Faith and Politics in South Africa: Should Christians Participate in Politics?

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Faith and politics in the South African context, are they God-ordained institutions, intended to be mutually supportive? Or are they permanent opponents? These questions will be the bone of contention for this article. The problem of the relation between faith and politics is not new. It has accompanied the faith communities for almost twenty centuries without being fully resolved. Answers that have been given at certain times and in certain situations seem to be inadequate when circumstances change and new issues appear. The roots of this struggle for theological clarity may be traced to the Bible and in the theological traditions. After investigating literature about politics and faith throughout ages, one could recommend that Christians should participate in politics.

Keywords: faith, politics, Christians

Introduction

This article intends to focus on the author's experiences of faith and politics in South Africa not as a representative of a political party, but as a faith leader and faith consultant. It is very difficult to accept that faith should be disqualified from any political role, currently or even in the future. It is very clear that the role of faith in politics up to 1994 was fairly undisputed. On the one hand, one finds the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) theologically justifying the apartheid policy, helping to present the apartheid state as Christian state, but creating no distinction between what it saw as Christian values and the need for the apartheid state to be the abode of these particular values. This was the major form of discourse on both faith and politics. The other major discourse was the active involvement and participation of anti-apartheid faith communities in the period between 1948 and 1993 to counter the white theology of domination of the DRC. The last, amazing discourse was the absolute silence of faith communities in the democratic government era. From these pivotal discourses the critical question emerged: Should Christians participate in politics in the democratic South Africa, or should they be concentrating on faith activities?

Background

The problem of the relationship between throne and pulpit, Emperor and the Pope, or God and Caesar, has been exposed since the beginning of the Church. From the very first phase of its establishment, the Church had to confront the conflicting claims of obedience to being identified with Caesar or God, or Pope or Emperor.

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One of the standpoints of Peter and the apostles was to declare with the statement that has come to be the rallying point of the civil obedience organisations, persons, and conscientious objectors: “We will obey God rather than human beings”. At that point, it was already clear that there was conflict about where the commitment fell (Tsele, M., 1997, p. 39).

Very soon, however, some kind of easy, convenient relationship was established where each identified its territory which the other one had to respect and they continued to exist like that. That status quo continued to exist until roughly the middle ages, the time of the reformation. Then three major orders of creation were accepted. One was the state, as an area or sphere, another one was then called Family, which we typically call the private sphere, and the third one was the Church. It is very interesting that in this depiction one got the state, the private family and the church as the three angles of the equilateral triangle, joined together by the interchange and exchange of roles of members from these three important spheres.

In this article the focus will be on the relationship between faith and politics in the South African context. Are they God-ordained institutions, intended to be mutually supportive? Or are they permanent opponents? These two questions will be the bone of contention for this article. The problem of the relation between faith and politics is not new. It has accompanied the faith communities for almost 20 centuries without being fully resolved. Answers that have been given at certain times and in certain situations seem to be inadequate when circumstances change and new issues appear. The roots of this struggle for theological clarity may be traced to the Bible itself and the theological traditions.

Definition of Concepts: Faith and Politics

One of the reasons why people have difficulty with these concepts is that people usually think of faith in terms of religious institutions and politics in terms of government or political parties, which have different realms to rule. It is necessary for us to enquire more deeply about the nature of faith and politics. In order to have a clear background of faith and politics, it is of paramount importance to define these concepts.

First, for someone who is engaged and involved in faith activities, the lack of opening up and functioning in the dimension of faith, belief, trust, and confidence—all belonging to the faith realm—in the socio-political context is highly problematic. Second, a lack of awareness is being detected amongst Christians of impact their experience of faith, belief, trust and confidence on their experience of socio-political context, their participation, performance and the execution of their skills and know-how in socio-political activities.

In these two statements, the author strongly alludes to the fact that people’s experience of faith, belief, trust and confidence is in many instances plagued by an unawareness of the problematic role of religious and church-centred faith which steadfastly considers God to be the only object of faith. The moment self-belief, belief in the neighbours and belief in the physical-organic-environment are being left out of the experiential four-some rolling pattern of faith, the role and experience of faith is paradoxically neutralised and immunised by the faith person’s involvement in his/her socio-political-environment. Religious faith and God are thereby forced back into and locked up in spiritual spheres and faith communities. Though faith communities are an integral part of people’s lives, the important point here is that God’s presence is intrinsically part of every social structure, institution and community. God’s presence is not explicit in certain social institutions and less explicit in others (Modise, L.J., 2009, p. 55).

Faith is unlimited; it is not limited to religious people at all. It is a human experience. Human beings can love; they can hope, they can fear, they can hurt and they can have faith. It is one of human being’s attributes.

This concept of faith as a human experience of belief is crucial: not as acceptance of a creed or a set of rules lay down by an institution (Mayson, C., 1997, p. 9). Faith is a movement within one's being, a conviction, and a commitment, not something one does but something that happens to oneself. It is the experience of believing in something beyond oneself, something transcendent, and something to which one can reach out, that draws one onwards.

In this sense faith is an orientation of personality, to oneself, to other human beings, to the physical-organic environment (universe) a total response; a way of seeing the world and of handling it; a capacity to see at more than an ordinary level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of transcendent dimension... it is the prodigious hall mark of a human being. Faith has to be seen as a societal, not merely a personal concept. It breaks through the restrictions of privatised religion with the vision of a transformed world. Faith is not complete without practice. Faith cannot do without engagement. Faith must be a practical force in life: in caring for the other, in justice for all, in solidarity between people. Faith and life are closely connected, thus faith and politics are connected in African context (Peetoom, R., 1997, p. 15).

Politics has been taken to mean the essential human activity of deciding how to live together in communities. Politics has to do with day-to-day lives of people who are governed. In essence, politics has to do with human relationships and how to protect and use physical-organic-environment. Politics is defined "as the process by which some people and groups acquire power and exercise it over other" (Popenoe & Cunningham, 1998, p. 348). Political power is a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised. The former exert it over the latter's minds. Such an impact is derived from three sources: the expectation of benefits, the fear of disadvantages, and the respect or love for humankind or institutions (Hulett, L.S., 1993, p. 14). Furthermore, politics is a social process characterised by activity involving rivalry and cooperation in exercising power, and culminates in the making of decisions for a group. Politics is found wherever power relationships or conflict situations exist. Politics means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state.

Faith and politics have something in common, namely a relationship among groups within society. Faith has to do with the relationship in terms of human beings, God and the environment, while politics has to do with the relationship in terms of human beings and the physical-organic-environment. The second thing faith and politics have in common is dualistic thinking. Faith communities think in terms of "belief or doubt", while political communities think in terms of "rivalry or cooperation". In essence these two concepts are the two sides of the same coin. They are societal entities that need to be considered as intertwined concepts. For example, when a political party approaches voters during an election campaign, they draw up a manifesto (vision), which is a faith-orientated exercise; they believe they will achieve all that they are promising the voters. The above connection between politics and faith is justified as follows.

Throughout the period of Afrikaner Nationalist oppression that fundamental faith in a coming new community was spelt out in numerous statements including the Freedom Charter, the message to the people of South Africa, the Kairos Document, and the annual January Statement of the African National Congress (ANC). It continues as the dominant feature in the ANC today, and is the major reason why, unlike every other party, the ANC has not found it necessary to change its fundamental policies or its constitution.

What is said above is more rooted in the belief, trust and confidence ANC has in these documents; belief, trust and confidence it has in its members; and belief, trust and confidence it has in its associate members like faith communities. Whether in personal or social expectations in political or religious connotations, such faith

can come in and call forward a person or group and direct them to an end which religion calls godly. Faith in a transcendent reality beyond oneself, beyond other human beings and beyond the physical-organic-environment is the basic energy, the vital force within humanity, which encourages, inspires and motivates human participation in socio-eco-political activities. The roots of this struggle for faith-political understanding may be traced from the Bible.

The Biblical Perspective on Faith and Politics

The Bible as God's authoritative and infallible testimony to God's revelation in history treats problems such as these in a historical way. Scriptural normativity is so closely interwoven with historical context that the direct application of what are sometimes called "Biblical principles" can often be hazardous and even a misleading undertaking. For example, *prima facie* in Romans 13 we have a clear-cut directive to which the apostle Paul addresses himself. We discover the same in 1 Peter 2:11-17. It seems as if in both cases we have to do with quiet and well-ordered society in which the relationship between politics and faith is clearly defined. But when we read Revelation 13 we realize that we have become part of a completely different atmosphere. Here the state (pagan) is viewed in its diabolical rebellion against God and its persecution of the Church. The whole of Revelation 13 vibrates with tension. What seems to be a discrepancy between different parts of the Bible has to do with different historical contexts in which they were written. This is why a straightforward and historical application of one of these parts to the present-day situation can be so deceptive (Durand, J. J. F., 1981, p. 3). In South African context famous text to support the relationship between Faith and Politics, is Romans 13. In this article I will use this text to try and answer questions posed in the introduction of this work.

In Romans 13 the main idea is submission to the laws of the land. "Submit to the laws of the land, because governments have been set up by God, and they do his work in the world. Therefore give to the government all that it has a right to demand". Romans chapter 13 should not be read in isolation, it needs to be read with Romans chapter 12. These two chapters are connected with ethical teaching in the following ways.

God rules His world in love, and also in justice. He punishes evil and one of the ways in which He does this is by using governments and laws. In so doing, God shows both love and justice towards humankind.

Some Christians may have thought that, if they had died with Christ under the powers of this age, they need no longer obey the worldly governments and laws of this age. Paul showed that such thinking was mistaken, because God wants his people to continue to live in his world as it is until He takes them out of it, as He will. They are not of this world but they are in this world.

Ethical teaching which is meant to guide individual Christians is often unsuitable for governments; and behaviour which may be right for government may be wrong for an individual in his/her personal relationship with other people. But the existence of a strong and just government to control people's behaviour makes it easier for individuals to be kind and forgiving to one another (Bowen, R., 1975, p. 167).

Based on the three ways of ethical teaching one might say that the political and faith are God-ordained institutions and are intended to be mutually supportive.

The vital points of Paul's teaching in this passage are clear. But the problem is how to interpret and apply his teaching to the very different circumstances in which Christians live today. Christians face different problems from his, and we have opportunities to influence the political parties or government, which Paul never had.

This text has a negative impact on Christian participation in politics, even more so when there are unjust

practices in political sphere. The fact is that Christians have often tended blindly to support the government in power, and forget its task of pointing out injustices and trying to correct them. The other fact is that one needs to remember that the Roman government was not democratically elected. It was imperialist, racist, disliked by the majority of people, often cruel and unjust, especially to the Christians, to slaves and to subject people. It represented the minority rule over the majority. Yet for all this time—for 300 years—the faith community taught Christians that they should submit to it (though not necessarily always obey it), and oppose any idea of violent revolution against it. Revelation 13 described a state which was demonic and opposed to God, but did not once encourage Christians to oppose it by violence.

These biblical texts give us the direction to how Christians should behave towards politics and the government of the day. When the government of the day demonstrates justice, care and love to its subjects, then Romans 12 and 13 are more applicable to the situation of the day. From that angle, one can say that government is a God-ordained institution and needs to be supported by Christians as equally as it supports its subjects, of which Christians are a part. In cases where government practises or demonstrates injustices, hatred and division, Revelation 13 should be applicable, and Christians should view that government as demonic. Furthermore, Revelation 13 does not give the way forward in that regard, therefore Christians will have to work out their course of action in each situation they face.

Paul the intellectual was conscious of the indispensability of government in the highly developed Roman society, and in Romans 13 he tries to instil some political sense into his audience by showing them the function of the government in this earthly dispensation. He rejects the oversimplifications that since Christians are under the kingship of Christ they no longer need to obey the authorities of this world and submit to them (Donnet, A.M., 1981, p. 16).

The pre-democratic regime misused biblical texts and Christian beliefs to justify its oppression of the people that was called state theology. The state appeals to Romans 13:1-7 where Paul says that we should obey the state. That would be true in normal circumstances but Paul does not tell us in this text what Christians should do when the state becomes unjust, oppressive and tyrannical. When this happens we must say with Peter that we shall “obey God rather than men” but this statement does not mean Christians should withdraw from socio-political activities that affect their relationship with God, with other human beings and with the physical-organic-environment.

Reformed Tradition Understanding of Faith and Politics

Within the reformed tradition we find different approaches. Like Luther, Calvin distinguished between a civil and spiritual regiment, but at the same time he differed from Luther, stressing the inner coherence of two regiments. This coherence corresponds with the coherence between law and gospel in Calvin’s thought and consequently with the characteristic reformed belief in the sovereignty of the law of God over life in its totality. Within this context the word of God gets an all-embracing function.

Through the word, the spiritual regiment should bring the worldly regiment in submission to the regiment of Christ. This is the unique contribution of Calvin to the very difficult problem of the two regiments. The two regiments are bound together by the sovereignty of Christ, but the first regiment and therefore the faith community retains priority. For in the faith community Christ reigns directly through Word and Spirit and only through the proclamation of the same word does his reign extend to the government and society. From this follows the conviction that the faith community as the bearer of the word has a prophetic task vis-à-vis

government.

This sounds rather straightforward to those that accept and share the reformed belief in the sovereignty of Christ in all spheres of life. There are, however, two basic problems that have to be faced before speaking too glibly about the prophetic voice of the faith community in matters that affect government and society. The first problem is the fact that within the reformed tradition the inner coherence between the regiments never annihilates the distinction of the two. Accordingly, both the faith community and the government as embodiments of the two regiments have their own functions and power, each within its own sphere. The question therefore is: In what way should the prophetic voice of the church be heard in view of the sphere-sovereignty of the government? The second problem is even more serious than the first. It concerns the method in which the faith community should proclaim the word of God vis-à-vis the government, bearing in mind that the faith community cannot proclaim the word without first having understood the Word of God for a concrete and specific situation. In other words, we are faced with the most difficult of all theological problems: the hermeneutical problem.

In combination, the two problems should be read as follows: How are the ethical norms of the Scripture to be understood in a specific political situation? And in which way should the faith community confront the government and individual politicians with these norms without over-stepping their boundaries into the political arena? Based on the nature of these problems we should not be surprised that in the history of the reformed faith different answers have been given and different systems have been developed, although all of them understood themselves as legitimate continuations of the original starting point of Calvin. There are three important Calvinistic models: the Kuyperian model, the Barthian model, and the Van Ruler's model. In this paper the author will attempt to find the solution from the Kuyperian and Barthian models.

According to Kuyper (2013), the faith community is more than an institution. It is not even an institution in the first place, because if it can be an institution it will compete with other institutions like government. More than anything it is an organism, consisting of regenerated human beings who move and live in all spheres of life. This is the truth faith community. Kuyper (2013) even identifies it with the invisible faith community. Living in all spheres of life, this rebirth of human beings has to exercise its influence even by means of Christian organizations (in the South African context faith-based organizations under a department of social development). With respect to the life of the government, this implies the formation of a Christian political party, by means of which the invisible faith community of true believers exercises influence.

The institutional faith community has no direct function in this respect. The influence of the institution on the life of the people, society and government will always be indirect, via the faith community as an organism of believers. This fact implies, furthermore, that in Kuyper's (2013) view the prophetic calling of the faith community in political matters is not primarily that of the institution, but of the organism. The tension between the faith community and the government is reduced to a minimum. The struggle to maintain Christian norms in the political sphere is to be waged by the Christian political party as the prophetic mouthpiece. This kind of conclusion can be drawn and has been drawn by some of Kuyper's epigones, especially in South Africa. Throughout the ages the followers of Kuyper in South Africa have the problem that due to historical and other circumstances only one part of the Kuyperian model has been copied in South Africa. The formation of a strong Christian political party was never realized until the democratic election of 1994 where political parties like the United Christian Democratic Party and African Christian Democratic Party were formed but with ulterior motives.

Barth in his model uses the image of two concentric circles to explain his line of thought. The Christian congregation forms the inner, smaller circle, the civil congregation the bigger outer circle. The common hub of these two circles is Jesus Christ and the proclaimed Kingdom of God. What then is the relationship between the two concentric circles and their common centre, and between the two circles themselves? Barth's answer is that the light of God's kingdom falls on the faith community and from there is reflected onto the government. The relationship is analogous by nature. By virtue of the common centre the government has the right of existence as a paradigm, as an analogy of the kingdom of God as it is proclaimed in the faith community. In this respect the political responsibility of the Christian congregation emerges. Through its existence and through its proclamation of the Word the faith community must remind the government of the kingdom of God, so that the government can become a mirror-image and paradigm of the kingdom of God. The true and successful government finds in the true and successful faith community its primordial example.

Barth does not align himself with the notion of the establishment of the Christian political party. He asked whether there can be any other Christian "parties" in the government apart from the Christian congregation itself whose task embraces the totality of the government and society. He argues that that which is Christian can never become directly visible in the political sphere. It can only do so as a mirror-image and a paradigm. In practice, it may well happen that the Christian message can become an embarrassment for a Christian political party if it is not able to find political room for that message. It is therefore possible that a Christian political party may compromise the Christian congregation and its message. Therefore, Christians must always act anonymously in the political field.

The anonymity of the Christian in the political sphere, however, finds its pendant in a speaking faith community. In the faith community the preaching becomes a political act and a good congregation will understand the political sense even though no word is said about politics. But the faith community does not only speak through its preaching. It is part of the duty of the faith community to make its political decisions known by means of notification from the pulpit and other official channels. In this regard the faith community should see to it that it does not awake from its a-political sleep only when the government lotteries and desecration of the Sunday are at stake. Even more important than all these is the necessity for the faith community to be truly a faith community. Within the government the faith community speaks the loudest through what it is. In this sense the faith community as such is a political factor.

When the two models of Kuyper and Barth, both of which claim continuity with the original idea of Calvin, are compared, it becomes evident that whereas the Kuyperian model combines the active Christian witness in the political field with an almost silent faith community, the Barthian model does almost the opposite: a speaking or prophetic faith community is combined with silent Christians as Christians. Their political actions and witnessing they do anonymously.

Christians should strive to be the salt of the earth on Monday, politically, socially, and economically. For that matter he may even organize a political party. But the voice of the political party can never be a substitute for the prophetic voice of the faith community.

The Interaction Between Faith and Politics in South African Context

As is already mentioned above, faith has to be seen as a societal, not merely a personal concept. It breaks through the restrictions of privatised religion with the vision of a transformed world. Faith being societal implies that it has a relationship with politics as a human activity of deciding how to live together in society.

Faith and politics have something in common namely human relationships and the transformation of society. The transformation of our country requires the greatest possible cooperation between faith communities and political parties, critically and wisely serving our people together. Neither political nor religious objectives can be achieved in isolation. The interchange between people's personal and communal experience of faith and other experiential dimensions, such as political and judicial, economic and class, marriage and family, gender and sexual orientation, should be taken very seriously in the South African societal context.

Once faith is seen in terms of adherence to a religious institution, it competes with other institutions. We see religious and political institutions competing for power instead of together exulting in empowerment. We see those seeking supporters for them instead of supporting the growth of human wholeness in the community. In this sense we struggle to find out how faith and politics relate to each other, and how those who have faith can relate to those who have power. The South African constitution rightly ensures the separation of religion and state within the secular state. Religions must not control the government, and the government must not run the religions. But this does not imply antagonism between the religion and state or faith and politics. It does not separate political integrity from spiritual integrity. Morals and truth are indivisible. Politicians have spiritual responsibilities and religions have political responsibilities but each is concerned with our society and all who belong to it. With that in mind, let us journey through the interaction or interplay of faith and politics throughout the ages in South Africa.

Faith and Politics During the Apartheid Era (1948-1993)

The faith communities during this period can be categorised into two categories—firstly, the ones that initiated and strongly supported the political order of the day, and secondly, the ones that opposed the political order of the day and sought an alternative political order. The second response was represented by those that adopted religious discourse to challenge the political order of the day, reaching a high point with the development of a liberation theology, black theology, and feminist theology, and where religious figures became active partners in the struggle, making contributions that often ranged from simple prayer right up to martyrdom.

It is of paramount importance to investigate how intertwined faith and politics were during this era. Faith and politics were so closely connected that one cannot see the line of demarcation. Hence we cannot distinguish between which faith community group did pioneer the apartheid policy in South Africa, whether it was the political party or the faith-based community. The below statement confirms that:

As far as the National Party and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) specifically are concerned, the origins of apartheid remain a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation: It is difficult to come to a clear-cut conclusion as to who should be regarded as the pioneer of apartheid. It is recorded that the first printed record of the term 'apartheid' in its modern sense can be traced back to a paper read by Rev J.C. du Plessis at a mission congress of the Free State DRC held in 1929 at Kroonstad. Apartheid, he stated, was the fundamental idea of DRC mission work, emphasizing the independent national future of all blacks. (Saayman, W., 2007, pp.70-71)

There is obviously no need here for a philosophical, moral or political analysis of politics (specifically apartheid). I am sketching parts of the history to establish the interplay of faith and politics, the overwhelming reality of South African life for the next four decades. Furthermore, as far as the faith community specifically is concerned, a conference that took place in April 1950 is of special importance in tracing the history and meaning of apartheid as the political order of the day (NGK, 1950). The Federal Mission Council of the

Federated DRC in South Africa (at that time there was as yet no single, unified DRC General Synod) had convened a nationwide church congress on *The Native Question* in Bloemfontein. Coming so soon after the 1948 election victory of the National Party, it is inspiring to note the synergism in the thinking between the party and faith community on possible solutions to the perennial “native question”. In terms of the policy of segregation (apartheid policy) in general, the congress (on behalf of the church) unabashedly claims to have played the leading role in the development of the political order of the day. It was the Afrikaans churches that accepted the principle that there should be apartheid between their white and black members. It is mainly as a result of the influence of the Afrikaans churches that the policy of apartheid between white and black in schools was accepted.

Furthermore, in 1947 D. F. Malan, leader of the National Party affirms this interplay of faith and politics. It was not the state but the church that took the lead in apartheid. The state followed the principle laid down by the church in the field of education for the native, the coloured and the Asian. The entwinement of church and state in matters of fundamental policy again is clear from the remark by the first Nationalist prime minister of South Africa, and a retired ordained DRC minister. The intimate link between faith and politics is also clear. Historically, the DRC assisted with the structuring of apartheid and its blueprints. That was wrong and they acknowledged that, according to their definitions. In the previous regime had been well documented and needed not to be repeated here—suffice to say that it is well known, although not widely accepted by the church itself that for many years the DRC played a crucial role in supplying a theological justification of apartheid to the state (Verwoerd, M., 1997, p. 54). This statement justifies what is said above regarding the role played by the DRC in establishing and sustaining the political order of the day through its theological justification of the policy of apartheid.

The second response was represented by those that adopted religious discourse to challenge the political order of the day, reaching a high point with the development of a liberation theology, black theology, and feminist theology and where religious figures became active partners in the whole struggle to get faith community involved in South African struggle for a just government. Members of faith communities stood together to fight that evil government, and one of the most important organs that faith communities utilized was “*Standing for the Truth*”. The statement below justify the involvement of the faith communities from the other angle in this way:

South Africa has witnessed the loss of lives of thousands who have tried to rid themselves of an oppressive yoke. Since 1985 the resistance of the people has reached unprecedented levels, while the repressive machinery of the state grew ever more intense and brutal. A wave of detention, imprisonment and brutal police action swept the nation and culminated in the banning of 17 organisations... The voices of the people were united by the action of an oppressor. The church—body of Christ—felt with its members the pain this brought and was called to respond. Church leaders marched from the St George’s Cathedral in Cape Town to register their protest against the government at this act of banning. (Chikane, F., 1991, p. 3)

This quotation illustrates how Christians responded to the unjust government. Faith leaders took initiative to counteract the action of apartheid regime that was supported by Afrikaner churches. The church became actively involved in the political order of the day. It became very prophetic in its actions against the regime. Church members started to exchange letters with the president of the country. The church held witness and protest services like the one held in St George’s Cathedral on Monday, 29 February, 1988. The faith leaders went on and on to make a call to action to the people of the land. They wrote a pastoral letter on March 13,

1988 in which they addressed themselves to the people in power. The author quote that letter: They spoke to the downtrodden, “We urge you, the oppressed, to identify the struggle for justice and peace in accordance with the Gospel and we encourage you not to lose hope for victory against evil in this world since it is guaranteed by our Lord”. The faith leaders and faith consultants were now mobilizing the faith community to respond to their daily life situation in the then political order of those days.

During this period, the second response by anti-apartheid faith leaders and consultants engaged in Church theology, which was against the state theology that misused the Scripture to justify the political order of the day. The main ideas of “Church Theology” were *reconciliation, peace, justice and non-violence*. By then the faith leaders wished to be more engaged in these theological truths, but due to the situation within the country that time, they deemed Church Theology being inadequate, irrelevant and ineffective. Furthermore, they sought an alternative to Church Theology; hence they deemed it necessary to turn to the “Prophetic Theology”. The only theological approach that was needed was a prophetic theological approach that took a clear and unambiguous stand in the then political crisis in South Africa. This approach was based upon a reading of the signs of the times, that is to say, a social analysis of the conflicting forces or interests that made our situation one of oppression. A prophetic theology, however, did not point out what was wrong and sinful in society, it also presented both the oppressor and the oppressed with a relevant and explicit message of hope.

Through such a message of hope, faith leaders and consultants believed that there was no faith without action, and then they took a decision to embark on the challenging actions that were prophetic by nature. The following were actions that were taken by faith communities:

Participation in the struggle: The situation challenged the faith community to move beyond an “ambulance” ministry to a ministry of participation in the struggle for liberation by supporting and encouraging the campaigns and actions of the people.

Transforming church activities: The usual activities of the church like Sunday services, baptisms, funerals and so forth were all re-shaped to promote the liberating mission of God in the then crisis situation.

Special campaigns: Faith communities also had to make their contribution to the struggle by having special programmes, projects and campaigns. However, this had to be done in consultation with political organizations that truly represented the grievances and demands of the people; otherwise there would be a serious lack of co-ordination and co-operation.

Civil disobedience: Faith communities were not collaborating with the tyranny and oppression. It encouraged all its members to pray and work for a change in the political order of the day. In the process, faith communities sometimes had to confront the political order of the day (apartheid regime) and even advocate civil disobedience.

Moral guidance: It was also the role of the church in the then crisis situation to provide moral guidance by helping the people to understand their rights and their duties, especially the moral to resist tyranny and the struggle for a just society. While it is necessary to curb the excesses of those who act wildly and thoughtlessly, faith communities were experienced as the community that challenged inspired and motivated people.

From these points argued above we could see that the faith communities were actively involved and were participating in both political and faith activities. They did not see faith and politics as two different entities but as the two sides of the same coin. This is seen in the way in which faith leaders were integrating the political agenda into church services and doctrines. Towards the end of the apartheid regime, there was a paradigm shift. Most faith leaders, faith consultants and faith communities enjoyed the “*arrival syndrome*”. They gladly and

praisingly thanked God that they had arrived, forgetting that freedom is permission to work. They were now preparing to go back to business as usual, preach doctrines, administering sacraments, visiting the sick and the prisoners, as well as counselling the depressed. Others were displaying the attitude of the sons of Zebedee by trying to position themselves in potential positions in the forthcoming democratic political order. Boesak when addressing the general synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa affirms:

In the beginning of the 1990s, apartheid and dawn of a new era, we also saw signs that the churches, which had played such a vital role in the struggle against apartheid, were beginning to reconsider their position. There arose a new and rather vigorous debate within the churches. Churches who had been in the forefront of the struggle were now publicly thanking God that their “political role” as now about to be over and therefore they could return to their proper roles (Boesak, A.A, 2005, p. 243).

This arrival syndrome did have a negative impact on Christians when they entered the democratic era. They felt that the church is called only to preach the “universal values” of love, peace, reconciliation, justices and non-violence, in short the “Church Theology”, which was viewed by faith leaders as inadequate and ineffective.

Faith and Politics During the Democratic Government Era (1994-2010)

The post-apartheid, post-1994 construction of a democratic state effectively displaced the focused role of faith in politics so prevalent in the apartheid era at the intellectual theological and philosophical levels. It was replaced by ambiguity, confusion and the demobilisation of faith forces and of the faith discourse in politics. The key-debates that emerged at the time centred on the new role of the faith communities or of faith in post-apartheid South Africa. Some faith leaders now felt that that the real political leaders were free, the priests should return to the parish. The faith communities should now get on with the business of faith and politicians should take on the business of politics. The author does not believe that this was a step forward. The author believes that the model-building that we did up to 1994 eroded in that moment of ambiguity, confusion and demobilisation. The impact of this ambiguity has resulted in the return of the dichotomy between faith and politics. Faith community activists were recalled to the parish, resulting in an abdication by intellectuals from the project to transform South Africa. This abdication was a product of the discourse at the time of 1994, which the author believes prevails up to today. This discourse centred on the question of the essential nature of the democratic state in the post-1994 period. The answer to that question, which is now the dominant and hegemonic position, is that the essence of democracy is opposition; if you do not have an opposition, you don't have a democracy. The alternative to the same question, which is far less than hegemonic, is that the essence of democracy in a post-apartheid, post-polarised, unequal, damaged society has to be transformed. The author is not saying that we should create walls between the two options, that you either choose transformation or opposition as the essence. What the author is saying is that the consequence of the idea of opposition as the central thesis of democracy has resulted in the pronouncement that the faith community has only one role politically, and that is to be the watchdogs of society and no more an active partner of the political organizations that used to fight back to back together with the faith community during the apartheid era to defeat the political order of that day.

One can understand the dominant discourse where it comes from, because it speaks to the sentiments of a group who have enjoyed all the power and privilege up to 1994, and who are now set up as the opposition. They therefore see opposition as the essence of democracy. It speaks to the discourse of a group who

understood that quick transformation was to be the essence of a democratic project to which they had to contribute, and therefore it was not comfortable to say that the essence of democracy is transformed. It was far better to say that the essence of democracy is opposition, with all its racial assumptions, and that a Black government should not be trusted. The author wants to argue that our constitution was precisely crafted in a way to facilitate the ongoing contribution of faith and politics. When the constitution was conceived and when it came to discussion on the relationship between faith and politics, there were four options.

The political parties were of the opinion that they should craft an atheistic state, hostile to the faith community, a state that had nothing to do with faith issues or did not encourage it. This option would have been betrayal because the very nature of South African society is fundamentally religious. It would also betray the entire role that faith communities played in bringing apartheid to an end and bringing the people to freedom. Therefore, this option never really became an issue of discussion in political parties' work towards South African's new constitution. Then there were obviously those who thought that maybe this was the moment to craft a theocratic state. South Africa had its own problems in terms of its diversity and the author does not think that this was the kind of discourse that South Africans needed to get into because it simply involved too many complications. The third option was to construct a secular state where religion operated in the private sphere, where individuals believed what they chose, as long as there was tolerance of the religious sentiments of our people. The option that was eventually adopted guaranteed freedom and even guaranteed access to resources in order to make sure that religions were equitably represented. For example, town planning had to make sure that religious sites were made available equitably; the airwaves and television time had to be proportionally allocated, etc.. Briefly, the constitution guarantees equality of status for all religions, but in proportion to the facility, i.e., you do not have Muslims and Christians sharing equal time on radio for their demands are different.

What is disappointing is that the broader faith community did not take up this discourse, and therefore the fourth position was not debated. Important questions concerning challenges and responsibilities were not raised. What we had was religion claiming its rights. The question to be asked is whether the religious establishment fulfilled its responsibility, because the constitution did not simply guarantee religious freedom, it also offered an opportunity for religious activism. But what are the responsibilities other than being the watchdogs of society?

In the ongoing dialogue on the political crisis like violence, increasing poverty, corruption, workers' strikes, and other more crucial issues in the country, faith communities' voice is missing.

Tshaka indicates: "This silence of the church and its leadership in public matters is astonishing. It is interesting to note that this silence of church leadership on public matters is in no way unique to the South African context but has become a global phenomenon." (Tshaka, R.S., 2009, p. 159)

This faith community's silence also disturbs the politicians. At a meeting with faith leaders early in 2004, the then minister of finance openly reproached the faith community that faith communities had become too silent. In response to this faith community's silence, former president Thabo Mbeki met with the delegation of the South African Council of Churches on July 29, 1999 to discuss the partnership of government and faith communities. What made that meeting special was that, in accordance with the famous injunction of Peter, the church was coming to "give an account of the hope that is in us".

Based on the argument above, there is always a platform, opportunity, and space for faith communities to

engage in public matters. The constitution of the country allows faith communities to participate actively in political activities of the nation. Lack of that will lead to individuals establishing a political party under the banner of Christianity while advancing their own political end. When responding to this silence and motivating Christian participation, Boesak pondered that the church is not a sociological phenomenon, interesting chiefly because of the way we expose our weaknesses, internal strife and insecurities in the pages of newspapers. Neither are we just another non-governmental organization trying to draw attention to our single-issue agenda. We are the church of Christ, called and mandated by God to speak to the whole of human existence, in the whole of society: to seek the Lordship of Jesus Christ by challenging, subverting and changing structures in society until they conform to the norms of the Kingdom of God. Faith communities are called indeed to incarnate God in South Africa and the world by following Jesus of Nazareth, in his life of servant-hood, in his call for truth, peace and justice, by being agents of reconciliation, in the loving inclusiveness of his embrace, and in his sacrificial love.

During the first part of this period, faith communities returned to business as usual. As in Israel during exile, oppression and suffering, the prophetic voice was loud and clear, but once the people were free and prosperous, priestly activities became the focal point. The temple activities became more important than other social activities. They worshipped and brought sacrifices to the Lord in the temple. It was “business as usual”. The same thing happened in the South African context during this period. Faith leaders, consultants and faith communities went back to “business as usual”, preaching, worshipping and administering sacraments, with the focus falling on church activities.

The silence of the faith community and its leadership in relating to the public matters is disturbing. At least several factors in the context of Democratic South Africa pushed the faith community and its leadership into silence and therefore into oblivion. The changed situation in which faith communities find themselves might be construed as a time for the faith community to find something else to do (priestly activities instead of prophetic engagement) and to reserve agitation in the hope that the new regime will remember the struggle and therefore remember where it came from. Where there has been political change, the faith community might be rewarded for its involvement in the struggle for a regime change by way of sacrificing some of its leadership to the state with the view that they can make a better contribution there.

In a sense, faith communities appear to have become uncomfortable with the prophetic language. It wishes to be loved by its secular leaders. Its eagerness to be loved by the world is problematic. Whoever is entrusted with the task of pointing out wrong, depending on the nature of circumstances, is not always loved, in fact, more than likely, that person is going to be hated and misunderstood (Farrakhan, F., 2002, pp. 339-348). Because no one wants to be shown as being wrong, particularly when one is dealing with governments, with principals, with powers, with rules, with administrations, when one is dealing with forces that have become entrenched in their evil, intractable and unyielding attitudes, their power produces arrogance and their arrogance produces blindness (Tshaka, 2009; Farrakhan, 2002).

Boesak spoke against this silent and blind attitude of faith communities. He writes that these issues, which cry out for the public witness of faith communities, are deep, disturbing and numerous. One of the anomalies of our new democracy is the growing gap between the rich and poor, including the gap between the new, black elite and impoverished masses of our people. Over 54% of South Africans live in abject poverty and our unemployment rate hovers around 40%, and in the rural areas it is closer to 70%. The AIDS pandemic is like a raging beast, devouring the most vulnerable in our society, the poor and our young people.

These issues are the ones that provoked faith leaders, consultants and communities to be engaged in a struggle for the liberation of the people throughout the ages in South Africa. Even today these issues should provoke South African Christians to partake in the political activities. While the prophetic nature of the faith community's calling was emphasized in the past, the priestly office is emphasized in the changed political situation. Due to the priestly office, the focus turns to be on the temple service. In other words, faith communities have become more concerned about their own survival. The overall good of the society is not something that interests the church anymore. The faith community/church is a bit of the qualified world, qualified by God's revealing, gracious Word. The church is always both political and apolitical (Bonhoeffer, 1965, p. 149).

Christian Participation in Politics Within the Democratic South Africa

The faith community is always both political and apolitical. This opinion therefore recognizes that the faith community as the custodian of morality must have a response to the political and socio-economic hegemonies. Thus, strengthened by the ministry of the word on Sunday, the Christian should strive to be the salt of the earth on Monday, politically, socially and economically. For that matter Christians may even organize a political party. But the voice of the political party can never be a substitute for the prophetic voice of the faith community (Durand, 1981, p. 13).

If Christians thought that God is not with politicians and governments, they therefore will not participate in politics and government activities, because they are of God but not of this world, it is very weak reasoning. If one looks at the inadequacies of government personnel and considers the insufficiencies of their regulations and planning, one feels that notwithstanding their clumsiness the world has not yet gone under; this is strong proof that God is with them and with us in his love and patience with humankind. Hence the president of South Africa in *City Press* dated 10 April, 2011 said that the African National Congress would win the municipality election of May 2011 because God was with them and God had been with them throughout the ages. The statement of the president confirms that Christians should be free to participate in politics in South Africa because God is with this government despite its inadequacies of government personnel, insufficiencies of regulations and planning. The government is a means in God's hand to check the consequences of human doing. With this consideration Christians should participate in politics and try to make their contribution in a democratic government. They will not be protected from the shortsightedness and shortcomings inherent in all human activities, especially in the most responsible political ones. Their only advantage is that they should be armed against the temptation of overestimating the capacities of the government. Especially, in the democratic government, where people are supposed to hold their lot in their own hands, the temptation is strong to use the government to affect all things possible.

That Christians should interpret the Word of God in the political sphere, or for that matter any other sphere for their own specific circumstances, is of course not wrong. On the other hand, such an idea is part and parcel of the reformed tradition that always emphasized the fact that the believer has direct access to the Bible as the Word of God without the mediating function of the church, and that that word needs to be related to the faith community's situation. A prerequisite for a hermeneutical event to take place is that the Word of God relates itself to the concrete situation of humankind and to the questions that live in the human heart. An unrelated Word is not a Word that can be understood. In the practical life of state and politics what has been said will mean *inter alia* that Christians strive to be uncompromisingly obedient to the Lord, knowing that somehow they

will be forced to compromise because the kingdom has not come. They will be able to erect signs of the Kingdom; they will be able to push constantly at the edges of the possible, but they will not be responsible for the capitulation of the church to the inevitable. As we have said before, the prophetic message of the church is a constant reminder to all people that it cannot come to rest in the structures of this world (Durand, 1981, p. 14).

The upshot is that the relation of faith to politics will necessarily be more critical than prescriptive. This may sound negative, but it is the only way in which the faith community can remain true to itself while refusing to compromise its own message. For the faith community to prescribe practical politics in the sense of supplying political alternatives is the surest way either to becoming irrelevant or to compromising its message. However, this critical stance should not preclude the faith community from praising and participating in actions where it sees signs of the kingdom being erected in ways consonant with the Word. Furthermore it should be realized that the negativity of the faith community is the direct outcome of the most positive of all messages: the proclamation that Christ is Lord of all life.

Conclusion

On the concluding note one needs to answer the two questions posed in the introduction of this paper. From the argument above, based on the Bible, reformed tradition and the faith-political practices in South Africa from 1948 to 2010 it becomes clear that:

The faith community and political government are God-ordained institutions that address human beings' welfare and wellness on earth and they are intended to be mutually supportive of each other to fulfill the purpose of God on earth, which is love, care, justice and peace to humanity as well as the physical—organic environment.

At the same time they are not permanent opponents. When there are signs of the kingdom, the faith community will praise and positively participate in the politics of the day, supporting and praying for the government as per Romans 13. When the political government moves away from the signs of the kingdom, faith leaders and the community will have to declare that government demonic as per Revelation 13 and Christians will be actively involved in bringing such a government to an end as the anti-apartheid faith community did during 1948-1993 in South Africa.

In the reformed tradition's view from the Barthian and Kuyprian models there is an emphasis of Christian participation in politics whether visible or invisible. The elements were viewed against a slightly different framework in which the problem of hermeneutics forms a basic issue. I hope nobody expected an original or conclusive answer to the problem that has taxed humankind for two thousand years.

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