems who appeared in 2019 before the Zondo Commission of Inquiry where he detailed his refusal to comply with the Gupta's wishes that he diverts the Government's entire advertising budget to the New Age newspaper.

When asked what motivated them to do what they did, both were clear that their Christian worldview of what was right and what was wrong, was responsible.

When asked whether others in the organisations were similarly motivated, they responded positively, but admitted that all had feared losing their jobs if they came out in support, a clear case of situational ethics.

But these two, knowing who their ultimate provider was, remained steadfast.

Whose task is it to make this truth known and equip these missionaries for works of service, if it is not the very same church leaders who form this grouping called NMB Church Leaders Network?

Set God's people free!

**Mike Smith, Workplace Minister**