



# The Church's prophetic role in the face of corruption in the South African socio-political landscape

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## Abstract

This article concerns itself with the silence of the Church in South Africa since 1994. It opens by reflecting on the prevalent corruption in high places. There is a historical reference of how the Church and politics during the apartheid era worked in synergy to address the plight of the victims of prejudice, oppression, and racism. The Church's prophetic role diminished to a certain degree, regardless of the democratically elected Presidents' affirmations of the critical role of the Church in transforming the society. High profile Christians in government structures fail to influence the political power when passing the unjust laws. From their positions of power, they utter and promote statements and laws that expedite the negative impacts on humanity such as the perpetual marginalisation from human rights and access to resources etc. The remedial suggestions include an appeal to return to God, return to the Constitution of the land; and return to the transparent dialogue. The Church then is called upon to induce and arouse new ways of effecting a stronger sense of morality in the lives of people in South African society.

**Keywords:** Prophetic, Corruption, Church, Politics, Religion

## Introduction

Corruption in South Africa is expressed through connivance. Connivance in this article refers to tacit approval of wrongdoing. It is the secret approval of corruption in high places. In this regard, when considering government, it clearly has a huge role to play. South Africa is at the crossroads as its moral compass is being eroded by unscrupulous people. Since the arrival of freedom and democracy, the voice of the Church is not audible enough to usher and lead people to God. Corruption in the form of oppression of the poor is at an alarming level. The beneficiaries are social elites and political demagogues. Ethics in political governance had become opaque. The populace finds it incomprehensible regarding politics and Church's role in public policies. The opacity in moral values had magnified beyond explanation. In citing De Wet (2013: 2) one can conclude that in its socio-political manifestation, corruption can be defined as the diversion of public resources to non-public purposes (Basdeo, 2010:388). Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It hurts everyone whose life, livelihood or happiness depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority (Transparency International, 2011).

Transparency refers to clarity, and in this context, it is what can be termed naked truth. Truth that leads to quality of freedom in life. This is the era of national crisis. The *realpolitik* is at the loggerhead with *vox populi* - politics of power cannot balance with the voices of the masses. The Church, since 1994, has lost its significance, the Christian leadership is blunted under current political dispensation. Just as in the Old Testament era, the prophetic visions are rare (1 Sam 3:1). During the time, the supremacy of priesthood was taken over by the popularity of people such as Samuel the judge, the priest and the prophet. Wood (1970:230) tells us that:



In these capacities he filled a vital need in a crucial time of Israel's history. His work in correcting religious malpractice, maintaining national morale in the face of major disaster, promoting return to faith in God, and even establishing the new Israelite monarchy was of the greatest importance.

### **Church -Politics Past Synergies**

During the liberation struggle, the prophetic voice of the Church was loud and clear. The oppressive regime was not worried about inter-political opposition. Its main worry was the voice of the Church through South African Council of Churches (SACC) and other faith formations. These communities of faith had a unified voice addressing injustice and apartheid unreservedly. Under the inspirational and charismatic leadership of the likes of Beyers Naudé, Peter Storey, Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane etc. the voice of the Church in South Africa was vocal and audible. Today, the deafening silence is conspicuous. The euphoria of arrive-ness has exerted itself ecclesiastically and socio-politically. What is prevailing is sad.

More predominantly, however, are patterns of marginalisation in the state of the SACC's public presence as manifested in an initial sense of 'arrive-ness' and a more lasting situation of having to deal with a diminished influence within the ANC (De Wet 2015:7).

The only hope is found in the words of John de Gruchy that:

there is a concerted effort at the moment to revive the SACC. It has undoubtedly gone through a serious slump and decline, lacking leadership and losing credibility. But the truth is that, if there were no SACC, we would have to invent one because we need such a structure" (Van Tonder, 2014:2).

The arrival of democracy and freedom in 1994 rekindled the false hope that the nation was entering the Promised Land after years of slavery (colonialism) and wilderness wanderings (apartheid). The secular state under African National Congress emerged. The new constitution of 1996 acknowledges the religious plurality of the country's populace. Some prominent theologians and the clergy became politicians. Forster (2012:78) concurs:

In South Africa, since the end of Apartheid rule, we have seen many former 'prophets' being silenced by being offered high-paying and powerful positions in the State.

Regardless of their presence in politics of the land, morality is continually pushed to the furthest corners of social conscience. Laws encroaching on Christian values are passed through the clear majority vote in parliament. Good examples here include compromising the sanctity of life (Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1996); fidelity and sanctity of legal marriage (Domestic Partnership Bill, 2008), the so-called gay marriages (Civil Union Act, 2006) etc. The fundamental truth that "if a policy conforms to the golden rule that 'you must love your neighbour as yourself' then it is morally justifiable" (Engdahl, 2012: 17) became a norm for dereliction. Ethics were and are still been floundered, hence the irreversible endemic corruption levels in high places.

Nelson Mandela's administration recognised and publically acknowledged the role of the Church during the liberation struggle and in transforming the society. At that time, the Church through its ecumenical organs sat at the zenith of the new era. It implemented and practised the arm-chair theology, starting to go along with the flow. The mentality of "we have arrived" developed subtly and subliminally. They forgot their critical role in addressing the injustices of apartheid before 1994. Regardless of this stolidity, Mandela appreciated Churches so much that his biographer, Anthony Sampson (1999:314) stated that



Mandela could find more encouragement elsewhere, particularly from the Churches, which had been so cautious in opposing apartheid at the time when he had gone to jail.

In this treatise, Sampson (1999:315) outlines Smangaliso Mkhathshwa's 1968 statement that "the winds of change were blowing inside the Churches." This Catholic priest broke the white domination by producing a 'black priests' manifesto attacking racism within their Church, and vowing to become vocal in denouncing apartheid.

It is clear that Mandela gave Churches the pavilion of honour in transforming South Africa. The response of the Church was unfortunately slumping into false utopia of Solomon's time when everyone "lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree" (1 Kings 4:25).

The Mbeki era saw the enhancement of the Inter-Faith Movement leaders. By 2001, Mbeki and the Churches were walking far apart from each other. On 7 April, 2001, a historic event happened when the President convened a meeting with Church leaders. Hooper-Box and Gordin gave the press release:

The president decided to get the relationship between the government and the country's religious leaders back on track – and met 34 clerics of all faiths at the Union Buildings last week.

The gap between the Church and the state was felt when corruption escalated in the midst of the silence of the Churches. The prophetic voice was not heard in the corridors of political power centres. Sense had to come from above. Sadly, the same news release above continues that:

The meeting, initiated by the president, took place under the umbrella of the national religious leaders' forum, set up in 1997 by Nelson Mandela and religious leaders.

The ruling party was starting to feel the rattle of its foundations. Chikane (2012:179) gives this picture:

Between 2003 and 2010, the ANC entered the stormiest waters it had encountered since returning from exile and, like any ship battling for such a long time, it runs the risk of being wrecked.

The other attempt by Mbeki administration was on 30 April 2003, when the meeting was held with 33 religious leaders.

The two delegations reached a broad understanding on the need for the involvement of religious leaders in issues such as nation-building, reconciliation, poverty eradication, social and moral delivery and better communication with the rest of the country (Battersby, 2015).

Mbeki continued to highlight the role of the Church even after his tenure as the President of the Republic. He was a guest speaker at the Anglican Conference in Johannesburg, where he reiterated the crucial role of the Churches. For instance, Peter Kenny of Ecumenical News 6 Oct 2013 reports that

Former South African president Thabo Mbeki has criticized the country's Churches for not playing a greater role since the end of apartheid and has hit out at Churches all round Africa for not speaking louder on issues facing the continent. He criticized South African Churches for "demobilising" after the end of apartheid and called on them to become more active in responding to the challenges faced by society



This sentiment is not uncommon, as the ecumenical voice had disappeared. The South African leader who is respected worldwide realised that the Churches had become silent. At this Anglican Conference Mbeki reiterated that the Church was one of the principal fighters for liberation but has now become demobilised. It has distanced itself in a way from responding as it used to respond to national challenges and has disappeared somewhere over the horizon. The Church's voice is no longer strong as it used to be. That voice is more needed now than ever. He concluded his speech by highlighting "The leadership of the Church is sorely missed."

Under President Thabo Mbeki, the administration encountered a great deal of criticism for its address of various issues. These are spelled out in Chikane's book; *The Things that Could Not be Said (2013)*. One of the burning issues mentioned and elaborated in this book is corruption and its ramifications. Indeed, in our current era, corruption has taken deeper roots. The status quo shoots itself on the foot all the time. The more they try to fix, the worse it becomes. Ethics and values are godless and do not even locate *ubuntu* at the centre of civil administration. The question that any theologian can ask is "Where is conscience?" However, it should be noted that godless values come to play when conscience is seared with a hot iron. One of the Reformed ethicists, Jürgen-Burkhard Klauke (2012:113) says:

The man of conscience fights a lonely struggle against the overwhelming pressure of dilemmas requiring a decision. But the extent of the conflicts within which he has to choose – with no one to advise and support him but conscience – tears him apart.

This might explain the rationale behind Christian prophetic apathy in the political landscape.

The current President Zuma's administration is the most scathed of them all. The Church in South Africa has lost its saltiness. Whatever religious statement the president utters, becomes a national debate championed by Churches. The rationale behind this is that the President's ethical norms are in collision and not consonant with religious didactics. The South African Council of Churches (SACC), Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), and The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA) become vocal only when the *vox populi* address and scathe the president's religious *gratis dictum* (mere assertions). It looks like the prophetic role of the Church in South Africa has adopted the position of *cave quid dicis, quando et qui* (beware what you say, when, and to whom). Some theologians may adopt the justification that the free state channels its religion to privacy, since now we are *chiesa libera in libero stato*. We are a free Church in a free state. This is escapism mentality.

President Zuma constantly appeals to religious leaders to participate in the social cohesion and poverty eradication initiatives. Common in the current state of affairs is the promotion, elevation, and commendation of the president and some of his cabinet ministers by the leaders of African Initiated Churches, especially those of charismatic inclinations. Constantly one sees, reads, or hear of the visits of these ministers to some cultic centres where they are being prayed for, and affirmed in public. One hardly hears from these ecclesiastical formations, any prophetic voice rebuking the wayward conduct of politicians or religious leaders. A typical example recently is of the Hawks boss, Berning Ntlembeza. Few days after the courts nullified his appointment; he turned to controversial Pastor Mboro's Church... "When Mboro took over the mic, he began by praying for Ntlembeza:

I'm saying to you, my general, you are unbreakable, you are indisputable, you are incorruptible, you are unmovable... even if a court says it's over, God can resurrect you to a higher life. It is not over until God says it's over (City Press, 2017/03/26:2).

This anomaly takes these politicians to as far as Nigeria, to receive the man of God's rubber stamps of their political steps. Like in many of African territories, this always happens before



or around the times of elections. The African Initiated Churches had always suffered political abuse in the hands of politicians. This is probably due to their Church leaders' theological ignorance or shallowness. Their indifference regarding political ramifications is exploited for political gains. President Zuma himself regularly visits these ecclesiastical formations where he always receive a hero's welcome.

In 2012, just prior to African National Congress Conference in Mangaung, when ecumenical prophetic voice's fade was felt, some Christian leaders convened and drafted a letter to the government to express their concerns regarding corruption. This formation is known as South African Christian Leaders Initiative (SACLI). It brought together mainstream Christian leaders, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and the African Initiated Churches leaders together. Their letter received some gravel reactions, especially from the ruling party, the African National Congress, through its General Secretary, Gwede Mantashe. In response "he labelled as "mischievous" and "vitriolic" the letter written by the clergy."<sup>1</sup>

Natural laws and natural justice are no more considered when laws of the land are formulated. Christianity provides for an ethics of responsibility intertwined with an ethics of duty. Once the natural law is compromised, values suffer inevitably. "Natural law theories base ethical norms on the facts of nature" (Wurzburger, 1994:11). In other words, morality, values, behaviour and ethics work symbiotically and synchronically to articulate and form a just society governed by just laws. This is because natural law is both a scientifically based description of how things normally do behave and a set of precepts as to how they ought to behave (Grenz, 1997:46).

Morality can be seen in the order or nature of things. The present generation grows in godless society, and the environment infested with sexual promiscuity and violence. What our government fails to see or realise is that: "where promiscuity increases, families are destabilized and more and more children grow to adulthood in environments marked by emotional deprivations, stress, abuse, and violence" (Miller, 1987:87).

The common enemy (colonialism and apartheid) had been defeated. All stakeholders, political and ecclesiastical, were singularly united against the apartheid regime. But now, comrades in arms are fighting each other, various forces position for power against one another. Instead of nation-building, there are internal strifes and conflicts; and the Church is conspicuous by her silence. What can be said about the Church in South Africa is succinctly put forward by Boon (1998:74): "The team which was strongly united, suddenly falls apart because its vision disappears." Transformation in all spheres of life has commenced moving with a snail pace. The tradition of our liberation fighters had become stagnant. By tradition here it is meant what De Gruchy (2011:10) refers to as "handing on from one generation to another something that gives meaning to life and shapes the identity of persons and communities today." Embracing corruption is enhancing human degradation. Church and politics are not in synergy for the promotion of human welfare. It is true that "when worldviews collide, nations hang in the balance" (Parsley, 2007: xv). The South African masses are watching with despair and restlessness as politicians ravenously enrich themselves at the expense of the destitute and marginalised poor. This is observed by Punt (2012:2) that South African citizens are deprived not only of their legitimate claim upon resources but must observe public officials squandering such resources on exorbitant yet fleeting materialist tokens of wealth and prosperity. This is theodic crisis that calls for ethical reflection. Brueggemann (1990:130) helps us to understand this crisis:

A theodic crisis occurs when the dominant social values, presuppositions, and policies no longer function meaningfully, and claim assent no longer are credited by public opinion as having foundational authority.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gatewaynews.co.za/mantashe-warns-clerics-to-back-off/> (11 November, 2015)



## Socio-political status in post-Apartheid South Africa

The current political leaders in South Africa seem to have forgotten the evil systems of colonialism and apartheid that prevailed and ruled South Africa for about three-and-a half centuries. From their positions of power, they utter and promote statements and laws that expedite the negative impacts on humanity such as the perpetual marginalisation from human rights and access to resources etc. The worship, morals, values, and ethics are all marred by *realpolitik* in high places. Politicians use power to control citizens' livelihood and access to basic human rights. The system advantages the minority elite at the disadvantage of the majority poor.

The constitutional justification for abuse of power and self-enrichment slowly stokes the fires of civil reactions and rebellions. Politicians and some clergy are symbiotic comrades. The era reflects the Church as an obscure partner who should only assert and affirm the current government (De Villiers, 2013). Some Christian leaders and ordinary believers are prepared to put their necks on the block for the purity of the gospel witness. They opt for the real biblical *marture* – witnesses of Christ by their death. These are from all racial and cultural backgrounds. They come from diverse ecclesiastical formations and confessions; and are taking their stands like their predecessors, such as Beyers Naude, Nico Smith, Allan Boesak, Desmond Tutu; and many other unsung heroes who in God's sight are or were 'known, yet regarded as unknown' (2 Cor 6:9).

On some political platforms, championing justice is equated with rebellion, absurdness, white monopoly, or *swart gevaar*. South Africa is made up of groups instead of being an entity singing one anthem under one flag, respecting same national symbols etc. People in politics do not lack belief, they lack a living faith – a radical loyalty to God and his written Word. They are too comfortable with their *private* doctrine of God (VanGemeren, 1990:303).

The past and the present generations in South Africa need not be *pedagogised* or reminded of the evil systems of colonialism and apartheid that prevailed and ruled South Africa for centuries. Ours was an abnormal territory where humanity suffered immensely through laws that dispossessed people of their land, disenfranchisement, tribal balkanisation, racial prejudices, perpetual marginalisation from human rights and resources etc. Entering the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, one comes across the inscription:

For white South Africans' the 1960s was a decade of boom and unprecedented prosperity. For black South Africans, the 1960s saw apartheid harden into its most dogmatic and racist form.

## The prophetic role of the Church in post-Apartheid South Africa

For South African Church today, the pulpit has lost its beauty. Opposition against the Church's role is distressing. South Africans, together with their political leaders have generally stopped consulting the Lord both for personal or national welfare. The religious condition is deficient and morale low. People's spirits are crushed and in a despair. Human ideologies such as egotism, individualism, secularism, and atheism have taken control of some of the nation's moral foundations. These were the conditions in which the Church's prophetic role should become conspicuous. South Africa is faced with what Israel of Samuel's days faced. Nürnberger (2004:151) paints this picture for us that:

It is on the whole, the prophetic movement which gave expression to this popular opposition, beginning with the story of Samuel, the first prophet of substance. In 1 Sam 2ff we are told of the demise of the dynasty of the *priest* Eli and his replacement with the *prophet* Samuel (3:20)

South Africa transitioned from apartheid to democracy. This has muzzled the prophetic voice of the Church as God was pushed to periphery and/or to obscurity. Since 1994 when South



Africa became a secular state, the worship escalated into being syncretic, and morals became decadent. The aim of this article is to point out the silence of the current South African Church in the face of escalating corruption. Human abuse and state resources suffer immensely in the hands of those in power. Palaces of justice had turned into the torture chambers for human dignity. The fact remains that:

Corruption is seen as a crucial issue in the South-African society. It is an issue that is urgently in need of critical and remedial action (De Wet, 2015:1).

The Church, as the community of faith, is a prophet in a decadent culture. A prophet's role is always not popular, especially with the socio-political status quo. Christ does not expect His Church to be meaningless in society or to be peripheral, but to be central and play the crucial role in human social interactions (Hendriks, 2010:275, Sarpong, 1990:9). The Church's missional task is both proclamational and incarnational. This is to be concerned for the welfare of the people within and outside the Church (Walls & Ross, 2008:35, 46–47).

In its proclamational (evangelism) mandate the Church is assigned a prophetic role of advocacy. It is expected to continue to echo her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless. The Church must denounce and combat all that degrades and destroys people. The prophetic voice of the Church must be heard and this voice must challenge all the people in society to become deeply involved in addressing this problem (Pieterse, 2001:122). Prophetic preaching does not shrink from disclosing and challenging the corrupt elements that keep the current state of this world from bearing witness to its destiny (De Wet, 2013:1/2).

Churches are therefore required to address the issue of corruption in political landscape of South Africa. The WCC points out that Christian faith compels Christ's followers to seek justice, to witness to the presence of God, and to be part of the lives and struggles of people made weak and vulnerable by the structures and cultures of society (2013:84-88). Forster (2012:78) correctly points out:

Christians have a God-given responsibility to engage any power, whether an individual or an institution, that acts contrary to the principles of the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Christ. Every believer is to be a prophet, listening for the will of God in society and living to see that will enacted...

It is extremely essential that the Church should incorporate a missional advocacy role in their mission agenda because, justice is an attribute of God. He rules with justice and righteousness (Ps 96: 10 – 13). He is a lover of justice, has established equity; executes justice and righteousness (Ps 99:4). The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed (Psalm 103:6-8). It is therefore not theologically correct to assume that "Political rationality and faith could coexist peacefully alongside each other as long as religion was limited to the private sphere" (Führding, 2013:129). This is a tension that is looming currently between South African politics and religion. The Church fights for its prophetic role of realignment towards righteousness and justice, while the government attaches a special emphasis "on the need for religious communities to contribute to a fundamental element of democracy: building the moral fibre of the nation" (Kusmierz & Cochrane, 2013:65).

As a voice of God, the Church is a prophet expected to be *related to community*. It is a task to be for the common good (1 Cor 12:7). This task is desirable, not because it is more spiritual, because it builds up the community (1 Cor 14:3, 4, 12). "But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort." The three key words here; *oikodome*, *paraklesis*, *paramuthia* (1 Cor 14:3): build up (strengthening), encourage, or exhort reveal the purpose of prophecy. The apostolic appeal to the Corinthians is the desire for the strengthening or building up of the local Church through their prophetic gift (14:12, 26). Central to the prophetic activity in the Spirit is the creation or building up of a new community. Wehrli (1992:46) drives the point home that "Prophecy is understood as a mark of the Spirit and a



sign of the new age in the Church.” Prophecy is *more specific in function*. It does not build in general, but it builds up the local community, specifically by encouragement and consolation (1 Cor 14:3). It is the sign to the members that God is with and among them. For the outsiders, prophecy is a conviction, a call to new accountability, discerning the secrets of one’s heart, and repentant worship, declaring, “God is really among you” (1 Cor 14:25). The fact remains that the Church prophetically, is a moral community... ‘the Church not only has, but is, a social ethic, a koinonia ethic’ (Smit, 2007:263).

### **Remedial action in the face of malignant corruption**

The current political landscape spends exorbitant amounts of money trying to clean up their mess. Mondli Makhaya of City Press (2017 March 26) is spot on that “At the height of the Nkandla scandal, ANC leaders and public representatives were almost evangelical in the defence of their leader and his wayward ways”.

There is an attempt at all costs to cover the tracks. Our politicians try to burrow themselves in the sand for corruption that has significantly tainted their image. In the same City Press article, Makhaya continues:

The current period has seen ministers and arms of state arrogantly spend public money on cases they know they have no chance of winning, and which are in defence of obviously unlawful actions...

The proposal set forth is for Church to be prophetic and call politicians to return to God, return to the Constitution of the land, and finally, return to the transparent dialogue.

### **Return to God**

The message to be taken to the politicians is that

God is not merely a quality of nature or of humanity; he is not simply the highest human being. He is not limited to our ability to understand him. His holiness and goodness go far beyond, infinitely beyond ours, and this is true of his knowledge and power as well (Erickson, 1999:76).

This calls for the return to the basic tenets of theological outlook.

The realignment of the prophetic voice and the revitalisation of the transformative presence in society need to be anchored in a profound and far-reaching theological reorientation (De Wet, 2015:10).

As a society, cultural incorrectness emanates from the views or perceptions about God. The belief in the transcendent and immanent God aligns the decisions to be taken when deliberating on moral or ethical issues. When worldviews collide, nations hang in a balance. Our nation is at the stage where returning to God should be inevitable. Politicians should accept the fact that “God is not an elective or a hypothesis, but a definitional and determinative partner who establishes norms and with whom we must deal” (Brueggemann, 1984:97). No alternatives, no substitutes. For this to happen, there should be a great emphasis on the need for theodeterministic approach to civil matters. This calls for discernment. This refers to the kind of discernment that involves making choices and determining the right approach “at the many seemingly unimportant crossroads of everyday practice” (Derkse, 2008:459).

Politicians should be conscientized of theological transcendence; which is “an interdisciplinary conversation between theology and sciences” (Veldsman, 2011:131). While politicians immerse themselves into socio-economic macrocosms of legislative rhetorics, they should examine the motives and critically reflect on the impact and outcomes envisaged by these legislations. This means they should attune themselves to theologians’ transcendental advice. In other words, theologians appeal to both natural and social sciences to come to satisfactory





conclusions that work positively towards human dignity and natural justice. On the other hand, the Church's prophetic role should start by exploring to undertake revision of our transcendent rhetoric, and to articulate the theological implications of these findings... to discern theologically the ways in which God's relation to the universe" (Veldsman, 2011:137/8).

is to be applied to political manoeuvres of governance. The fundamental rationale behind this is that people are religious, and religion provides them with meaning for life. There cannot be a dichotomy between religion and civil affairs. Throughout history religion has provided people with security, by assuring them that, in spite of everything, they have a place in the world. Religion provides people with 'roots' (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn, 2009:7).

Civil governance should lay laws that are not in conflict with people's religious worldviews.

### **Return to the Constitution of the Land**

The second proposal is that the Church should assert itself prophetically by revisiting its knowledge and articulation of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. This calls for communication of God-desired values of the Constitution that we confess to the political leaders without any fear of repression or rejection. The example of Jesus is to be followed; as Nyathi (2004:120) points out that "Jesus was the perfect communicator. He challenged his (Jewish) culture where it was wrong and unjust." Boldness in proclaiming the ethical demands of God's justice is a non-negotiable *klēsis* – calling that cannot be reversed. The Church's relevance is enhanced by being prophetic in the history of humanity, offering hope to present generation. That role is of vital importance since the majority of the population is bleeding inside due to negative systemic socio-economic experiences that had become part of their daily lives. All these are addressed in the Constitution and if the Church is not knowledgeable of them, it cannot address them.

The political voice is not audible enough to assure the citizens of their survival, safety, security, and livelihood, which are all enshrined in the Constitution. This offers the Church an opportunity to appeal to the Constitution for proclamational incarnation in the hopeless situations. This is enhanced by the fact that our Constitution, as per Le Bruyn's (2012:61) assertion: "Its themes include social justice, unity in diversity; a human rights culture; improved quality of life for all; and human dignity, equality and freedom." The voice of the Church should surface and give hope to the hopeless and peace to the weary. As the Church, *aluta continua* for people's constitutional liberation. This a struggle for social justice, the justice that is expounded by Ratzinger (1987:245) to be the "struggle for a system of law, for a moral system of law, a struggle against lawlessness and injustice."

### **Return to transparent dialogue**

The proposal of De Wet (2015:9) cautions believers to the importance of dialogue: "Rather than merely directing the critical voice in a monological, threatening or prescriptive way, the possibility of critical dialogue should be considered." Prophetic ministry cannot be practical without transparent dialogue. Dialogue is a special kind of discourse that enables people with different perspectives and worldviews to work together to dispel mistrust and create a climate of good faith (Resane, 2016:62).

Dialogue is practised through and within the atmosphere of discernment. Discernment calls the communities (Church and politics) to the table. Discernment is always a result of interaction between the two parties or different individuals. It is indeed true that "discernment is also undertaken when groups and societies have to reflect on the divine will in times of transition and change" (De Villiers, 2013:136). Kerygma is the Church's *modus operandi* and *raison d'être* (method and purpose) of prophetic assertion in the secular society and age. In *sancta simplicitas*, the Church is called upon to break its silence by *reculer pour mieux sauter* – in simplicity the Church is to draw back to take a better leap. It should withdraw to examine its theological mandate in order to advance its prophetic role. This is done through kerygmatic



initiatives such as dialogue, discernment, and rebuke where necessary. After all, “Critical debate about propositions and doctrine can indeed be liberating and transformative” (De Villiers, 2016: 41).

The fact is South Africa is at the stage where the public spaces have been supposedly been emptied of God. The return to the basics of God as the premise of all acts of justice is far-fetched. The Church’s mission of healing the world is hampered by political chasms created by unethical and unjust legislations. When justice is thrown out of civic affairs, corruption escalates and topics such as philanthropy, humanitarian solidarity, fighting for justice, reconciliation, heroism, and a fixation with trying to capture ethical life in codes all come under review (Lincoln, 2011:70).

The Church is to maintain its sanity and integrity of remaining faithful to its prophetic calling. Ratzinger (2008:145) makes an appeal to learn from the early Church:

Although the Christians were being persecuted, they did not have a negative view of the state in principle, but rather they still recognized in it the state qua state and did what was in their power to build it up as a state; they did not try to destroy it.

## Conclusion

African countries in general are plagued by a plethora of economic-socio-political issues. Corruption is one such major challenge and there is then an urgent necessity for spiritual and physical transformation in society. The Church has a huge role to play as it is called to strive for human salvation as it engages in dialogue with society and its ills.

Dialogue calls for proactive initiatives in the face of corruption. Through dialogue, a prophetic role can be fulfilled. When cultural decadence escalates, the Church’s presence must surface and be felt. This is when proclamation and incarnation form a synergy for prophetic revelatory exertion. God’s Word and Church involvement are important tools for bringing about affirmative life-changing transformation of people in society. In congruence with Parsley (2007), victory will not come if we remain sheltered behind the four walls of the sanctuary. We must be equipped to confront false worldviews in every sphere of human activity, and make a convincing argument for the truth of our biblical view.

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