

BEING A CHURCH TODAY IN SOUTH AFRICA'S LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

The emergence of a liberal democracy in South Africa confronted South African churches with a new environment. Until 1994, churches were mostly involved (on both sides) in the struggle against Apartheid. This situation resulted in a church model which can be defined as *institutionalism*. Churches acted as mega-institutions over and against the state and confronted or supported the state in decisions taken by synods, councils and ecumenical bodies. After 1994 the churches gradually lost their political relevance and subsided into a model which can be defined as *spiritualism*. *Spiritualism* emphasises the spiritual nature of Christianity to such an extent that the social task of the church becomes obsolete. This article endeavours to formulate a model which can overcome this problem and the article proposes the model of the "church as servant". I then describe the role of the serving church in South Africa under the following rubrics: the church as a holy community, the church as an exemplary community, the church as a preaching community and the church as a worshipping community.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of a liberal democracy in South Africa in 1994 churches were confronted with a new moral environment. This new environment is characterised by the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state, the introduction of a bill of fundamental rights and a liberal society with a social-humanist morality. The new society is constructed on the pillars of human dignity, equality and freedom and the bill of rights introduced a new value system which is systematically unfolded by decisions of the Constitutional Court. Furthermore, this liberal democracy is accompanied by a neo-liberal economic philosophy and policy. The community has also witnessed the immense rise of the western paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism in the latter decades of the twentieth century.ⁱ These influences have changed patterns of belief and worship.ⁱⁱ

This new environment poses new opportunities and challenges to the churches in South Africa.ⁱⁱⁱ Previously, churches were involved in the struggle centring on Apartheid. The Dutch Reformed churches and some Pentecostal churches endeavoured to entrench the system in a political theology of Apartheid, while others agitated for deep-rooted political change and a new

dispensation. De Gruchy described this struggle in his well-known publication of 1979.^{iv} Racism occupied the agenda of churches for a very long time. Churches had to deal with colonialism, social stratification and the social distress that was caused by these macro political processes. However, the new dispensation opened up the church's agenda.

Can the South African churches deal effectively with this new environment? This question is the topic of this article. Firstly, the article analyses the current ecclesiastical models of the churches in South Africa as they emerged from the period of the struggle. Secondly, it indicates some of the major challenges in this new environment. Finally, it proposes an ecclesiastical model in an effort to answer this question.

2 CONTEMPORARY MODELS OF THE CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

Churches are always, to some extent, influenced by the society and cultures within which they function. To deal with their environments churches tend to develop certain models of ministry that answer to people's needs at certain times. It is therefore possible to define certain prominent models in a certain moment. Dulles prefers to typify these models as paradigms. As long ago as 1986 he concludes as follows:

At various times in the history of the Church it has seemed possible to construct a whole theology, or at least a total ecclesiology, on the basis of a single model. Such a dominant model is ... a paradigm.^v

Because they present themselves as solutions to prominent socio-historical problems, these paradigms are characterised by one-sidedness.

Küng proves this point in his use of the paradigm theory in his periodisation of church history. According to Küng, church history reveals major "paradigm shifts" in Christianity. To explain this he distinguishes between the Jewish apocalyptic paradigm of earliest Christianity, the ecumenical Hellenistic paradigm of Christian antiquity, the Roman Catholic paradigm of the Middle Ages, the Protestant evangelical paradigm of the Reformation and the paradigm of Modernity.^{vi} The missiologist Bosch uses the same method of periodisation in his development of various missiological models in the history of mission.^{vii} Küng and Bosch identify these models at the macro-level of church history, but this recognition of models can also be valid at the meso- and micro-level. Indeed, even in a given period it is possible to distinguish various models.

Dulles provides adequate examples to illustrate this. He distinguishes between several models of the church which flow from the historical interpretations of the various metaphors of the church in the New Testament. Each model has its principal basis and is, in itself, an expression of the New Testament doctrine of the church. However, these models can develop one-sidedly to extreme forms that inhibit the effective functioning of the model. Dulles identifies the following models and indicates their extreme forms: the

institutional model tends to degenerate into institutionalism, the mystical communion which tends to deteriorate into spiritualism, the sacrament model which may grow into symbolism and the model of the church as a herald, which can collapse into activism, while the model of the church as servant can be reduced to the church as mere social remonstrance.^{viii}

One can argue that the church in South Africa portrays a wide spectrum of models, ways of conduct and worship. Still, certain models are prominent owing to the circumstances of the recent past. A review of the current functioning of churches in South Africa in the light of Dulles' model theory brings two features to prominence. These are *institutionalism* and *spiritualism*. The others are also present, but at the moment these models do not dominate the South African ecclesiological scene. It seems that the struggle of the past and the development of a new social dispensation have bred churches which are either caught up in the extremes of *institutionalism* or in an ultimate form of *spiritualism*. These trends are not limited to certain traditions but manifest themselves to some extent in all the ecclesiastical traditions.

Institutionalism portrays a form of church life where the elected leadership is the sole face and the voice of the church. This degeneration into the extreme institutionalism turns the church into a power structure that attempts to influence society through an authoritative expression in synods and councils or through powerful leaders. The voice of the leadership (council, synod) is seen by many Christians as the voice of the church. Little activity at local church level is noticeable and the laity remains passive in terms of addressing pressing social problems. As "the church", the leadership should speak about the poor and the needy, about HIV/Aids and about other social and political issues. Instead, they speak to another power, namely, the state. The life of the communion of believers is engulfed in the functioning of the power structure and that becomes noticeable in the activities of the leadership. In this model clericalism tends to reduce the laity to a condition of passivity and to make their apostolate a mere appendage of the apostolate of the hierarchy.^{ix}

This institutionalism was effective in the pre-1994 era, when churches spoke out either in favour or against Apartheid. Churches were prominent because their testimonies served the political ideals of many people. However, after 1994 the effectiveness of institutionalism faded away and, in particular, the established mainline churches experience a loss of both membership and influence in the new society.^x In their research into denominational trends in South Africa in the years 1911-2001 Hendriks and Erasmus found that the mainline churches' "Christian market share" is declining. This includes the following traditions: Reformed, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran and Roman Catholic.^{xi} Steyn even speaks of a deep-rooted identity crisis in the once powerful Dutch Reformed denominations and it is fair to say that his analysis also applies to the other mainline traditions.^{xii} This trend corresponds with Knox's observations, as far back as 1993, that institutional religion has become increasingly irrelevant in western culture.^{xiii} As is the case in other parts of the world nowadays, *institutionalism* even leads to resistance against the church and people are exploring other ways of

giving expression to religion and worship, either within independent community churches or within extra-ecclesiastical religious movements.^{xiv} This resistance is, according to Toffler, a global trend because it is part of modern people's resistance to huge power structures that manipulate people's lives.^{xv} This resistance can now be observed in South Africa.

The other main trend in the current South African ecclesiological scene can be identified as *spiritualism*. This concept describes a way of believing and conduct in which the model of the church as a "mystical communion" is made absolute. This model puts a great deal of emphasis on the church as an informal and interpersonal community.^{xvi} The trend can be seen as the antipode of *institutionalism*, because it is a specific reaction against the institute model. Brunner puts this trend into words as far back as 1952 with his definition of the church as the *Gemeinschaft des Geistes*.^{xvii} But the main force nowadays behind this trend is the Charismatic movement, with its emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit, the importance of the laity, the literal understanding of Scripture and the direct experience God. The Charismatic movement today can be detected in all the ecclesiastical traditions. Spiritualism is anti-institutional, anti-clerical and anti-rational. It privatizes religion to the sphere of the spiritual and the only task of the church is to "win souls for Jesus" by way of active evangelism directed at personal repentance and conversion. This trend has little concern for socio-political problems such as poverty, oppression, racism and violations of human rights. Its angle of approach in the social field is that spirit-filled people will improve the world.

This trend has emerged very strongly over the past decades in South Africa. The research of Hendriks and Erasmus proves this point.^{xviii} What is remarkable is the growth in Pentecostalism and especially the African Initiated Churches, which have become the biggest Christian movement in South Africa.^{xix} These groups hold enthusiasm, the visible expression of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, healing ministries, exorcism and demonology in high esteem.^{xx}

Both *institutionalism* and *spiritualism* contain elements of the biblical doctrine of the church. But, as Dulles indicates, these extreme movements are usually used in a one-sided manner to solve certain problems.^{xxi} *Institutionalism* was a paradigm suitable to the church's struggle during the previous political dispensation. *Spiritualism* probably emerged as a new paradigm to fill the void after the establishment of a democratic society, when the political role played by the churches became irrelevant. Churches are opting for a new identity and this explains the anti-institutional charismatic trend. In other words, this new paradigm is an attempt to answer the contemporary need for spirituality.

However, extreme forms will always have deficiencies, and the main deficiency lies in their obvious one-sidedness. Scripture reveals that the church is at the same time charismatic and institutional, socially involved and missionary, concerned with human rights and spiritual needs and is the voice of the poor and distressed as well as a refuge for seekers. This article takes this rich variety into account in an effort to develop a suitable model which can express all of this. It is therefore necessary, again, to have a close look at the

biblical models of the church in order to define the role that the church should play in South Africa's liberal democracy. The analysis of this role will subsequently be employed as a model for contemporary South Africa.

3 THE SERVANT CHURCH

The approach of this investigation is to define the church within the context of the concept "Kingdom of God". Many theologians over the past fifty years have called for us to direct our attention to the rich meaning of the Kingdom in our efforts to define the essence and function of the church.^{xxii} In what follows, the prominence and core meaning of the Kingdom will be described first. Subsequent to this analysis of the New Testament idea of the concept of the Kingdom, I would like to define the church also within the perspective of the Kingdom - at least for the purpose of this investigation.

3.1 Kingdom and church

The theology of the Kingdom of God has become an important paradigm in recent Reformed theology. This development is evident in contemporary publications in ethics, missiology, ecclesiology and practical theology. The concept of the Kingdom can be regarded as one of the central issues in biblical revelation. In his well-known book on the topic in 1963 Bright goes as far as to say:

For the Kingdom of God is, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible.^{xxiii}

The phrase "Kingdom of God" does not occur in the Old Testament, but the substance to which it refers is clearly visible. It becomes visible in the continuous preaching of the kingship of God and in his intention to renew creation through redemption in Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.^{xxiv} The idea of the kingship of God is also a basic message of the New Testament.^{xxv} In the New Testament, when it comes to the Kingdom of God, several different expressions can be found describing the same matter. These are:

- Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 3; 2; 4:17; 5:19; 18:1, 4).
- Kingdom of God (Mt 6:33; Lk 12:31; Mk 1:14).
- Kingdom of Christ (Lk 22:30; Cl 1:13).
- Kingdom of God and of Christ (Ep 5:5).
- Kingdom (1 Cr 15:24; Jm 2:5; Rv 1:9).
- Kingdom of the Father (Mt 13:43; 26:29 and Lk 12:32).

In essence, the Kingdom is about the reign of God. The Old Testament proclaims the reality of the rule of God over the whole of creation.^{xxvi} The New Testament proclaims the rule of God as it becomes manifest in the coming of Christ and the formation of the people of God.^{xxvii} The reign of God is a present and future reality. Küng calls this futurist-presentist eschatology.^{xxviii} This reign has already been manifested in the coming of Christ, but will be revealed in its completeness at the end of time. The whole history of the

covenant is an indication of the historical reality of the Kingdom. Some of the teachings of Jesus point to the Kingdom as a present reality and others to the Kingdom as a future reality. However, these expressions are not contradictory. Conzelmann argues persuasively that the two have the same significance for human existence.^{xxix}

The reign of God as a present reality finds concrete expression in the coming and teaching of Christ. It finds further expression in the community which results from the work of Christ, namely the church. The church can therefore be regarded as a present sign of the Kingdom.^{xxx} The church is the universal community of believers. This universal community manifests in the local congregation.^{xxxi} We can distinguish between the invisible or universal church that comprises all believers all over the world and the local church, which comprises believers of a certain place. The New Testament speaks of the church as the “body of Christ”, but also of the church as a local congregation (e.g. the church of Jerusalem).

The local congregation also bears all the attributes of the universal church. It is *ecclesia completa*. It has the same responsibility, namely to embody the reign of God and everything it represents such as love, hope, peace and joy. In addition to be the sign of the Kingdom, the church must also be the “spear point” of the Kingdom. The church should embody, reveal and promote the reign of God. The essence and calling of the church must therefore be defined within the broader concept of the Kingdom. The church is subservient to the Kingdom and this determines every aspect of church-life.

The relation of Kingdom and church is essential to an understanding of both concepts. The Kingdom is all about the establishment, recognition and eventual vindication of the reign of God. The church is a visible sign of this reign, but also the herald of this reign. The word “servanthood” thus captures the elemental role of the church. As a congregation of believers, the churches, as well as individual Christians are servants in service of the Kingdom of God. Bonhoeffer calls attention to this concept in the troubled situation of World War II and his ethics of servanthood are still very relevant.^{xxxii} Servanthood manifests itself as stewardship, one of the characteristics of a Christian attitude. Stackhouse reminds us that stewardship is a major guideline in Christian moral action.^{xxxiii} Thus, the church as the congregation of believers at the local level, as well as the universal church comprising all believers at a certain time, is servants in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is coming and this kingdom will be characterised by justice, love, joy, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. The Kingdom changes reality. The servant of the Kingdom must therefore be involved in the furthering of these noble principles in order to change society. The church will inevitably also be a servant in the world - an instrument of change.

3.2 A communion of believers

In the biblical revelation many metaphors are used to describe the church. In the past some of these metaphors were used to form a prescriptive model or a paradigm to suit the problems of a certain time, and Dulles has done thorough

research into these paradigms.^{xxxiv} The tendency to use these models one-sidedly has already been mentioned earlier in this article. What will a more balanced approach look like? I believe that Küng gives the answer to this question in his classic work on the church. He chooses to approach the issue from a Trinitarian perspective. He speaks of the fundamental structure of the church which is determined by the metaphors “people of *God*,” “body of *Christ*” and “creation of the *Spirit*.”^{xxxv} These metaphors portray the church as a unique community of believers. In order to formulate guidelines for “being a church” in a liberal democracy, I shall explain the theological meaning of each of these concepts in more detail.

3.2.1 People of God

The expression “people of God” stems from the Old Testament. Israel is described as such because of her unique relationship with God, which implied a specific way of living (Dt 14:2; 26:16-19). Israel is called to be holy just as God is holy. According to Küng this meaning influences the New Testament conception of the church.^{xxxvi} The relationship with God is best expressed by the metaphor of a king and his subjects. God was the ultimate King of Israel and the kingdom was a theocracy. The king ruled with his laws and commandments and the people had an obligation to be obedient and to fulfil the will of the king. The same idea is maintained in the New Testament regarding the church.^{xxxvii} The church is seen as the people of God - a spiritual theocracy under the kingship of Christ. Besides the emphasis on this unique relationship, this metaphor also points to the fact that God guides and protects the church through the course of history. Believers can put their faith in the caring hand of God.^{xxxviii} Thus believers are described as holy, as obedient to God and as a people with hope. The New Testament also uses other concepts to illuminate this metaphor. It describes believers as elected people, called people and loved ones.^{xxxix}

3.2.2 Body of Christ

The metaphor “body of Christ” is frequently used in the New Testament (*see* 1 Cr 6:12-20; 10:14-22; 12:4-8; Cl 1:15-20; 24-27; Ef 1:10, 22, 23; 2:16; 4:4-16; 5: 22, 23). Christ is the head, the church is the body and the individual believer is a part of the body, just as the hand or the eye is an organic part of a human body. The Greek word used to describe the “head” is *kephale*, a word used to describe the head of a human body. Thus Christ is not the head of the church in the sense of a headmaster of a school, but in the sense of the head of a body.^{xl} The head and the body function in the same way of a human body. From the head flows the neuron that controls and activates the body functions. Without the head the body is dead and the members of the body can relate to each other only because of the head. The relationship with Christ determines all other relationships in the Christian community such as marital relationships, labour relationships, family relationships and relationships between believers (Ep 5). Other concepts used to illuminate this metaphor are the church as “community of believers” (1 Cr 1:9), the church as the “bride of Christ” (Rev 18:23; 21:2, 9; 22:17) and the church as the “vine and the branches” (Joh 15). All of these concepts stress the unique relationship

between Christ and believers and between believers themselves. Because of this relationship believers are obliged to love, encourage, forgive, care for, pray for, support and live in peace with each other.^{xii} This metaphor describes the new relationship that came into being as a result of the reconciliation in Christ.

3.2.3 Creation of the Holy Spirit

In the Old Testament the tabernacle is a symbol of the presence of God in the midst of his people (Ex. 4:34). This meaning has been transferred to the temple in Jerusalem.^{xiii} In the New Testament the church is called the temple of the Holy Spirit and this expression indicates that God is present in his church just as he was present in the midst of his people in the Old Testament.^{xiii} In this sense the church is a sign of the future dispensation after the second coming of Christ. The Spirit represents part of the future that is already present.^{xiv} The church as the dwelling of the Spirit is therefore a unique community - a community with its own identity, calling and future. It is a holy community.

The church is also the workplace of the Spirit. The Spirit equips the believers with the necessary gifts to perform their duties in the expansion of the reign of God. Furthermore, the Spirit comforts the children of God and guides them in the fulfilment of their calling. The church is therefore a dynamic community that can and should adapt to the challenges of different times and situations.^{xv}

This Trinitarian perspective of the church highlights two of its major features. As the people of the Kingdom of God the church should be:

- obedient to God;
- an extraordinary community with an own identity, principles and norms, calling, life and worldview;
- a servant of God within the world communities who should promote the love, peace and justice of the Kingdom of God.

These major features of the church will now be used as a framework in explaining the task of the church in South Africa's present liberal democracy, which has its own unique challenges.

4 THE SERVING CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

The role of the serving church in South Africa can be described under the following rubrics: the church as a holy community, the church as an exemplary community, the church as a preaching community and the church as a worshipping community.

4.1 The church as a holy community

The church should first and foremost be the servant of the King of the Kingdom of God. Obedience to God, as an essential part of Christian attitude,

can therefore be described as the core value of being a church in a liberal democracy today. This principle implies that the plans and actions of churches today should correspond with the moral principles of Scripture as these are expressed in the Ten Commandments in its synecdochic character.^{xlvi} These principles are defined in various interpretations and summaries of the Commandments in the rest of Scripture.

As the servant of Christ, the church is thus a unique community in the midst of many other human communities in modern society. It has its own character, calling and way of doing things. It is responsible for its actions, not to humankind but to Christ. The best way to describe this uniqueness is by using the concept “holiness”. To be holy means to be different being the worldly, not in a pietistic sense such as in *spiritualism*,^{xlvii} but in the active pursuance of principles and norms that are very different from those that control modern society. A holy church is like the sun with its own energy, whose radiating beams penetrate deep into society. The holiness must grow and influence modern thinking, planning and lifestyles. The holiness of the church must touch the centre of society. In a success-driven society with its worship of performance, achievement, prosperity and wealth, the church should promote the values of love, stewardship, self-denial and obedience to God. In doing so the church cannot refrain from speaking its mind on the necessity of transformation in South Africa, issues such as land reform and affirmative action, business ethics and poverty, and the plight of women and children in today’s world. The calling to holiness obliges Christians to be involved in the sanctification of society in all spheres where sin blemishes the rule of Christ.^{xlviii} The holiness of the church does not transfer Christians to an other-worldly sphere of “spiritual things,” but implies a deep involvement in society in order to change society for the better on the basis of Christian moral principles and norms.

The current trend of *spiritualism* in Christianity within South Africa runs against the holiness of the church. In its attempt to privatise Christian religion and to move it to the sphere of the “spiritual” and the “sacred,” it violates the real essence of what true spirituality and sanctification means: the renewal of society in the light of the principles of the Kingdom. As *spiritualism* is growing, secularism will follow suit because the disengagement of Christian morality from the fibre of society creates a void for secular ideas to fill. *Spiritualism* plunges Christianity in South Africa into a negative mode of withdrawal from the public sphere. This process will soon have destructive results.

The holiness of the Church also implies the independence of churches. This is important because one of the major reasons for the deformation of churches in the past is the fact that they aligned themselves with the powers of the day. When a church becomes a “state church,” its message becomes compromised. Church history is full of examples of this phenomenon. One can refer to the State-Church of the post-Constantinian paradigm, the Lutheran Church in Germany before World War II and the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa in the era of Apartheid. The South African experience indicates how a church can err by siding with the forces of the day and neglect their calling to be a sign of the Kingdom and the Kingdom alone.

Churches in South Africa have to restore their holiness and redefine their

obligations in being a critical voice in the development of the new dispensation. But the churches that opposed Apartheid should also be careful not to side uncritically with the new powers of the day because then they will merely repeat the mistakes of the past. The liberal democracy with its neo-liberal philosophy of the economy, its secular life and world view and its neglect of the poor and downtrodden, especially those suffering from HIV/Aids, should be assessed in an ongoing way against the moral principles and norms of the Kingdom of God. The possibility of becoming a “state church” again is as real for churches in South Africa today as it was in the past. Holiness requires independence and commitment to the Kingdom alone.

Of particular concern in this instance is the role of the churches in the alleviation of poverty. The South African government has chosen neo-liberalism as its philosophy and economic policy. The question can be raised whether this policy is effective in the alleviation of poverty. And the churches should raise this question, because the alleviation of poverty has everything to do with promoting the justice of the Kingdom of God.

Küng voices valid criticism against neo-liberalism from a Christian ethical perspective. He says that the total market economy easily develops into a total system and that all values become subject to it. The total system leads to a “domesticated” and “depotentiated” ethics and he is of opinion that:

a domesticated and depotentiated ethic puts at risk its very own values and criteria; it serves only as a pretext and remains inefficient. And at the same time, as is already proving to be the case in many areas and regions, a total market economy has devastating consequences: the law, instead of being grounded in universal human dignity, human rights and human responsibilities, can be formulated and manipulated in accordance with economic “constraints” and group interests; politics capitulates to the market and the lobbying of pressure groups, and global speculation can shake national currencies; science delivers itself over to economic interests, and forfeits its function of achieving the most objective and critical control possible; culture deteriorates into being a contributor to the market, and art declines into commerce; ethics is ultimately sacrificed to power and profit, and is replaced by what “brings success” and “gives pleasure”; and finally even religion, offered as a commodity on the supermarket of ideas along with much that is para-religious or pseudo-religious, is mixed at will into a syncretistic cocktail for the convenient stilling of a religious thirst which sometimes overtakes even *homo oeconomicus*.^{xlix}

This criticism and the failure to alleviate poverty in South Africa leads one to the inevitable conclusion that neo-liberalism does not prioritise the fate of the poor. From a Christian ethical perspective, in which the fate of the poor is a fundamental theme, the philosophy of neo-liberalism contains serious errors. Although one can recognise the positive aspects of neo-liberalism, we should still search for a philosophy and policy that brings immediate and direct relief to the poor. Küng sees such a philosophy in “neo-liberalism with a social responsibility”. Terreblanche goes even further and, after a thorough criticism

of neo-liberalism, pleads for a paradigm shift in South Africa towards a philosophy of social democracy.¹ The churches should become active partners in promoting such a paradigm shift.

4.2 The church as an exemplary community

The church is a new community within the communities of this world. As the people of God, the body of Christ and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit it has the vocation to act as an exemplary community - a model of love, stewardship, self-denial and obedience to God. Christ must be seen in the Church to the same degree that the Gospel must be heard. Just as the sacraments symbolically portray the ideas of love, reconciliation and forgiveness, so should all the other acts of the church point to the importance of the principles and norms of the Kingdom.

Until now, churches in South Africa have struggled to meet this obligation. Instead of being examples of the new community in Christ, they have become images of society's social patterns. The ideology of Apartheid penetrated some churches and these churches organised themselves along racial and ethnic lines.ⁱⁱ Women were oppressed within the churches as much as they were oppressed within society at large. Bias against homosexual people, stigmatisation of people with HIV/Aids and lack of concern for children are features of many churches and as such, these churches merely reflect the deficiencies of contemporary South African society. It is fair to say that churches in South Africa have, to a large extent, become the extensions of a troubled society.

To be a truthful church in this new liberal democracy the exemplary character of the church should be restored. The prophetic critique of the church will be regarded as little more than hollow rhetoric if it is not backed up by deep-rooted internal reformation. This reformation need to include:

- The clearing away of all vestiges of Apartheid. As long as white and black Christians worship in separate spheres they will have neither the moral right nor the ability to promote reconciliation and forgiveness in society. Although most churches have overcome the racial segregation in their organisational structures, this integration is not visible in many local congregations. Previously white congregations are still mostly white and communities still tend to worship along racial lines.
- The rectification of the inferior position of women in the majority of churches. As long as women are denied participation at all levels of church government and decision making, churches will have little to say in favour of the development of human rights of women in society. How can a church campaign for the proprietary rights of women in land reform while denying her God-given right to function fully in the Kingdom of God? The church as the people of the new Covenant and the Kingdom of God therefore has a very important calling amidst the prevailing culture of woman abuse, namely to teach the biblical perspective on gender equality, to manifest this equality in ecclesiastical structures to its fullest extent, and to act as the conscience and the voice of abused

women and girl children in society. In the time of Apartheid in South Africa the late well-known missiologist Bosch challenged the churches to act as “alternative” communities by manifesting true reconciliation between black and white in the churches and, by doing so, teaching society that black and white can co-exist peacefully.^{lii} The same can be done in the case of gender. The church can then act as an “exemplary” community, in other words, as a model of the gender relations that the community can live by.^{liii}

- The raising of awareness for the vulnerability of many children in this country. Churches should be the major agents on behalf of children and should never cease to voice concern about child labour, neglect, and corporal punishment, lack of education, sexual abuse and vulnerability to HIV/Aids. Furthermore, every local congregation, as God’s caring community within an unkind society should be involved in caring for street children, children who are forced to roam the streets of cities and villages.
- Caring for the poor by way of their own diaconal work, but also by reminding government and business to act in such a way that the poor remains the main focus of attention. Churches can educate people to act as responsible stockholders and stakeholders. Gunnemann explains this responsibility by calling our attention to the increased participation by churches and other eleemosynary institutions (especially universities and foundations) in a spectrum of shareholder activities designed to monitor, modify, and correct egregious social harm done by those corporations in which they hold stock.^{liv} Not only have such efforts led to changed corporate behaviour (notably in the areas of foreign investment in South Africa, environmental impact, developing world marketing practices and community and employee relations), they have also contributed to legal decisions and literature clarifying the role of stockholders in modern corporations. Stockholders and stakeholders should realise that the purpose of business is to serve people and not simply to make profits. They should accept the ethical challenge to serve society even if it means lower dividends and fewer benefits. Furthermore, stockholders are more than capable of exerting a strong influence on a company’s strategic planning and can use a number of opportunities to remodel corporations into becoming moral agents.^{lv}
- Radiating positive energy in a despondent community by being a model of peaceful relationships, joy, love, hope, willingness to forgive and visible and lasting reconciliation. In this way the churches can manifest and reflect the virtues of the Kingdom of God to the benefit of an often downhearted society.

In his recent research, Molobi indicates how some of the churches that have focussed their attention on the need for the church to have an exemplary character, especially in condemning violence against women and children, specifically in South Africa’s squatter areas, have developed people’s conscience towards providing welfare and moral support.^{lvi}

4.3 The church as a preaching community

The ministry of the Gospel by way of the official preaching of the Word of God in the local congregation is synonymous with Christianity. Bright expresses this conviction with his statement:

The church lives, let it be repeated, in the preaching, always has and always will.^{lvi}

Stott is of the same opinion and he says:

Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God^{lviii}

This has been the case throughout the history of the church.

Preaching should point to Christ as the hope for a fallen world. People must be called to repentance and faith.^{lix} They must be reminded that the only way to a new life is regeneration by the Spirit of God and daily conversion. This essential aspect of Christianity cannot be replaced by a social gospel, political theology or a theology of religions. Without the calling to repentance and faith and the proclamation of the kingship of the resurrected and living Christ, Christianity will be meaningless. Preaching is the way the church should convey these truths in a broken world and to a fallen humankind.

However, preaching should not be reduced to the spiritual realm alone. The range of the kingship of Christ requires the church to address the totality of life - the spiritual *and* the social. In the Reformed tradition, this all-encompassing character of preaching is called topical preaching. The truths of the Word of God and the moral principles and norms of the Kingdom of God must be applied to all spheres of life. Topical preaching is the most important contribution the church can make to our liberal democracy today, for it is by this form of preaching that the church can exert the pressure that comes from a prophetic critique of the social problems of our time.

To support this argument a few areas can be addressed in order to indicate how preaching can fulfil its important role in this dispensation.

- Preaching should reveal the moral principles and norms of the Kingdom of God. Christians should be persuaded to live in accordance with the attitude of Christ - that is, show love, be stewards, be willing to engage in self-denial and to be obedient to God. Preaching should shape Christians into servants.
- Preaching should teach Christians how to build the nation by fostering the principles and attitude of forgiveness and repentance. In a country where the leadership often exploits the remaining pockets of racism and disunity for political gains, preaching can remind people of all races that

unity and racial harmony is the way to peace.

- Preaching can define the moral foundation for a responsible redress of society's social inequalities. Christians can be educated in the Christian moral principles at stake in terms of burning social issues such as land restitution, affirmative action, political protest, labour relations, business, religious freedom and HIV/Aids prevention. Well-educated and equipped Christians can play a part in the cultivation of a better understanding and handling of these matters by society at large.
- Preaching can nurture respect for human rights, and in particular a culture of respect for the human rights and dignity of women and children. Furthermore, preaching should reveal the God-given foundations of responsible family life and responsible sexuality.
- Preaching should be accompanied by the testimony of churches when they address the governments of the day and other social institutions. While the church cannot enter politics, it should be politically relevant by being in constant dialogue with other role players in the political and social field.

Topical preaching requires thorough training. Theological institutions are therefore challenged to train future ministers to understand the problems of the time and to react to these problems in a credible and informed way.

4.4 The church as a worshipping community

To come together to worship God is one of the core characteristics of the church. In practical theology the worship service has been defined as a meeting between God and his people, as covenantal communion, as a feast and as communal worship. All of these definitions portray a certain, and very important, aspect of the worship service.^{lx} Here Christians can honour God in their singing, testimonies and confession of faith. Here they receive guidance by way of listening to the commandments of God and the preaching of the Word. Here they are constantly reminded of the promises of God in the sacraments as visible signs. And here they can intercede in prayer for the authorities of the day and for all people in need. The worship service on Sunday is an opportunity for the educating and equipping of Christians.

Worship and liturgy has attracted renewed attention over the past few decades. The main reason for this interest is the establishment of the "Lima Liturgy" of the World Council of Churches under the banner "Baptism - Eucharist - Ministry" (BEM).^{lxi} The purpose of BEM has been to promote ways of worship in which people can be made sensitive to the social problems in society and to the need to fulfil their calling in this regard. This development should be welcomed, especially in view of the fact that the trends of institutionalism and spiritualism have reduced worship to either a meaningless rite or to a mere emotional experience. Worship on Sundays should touch Christians' lives during the week. It is the central dimension of the believer's

total service to God.^{lxii} Furthermore, by relating the worship to the social circumstances of the congregation the Christian attitude of love, stewardship, self-denial and obedience to God can be developed.

Every ecclesiastical tradition has its own forms of worship. However, the new ideas brought forward by the BEM document can enrich these traditions. Churches in South Africa may consider focusing on social problems in their way of worship in order to create sensitivity and awareness. I would like to propose the following broad guidelines here:

- Praying for the poor and for the ability and means to share remains one of the most important ways of focussing on poverty. In his recent research, De Klerk substantiates the value and importance of this aspect of prayer in the worship liturgy.^{lxiii}
- Preaching constantly about the calling of Christians to be involved in creating solutions for the problems of society. The members of the congregation are politicians, teachers, business people, employers and employees and the preaching should motivate everyone to be a steward in the workplace.
- Arranging the ministry of the sacraments in such a way that the plight of neglected and abused children and the violation of the human rights of women can be highlighted.
- Expressing the unity of the Christian community in such a way that it can send a positive message to our society with its pockets of racism, xenophobia and ethnocentrism. Black and white will not hate each other in the social field if they learn to worship together.
- Accentuating the Christian virtue of sharing against the background of the current process of land reform and the policy of affirmative action.
- Drawing attention to the importance of family life and the value of stable families for society at large.
- Focussing the eyes of people on the predicament of people with HIV/Aids and the sin of rejection and stigmatisation.
- Welcoming people with a homosexual orientation and guiding them with love and care on how to manage their lives.
- Encouraging each other to live in accordance with the attitude of Christ.

The worship service can function as a generating station where the energy for social change can be created. Christians can be the carriers of this energy to the secluded regions of society where people live in the darkness of despair. Worship should move people to seek solutions.

5 CONCLUSION

The new political dispensation in South Africa is certainly a huge improvement on Apartheid. The new constitution protects the human rights of every person and the processes of land reform and affirmative action attempt to rectify the imbalances of the past. The economy seems to be sound and it is creating better opportunities for many. The freedom of the press and the independence of the judiciary are held in high esteem. South African society has witnessed three free and fair elections. Nation-building is taking place. It is fair to say that the necessary social processes are in place.

However, what is also required is a correct attitude among South Africa's citizens. Social processes cannot succeed if they are not carried out by honest and committed people. Good intentions can easily go astray if people are not willing to serve a bigger purpose. This attitude is lacking. Crime, corruption, sexual immorality, power abuse, exploitation and poverty still plague society and blemish the positive results of the past twelve years. The church can play an important part in the development of a new attitude. And what is better than pointing to the example of the attitude of Christ? This is why the positive influence that the church could exert in South Africa's new liberal democracy can hardly be overestimated.

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