

## **Good relationships will help heal SA society**

Jacob Freemantle

Good relationships are the foundation of a thriving society.

Whether we call ourselves "comrades, brethren, colleagues or friends," if that is not based on appreciating and developing relationships, our society has no future.

Our mental, physical and emotional wellbeing are all integrally foundational to human health. We are better placed to respond to any individual or corporate challenge when we are in a good relationship space.

Relationships affect our psychological and spiritual behaviour in our daily life. The environment we create reflects what is happening inside us and around us.

Our response to challenges depends largely on this inherent quality to relate both to ourselves and those around us.

When our natural inherent quality fails to positively connect within and to others, much becomes dysfunctional at a deeper human level. Psychologist Sheehan Fisher, a relationship expert, says broken or damaged social relationships can have a big impact on our mental health and wellbeing.

Today we are experiencing collapsing relationships in every sphere of society. Politically, intra-party wars are not only self destroying, but threaten cohesion of society as a whole.

Factionalism and disgraceful conduct have turned the younger generation away from politics.

Warring politicians forget that this practice is a distraction from delivering good governance. They also directly or indirectly compel South Africa society to be divided along factional lines.

Relationships are so broken that we have, without a choice of our own, been driven to belong to a faction. A clear example is when a cabinet minister attacks the country's constitution, a cornerstone of our human life and social foundation.

You can be sure that, irrespective of the truth behind the claims of the minister, some will defend them, while others – even in the same cabinet – will distance themselves.

In a democracy as young ours you can be sure anarchic relationships will follow. The repercussions of being governed by factions are too ghastly to contemplate.

The political infighting we are witnessing has gone beyond fair play. It will lead to further economic suffering, increase our national debt, and result in festering poverty and unemployment.

Political infighting has also taken on sinister undertones. Politically motivated assassinations are almost a daily occurrence. These murders resemble a style of dealing with opponents that was common during apartheid years.

The same criticism can be levelled against the Church. Relationships between leaders and within the body of the church have broken down.

When the church fails in its prophetic and pastoral mandate to restore relationships, our society will become a breeding zone for crime, war and destruction. We will lose the relevance of Christ's message if pastors and congregants do not actively work to restore relationships.

God has divinely positioned every member of the church to be an instrument of good relationships.

Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in the Vatican City wrote on 29 June 2004: "The salvation offered in its fullness to humanity in Jesus Christ by God and brought about and transmitted by the work of the Holy Spirit, is salvation for all people and of the whole person. It is universal and integral salvation. It concerns the human person in all his dimensions: personal and social, spiritual and corporeal, historical and transcendent. It begins to be made a reality already in history, because what is created is good and willed by God, and because the Son of God became one of us."

He continues: "universality and integrality of the salvation wrought by Christ makes indissoluble the link between the relationship that the person is called to have with God and the responsibility he has towards his neighbour in the concrete circumstances of history... in humanity's universal quest for truth and meaning, and it becomes the cornerstone of God's covenant with His people, as attested by the tablets of the Law and the preaching of the prophets."

The church as the custodian of family and societal relationships, cannot just be an idle spectator which is only concerned with going to heaven. If the church keeps quiet now and pretends to be blissfully ignorant of the call to renew society, we are deeply compromising the relevance of Christ's mission message.

We as a Church must rise now against the amateurish, disappointing and deliberate misrepresentations of the new democratic dispensation.

Churches are the hope to the restoration of good relationship or what is known as "social cohesion." People come to church as family members who must be enabled to harness family and societal relationships.

Relationship begins at home. When families cease to take relationship seriously, all institutions will be hollow skeletons that are incapable of service delivery.

As a Church, we will stand proud when we return to good relationship to which Christ commissioned us.

All professional work, our schools, industries, labour force and unions will also stand proud when they take the pledge to do something about dying relationships as a matter of urgency.

When that stewardship of good relationship happens, when love and respect are nurtured, the double portion of blessings will be our best harvest.

People of God, this can happen wherever you are.

Indeed, businesses will grow, politicians will deliver on their promises and the people of our country will flourish.

Good relationships will lead to the renewal of South African society at all levels.

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