



ELECTIONS 2009 – A perspective

When the new South Africa came into being after the euphoric events of 27 April 1994, the fact that we became a secular state which permitted the freedom of religion and religious expression almost went unnoticed. There were several good reasons for the decision to go in this direction: the fact that the National Party regime had constructed the evil of Apartheid on the foundation of Christian Nationalism; the fact the South Africa was in fact a multi-faith society and people of faiths other than Christianity, and in fact of no faith, had contributed to the liberation struggle anchored by the ANC; and the fact that a greater religious tolerance was becoming the norm around the world.

Now, 15 years later, it appears that the Christian Church has become the battleground for the ANC. Some while back there was a flurry of publicity when the African Independent Churches, under the leadership of ANC Councillor for Ward 32, Vusi Khoza, ordained Jacob Zuma as a pastor in that church (despite Zuma's nominal membership of the UCCSA). More recently there was controversy stirred up by the permission of the Rhema Church leadership to allow Jacob Zuma access to the pulpit at a regular worship service on a Sunday morning, followed by a meeting between Zuma and religious leaders in the North-West Province, followed by Zuma attending a conference of the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe). This is, to my mind, recognition by the ANC that the Church and Church people are critical in the search for power in this country.

The message to Church and Church people therefore needs to be clear and unequivocal: the Church must steer clear of party political affiliation if it is to remain relevant, consistent with its mandate, and faithful to its mission to reach all people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. The historical engagement of the Church with the ANC, of which we have been reminded several times during the encounters referred to above, were in pursuit of liberation from an evil and repressive regime. That struggle found its goal in 1994, and the ANC became government, or as it wishes us to believe the "ruling party" – I prefer "majority party". As a political party among many in a multi-party democracy the ANC is no longer entitled to the unquestioned support of the Church. As the majority party in government the ANC is not entitled to believe that it should be let off the hook when its policies and practices are not in the best interests of the people or the country. The Church must claim and maintain the role as conscience of the State – whoever holds the power in the State.

Any party wishing to attract our vote needs to convince us that their policies offer the best solution for the social needs of the people, and that they will uphold justice and the rule of law fairly and objectively. They need to be prepared to be accountable to the people who vote for them. No party is entitled to our vote. They must each strive to earn it. And they must

know that, however we may vote as individuals, no party is entitled to the unquestioned support and endorsement of the Church, whose mandate is to build an alternative society based on the values of the Kingdom of God, in which whatever we do on earth finds endorsement in heaven.

Think carefully and prayerfully before placing your cross on the ballot paper. And then be prepared to open your arms to welcome your brother and sister who may have voted differently for the secular government in our land – they are your family in the Kingdom of God.

Ian Booth

Holy Week 2009