

The silence of the Church makes it complicit in government failures

Gail Charalambous

Dear Church.

Why are we silent about the state of our beloved Country?

South Africans currently live in a broken society.

Our state-owned support systems and enterprises have collapsed, causing widespread suffering in the lives of vulnerable and marginalized citizens.

Instead of being empowered, they have been disempowered by a government whose behaviour is despicable and, at the very least, contemptuous.

In fact, if the truth be told, all of us have been affected in some way or another by the self-centred and largely corrupt people who govern us.

When elections come along, they pretend to care about us.

The real tragedy here is that we, the church-going community who worship together, are aware of the plight of our fellow congregants, yet we choose to remain silent.

We are guilty therefore, of contemptible behaviour ourselves.

We are also responsible for the mess we find ourselves in.

Church! We have to be better.

Instead of calling out leaders who push a populist agenda, and who don't know how much a loaf of bread costs, most of the churches choose to focus on soft issues, preaching feel-good, easy stuff.

We can't upset our congregation now, can we?

Some of us even go as far as preaching a prosperity Gospel.

We are happy to give a skewed version of the meaning of the Gospel, personalising the message, (it's all about me), and how well God has blessed me.

Let's take this one step further. Some men of the cloth relish and thrive in creating a celebrity status - how they dress, act and how good they look on the big screen.

The focus of this election should be about addressing poverty, unemployment and sustainable job creation.

Instead, the focus is cracking down on crime, which is a direct result of the three evils.

Some political parties, are even muttering about reintroducing the death penalty.

In my opinion, that's just plain lazy thinking, electioneering and a cop out!

Beloved Church, our focus should be on holding those in power to account for their actions.

I think it's time we started speaking up and speaking out loudly on a daily basis every day.

Jesus warned us against selfishness and greed.

We need to be reminded of the fact that, not only should we be feeding the hungry, we should also be reminding the state that "servant leadership" is key in addressing the plight of the majority of the electorate, who are forced to live in abject poverty because of the disgraceful behaviour of those in power.

Calling for the introduction of the death penalty is not the answer to crime. Neither is it a solution to redressing a broken and beaten society.

The very people who need the most assistance, the poor, homeless and the marginalised are the ones who will be sentenced to hang!

Shame on all of us!

The Church has many splendid initiatives, such as feeding schemes, and many other worthwhile projects.

They too are victims of state failure. The Epworth Children's Home for instance, which, after 105 years of dedicated service to children and families in need has announced that it will be closing due to the Department of Social Development's dysfunctional funding approach.

Again, why are we silent about the appalling behaviour of the state?

Church! Why are we so complicit?

Now is the time to speak out and call the government out for its wasteful expenditure, greed, wanton theft.

Too many wonderful initiatives cannot operate and deliver their valuable service to communities who are in dire need, all because our government just doesn't seem to care.

What happens to the folk who have been let down?

Better still, what is going to happen to the young people and their families who desperately need the intervention and services of organisations like the Epworth Children's Home?

When there's nowhere to go and nobody left to assist you, committing a crime seems to be the only option.

Then the church and state trot out the same old mantra – "we just have to get tough on crime!"

In the grim and dark days of apartheid, some members of the church community played a critical and influential role in highlighting the cruelties and injustices of the government, and in so doing helped to end these evils.

There was also a denomination of the Christian church which justified a system that tore communities apart and dehumanized folk by telling them where they could live, who they could or could not marry, forcibly removed families from their land and murdered and tortured folk.

Let us not go back the same situation, but band together as a united church and do good in the name of our faith.

Please Church, rise up, live the words of Jesus.

In the words of Rev Dr Munther Isaac

"The followers of Jesus risk all to speak truth to power.

This is not about making a statement. "Jesus did not say I was hungry, and you prayed for me and made a statement!"

"What many in the church lack the most today is courage.

"They know the truth.

"But they are not speaking the truth, because they fear the consequences.

"They fear a backlash!

"Many in the Church want to avoid controversy. Can you imagine if Jesus walked on earth avoiding controversy?" – I, for one, cannot!

Sincerely, your faithful servant, Gail Charalambous.