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The Bill of Rights, transformative ecclesial leadership, and the kairotic task[1]

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Abstract

This article argues that South Africa's democratic transition remains incomplete because democratic values have not been sufficiently institutionalised at the community level. Drawing on the Kairos tradition, I propose a model of transformative ecclesial leadership that advances the constitutional vision embodied in the Bill of Rights. I argue that transformative ecclesial leadership, equipped to function in a democratic context, rather than resistance or protest leadership, is required to carry democracy beyond the liminal phase it is currently in. The church, propelled by the spirit of Kairos theology and in pursuit of the common good, does not need government approval, as this is enshrined in the Bill of Rights. I conclude the discussion with practical proposals for bringing democracy closer to the community level.

Keywords: Transformative leadership, Bill of Rights, Public theology, Kairos theology, liminal democracy

Introduction

In a situation characterised by ambiguity, chaos, uncertainty, and disorientation (Turner, 1969; 1974) owing to the liminal state of the South African democracy, the resolve to focus on a kairotic task on the thirtieth anniversary of the South African democratic constitution is appropriate. A kairotic task is an apt, strategic action at a precise moment.[2] Its emphasis is on both the urgency and the nature of the action taken. However, to be impactful, it requires transformative or catalytic leadership, as seen with the initiators of the *Kairos Document* in 1985.[3]

1 This essay is a substantially revised version of an article published in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, issue 182/83 of 2025. That justifies some sections of repeated information.

2 My own working definition for this article.

3 According to the records, the reflection began with six people, who then took action that spread across the entire country (see Mabuza, 2024).

Open Rubric

My aim in this article is to argue for the urgent empowerment of the new generation of ecclesial leaders with the skills to help them take democracy out of the liminal space it is in and over the threshold, so that South Africans can reap the benefits of a democratic system. The article moves from the premise that the post-apartheid church leadership in South Africa is incapable of acting as catalysts because the skill sets of both ecclesial and civil leaders are inadequate for the present context, having been cultivated for the struggle context.[4] They are analytical and critical, but they constantly look backwards and offer no forward movement. Political contestations and attempts to outmanoeuvre each other, as in the past, have become the order of the day,[5] thereby distracting from the core business of democracy as reflected in the Bill of Rights[6] (Chapter 2 of the 1996 Constitution).

A call for the empowerment of ecclesial leaders to take proactive action is not a substitute for good governance or a competition with political leaders, but an option for practical and inclusive democracy. After all, the Church has traditionally played an important role in the city's affairs in response to scriptural teachings (cf. Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 5:14, 16; 1 Peter 4:10). Reverting to that at a time when society needs it most is not a departure from the Church's mission, but a renewal of its core mission (cf. also Speckman, 2002; 2007). This should take democracy beyond its liminal point, thus mirroring the kin[g]dom, that is, God's rule on earth, as expected in our context. The article follows a 'public theology' approach, which allows for the use of scripture to reflect on the society's socio-historical experience without an obligation to undertake conventional exegesis.

Below, I briefly outline the method, followed by an unpacking of the problem at hand. This is followed by a section on 'kairotic task and transformative leadership'. Next comes a section justifying the need for transformative leadership, titled 'Why transformative leadership?'. The justification is followed by a discussion of the significance of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution, under the heading 'The Bill of Rights'. After this, I outline three thorny but urgent issues under the heading 'Transformative leadership and three thorny issues'. The last section before the conclusion poses an evaluative question about the proposed course of action, under the heading 'Is a kairotic approach the solution?'.

Method

As mentioned in the introduction, this article follows the Public Theology method. The justification is that it provides a compelling rationale for the interaction between my faith and the social problem addressed by the article. It helps transcend the constraints of Biblical Studies' critical methods while ensuring that my approach retains its academic *bona fides*, despite its focus on social action. Forster and Machinkowski (2024) distinguish it from its lower-case form, which denotes the public nature of theological activity; the upper case refers to an emerging field of study that has taken root, especially in the last three decades.

[4] There is, on the one hand, no lack of evidence in the public domain on criticism of the government for failures in certain areas of service delivery by church leaders, and little or no alternative provided. On the other, this tendency to act as a guardian of democracy rather than its developers is paralleled with an escalation of the tendency of some church leaders to spiritualise situations that need a practical response.

5 According to IEC House, the number of political parties registered with the IEC to date is 609.

6 The basis of many other chapters and Acts in the Constitution.

My version of Public Theology falls within the category Breitenberg (2003) describes as the 'constructive public theology, which operates from a theologically informed base to engage events, policies, practices, values, beliefs, and ideas from a wide range of contexts inside and outside of the church'.[7] Given its almost five-decade history[8] and all that has been written about it, I am consciously steering away from a hermeneutical engagement[9] as that falls outside the scope of this article. My focus is on developing a theologically inspired model as a response to the need for a viable democracy. To do that, I only need an appropriate definition of Public Theology, an understanding of the context, and relevant biblical references.

I begin with the definition of Public Theology, which is phrased differently by different authors, although the basic meaning is the same. Kim (2017) defines it as a 'critical, reflective and reasoned engagement of the theology in society to bring (sic) the kingdom of God, which is for the sake of the poor and the marginalised'. Another definition, offered by Forster and Machinkowksi (ibid.), is that it is a 'distinct paradigm that seeks to articulate and critically engage with the intersections of faith and public life'. The nuance between this and the above definition should be appreciated. Both definitions are concerned with interpretation; unlike Kim, Forster and Machinkowski do not emphasise a reflection on the theology that is already in existence, but on the process that leads to the product. That is what I will be doing in the rest of the article below.

In my opinion, Public Theology is broader than a parochial perspective, which confines it to a specific faith or religion. For example, the narrative of 'God's kingdom' sounds more parochial than 'common good'. A better formulation is one with a particular qualification, 'Christian…', if it must reflect particularity. After all, Public Theology started in its original form, in the public square long before the era of Christianity (van Aarde, 2008). Breitenberg's three-point scheme also confirms that it is broader than a denomination, faith, or religious affiliation. As it is, the definition has a narrow focus unless it is prefixed with a particular tag that links it to a context. This should respond to gate-keeping critiques like those that take issue with the branding, "African Public Theology" (e.g., Maluleke, 2021). I do not think that Maluleke's justification of his personal choice should have a limiting application on others. Nor do I think that Forster (2022) should doubt the validity of his work if he is conducting a hermeneutical exercise on the work of, for example, Sunday Agang, or believes that his own work is rooted in the African context.

The latter point prompts me to provide further explanation of my preferred approach in this article. In choosing to develop a practical model, I am engaging in what I call the productive process above. The situation at the social level demands that kind of interaction, as opposed to an academic debate on nomenclature, logomachy, or even polemics. Kim's definition of Public Theology opens it up to be misconstrued as an academic exercise; the allusion to the 'kingdom', poor and marginalised, does not change this. In my view, Public

[7] The other two versions in his scheme are, respectively, i) research into the life, work, and contributions of certain persons that aims to clarify what they understand public theology to be, ii) methodological research projects that aim to comprehend what public theology is and how it is done (Breitenberg, 2003).

[8] This field of theological studies has been emerging since the early 1970s (see Latourette, 1971; Tracy, 1981; Smit, 2013) and has now become a well-established field in the last three decades or so (Forster & Machinkowski, 2024). I will not go into its history and critiques.

[9] However, I will, albeit reluctantly, respond to some aspects that require me to clarify my preferred position.

Theology is an interaction, the emphasis being on the action of interfacing, not an observation and analysis. It should therefore look for inspirational points in the text, that is, the emancipatory moment of the text[10], in response to a social concern.

We have to guard against repeating the mistake that led to theologies like Black and African theologies losing their momentum and potency when they became playing games in academic circles.[11] This article makes the point that democracy cannot be developed on the pillar of Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' only (cf. Alison Scott-Baumann, 2009). There was a point when this was very necessary. This does not mean that leaders should blindly adopt a 'hermeneutics of trust' either. Democracy now needs a dynamic forward movement, not a rear-view mirror focus.

My understanding of Public Theology is that it is a theology that is concerned with an interaction between one's spirituality, the public, and public concerns, in pursuit of the common good (see also Tracy, 1981). It is not linked to any particular faith statement but embraces any confession that pursues principles of the common good. I think of it as an approach that seeks to reverse the retrogression of theology to the narrow track it was placed in by the early church. As a public square activity, theology was dominated by philosophers, and it was not tied to any religion (van Aarde, ibid.). Jesus' ministry and theologising were also public activities, highlighting God's intervention in public affairs. We see what was lost between the time of Jesus and the Middle Ages resurfacing in the theologies of Calvin and Luther, among others, only to be lost during Modernity (Kim, 2024). Common in their theologies is a strong social dimension. As Tracy (1981) argues, 'the publicness of theology addresses the issue of the privatisation of religion'. He goes on to say that 'if faith in God is serious, then any discourse about that faith must be public' (ibid.).

I conclude this section with a brief comment on how Public Theology works. Its application also varies, depending on who is applying it and to what end. Some use it with the See Judge Act, others with Feminist theology, others still with Black Theology, while others use it with the African Theology approach (Forster & Machinkowski, ibid.). I use the scripture to support a point on which I am reflecting at a given time, rather than as a focal point to exegete a text. The most important feature is the pursuit of the common good. This helps to distinguish the progressive from the reactionary, who claim to do public theology while they support actions that work against the public good. For example, apartheid theology was a public theology in that it sought to interpret the experience and aspirations of one group theologically. Yet, in doing so, it consciously and intentionally used that as a justification to exclude others who should be included. That is not my version of public theology.

[10] This term is not original with me. It has been in use for more than a decade. However, I am unable to locate a reference for it at this point.

[11] Badat (2009) traces the transition of Black Consciousness to a class analysis back to Diliza Mji in 1976. Since then, Black Theology itself drifted towards a class analysis, as seen in the work of Mosala (1989), for example, and stayed in academic circles.

The problem unpacked

Many South Africans today continually express dissatisfaction with the state of democracy.[12] It is caught between the apartheid system of the past and the ideal democratic state aimed for. There is a feeling that the hope inspired by the leadership of the first decade and a half of democracy was eroded by the weakening of democratic institutions during the State Capture years.[13] This has left the country at the threshold – that is, in a *liminal* phase, unable to cross over, yet not in a position to go back to the past either. I use the term 'liminal' in the way that Victor Turner (1969, cf. Kapferer, 2019) did, based on Arnold van Gennep's work (1909 trans. 1960): referring to an in-between state marked by ambiguity, disorientation, uncertainty, and pain for some, with no clear way to go back or forward. The democracy envisioned exists largely on paper – that is, in the Constitution, which serves as a threshold between the ideal and reality. Therefore, the chaotic liminal space is filled with personal experiences and wrestling with constitutional imperatives.

Some (e.g., Van der Merwe, 2025) have alluded to a declining democracy. This author has a different view because, in his opinion, the decline can only occur if democracy has reached its highest point. That has not been the case in South Africa, even during Mandela's term in office. There was a fledgling system that was interrupted by corruption.[14] Focus should therefore be on the failure or slowness of leadership in guiding society towards democratic values. The costly commissions of inquiry into corrupt activities do not advance democracy, especially if there is no consequence management thereafter. Instead, they amount to a further diversion of funds that could have been used for programmes to advance democracy.[15] This is the gap into which Church leadership must step to take the lead. Instead, the Church's response is always confined to condemning the situation, offering little or no alternative to advance the democratic vision.[16]

Focusing on condemning corruption and the lack of service delivery while the country is stuck in an in-between position serves to highlight the urgency of the need to upskill Church leaders to enable them to strengthen democratic institutions and to raise democratic individuals. Most of them came through a culture of questioning and resistance (hermeneutics of suspicion), but that is not all that the current context needs. Corruption and the lack of service delivery, for example, are distractions, while putting in place

[12] As evidenced by regular (lack of) service delivery protests in most cities of the country.

13 The years 2009 to 2018 are often referred to as the 'state capture' years. They cover the presidency of Mr Jacob Zuma, which coincided with the hijacking of state institutions by corrupt syndicates.

[14] The first public outcry was about the 'arms deal' case, which is continuing, and then the Jackie Selebi case. However, in my corruption book (2023), I refer to traces of corruption earlier, which led to the expulsion of the whistleblower, Bantu Holomisa, from the African National Congress in September 1996.

15 In other words, too many resources are spent on issues that are characteristic of a liminal phase: there is wrestling with right and wrong, a refusal to discard the past and move on, a refusal to embrace the new, etc. See also the chaos of the 'Apiru during their forty years in the wilderness.

16 This might sound like a generalisation, but there is a lot of evidence in the media, sermons, and speeches by church leaders.

equitable systems and developing a culture of democratic values are substantive issues. I have found no record of Church leaders doing this on a sustained basis.

Transformative leadership is required to turn the wheel of democracy clockwise. I have borrowed the definition of the term from Business and Management sciences, where it is defined as 'a leadership style that focuses on inspiring and motivating employees to innovate and find new ways to drive the organisation's success' (Hanna & Needle, 2024). The authors go on to describe such leadership as 'responsive to issues and concerns as they arise and are more proactive in encouraging new ideas and approaches on an ongoing basis'. The term goes back to James V Downton (1973). This is the kind of leadership that prevents an anti-clockwise movement by enabling individuals and communities in various ways, developing or fostering sustainable, transformative strategies, and helping people to translate the language of the kin[g]dom into the visible presence of God's rule on earth as it will be in 'the world to come'. As can be seen in the literature about leadership, 'transformative leadership' is not the monopoly of the Church. However, I am writing from a Church perspective.

I link the discussion of transformative leadership to a kairotic task because of the urgency of the situation and the need for the most appropriate and theologically credible intervention. This is explained further in the appropriate section. The democratic vision contained in the Constitution looks noble, but its implementation is underwhelming – hence the endless murmurs across the country.

The problem may be summed up as the need to raise Church leaders with the skills to take South Africa over the threshold between the past and its potential future; South Africa needs guidance out of this liminal position and into real democracy. In biblical language, the country is in the wilderness.

The kairotic task and transformative leadership

The term 'kairotic task' is my own construct. It is based on the principles embedded in the *Kairos Document* (KD) (1985; 1986). As stated above, I am not here concerned about academic arguments based on hermeneutics of suspicion (see Maluleke) but on practice on the ground, of which Smit says many are not even aware they are engaged in (2017). This is confirmed by Koopman (2011), who acknowledges that Christians are involved in public theology all the time. Delimitations of the article do not allow for further discussion of these views. Back to the *Kairos Document*, it has three focal areas from which I have extracted four undergirding principles (see also Speckman, 2025). I briefly explain the principles below.

The first is the notion of *urgency*, which comes through strongly throughout the document. It calls on all to turn back to 'the word of God to seek answers' to the concerns raised by the context. What the scripture offers about the urgent proclamation of the kin[g]dom is similar to what is found in Mark 1:15, after which the Greek term *euthus* is used frequently in the gospel – about forty-two times, according to *Biblical hermeneutics* (Smith, 2016), and about eighty times in the entire New Testament.

In contemporary times, this urgency is mimicked by contextual theologians in their proclamation of the urgency of liberation, which is portrayed as God's rule. They create opportunities to put a message across, followed by actions, and they exploit gaps in

systems to do the same. John de Gruchy (1994) refers to these gaps as 'interstices' that give birth to contextual theology. The context forces people to exploit every little opening as an opportunity to act without delay. As it was in the first century, under Roman rule and constant opposition from the Jewish authorities, so it is today under pressure from the rulers who operate within the 'empire' paradigm.[17]

A second important undergirding principle is the notion of *precision.* This is exactly what the kairotic moment is about: striking at the right moment. The gospel of Luke is consistent about this point throughout, until chapter 19:41–44, the passage on which the KD is based. It is a debatable point whether the KD would have been as effective if it had come out at any other time. The theological points made in its contents were not original to the authors; they had been raised by other theologians and biblical scholars before. Why, at the time, were they of more interest to theologians only than to the entire Church? In my opinion, it is because they were raised prematurely, at an academic level. Then came 1985 in South Africa, when the KD came out, and it took the country and the Church by storm, thus confirming that it was the right action at the right time.

The third principle, *decisiveness,* refers to the non-compromising, non-procrastinating stance of the document. It uses direct language to talk about the moment of truth: State Theology, Church Theology, and Prophetic Theology. The first and second focal areas are as direct as they could have been, challenging the state and the Church directly. In the second, the Church was criticised for its theological stand despite the situation in the country; in the third, it was challenged to adopt a prophetic theology in support of the struggle for liberation and justice. This, in a sense, was pushing the Church not to sit on the fence or to be lukewarm, but to be decisive about its position in relation to the apartheid regime. As a participant in follow-up activities between 1985 and 1995, I can confirm that this was a shared understanding.

A fourth and final principle is the *establishment of God's rule on earth.* Staying with Luke's narrative, Acts 1 (Mark 1:15) is the biblical reference for this. It did not have to be spelt out in so many words in the document, but it was always understood by contextual theologians that prophetic theology pursued God's project of establishing the kin[g]dom through Jesus, later, his apostles. All Christians would argue the same, but it depends on what different people understand by 'God's rule', and how it would come about. In God's time, the response in South Africa became what is talked about to this day: the collapse of the apartheid regime, which had invoked the Exodus theme and Israel's theology of election from the start; and the ushering in of democracy, which could have been a launching pad for God's rule in South Africa.

Transformative ecclesial leaders act on the above principles. They view the transformation of situations as an urgent task while seeking opportunities to transform by exploring and exploiting all available gaps (DeGruchy, ibid. Nolan, 1976, 1988). They are always conscious of the contextuality of transformation, and therefore, ensure that it applies fit-for-purpose methods at the appropriate time. This is where aptness and precision come into the picture.

17 By this, I mean a system that perpetuates and justifies the imperial culture, is dominant, and sometimes fascist.

The question is whether a kairotic approach on its own is transformative. Before I reflect on that, we need to look at why transformative leadership is necessary.

Why transformative leadership?

I have outlined above the principles of a kairotic task and my understanding of transformative leadership. During the struggle days, these were crucial for those planning programmes and actions. However, they are applicable across eras and generations. The difference is that South Africa in 1985 needed urgency, precision, and decisiveness to get the struggle over the line. It also needed a vision as a rallying point to provide the masses with a social wave.[18] Hence, the vision or utopia of the kin[g]dom or God's rule on earth. There was a collective driving the struggle, and a physical enemy to fight. The absence of either a physical enemy or the people to pursue the utopia a decade into democracy seems to have affected the pace or direction of the wheel. This is one of the reasons why transformative leadership is needed today.

Many concerned Church leaders and theologians long for the return of an intervention similar to the KD.[19] In my opinion, that is misplaced. The KD was a strategy for a specific era and set of circumstances. We need to ask whether the same circumstances obtain today and whether the same strategy would work. The issue of being stuck in the past is what I am attempting to address in this article. We no longer live in an era of people who are 'by law or tradition, politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and fight as a unit for their emancipation' (SASO Policy 1971). Nor do we need to use 'match boxes and petrol' to achieve our goals (Madikizela-Mandela, 1986). Visions and models are what South Africa needs to move forward, without necessarily denying the existence of challenges. Positive psychology calls this a 'strengths-based approach' (Seligman, 1999; Gibbon, 2020).

The Bill of Rights

This section deals with the rationale for the inclusion of the Bill of Rights rather than references to the individual rights enshrined in Chapter 2 of the Constitution. The Constitution is largely based on the framework of the Freedom Charter, which, in 1955, may have appeared to be a very distant utopia. When 1994 happened, and a democratic constitution was adopted on 8 May 1996, the utopia moved closer to reality: South Africans saw that it was attainable. The first decade or so after 1994 created the impression that the country was moving in the right direction. However, it appears that this, along with a feeling of 'mission accomplished',[20] deceived South Africans into lowering their guard.

It must be remembered that the Constitution plays a similar role today as did the Freedom Charter before it, and the same as the notion of God's kin[g]dom. It is the utopia, therefore,

18 See the discussion of a people-centred development theory in Korten (1990) and my application of it (2002).

19 This was confirmed by many comments leading up to the 40th anniversary of the *Kairos Document*.

20 Revd Frank Chikane's statement at a South African Council of Churches (SACC) meeting in 1994 reflects the mood displayed by some after the first democratic elections. He referred to the 'mission accomplished' as he was about to leave the SACC to join the government.

a rallying point for struggling communities. The Constitution (1996) includes the Bill of Rights, which addresses various aspects of daily life. Many South Africans miss the fact that this is the core of democracy, from which many laws flow, and around which they orbit. Structures are created to pursue the provisions of this Bill. Regrettably, people tend to lump it together with Chapter 9 institutions because of the Commission for Human Rights (one of the Chapter 9 institutions in the Constitution). This blinds them to the fact that it is democracy itself from which the laws about land, housing, education, nutrition, citizenship, crime, and many others stem. Social instability is caused by the failure of democracy to deliver in these respects. Ordinary citizens expected 1994 to mean the actualisation of this utopia.[21]

If, for argument's sake, the Bill of Rights were equated to God's kin[g]dom or rule, as understood in Kairos Theology, then work to bring it about would be an ongoing programme.[22] According to Nolan (1987), eschatological eras end after each divine visitation (*kairos*), and new eras then begin because a kairos visitation is a divine intervention in a situation of suffering. This is different from the conventional understanding of the concept as 'end-times', when the world as we know it ceases to exist. Examples of that abound in history; kingdoms come and go. We have also seen, in contemporary history, the end of a very short Nazi era (1933–1945) and the end of a longer apartheid era (1948–1994). It is always hoped that, after each era ended, a better situation would emerge. Those who work alongside God are called to a lifetime of commitment, as the work of bringing about God's rule is endless. It is God's mission continually to change the world for the better.

Below, I offer three examples of the ways in which ecclesial leadership could advance the Bill of Rights. It takes a leader with a kairotic thrust to know when and how to respond.

Transformative leadership and 'three thorns'

The following three examples show how transformative leadership can advance democracy. They are the thorny issues of poverty, crime, and xenophobia. Two of these issues, namely the poor and foreigners, are addressed in the Bible, and 'transformative leadership' is measured by how it responds to them. I had stated above that Public Theology is not about observation and interpretation, but interface and action. Latourette (1971) would argue that it has always been the church's approach to its mission. The examples cited below demonstrate that.

The Mosaic tradition (cf. Mendenhall, 1954; Mamahit & Widodo, 2024) in the Old Testament specifically mentions the categories of poor and stranger or foreigner. However, the New Testament presents vertical and horizontal dimensions as broad categories (Matthew 22:37–40), with the latter being inclusive, while it reserves the terms *xenos* (stranger) and *paroikos* (foreigner) to describe the status of Christians as heavenly citizens in this world. The use of these terms in a symbolic, spiritual sense should not necessarily imply that the New Testament ignored the materially poor or foreigners. It addressed the issue of wealth and poverty, for example, in Luke and Acts (cf. Brewer, 2009; Woodbridge & Semmelink, 2014), and it also advocated the inclusion of Gentiles, not as passing

21 There is no scarcity of literature on this, in addition to many anecdotes about it on the ground.

22 'Programme' is distinguished from 'project' because the latter has a beginning and an end date.

strangers but as permanent members of the Christian family in Acts, Galatians, Ephesians, Corinthians, and Romans.

The statement 'a wandering Aramean was my father…' (Deuteronomy 26:5ff), which had to be memorised and recited when the first fruits were brought to the temple, was a constant reminder of where the descendants of Abraham came from. Failing to offer basic hospitality to the stranger – that is, water, food, and a place to sleep – was a violation of the Mosaic tradition. The Book of Leviticus (19:33–34) is even more forceful: 'You were once foreigners…', referring either to their wandering past or, as other commentators argue, to their time in Egypt. The teaching was that they should never ill-treat a foreigner or a stranger, but instead, treat them as natives. Many other references prohibit the ill-treatment of foreigners.

In our own country and time, we could refer to the hosting of South African and Namibian refugees for four decades (1950–1990) by countries in Africa and overseas. They were foreigners in those countries while fleeing the atrocities of the apartheid regime. The apartheid military constantly conducted what they called 'hot pursuit' raids in the host African countries, causing damage to their economies as well (see Sechele, 2023). Cuba even offered its soldiers to confront the apartheid army in Angola, while some uMkhonto weSizwe soldiers fought alongside the Zimbabweans to end Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence (UDI). Today, it is the citizens of those countries who are strangers or foreigners in South Africa. Do South Africans not have a moral duty to provide hospitality to them?

In my opinion, South Africans in general should consider doing so as a way of thanking those countries for their hospitality and active support over many decades. Still, Christians in particular have an obligation to welcome the stranger/foreigner. It is a biblical imperative they have inherited. The question is whether, with or without the biblical imperative, South Africans can fully enjoy democracy when their former hosts and allies during the struggle are being persecuted as economic refugees in South Africa. How does the Church respond to the brutality of groups such as Operation Dudula and March and March that is unleashed against African economic refugees each week?[23]

When ordinary members of the faith join other citizens in persecuting foreigners, it may be out of ignorance. It raises questions about their understanding of the gospel values. However, leaders have a duty to call them to order and guide them in the right direction, even though that is a piecemeal response to the challenge of xenophobia. A stronger response from the Church might be a programme dedicated to the welfare of foreigners in South Africa. That would make the Church's stand clear and public. The government might regulate access from an administrative perspective, but in line with the greatest commandment to love God and neighbour as cited above, the Church should provide the pastoral face of democracy, regardless of what the government does or does not do. We have seen some of this working well in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, where some

23 We accept Ndhlovu's (2016) observation that the matter is multi-layered and that treatment depends on where one is. However, with the activities of Operation Dudula spreading to many parts of the country, the picture is changing very fast. The fact that KwaZulu-Natal now has its own versions, March and March, and Phakelaumthakathi, is concerning. It is not the motive but the methods that cause concern. Mobs do not distinguish between documented and undocumented.

churches have come forward to assist in the days leading up to 30 June 2026 and thereafter.[24] But they do not have the wherewithal to go all the way. My suggestion is not for permanent migrants but for those in transit while they are applying for a status.

As some argue, a solution to poverty and the poor is the creation of employment (e.g., Vaalavuo and Sirniö, 2022). However, it is often forgotten that employment implies productivity. Do people have to be employed by someone else to be productive? Are they not able to produce for themselves? There must be something wrong with the mentality of people who think that they can only be productive when they do so for someone else, or for remuneration, not for themselves. Productivity can take different forms.

The third issue, crime, which seems like a runaway train, indicts both the Church and the government equally. It either reflects laxity in the application of laws, if not an absence of consequence management, or it points to the Church's failure to preach or inculcate positive values. For some, it is the level or volume of crimes that is of concern, but for others, it is the nature of the crimes that is being committed. The inhuman nature of crime points to a deep spiritual problem. Can the laws deal with that? The empirical situation proves that the law is unable to fix spiritual challenges. If it were not so, the crime situation in the last thirty-two years would be different from what it is.

It appears that different efforts are neither coordinated nor supported by an institution. One simple example is the situation of crime in the Cape Flats. Many concerned individuals have unsuccessfully tried to intervene in the situation, some even established some non-governmental organisations to address the crime levels, but there was not much success. The churches have not come together to form an umbrella body. They are looking up to the government. In the Eastern Cape, a province that is largely rural, with some industrial activity in two cities only, there is a lot of land under the name of churches. The latter, made up of different denominations, have not come together to see what they can do with that land to alleviate poverty in a big and meaningful way. When I last checked, individual denominations were sourcing donations for their own projects. That did not go far either. These are just a few examples of the silo mentality that has gripped South Africans, especially after the struggle era. I have facilitated workshops where I have had to discourage church members from blaming the government when individual efforts do not work out. In my observation, that is the difference between South Africans and the African economic migrants seen trading in the townships. There is a lot of anecdotal information to share.

The situation may be ascribed to a culture of dependency, one of the legacies of four decades under apartheid rule. In the past, even as they rejected colonisation, South Africans found ways to survive through self-sufficiency: they kept animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens, and they planted crops in their small yards. Several of them built or repaired houses and furniture as part of self-employment. Although much of this may be anecdotal, there is evidence to which people point, and this author also grew up witnessing such things. What has changed so that even government leaders display dependency tendencies? We often hear government ministers and deputy ministers complaining about what 'the government' has or has not done.

[24] June 30 was set as a deadline by some social activist groups for undocumented migrants to leave Sout Africa.

Transformative leadership creates opportunities. In other words, it is the catalyst that unlocks people's potential. On the one hand, it should facilitate the use of a person's inner strength, which motivates them to improve their lives (Korten, 1990); on the other, it should assist in facilitating that as a bargaining power. The Jesus model of inculcating a spirit of solidarity among the poor (Luke 6:27–42) could be adopted. This would help to remove competition and to foster good working relationships. Most of the projects that poor people start to improve their lives die because of a silo mentality and selfishness.

I have consciously not listed land use as a separate issue. It belongs to strategies for alleviating poverty. In that regard, churches, especially missionary churches, own large tracts of land. What prevents them from using that land for the benefit of their communities? Is it because everyone is looking to the government for grants that do not last a week?[25] If that is the case, the Church is not helping people overcome their lethargy; the Bethsaida syndrome (John 5:5–7) remains. Under different circumstances, the churches could get together, determine how much land they have in each area, and decide which land would be suitable for farming, which for industry, which for housing, and which could be used for shopping centres, whether rented to developers or owned by communities. A trust could be set up to finance the welfare of communities.

In response to the issue of crime, we need to ask again why the Church is not taking the initiative. Some churches have a model that includes cell leaders. This is part of decentralising the ministry. Apparently, these leaders work with individuals, and each street has one or two such leaders from different denominations. Why could the Church not use such cells or leaders to disseminate information about morality and to instil positive values? Every national census over the last four decades, that is, from 1996 to 2022, indicates that the percentage of Christians, or those who claim to be, in South Africa averages around 80%. This is a significant number, even if a quarter of that figure is nominal Christians. The impact on society and its moral fibre should be visible. That is not the case – hence our assertion that both the government and the Church should regard the empirical situation as an indictment of both of them.

The ideas above are not a prescription for what must be done. They are intended to show that it is possible to find an alternative to the current situation and to move out of the liminal state of the South African democracy. After three decades of democratic rule, there is very little to show in respect of transforming the condition of the poor. It is hoped that the government would be grateful for the initiative, which should augment their plans, rather than resent it. No request for government money or land is being proposed, but rather an alternative for those who are being left out by the democratic system.

We refer to the three examples as thorns because they have been part of the public discourse for the past three decades, without resolution. Part of the problem is resistance from the elite, who are irked by any talk of poverty and affirmative action,[26] and part stems

[25] There are different types of social grants in South Africa: the Older Persons' pension, Disability grant, Child support grant, Foster child grant, Grant-in-aid, War veterans pensions, and Social relief of distress.

[26] The laws promoting affirmative action are not only resisted internally by those who once benefitted from affirmative action under apartheid (Employment Equity and Broad-based Empowerment Acts), but they have also acquired the assistance of the United States of America in resisting them.

from a lack of viable models from the managers of our democracy.[27] The proposals highlighted as examples come from what could be regarded as a search for the 'gold' of each city and province. There may be no mines or factories in an area, but that should not be the end of a dream. A lot could be done with the assets of a city or area, because the asset-based theory of community development (McKnight & Kretzmann,1993) teaches us that little is more. In other cases, assets may not even be tangible things. For example, education, music, or sport may be assets of a community or province from which the area could make economic mileage. Key to its success is leadership that could facilitate the release of potential and help to enhance what is available.

Is a kairotic approach a solution?

A kairotic approach is exactly what the title says: an approach, not the action itself. It raises urgency, critiques the situation, and calls for action. Therefore, it cannot be sufficient on its own. There has to be a critical mass to facilitate the initiative. This includes actors and foot soldiers, coordinating structures, assets, and mechanisms to facilitate action(s). The advantage of the kairotic approach is its double-edged nature; it can bring good, but it can also bring judgment to the same situation.

The two main actors mentioned above are the government and the Church. Both must act to bring about the democracy reflected in the Constitution, which ordinary South Africans have not yet fully experienced. But this does not mean that the Church must be dependent on the government. It has been so, in this regard, for three decades, without success; it must now work independently. If the Church falls short, as the government has, it should also expect, alongside the government, to be condemned. Its Christian identity will not save it. God is even-handed. The KD warns that the *kairos* is like a double-edged sword, capable of cutting the one in whose hand it is (KD,1986). This is meant to ensure that those who expect positive results act earnestly and honestly. They cannot take the situation lightly.

Against the backdrop of the above discussion, a transformative ecclesial leadership has to prioritise the following steps if a kairotic approach is to help steer towards a solution.

Introspection with a view to acting

In 1985, a small group of theological activists initiated a theological comment on the political situation and the Church (Mabuza 2024). It was not the Church looking at itself, because the broader Church at the time was in the grip of what the KD calls 'Church Theology'. Time has since proved Church Theology wrong about its understanding of salvation in the context of an oppressive state. Today, in a democratic context, it is the Church that must look critically at itself as an institution, to see how faithful or otherwise it has been to God's mission, through Jesus, to bring the country closer to South Africa's version of God's Rule. It would be interesting to see what comes out of such an exercise, because the commitment some churches had made to the South African Council of

[27] The government has not devised a straightforward, viable model that takes the current socio-economic situation into account. It is caught up in 'correcting' the wrongs of the past three decades after the collapse of the apartheid regime. There were so many wrongs that they take up all the time and resources available as they are being addressed. When is the focus going to turn to 'this is what we fought to experiment with'?

Churches' (SACC) mission during the struggle for democracy was no longer visible after the 1994 democratic elections.[28] Instead, the SACC became weaker in numbers and voice. This is supported by the empirical situation of the SACC.

That said, individual churches should still have pursued the mission in their contexts. This reversion to a silo mentality is probably what has weakened the Church's voice and made its mission invisible. If it had to confess its failures of the last three decades, among them would be a failure to preserve the unity-in-mission that developed during the struggle days, and a lukewarm approach to the plight of the poor.[29] The Church would also have to confess its silence in relation to the plight of African economic refugees (migrants) in South Africa. It has no moral right to be vocal on matters about the Middle East and Ukraine when it is silent on the persecution of African immigrants in South Africa. There are both legal and pastoral aspects involved. The church needs to find a solution to those.

An audit of Church assets

When we say above that, for three decades, the Church has looked up to the government without much success, we mean that the Church did not do much about the plight of the poor or anything else that distracts from the rolling out of the benefits of a democratic government. Part of this 'looking up', in our view, is because of the non-use of the Church's tangible and intangible assets. Something seems to have eroded the spirit of initiative after 1994, which led to projects and self-help initiatives being abandoned in favour of dependency or 'looking up' to government handouts, which, in most instances, never came.

We submit, from the perspective of asset-based community development, that it has a lot it needs for the critical mass. There is human capital as an asset; there is land; there is a system of social values; there is indigenous knowledge; and there are spiritual services and a social net. The early Church, which decided to set up communities parallel to the 'temple state' government, discovered that it could and had to be self-sufficient so that it could lead the way. Two rules helped it to succeed: the audit of collective possessions that members had, and the willingness of individuals to part with those for the sake of the common good (cf. Acts 2-4), as understood by Plato, who advocated a sharing of possessions for the benefit of all. That is what we read about the ideal Church in the first five chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The report about the risen Jesus and the discussion about the coming of God's Rule are followed by the practical redistribution of possessions to accommodate all according to their needs.

The Church in South Africa has vast tracts of land,[30] experts in different areas, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It could be a senior partner in a coalition with the government when it needed additional resources. If the Church could revert to the *kairos* theology, it would have a possible solution to the current situation because a kairotic approach forces it to read the signs of the times and to act with urgency and confidence.

28 See Modise (2018) for part of the role played by the SACC during the struggle for democracy.

29 Literary evidence for this, too, can be found, but it is not essential for this chapter. The intended audience is aware, even from an empirical perspective.

30 See Department of Rural Reform, Archbishop Ndungane, from 2004 onwards.

Put the principle of the common good to work

The principle of the common good is not only about sharing material possessions; in Plato, it may have been primarily about that. However, for Aristotle and for later theologians who adopted it, intangible spiritual possessions were also involved. For example, in *Nicomachean Ethics* (written between 334 and 323 BCE), Aristotle has both the sharing of material possessions and the strengthening of kinship in mind. What belonged to one belonged to a friend as well. This meant that they were not forced to pay back if they could not afford or manage it. Our understanding of the concept in the Anglican and Catholic worlds has been largely influenced by Thomas Aquinas, who wrote in the 8th century CE. His use of the concept in his *Summa Theologica* leans more towards the intangible and the spiritual. From the perspective of the summaries of sharing in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–34, 35–37), this is in line with the spirit of Acts, but falls short of the redistribution of goods. The word was preached; people heard and were converted, and then they opened their 'hearts' and hands to receive as well as to give.

In the South African context, analysts from different academic disciplines have long pointed out that inequality, alongside crime, is a threat to democracy (e.g., Terreblanche, 2002), that the bulk of South Africa's wealth is monopolised by a few families (Terreblanche even mentions the number, 13 families), and that South Africa needs a mind shift if it is to enjoy the fruits of democracy. It takes planning, preaching, teaching, wisdom, and patience to effect change on a large scale. The model found in the Acts of the Apostles shows that winning 'hearts and minds' leads to the opening of pockets as well. Leaders who are serious about the common good and about change must act in a way that is relevant and effective.

Conclusion

The open-endedness of this article's title has allowed for an exploration of the kairotic task of ecclesial leadership in a democratic context more broadly. We have argued that, with transformative leadership, South Africa could traverse the threshold into a truly democratic situation. The Constitution expects South Africans to shake off the past in preparation for the new situation (see Preamble), but South Africans seem caught up in what appears to be a chaotic situation, as some are refusing to rid the country of the past. We have argued that, since civil leadership is caught up in the same situation, ecclesial leadership needs skills to help it to move the country over the threshold. The four principles extracted from the KD could be used as a guiding framework.

As the above discussion has shown, even if it has not robustly argued, the focus should be on the option for a practical, inclusive democracy, led by transformative ecclesial leadership, with the view to integrating the excluded who are currently knocking on the door from the outside, asking for an opportunity to experience 'soft life' (Nomfundo Moh, Soft Life, song). Future researchers should be encouraged to refine and pursue the basic idea for the model that is proposed in this article. Its viability also needs to be tested further in living communities.

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