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## Fellow South Africans

**“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”**

Ours, like many others around the world, is admittedly a society made up of mere mortals and fallible human beings – strong men and women weakened by a multiple of social pitfalls, failed political ideologies and poor judgement occasioned by sheer human error and history. Ours, therefore, is a society that from time to time requires corrective vigilance and alertness on how to redefine itself, its identity and vision.

It is utterly unfair and a travesty of justice that today in our democracy, we sit back and helplessly watch a nation in a perpetual struggle of self-destruction while seeking to redefine itself away from what made apartheid morality highly questionable.

This attitude has given birth to a culture of intolerable silence in the face of sin and evil. And as Stuart Mill says, *“the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing”*.

When we finally attained our freedom from the corrupt apartheid rule, some twenty-six years ago, through the voice of the iconic President Mandela who represented our national aspirations and desires, we vowed in unison on the steps of the Union Buildings that, *“never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another”*.

This we said because of our conviction that what was as immoral as the apartheid rule was, must never again be used to define the identity of our new nation. Through this statement we vowed to the world that we shall do all within our capabilities to develop a new human being with a soul alert to the values of *ubuntu/botho* as correctly enshrined in the preamble of our first democratic constitution.

This stance we took, not because we were in competition with any one of our world peers, but because we were determined to construct a society with new values that could epitomise and represent a caring and a compassionate people – a society governed by values that are extremely apart from those of the apartheid South Africa. This was and still is our resolve as a nation because we were emerging out of a painful history of division, neglect, oppression and despise.

It therefore cannot be that a society found on these noble human values acclaimed by the whole world as civil, a society whose some of its forbearers had to pay the ultimate price so that we could taste the fruit of freedom, can today relate to one another in the manner we generally do. We have lost respect for one another and are treating our own country and its institutions with disdain.

Developments that have come to define the past twenty-six years of our existence as a new nation point to the fact that ours is a democracy under-theorised and undermined by the very people who are and were supposed to be the first line of its defence.

We have been so able to theorise the kind of political South Africa we yearn for and wish to be and yet failed to construct a South African – a patriotic social being who would add to the geographical space called South Africa the soul element.

Perhaps the question we must wrestle with is and must be, *“who is a South African, how is a South African identifiable from the rest of other nationalities and what human qualities are found in a South African?”*

Guided by the preamble of our democratic constitution, perhaps an easy response to this question must be that, a South African is this person whose viewpoint of life must be firmly rooted in the values of *care* and *compassion* for fellow human beings and the country. In other words a South African must appreciate, respect and honour human life as a sacred gift. How we conduct ourselves, behave and relate to one another and the world must indeed confirm this common identity.

There is a biblical injunction that points directly to our situation in this country. And this is what it says, “...no one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the wine will burst the wineskins, and the wine is lost and the wineskins are ruined; but new wine must be put into new wineskins”. (Mk 2:22)

The instruction of this biblical parable is perhaps what we failed to follow - that we couldn't construct a new South Africa without constructing a new South African. What we did, in the context of the parable, was to conceptualise a new South Africa where an old South African will still stay and live as though the country never transformed. That is the reason some dubious people still have the courage to publicly display flags associated with the old Republic of South Africa. These are South Africans who haven't as yet repented from their inglorious past.

And clearly this sets a serious negative trend for the country. The practitioners of this trend are “bursting the new wineskins”. These are South Africans whose values still belong to the past order and their ideology is to continue to determine how and where the rest of us should live. Some of them continue to refuse with land while others are determined to keep the economy to themselves and their children.

Of recent time we saw how some of the schools in Gauteng Province and elsewhere in the country have become battle grounds for those parents who would wish to flex their racist muscles against little children whose guilt is that they are striving to receive education within the confines of their own country.

And, I am saying these are some of the glaring contradictions of a society that has not addressed its past adequately to fit appropriately the values of *care* and *compassion* – which values constitute the baseline of what the new South Africa is about.

To disregard the essence of this parable is to perpetuate the fundamental contradictions and commotion that are today responsible for sustaining an unequal society characterised by high rate of unemployment, joblessness, outdated skills and poverty. *So, the new wine will spill out and the old wineskins will burst.*

Persistently we therefore must wrestle with these concerning developments that make our country appears still so racist and so un-reconciled even after we made a social pact that invites all of us to build a non-racial, non-sexist and a united South Africa along the spirit and letter of the new democratic dispensation.

If so, then why in these twenty-six years of our new birth, do we still struggle with the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations most of which are aimed at the reconstruction of a new society that is aligned to the dream of a *caring* and *compassionate* society? What is so much in our way that communities, individuals and families destroyed by the past order could not have their dignity restored?

Why is it so difficult for those who own the economy of this country to share its natural minerals and resources with those who have been deprived of this privilege?

In other words, what values are applicable in a situation where some people live in abject poverty while others who share the same country continue to live in plush and filthy affluence?

The condition of the Covid 19 pandemic, we are told by experts, will throw the country into a 50% bracket of unemployment. In a society so unequal, we already have an idea who is going to take the hardest punch. So, our challenge is how to ensure that even if it happens, this level of unemployment does not break our social compact of a *caring* and *compassionate* society.

So as contested by Mcebisi Jonas, Chairman of MTN and former Deputy Minister of Treasury in one of his recent articles, "*Covid 19 pandemic has added urgency to the need for democratic reform, economic restructuring and institutional rebuilding*" – in a sense calling for a new policy direction that will feed us in the midst of hunger, poverty and heightened unemployment – without which our nation will perish.

Unfortunately, this state of affairs confronts us at the time when the country is under a severe attack from leaders and individuals whose bar of morality and ethical conduct is so low to the extent that acting in an abusive manner and

stealing from the public has become a norm – people who are insensitive to the plight of others and whose love for the country is now questionable.

Quite concerning is that while we are in a fierce battle for life against the Covid 19 pandemic, public reports continue to expose how much some amongst us are stealing the same resources that are supposed to support the weak, the sick and the most vulnerable of our society.

Soon, another Commission of Enquiry will be appointed to answer the rhetoric question, “*where did all the money go to?*”

Very much against the universal law of morality and ethics, some of those who assume positions of leadership and influence tend to arrogate to themselves the right and power to abuse public office and state resources for their selfish benefit. In other instances we see them purge from positions of responsibility those who disagree and hold a different view from theirs.

Sitting and listening to what has been and still is happening to this country through the Zondo, Nugget, Marikana, Seriti and many other Commissions of the same sort, serves as a chilling indication of how much of our civil responsibilities have we abdicated as a nation to the extent that the country has long been on an auto-pilot mode.

And the regularity at which this and other maladies are happening and yet the consistency and the rhythm at which much of it gets ignored, leaves our country with an impression that to steal from the public and to act with impunity is an acceptable standard that defines the kind of leadership this country tolerates.

Michela Wrong, the author of “*It’s Our Time to Eat*” paints a rather gloomy picture of a people with access to public resources and leadership positions devoid of any human conscience and adherence to the basic values of human decency – heartless people, who like the VBS looters and state capturers, would do anything to leave the country dry and penniless with the poor dying in their poverty.

So that the weak and the poor are forever defended against the powerful and the rich, John Ortberg then summons us in the same spirit of John Stuart Mill to “*do the right thing at the right time for right reasons with the right attitude*”.

We need to rise up and seek to understand and comprehend, as a nation, the motif behind men and boys who are out to kill women, girls and children at a rate and regularity so alarmingly unprecedented – in the process constructing a culture of hate that flies across the values we have defined for this new society – the values of *care* and *compassion*?

Similarly, we need to rise up and seek to understand and comprehend, as a nation, the motif behind a teacher who refuses to teach for whatever reason and a learner who refuses to learn - a doctor, a nurse who refuses to see patients and a pastor who rape congregants and rob the poor of their little earnings – these are all anomalies are associated with our nation and yet fly across the values that define who we are as South Africans.

That which is wrong is wrong and that which is right can never be wrong. Justice is that which is just and can never be an injustice.

Working together and sharing our love for this country, we can correct the wrongs of the past and build a home for our children and their children. After all South Africa is our heritage.

I thank You!