

E. 3 SPEAKER'S NOTES FOR LIMPOPO PREMIER MR SELLO MOLOTO AT THE SINOD MEETING OF THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH, WEESGERUS HOLIDAY RESORT, WATERBERG DISTRICT

03rd September 2008

Programme director
Head Pastor
Ministers of the NG Kerk
Church Elders
Congregants
Distinguished Guests
Fellow brethrens

Goeie dag!

One feels truly honoured and humbled to be in the presence of you our dear sisters and brothers - the man and women of the cloth who make up the congregation of the NG Kerk in this part of our country. Having accepted this invitation, we are mindful of the responsibility which goes with it - that is to share with you, some of our general thoughts about what we feel the church should be doing today in our country. Our coming here today, was obviously also motivated by the understanding which we have about the importance of your institution in our society, and the strategic place it occupies.

The church is not only a place of praise and worship, as many of you will agree. Its significance in society has evolved to become one of the most dominant and influential socializing institutions in the 21st century. The church, just like a school and the media, plays an important role in honing social behavior and shaping people's perceptions of what constitute reality.

All of us are in agreement that, human beings by their very nature are a vulnerable species, which cannot survive the stresses of everyday living, without the intervention from high powers. This is where the church often comes to the picture. Apart from prayer service and fellowship, the truth of the matter is that, more often than not, people go to church in search for spiritual solutions to their problems, but also answers to certain questions in their lives. In the face of political uncertainties and economic hardships, many people see the church as a sanctuary of hope in a sea of despair.

This to a larger extent explains the reason why church membership is often higher than the membership of political parties.

In one survey that was conducted by an independent group, the majority of people who were interviewed even showed a bigger approval rating and confidence in the institution of the church, than in the country's justice system and Parliament.

This proved the esteem with which you as theologians are regarded by our people, as proponents of the holy truth, and holders of the moral compass. All of this indicates that you have a moral duty not only to your individual churches, but also to the society as a whole.

Programme director

The societal responsibility of the church should not only be seen as something that is starting to evolve now, as this obviously comes a long way. Perhaps, some of you may not know that as early as 1912, the church already had an influence over the politics of the liberation movement. This is why it does not surprise one for instance, to find amongst the founders of the African National Congress (ANC), men of the cloth such as John Langalibalele Dube, ZR Mahabane, Sefako Makgatho, Rev WB Rubusana and Chief Albert Luthuli. As years went by, the African National Congress was to draw most of its chaplains from the leaders of the Christian Faith - something which served to solidify the closer bond between the church and the liberation movement up to this day. Tribute can be paid to respected theologians such as Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, Beyers Naude, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rev Alan Boesak and Rev Frank Chikane for doing everything possible to foster this bond.

Their contribution helped in the redefinition of the mission of the church and in its positioning, as the new conscience of a society, which was torn apart by the evil system of apartheid. As a result of their

contribution, we gradually began to see a rupture from the mainstream colonial church, which justified apartheid oppression, to a more humane and progressive church, which embodied and embraced the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood across racial lines.

We saw the church playing its role, not only through the provision of shelter and humanitarian assistance to the poor, but also through its criticism of the atrocities committed by the apartheid regime. This was consistent and compatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ which taught the values of love, compassion, solidarity and sharing.

Programme director

Now that we have achieved our liberation, what relevance does the church still has in our society? Some of us may start asking this question. To what extent has the church itself transformed to accommodate the social realities of the new South Africa? What role can the church play and should play in today's society?

When confronted with a similar question, Oliver Tambo had this to say about the church in his 1980 address to the World Council of Churches in Holland.

"We want a church that openly, publicly and actively fights for the political, economic and social liberation of man, as part of the world forces engaged in the process of bringing into being a new world order for those who are discriminated against, for justice, peace and social progress."

This is a statement which clearly resonates with Christ's beliefs on the need to pledge solidarity with the poor. In our view, Oliver Tambo's response would still be relevant today as it did 27 years ago. As the church has always done in the past, it cannot deny itself the right to propagate the truth and social justice. If the church is the true body of Christ, it cannot deny the inherent link between the material world and the spiritual world - for human beings do not only live for the spirit alone, but also need and desire material things as well. Everybody needs to eat, drink, and be clothed. We also need shelter and good health. Over and above these, human beings also need a sense of belonging; we need security, love, respect and self actualization. These according to Abraham Maslow, remain the basic needs of man which have to be fulfilled in order to satisfy human happiness and personal growth.

As the church, we have to ask ourselves whether we are satisfying these needs or not. To what degree are we helping the poor, in our daily pursuit for the truth and sanctity of life? How relevant are we to the issues of the day and the current challenges facing humanity? Can today's church be regarded as the conscience of society?

One of the most unfortunate realities of the past is that we live in a diverse society which is highly unequal, and in many ways fractured along racial lines. It is here in this country where one still finds the wealthiest people in the world, with lifestyles that are only comparable with the best found in London, Paris or New York. We have a country of few people who live in manicured suburbs, surrounded by high walls with almost every amenity one can think off. They drive expensive vehicles and their children go to the Ivy schools which are available in their local neighbourhoods. Not very far from these rich leafy suburbs, one gets another common reality faced by most South Africans. This is a reality of villages and townships which are crime infested - which do not have proper roads and sanitation and are characterized by a deep stench of disease, poverty and squalor, of the kind which could only be found in such places as Monrovia or Mogadishu.

On the other hand, the situation in the farmlands of our countryside also does not inspire much confidence to race relations in the country. Although the situation is not bleak everywhere, we often find that many farm workers are often discriminated against, and live in conditions of abject poverty. In recent times we have become accustomed to cases of illegal evictions, blatant racism and the denial of burial rites in some these farms. All of this is happening whilst there is legislation in place to protect both the rights of the farm owner and the farmworker.

Such is the reality of present day South Africa, where poverty and inequality reign supreme.

Linked to this, is the issue of crime which has become one of the most top priorities in post apartheid South Africa. Crime affects both rich and poor. It affects white people and black people. It affects man and woman, living in either rural or urban areas.

One of the crimes that our country witnessed over the last few years, for example, has been the spate of violent crimes committed in some farming areas in our province. This has had a devastating effect not only to the farming community but also to agricultural productivity as well. Like in all other crimes, government responded by setting up rural safety mechanisms to prevent these crimes from continuing.

There is obviously room for improvement in the future, but we are sure that the tide is turning around these attacks. With the overhaul of the criminal justice system in the offing, we can only hope that the situation will even become better.

The social and economic inequalities which persist to this day cannot be allowed to continue forever, as they have a potential to breed future instability. An equitable South Africa will simply not happen if we do not invest enough in education, health, and in the skills provision for the majority of our citizens. South Africans themselves must be the first people to show confidence in their own economy, even before we make strides to call for foreign direct investment.

Our vision as government is to build a country and a province which cares for its entire people. We want to build a society where everybody feels safe and wanted. A society where everyone's abilities and contribution is valued irrespective of one's race, gender or creed. There are obviously many obstacles which are standing on our way towards the realization of this order.

One of these has become the need to build social cohesion and moral justice. While government on its part has developed a number of self regulating measures to promote moral justice and to fight against social corrosion, including, corruption and impropriety, we are under no illusion that the problems can be solved merely as a result of these interventions. Through the partnerships we have with relevant stakeholders, like Traditional leaders, religious community, business and organized labour, we are continuing to strengthen our efforts to regenerate morals, and acceptable norms.

High on the list of our country's moral challenges include concerns such as crime, racism, abuse of women and children, teenage pregnancies, domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse, road rages, corruption, a culture of disrespect for the law and human life, HIV/AIDS and xenophobia.

We know very well that, morality remains one elusive concept which none of us can legislate or police. This is why we believe that it is a responsibility that must be shared equally by every stakeholder in society. Every human being carries the responsibility to do something about the challenge of building the moral fibre of our nation. The challenge always starts with each individual. Not least important in this campaign is the role which parents and families themselves can and should play. Parental care and role-modeling should be regarded as the first step to be taken in the rejuvenation of positive moral values.

The socializing institutions like schools, church and the media can only play a secondary role in moulding the consciousness of our people. Our thoughts play an important role on whether we want to do the right things or bad things. This is why giving everyone a police uniform for instance, may not end crime, which is the reason why cell phones may still disappear in this room.

Programme director

The last thing we need in South Africa at the moment is for people to feel alienated from their own country, by starting to migrate to some other foreign country. South Africa is our home and nobody should get a sense that government does not care for them or that their contribution to society is not being valued or recognized. We need the skills of everybody, in order to build a prosperous and successful nation. All of us have a responsibility to ensure that we build a one South African nation which is united in its diversity.

Government will continue on its part to build bridges where there are none, and foster cooperation with all sectors of our community. We have in the past held various interactions with different sectors of our population and the impression that one gets is that the majority of minority communities, equally share our passion and energy to build a united Limpopo province that truly belongs to all.

Limpopo is the best home we know off. It is here where we were born, raised and spent most of our schooling years. It is here where we should work and produce goods and services for the benefit of our economy. There is no other place on planet where our dreams can fly high, than here in this country. After all, this is where lie the bones of our forefathers.



We believe that our success as a country lies in nothing more than dialogue and reaching out to one another. South Africans have overcome many challenges in the past because of their commitment to peace and negotiations. We must continue to strengthen communication between government and the church, going forward.

We thank the leadership of the church for inviting us to come here and share these thoughts with members of your congregation. You are at any time welcomed to engage us on these matters.

We are hopeful that this congregation will once again succeed in its mission to carry the torch of *Ubuntu* high, and demonstrate to the rest of us what it means to be human in this day and age.

Thank you for your attention!