

CHURCH NEEDS TO RID ITSELF OF POOR LEADERSHIP.

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Writing in personal capacity*

Retired Bishop of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, a tried and tested disciple of the ecumenical movement, the late Rt Rev Patrick Matolengwe, will be laid to his final resting place in Graaf Reinet, Eastern Cape this week.

Matolengwe (81) who worked for the SACC as a coordinator of the erstwhile Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) will be remembered as a servant of priesthood who lived according to the dictates of the Gospel and met the requirements of being a complete and caring pastor.

At his memorial service and mass requiem held at Christ the King Church in Sophiatown, Johannesburg over the past weekend, one of the most highly respected Anglican cleric and an outstanding theologian of impeccable credentials Father Barney Pityana and I shared the podium and both of us lamented the emergence of a culture peddled by some of our colleagues in the ministry whose sense of vocation and commitment to the ministry is questionable.

There is a concerning phenomenon in the recent conduct of some clergy persons who have apparently assumed the role of destabilizing the ministry of the church by sowing divisions and promoting factions among and within members of the flock.

These anti-peace individuals who are bent on opposing anything but themselves consistently seek to advance their personal and selfish interests at the expense of the ministry that the church has to the world. They speak and act as though they are the proponents of justice and yet hosting high the flag that is responsible for entrenching further conflict and divisions within the life of the church.

Instead of paying attention to the biblical prescripts, the imperatives of the Gospel and the teachings of Christ, these leaders, who by and large represent a tiny clique of priesthood, spent long hours in secret meetings studying, amending, strategising, misinterpreting and manipulating church orders and constitutions to feed their own ego as they crave for power and influence.

They have no regard for servant leadership nor the appetite to be led by others. To them humility is foreign for they never imagine themselves as followers than leaders.

These are individuals and groups of leaders who spend much time and resources in the courts of law either fighting fellow believers or church leadership. Their battle is to gain control and capture the church with its leadership.

Pityana and I agree that this tendency is not only harmful and injurious to the body of Christ but a distraction to what the church has been called to do in the world.

More than bringing the church into public disrepute and stifling its prophetic voice these individuals do not reflect the mandate and focus of the office they hold.

South Africa faces a myriad of challenges to the extent that it cannot afford to have leaders of faith institutions whose focus is either blurred or lost.

There are serious political, socio-economic and moral challenges confronting this nation where children are maimed and killed by their own parents, school learners engaged in violent and drug related gangsterism. Incidents of rape and domestic abuse are on the rise. Acts of racism and xenophobic tendencies are repeatedly playing themselves out. People suffer homelessness while unemployment, poverty and inequality remain a bad stain that defines our nation's failures.

A socio-political and economic environment characterised by the absence of ethical and moral consciousness cannot afford to have elements within the faith leadership who are insensitive to the plight of the nation.

These ugly scenes where some faith leaders are publicly seen attacking one another physically, wielding firearms, in certain instances barring congregants from accessing the sanctuary for prayers are not only an indictment but a shame on the church and its mission in the world.

Ordinarily one would expect men and women of the cloth to be caring and mindful that they have a moral responsibility to provide sound leadership and guidance to the nation at a time such as this where damning information about premeditated corruption at the State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) is sending daily shockwaves through the length and breadth of our country.

It is therefore not the time to bicker and squabble but one that calls for serious discernment on the part of the church and its leadership. In many more ways than one, it is a *kairos* moment.

Those clergy persons who typically act like the biblical sons of Zebedee, preoccupied with lordship positions, failing to read the signs of times and being all out to unseat others so as to take charge, may be well advised to look elsewhere rather than to continue serving their own personal and selfish interests under the pretence of serving the Lordship of Christ and humanity.

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