



Diakonia Council of Churches

PROPHETIC DIAKONIA IN ACTION: SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

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Julius Malema

Just over a few days ago the President of the ANCYL, Mr Julius Malema, threatened to remove from power those leaders elected by the people who refuse to align their political thinking with his. His was expressed in the closing remarks of the ANCYL Congress held at Gallagher Estates in Johannesburg, as a relentless fight to have the mining industry nationalised and the land expropriated from those who got it for nothing in the past. Malema argues that those who hold a different view will be forced out of political office to give room to those who agree with his and the ANCYL view.

However in essence, Malema raises nothing new that the people of this country do not know about. The question of land reform policy has been brought to question on a number of occasions where individuals and organisations expressed their frustration and dissatisfaction about the slow pace of redistribution, the ineffectiveness of willing-buyer-willing seller approach.

For him to link national policy direction with threats to remove certain people from power, if he doesn't find his way through, creates a strong suspicion of what the battle is all about. So, the question that needs to be asked is whether indeed Malema is interested in the plight of the landless and those that mining activity had disadvantaged or that he is simply using the plight of the poor to justify his intention to have other people within the ANC removed from power.

The truth is anyone who has passion for the poor and works in solidarity with them will be part of their journeys by participating in their struggles including being part of the discussions around land and mining. Instead of speaking on their behalf, he speaks with them.

On the basis that what Malema raises are legitimate concerns in this country, then the Church needs to take note and re-organise its position on all these matters and make the necessary pronouncements that could serve as a contribution to a very complex national debate.

President Jacob Zuma

Few days before this statement was said, the President of the Republic, Mr Jacob Zuma, delayed rather failed to execute his state duties to address a huge crowd who gathered at Orlando Stadium on June 16 day to commemorate the 35th Anniversary of the violent and fatal incidents of 1976 where this nation was plunged into a mourning of a unprecedented scale. The President later confessed to the nation that his late arrival by four hours was as a result of the delayed logistics of the ANCYL Congress.

It is concerning that those who are employed to ensure that the President makes up his engagements and honour national and international appointments can be so indifferent to the fact that June 16 does create international interest and therefore to display the President addressing empty seats instead of people creates an embarrassment to government as a whole. What does this mean to us, why did it happen? Who could have been behind this – are the necessary question which must be asked.

It is prudent that the State President and those around him are reminded that the President serves the nation and not the ANC alone. This continues to happen because when President Mbeki was removed the nation was afforded no opportunity by the ruling power to make an opinion. This gives an impression that so long it suites the ANC, Presidents can be told what and not-what to do.

Chief Justice Nqobu

It is incredible how our democracy continues to grow to the extent that when the President extended the term of office for the Chief Justice Sandile Nqobu, institutions of law and the advancements of democracy and constitution were quick to file the matter at the Constitutional Court challenging the President to have used a law that is unconstitutional.

This and many other related decisions are indicative of how democracy can still be misused and undermined to serve political interests. If the President's decision was to be upheld or thrown out – either way, the damage on the integrity of the Chief Justice will not be easy to manage. This is because the office he holds must at all times remain above any political influence.

There must be a way in which the Church remains vigilant to raise any suspicions that may damage the constitutionality or otherwise of the decisions that the President take on daily basis. The Constitution is meant to protect and defend the sovereignty of the state and once you have it disregarded, we will deteriorate and become a dysfunctional state.

Xenophobic Attacks

Shortly before Malema could say all these things, we were battling with violent attacks against people of other nationalities other than South Africans. Most of those who got attacked and some killed, are businesspeople who are accused of taking over jobs and business at the time when locals have no jobs and are economically inactive. The police were hard at work to define these attacks as the work of criminals and not representatives of xenophobic fanatics.

My feeling is that there is need for South Africa to open up a national dialogue on the so-called xenophobic attacks as opposed to criminal activities. We have not as yet dealt with the question of accommodation of other nationals at the scale with which we are required to. We cannot continue to be a nation whose prime attitude is defined by hatred of the other.

So, what we need to confront is whether criminals are hiding behind xenophobia to carry out their criminality or it is just that South Africans feel so disregarded in their own country to the extent that they now are prepared to fight for that space. How then do we link up xenophobic tendencies with poor delivery of social services?

National Security

During the past weekend, we read from the popular editorials how some assassins from Rwanda took cover in our country on trail to kill one of the former Military Generals who have received political asylum in our country. According to the editorial these people move from country to country in search of those who have the potential to overthrow the sitting government of President Kagame in Rwanda. In that sense our country becomes a murder battle for such people.

These kinds of attacks have also been prevalent in Mpumalanga Province where people who held different political views from others ended up being assassinated. The attacks were so systematic and consistent with those who hold political office to the extent that suspicion is created that they are not just mere criminal incidents.

The challenge posed is whether a culture is developing in this country to eliminate those who pose as political opponents. If it be true, then the trend of political assassinations is rearing its ugly head.

Foreign Policy

You are certainly aware that there are countries on the continent that have gone through some revolution as a result of people's dissatisfaction with their rulers – some of them having been in power for many decades. Tunisia and Egypt graduated from such despots. However, we are still confronted with the situation in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Sudan and Libya.

What is concerning though in all these situations is the involvement of foreign imperialist countries who consistently ignore the decisions taken by the African

Union about these countries. The UN Security Council is equally unhelpful and to a certain extent Africa is still not free. The leadership of the African Union has said time and time and again that the solutions to African problems and challenges must be home-brewed, however, it doesn't appear the colonial masters understand this.

The killing of civilians in Libya is concerning. We do know that NATO forces are bombing that country while Colonel Gaddafi's forces are not relenting as well. South Africa maintains that the no-fly resolution 1973 of the UN Security Council to which South Africa is a member who voted in favour is implemented in a questionable manner.

Mining and Business Ethics

Listening to the reports of the Benchmarks Foundation AGM last week, I can't help it but worry that people of God have been turned into objects by those who are concerned only about making profits at their expense. Relocation of people from their stable homes, degradation of the environment, pollution of water and air are just some of the disservices rendered to the weak and the poor. It is becoming urgent that unless communities rise against capital, we will soon have no planet to stay on. Greed has gone rather too far in the mind of those who control wealth to the extent that the capacity to destruct human life is heightened.

Church in South Africa

We unfortunately have a church in this country that is divided. Issues of social justice and transformation are not divorced from worship. Guided by the signs that we read from all spectra it is becoming increasingly apparent that we need leadership.

South African context has changed over years to warrant the development of a new theology. We need a church that is not only reactive but one that is able to set the moral agenda for the nation. This is a church that must not rely on media for information but to do research and base its positions on facts.

Further, it must be a church that has to make hard choices between flirting with power or residing with the powerless. The social space has opened so much that we have mushrooming churches whose prime focus is to make money out of the misery of the poor. We need no vacuum.