

Church & politics

IS IT possible to talk about church and politics at the same time? Do the two have anything in common? Can the church mix with politics? Such questions and more similar questions are struggled with in the context of Namibia in particular. Such questions are both theological and political. Fortunately, theological and political questions are asked by human beings who are involved either in the church and/or politics in one way or another.

My aim here is to open up a theological and political debate for concerned people in a situation of apartheid, colonialism, racism, exploitation and draconian laws such as those of Namibia. I am stating only preliminary remarks, sparing the rest for contemplated responses.

The truth of the matter is that the Church cannot claim its existence without people. Likewise politics cannot be without people. It is the people who constitute the church. it is the people who politicise. The basic concern of the church is wider and broader than its numerical membership. It is within the framework of the Church's prophetic call and public responsibility to aspire for peace, justice, freedom, respect of human rights and dignity to all people irrespective of their stations in life. On the other hand, the Church is not serving angels, but human beings whose basic needs - among others - include food, shelter, clothing and security or safety. In essence, these needs cannot be secured without some

forms of political and economic exercise. In fact, even if the Church may manage to christianise each and every person on the globe (if that could be possible) political structures and economic systems will be imperative.

Unfortunately we often hear the parrot cry that "the church should not be involved or mixed with politics", as if there is a divine command, especially given to certain people, to be politically involved.

The irony of the issue is that most of those who cry loudly that "the church should or even must not mix with politics" are themselves members of the Church - of whom some may well still go to church on Sundays. The question is: where do they hide their mysterious political bodies and souls when they go to church clothed in their church body-souls?

It should be known by both believers and non-believers that the church proclaims the God who created the universe including mother earth. Does politics take place outside and beyond this universe? If that is the case, then the Church would be wrong to be concerned with political oppression and injustices taking place outside God's created cosmos. As far as we know, politics is done not only on earth but exercised by these God-created creatures - human beings. On the other hand, the language of the church transcends this life to heaven as well.

If politics is touching the lives of church members in Namibia, how can it be, that the Church of God of justice and love can be indifferent to suffering and the selfish spirit of imperialism? If the Church's mission before all else is supernatural - preaching only reward in heaven when one dies and let misery and oppression in this life pass unabated - then no wonder some tempted to call it the "opium of the people". There is no way for the Church to avoid such accusations until the Church takes up its role of a conscience of a conscienceless society. Neither the church nor any one responsible person is exempted from the obligation to resist cruelty, violence, colonialism, exploitation of person by another person, and the like. The Church, together or in conjunction with all concerned people (wherever they are) should join hands to ceaselessly struggle so that human dignity and peace be restored on earth.

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In short, politics is not foreign to members of the Church. To be a member of the Church does not extract any one person from being a human being with human needs. Therefore, the Church as comprised of people cannot be accused of mixing with politics until a normal political atmosphere is restored - when threat to human lives and properties ceases and safety and security, is guaranteed by a proper judicial system and humane, acceptable protection of human rights.

Again, these are just opening remarks. I am expecting a response. Especially from those who feel this is a scandal both to their Christian or otherwise understanding of the Church and political analysis. Remember also that we do not speak about a theocratic state here since this is not our vision in an independent Namibia. I have deliberately scratched the surface. Let us ponder together over this issue of church and politics in our abnormal Namibian society today.

SHEKUTAAMBA shaNAMBALA
2481 COMO AVENUE WEST
ST PAUL, MN 55108 USA