

The Church and the State : mutual role and reciprocal responsibilities

Addressing the IDAMASA conference at Mandeni on the 15th of August 2012

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Greetings to;

The Church Leaders and Members of IDAMASA

The Politicians

The Distinguished Guests and

The Fellow South Africans;

Please allow me to say many thanks to the leadership of IDAMASA for this invitation. It would be religiously correct to call IDAMASA the Dinosaur in the faith sector. It has been there long before some of us thought of wearing the white collar. I salute the current leadership that is still steering this ship towards God's direction. Not to forget the veterans and pioneers of this giant organisation who had a vision about the birth of this animal, IDAMASA. As the KwaZulu Regional Christian Council, KRCC, we are proud to say that you are one of our loyal members.

Standing before you, the people of the cloth, I am blessed to address one of the most respected organs of our society. The church still remains the custodian of morals and values of our society. If it was not for the church, most if not all of we would have perished. We would have been no more. We would be traced in the dusts and ashes of this earth. Unfortunately some of our leaders have fallen into the trap. I can't say much, but I invite you to read Sunday Newspapers you will learn more about some of the respected leaders who go on the front page for wrong reasons.

Bathandekayo, talking about the state and the church these days is exciting. The political climate is unlike 18 years ago. In the next five years it may be totally different. We have seen what was happening in Egypt, Syria, Libya and many other countries in the North and some in the West. Nothing much was



said about the role of the church when thousands of people were butchered shot at and bombed alive. The only thing we are sure of and saw happening was that the church leaders were there when they were buried. This presentation will give you insight than answers to the question of the church - state relations. Please bear with me that I didn't bring all the answers, but have prepared questions that should give you answers. Let us ask ourselves at least the following three questions for now;

- ***Is our role as leaders in this changing SA limited to burying the dead?***
- ***Is it ok if we only open and close government functions?***
- ***Is our platform limited to the pulpit?***

I would like each and every one of us here, to go home and give these questions a serious thought. I am against the idea of using our leaders as flowers and roses of events where they are put in front where there is no expectation that they are going say something other than a prayer. The true emancipation of the people of God lies with you. You have the guaranteed audience. You send no invitations to have 100 people or more in your churches. The congregants are there in front of you every Sunday, Thursday, and Saturdays during the funerals and many other platforms that you enjoy. The question comes again, ' *uthini kubo (what are you saying to them)?* '

Men of Faith, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were brought before King Nebuchadnezzar to answer to charges brought against them by the State authorities. And this is their statement of defense,

"We don't need to answer your last question. If our God, whom we honor, can save us from a blazing furnace and from your power, he will, Your Majesty. But if he doesn't, you should know, Your Majesty, we'll never honor your gods or worship the gold statue that you set up." Daniel 3: 16-18

Do we have leaders of such a caliber? The above scripture gives a convincing impression that the responsibility to serve State authority has its limits and conditions. This is made imperative by the recognition that all authority belongs to God who in turn is an absolute authority. In other words, God may establish a civil authority but as soon as the same authority ceases to represent His will, intention and authority, it no longer deserves obedience.



How can the Church remain silent and continue being in good relations with State authority if that authority doesn't care for the citizens' needs or even oppresses them? Remember, the nature of **state power is more political than divine** and has tendencies to exclude and deprive others while taking others being taken care of.

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and the Apostle Peter make it clear in front of State authority, that obedience must be earned. This is because King Nebuchadnezzar and the Jewish Council was found to have lost any sense of vocation in favor of feeding their own narrow interests, personal and political ego representative of their crave for human power and dominance over the others. Hence, the politics of the stomach.

Bagcotshwa, this is not at all the deviation from the topic, but the application of the Holy Book to illustrate our responsibility as the people of faith.

This paper is not a questionnaire, but a document that should challenge us to think more. It is the document that we need to use to put our thoughts into action. However, asking questions is inevitable;

- ***Is our role about creating space for the government or***
- ***inviting government into our space or***
- ***Rather government creating space for the faith community?***

In 1997, the 1st president of the RSA in the post apartheid era Nelson Mandela, *commissioned a Commission on Religious and Traditional Affairs (CRATA) to facilitate a dialogue among government and faith-based communities which led to the formation of the National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF).*

Out of the three questions asked above, the latter part of the question is more relevant. The government is creating space for us. We are invited to come to the party. Therefore we need to go there with a clear mandate from our constituencies. We need to be vigilant and refuse to be passive recipients of the political agenda unless it speaks to the needs of the people we minister to. The Church must **resist any imposition of any faith movement** in the life of this society by powers of State. On their own, communities of faith can and must



organize themselves into a viable prophetic voice. State power cannot determine the nature and character of faith. Only the divine power can and must.

Let us not sell our vision because there is money, recognition or power at stake. Let us stand with the marginalized through thick and thin. Money is the root of evil... Let us not stop being good servants. But a good servant has eyes to see and mouth to speak. Ask yourself a question, how long do you take the stage in a government organised event? How long does the government take the stage in your event?

What has been said above has no intentions to plant any seed of animosity. The church is not about that. Our institution as the church is characterized by love, humility and good ethics. It is for that reason that the church continues to pray for political leaders and peace on this land. There is no prize to guess where politicians go before elections and how long it takes for some of them to call again. But as the church, we must continue praying for them to deliver on the mandate that, we the citizens have given them.

Whilst it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that the marginalized groups are not neglected, especially in the post apartheid era, the church role will always be to remind the state when that is not delivered. It is the church responsibility to hold the state accountable.

Given the dilemma we are faced with as the community, but we need to question our actions. We need resources. We need money to keep the gospel going. But if government were to provide, we mustn't lose our identity. We mustn't sacrifice God. We need stipends and buildings. How we acquire that remains the question of our conscience knowing that we have people that we represent. We are the torch that gives light to our communities. We are the salt of the earth.

In ending this short presentation , I would to make use of Dr John M Swomley words who argues that *churches are healthier and stronger if they assume responsibility both for financing their own programs and for stimulating their members to accept that responsibility.*

Peace!

