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Restoring the ethics of the common good in the South African pluralistic society

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The idea of the common good is missing in politics today. Fighting for political ideology and self-interest has replaced finding solutions to problems or practising the ethics of public interest. We urgently need to create a new social contract with proper implementation of the values set out in the national Constitution. This study was undertaken from a reformed ethical perspective, with special emphasis on the ethics of the common good. Methodologically, in researching this article, the author was guided by two related questions: how do ideas, beliefs and norms form? What happens in society to let these norms shape our actions? Conducting research guided by these questions has helped the author to understand that for many communities, stability is maintained by rules, norms, beliefs, convictions and worldview as located in tradition and culture. It is institutions such as those outlined here that still guide attitude and behaviour in the majority of cases. While being sensitive to these institutions and the role they play, through policy and legislation, under constitutional supremacy, the Constitution has become the primary guide and source for community stability.

Interdisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article brings the disciplines of theology, politics and governance together in defining the ethics of the common good in contemporary South African politics. It proposes that the moral prerequisite for solving the deepest problems our country now face is a commitment to the ethics of the common good. By definition, this will require the engagement and collaboration of all the 'stakeholders' – government, businesses, civil society groups, faith groups and especially young people.

Keywords: common good; government; democracy; Constitution; values.

Introduction[1]

Values define the boundaries we set for what we regard as appropriate behaviour, practices and attitudes. Successful as one may be as a young professional, business person, artist, politician or even if one is unemployed, life becomes a game of change without a clearly understood and predictable shared framework of values within which social relationships may be conducted (Ramphele 2011:60). This has led Stumpf (1993:294) to believe that a stable society is based upon a set of opinions or values which the majority accept as the rule for their thought and behaviour. In reference to the above, De Bryun (1993:2) notes that in any ethical system and in all moral choices the question about norms is of utmost importance. According to Graig, Griesel and Witz (1994:139), norms mean appropriate behaviour or standards of what is right and wrong, correct and incorrect. What is the content of these norms and where do we find them? Generally, institutions that mediate the relationship between leaders and citizens are founded on a social contract that has both formal and informal constraints designed to limit the excesses of public office holders. Formal constraints would, for example, be in the form of independent agencies that act decisively against acts of corruption. These constraining mechanisms would assume the form of a transparent and enforceable sets of rules that circumscribe or prescribe behaviour on the part of those who hold public office. On the other hand, informal constraints are expressed in the shape of certain codes of conduct, norms of behaviour and conventions about what is acceptable and not acceptable. These may not necessarily be written down, but it would be assumed that those who hold public office are motivated, for example, by a sense of honour and that their motivation is primarily to improve the quality of public institutions and therefore that of citizens. Together these constraints, formal and informal, constitute a significant part of what is referred to as political culture or the character of a nation's politics (Mashele & Qobo 2014:106; cf. Van der Waldt & Du Toit 1997:43). Under constitutional supremacy, the Constitution is the highest norm

and has become the primary guide and source for community stability. Rights and responsibilities are clearly spelt out for us in that founding document to guide our conduct as citizens and as a nation (Ngcaweni 2014:198; Ramphele 2011:61; Venter 1998:86). There are, however, serious gaps between the ideals and the reality in our performance. We have failed to align our system of governance and its performance with the values set out in our Constitution. The challenge we face after 28 years of adopting a human rights-based national Constitution is how to close the gap between the value system we committed ourselves to and our actual day-to-day practices in our social, political and economic relationships. Understanding, respecting and advancing the precepts of our national Constitution are critical to the kind of society envisaged in our national Constitution (Ramphele 2011:63–65). The purpose of this study is to explore how the South African Constitution and the law can be used to advance the ethics of the common good. It further assesses the extent to which this has been done in past, outlining successes and failures. This question can be divided into five subquestions. These are: (1) what is the idea of a society envisaged in the Constitution? (2) What is the meaning of a government, state and politics? (3) What is the role of the government? (4) What is the role of law and the Constitution in societal norming and the advancement of the economy? (5) How can we implement the common good? These questions are followed by a conclusion.

The idea of a society envisaged in the Constitution

The society envisaged in our national Constitution is an inclusive society characterised by social justice, enabling all to develop their full potential to be productive citizens. According to Mashele and Qobo (2014:83), inclusive societies are characterised by low levels of inequality, strong and effective public institutions, vibrant civil society formations, materially modest politicians, low levels of conspicuous consumption and respect for and equality before the law. The preamble to the Constitution confirms this approach when it enjoins the government to heal the division of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights, democracy, peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex (Chikane 2012:92; cf. Malala 2015:10; Parsons 2020:4–5; Stott 2006:278; Venter 1998:103). These values reflect the idealism that is the foundation of the kind of society we want to build in the post-1994 dispensation, an idealism that is inspired by our cultural heritage of the recognition that our own humanity depends on these respectful relationships with other. Our idealism is reinforced by alignment with the Universal Charter of Human Rights (Ramphele 2011:64). This pragmatism and realism can be seen in the Constitution, in particular in sections 26, 27, 28 and 29, which recognise the progressive realisation of fundamental social and economic rights, such as healthcare, water, social security and education. The state must take reasonable legislative and

other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights (Ngcaweni 2014:265; see Plaut & Holden 2012:162). It is because of these rare provisions that it is considered to be most sweeping, expressive and comprehensive on issue of dignity (Gqubule 2017:190). Our national Constitution stipulates clearly how our democracy is to be governed. It is to be a participatory democracy in which citizens are sovereign and are equal before the law. Through mechanisms such as one citizenship and values such as human dignity, equality, nonracialism and nonsexism, the Constitution aspires to build one nation, but in various ways it also attempts to accommodate the diversity of interests in South African society and to ensure justice for all. Example are culture, religion, education, women, traditional law, the recognition of self-determination for communities and the establishment of offices such as the Public Protector and the Commissions for Human Rights, Independent Electoral Commission, Gender Equality and the Promotion of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. Section 181(2) of the Constitution states that these 'institutions are independent, and subject only to the Constitution, and they must be impartial and must exercise their powers and perform their functions without fear, favour or prejudice'. The independence of our courts is guaranteed by the same Constitution. The courts are tasked with protecting the fundamental rights of all citizens (Chikane 2012:172–173; cf. Rautenbach & Malherbe 1998:5; see Ngcaweni 2014:10–13). This new constitutional dispensation has had a profound effect on the lives of all South Africans. Indeed, when the Constitution was adopted, there was much fanfare, followed by a period that could be characterised as a new dawn. New laws and policies were introduced, and President Mandela and his cabinet spoke in unison about the need to meet basic needs and afford everyone equal opportunities in life, while also striving for global competitiveness. For a little while, there were signs that the shared prosperity in the Constitution was gradually being attained. The economy was growing – at least as measured in gross domestic product (GDP), which peaked in 2004 – and poverty was declining, reaching its lowest recorded in 2004 (Parsons 2020:6). However, the 1994 social contract has unravelled. Former assumptions and shared notions about fairness, agreements, reciprocity, mutual benefits, social values and expected futures have all but disappeared. Fighting for political ideology and self-interest has replaced finding solutions to problems or practicing the ethics of public service (Wallis 2014:218). The spirit of *ubuntu*, as exemplified by Nelson Mandela at the outset of our new democracy, is missing from the psyche of our current government. It no longer displays the true values of an executive that should be at one with, and in service to, its people. This lack of respect for the people they serve has seeped deep into the roots of our public service (Ngcaweni 2014:60). Ours was to be a meritocratic public service that exemplified the dawn of a caring government that put people at the centre of the governance process. The public service is not only expected to implement agreed policies and programmes but to create an appropriate environment for the private sector and civil society to contribute to national

development goals (Ramphele 2011:65–66). Equally disturbing is the increase in institutionalised corruption of state-owned enterprises as the African National Congress (ANC) party 'deployees' adjust to a free-for-all environment (Biko 2013:6; Feinstein 2007:248; cf. Mashaba 2019:87). As revealed by the state capture report, the level of corruption has seen billions of rands siphoned from state coffers by the politically connected elite. An estimated R1.5 trillion was lost to corruption during Jacob Zuma's second term as president, a tragedy reported by whistle-blowers, journalists, auditors, forensic investigators, lawyers, judges and the public protector (a trillion is a 1000 billion):

> That is just short of the R1.8 trillion budget for 2019. Put differently, state capture wiped out a third of South Africa's R4.9 trillion gross domestic product (GDP), or effectively annihilated four months of all labour and productivity of all South Africans, from hawkers selling sweets outside schools to boardroom jockeys. (cf. Rossouw 2020:5; Styan & Vecchiatto 2019:96)

The critical question is why have there been such systemic failures in aligning our system of governance and its performance with the values set out in our Constitution? There are a number of issues that can be mentioned in this regard, the important one being that the tension between wish and reality, between ideology and practice, between policy and implementation has, and always will be, major sources of political discontent and conflict. Political promises are no longer meant to be kept – that old-fashioned view assumes that truth is some sort of an absolute. Rather, political promises are 'performative', meant to achieve a momentary result, to sway an audience or make a statement. Once the moment has passed, the result has been obtained and politician faces 'new realities', he or she openly abandons the promise (Veith 1994:268). Perhaps a second issue is that 'political change has its limits'; if you change only government and not the hearts of the people, the problems will continue to multiply, and disillusionment and cynicism will surely set in. By contrast, the gospel of Christ offers a peaceful revolution of the heart. By changing the hearts of people, it deals with injustice at its source. Apart from giving one the only true foundation for human rights, the Bible points out that it expects more from one than respecting human rights in order to do real justice (the main aim of the state). As long as people do not have the special revelation of God, such is of course impossible, but when that special revelation reaches a nation, its rulers become unimpeachable when they maintain order and decency as a necessity of human society (Sekhaulelo 2007:97).

Definition of a government, state and politics

According to Fourie (2006:8), government refers to different levels of the state, including national, provincial and local governments. For the purpose of this study, a distinction can be drawn between the interventionist state and the noninterventionist state. The state in this context refers to both the government and the entire public administrative apparatus of a country. In this context, 'interventionist' and 'noninterventionist' denote the degree to which the state intervenes in the society that is part of this sphere of influence. All state interventions can be arranged into four collective functions, namely power functions, security and protection functions, economic functions and redistribution functions (Venter 1998:114–115). The words 'politics' and 'political', according to Stott (2006:34), broadly speaking, denote the life of the city (*polis*) and the responsibilities of the citizen (*polites*). Venter and Johnson (1991:7) are of the view that politics is the science of government. It is concerned with the development and adoption of specific policies with a view to their being enshrined in legislation. Over the last decade or so, South Africa has showing signs of decline in its performance as a well-governed country. At the core of our troubled democracy is the lack of a coherent economic policy that is congruent with the societal architecture envisaged in the Constitution. As Meredith (2010:496) observes, finding an agreed economic policy proved to be a difficult business for the ANC. It re-emerged in South Africa in 1990, a revolutionary organisation laden with a great deal of ideological baggage, proclaiming the virtues of socialism and state control despite the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. Combined with high levels of corruption among the political classes and nondelivery in critical areas by local authorities and central government, this had a negative, often paralysing effect on much-needed transformation agendas and the building of a national consensus (Odendaal 2012:483). Failing infrastructure and a lack of foresight and planning have caused electricity outages, increased rail accidents and unprecedented government bailouts for the parastatal corporations, including the public broadcaster, the national airline and electricity supplier (Matisonn 2016:14).

Purposes of government

According to the biblical Christian worldview, human government was instituted by God to protect humanity's inalienable rights from humanity's sinful tendencies (Gn 9:6; Rm 13:1–7). Human nature being what it is, humans will attempt to infringe on one another's rights in an effort to improve their own lives; therefore, a political system must exist to protect rights and keep these evil tendencies at bay. Since every person is inherently sinful, our evil inclinations must be kept in check by laws and a government capable of enforcing such laws. That certainly means to protect its people from the chaos of evil, to protect the good of the society, punishing evil and rewarding good, and we are even instructed to pay taxes for those purposes. Government must fulfil its responsibilities to provide for the general welfare and promote the common good (Geisler 2005:240; Noebel 2001:266; Wallis 2014:227). Based on this premise, the role of the government can be summarised along the lines of the following mandate.

Promoting social justice

From the Christian ethical perspective, justice is the principal task of the state's existence. According to Wallis (2014:244), the clear meaning of 'justice' is 'what is right', 'rightness' or 'what is just' or 'what is normal', the way things are supposed

to be. Justice therefore is about repairing the relationships that have been broken: our relationships both with other people and to structures and systems, systems of courts and punishments, money and economics, land and resources and kings and rulers. *Shalom*, translated 'peace', proves when unpacked to mean not just freedom from war and trouble, sin and irreligion, but also means justice, prosperity, good fellowship and health and all-around communal well-being under God's gracious hand. It is a wonderfully creative and expansive idea that can be applied to all of our personal and social relationship and even to imagining how our societies can be changed (Packer 1994:284; cf. Greenway & Mashau 2007:42–43).

Safety and security

When law and order break down, as they sometimes do in the aftermath of natural disasters, for example, we see how quickly chaos, looting and random violence can break out, pointing again to the need for the maintenance of civil order and protection. The security function of the state relates primarily to the most basic of human needs – protection (Venter 1998:117). It is very necessary for civil government to employ those kind of laws, rules and regulations consistently in order to protect the people and the economy. Government also needs to protect the people judicially and make sure our legal and court systems are procedurally just and fair. Along with protecting, government should promote the good of society. The prophets hold kings, rulers, judges and even employers accountable to the demands of justice and fairness, therefore promoting those values (cf. Wallis 2014:228). In Christian ethics, it is also accepted that all authority comes from God and that he instated government to make order possible within a broken dispensation (Kerr 1989:171; Packer 1994:280; Parker 1995:158; see Vorster 2004:202).

Applicable legislation or statutes

As a result of rapid changes in society, constitutional law, like many other branches of the law, is largely contained in legislation. The term 'legislation' refers to generally applicable rules of law made by government authorities. Traditionally in South Africa, the term has been associated with laws made by Parliament, provincial laws and ordinances, municipal by-laws and proclamations and regulations by the president and ministers (Basson & Du Toit 2017:136). The legislature intends to promote the public good. The term 'public good' refers to those things that are to the benefit of the community as whole. On the other hand, statutes determine what the inhabitants of this country may or may not do (Van Heerden & Crosby 1996:6–7; cf. Moseneke 2020:7).

Renewal of our educational system

For Stott (2006:184), universal education is probably the shortest route to social justice, for it develops people's social awareness and thus gives them the understanding and the courage to take hold of their own destiny. Mashaba (2015:151) laments that our education system is the fragile root of our economy, and we simply have to recognise that the failure to make meaningful changes to our education system will result in a failed country. This has led Wallis (2014:234) to believe that the goal of the reform and renewal of our educational system should be one of the most important purposes of government. That does not mean that the government must do all the educating but rather that it makes sure it is being done and done well, especially for those who have been trapped in educational poverty.

The continuing of the land question

According to Pottinger (2008:189–190), in South African history, land has played a particularly significant role in defining political positions. Any political party, no matter its history or future hope, would have to manage the question of restitution and redistribution with sensitivity. Yet despite this sensitivity, the reality is that the land-reform programme in South Africa has been slow, inefficient, confused, inadequate and ideological. This failure was not because of a lack of a lack of good ideas or missionary zeal from the top. It was not even because of a lack of cooperation by white farmers. Land reform has been held up by administrative incompetence, corruption and inadequate government funding, and despite that, large acreages have been transferred to black people's hands. Almost 90% of the farms thus transferred have failed because farming is a highly specialised, competitive and tough business. In fact, relatively few Africans want to be farmers: far more want urban land or land that they can develop or sell for cash, which is not surprising when one considers that 60% of the population lives in urban areas (Johnson 2015:61–62, 2019:118; cf. Basson & Du Toit 2017:271). From the foregoing, it is clear that the redistribution of land is necessary, but not sufficient, to bring about real economic empowerment and poverty alleviation. Additional services, including infrastructure, markets and social services, among others, have to be provided as part of a comprehensive reconstruction and development programme (Sihlobo 2020:21).

Needs to promote community solidarity and social cohesion

The perception persists, though, that many Africans still experience alienation towards public facilities, manifesting itself in vandalising of essential resources by people who need those resources to survive. The origins of this attitude and its consequential sets of behaviour can be traced back to the political struggles of the 1980s that encouraged a revolt against public authority and public resources (cf. Mkabela & Luthuli 1997:8). It is precisely because we have citizens who do not know how the process of active citizenship works that we experience violent service delivery protests leading to looting and arson and destruction of municipal properties. Some people do not seem to grasp that state property belongs to the citizens, and they are destroying the very facilities that should be serving them. If these frustrated communities understood the democratic process involved, they would realise that they do have agency, and that it is their right to

contribute to government's decisions. Such active citizenship can take place through sharing frustrations, attending community meetings, joining forums, peaceful protest, signing petitions and voting. However, active citizenship should be concerned with more than just absorbing the protocols of engagement and learning how to participate within the existing models of interaction. It needs to promote community solidarity and social cohesion, both to strengthen civil society and to empower individuals (Mashaba 2015:169, 170). In a practical sense, it requires foregrounding civic education. Civic, by definition, means understanding the political and practical aspects of citizenship, as well as rights and responsibilities that we have to each other.

The role of law in societal norming and economic growth

Laws are those rules of conduct that apply generally in society, are enforced by the state and exist for the purpose of regulating the affairs of society in an equitable manner (Moseneke 2020:7; Venter 1998:83). Parsons (2020:8) is of the view that the law can also be used for societal norming, shaping economic relations and driving economic development. The Afrikaner nationalist policy frameworks and the black upper middle class that became South Africa's dominant political elite in 1994 offer a clear example of the potency of the law in shaping society and advancing economic growth. The Afrikaner group, to whom the British handed state power in 1910 on the formation of the Union of South Africa, were very poor and were not in any position to engage in any large-scale trade (Bundy 2017:49; cf. Meredith 2010:69–70; cf. Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:251). After this group took power from the British in 1910, they started to promote some economic development in South Africa. The objective of this ruling elite was to make the land they owned more profitable. So until well into the 20th century, South Africa's agriculture remained under-developed. The Afrikaner landowners' first initiative after coming to power was to establish the Land Bank in 1910. To realise its goals, the Afrikaner nationalist elite had to invest in the building of South Africa's transportation and communication infrastructure. It also had to build the necessary education institutions to provide white citizens with expertise in all aspects of agriculture. Simultaneously, it incentivised others to invest in different sectors of the economy. As an incentive to investors, this elite group made available a dependable supply of cheap labour from South Africa's black population and its neighbours. All of these efforts culminated in making South Africa the largest economy in Africa today, which produces almost a quarter of the continent's GDP (Mbeki 2011:7–8). Additionally, over the 84 years since Union in 1910, the Afrikaner nationalists built a formidable infrastructure, a developed economy and a series of powerful and efficient institutions – the armed forces, Eskom, Transnet (including a large railway and port system), the civil service, a strong police force, a highly developed water distribution system – and much else (Johnson 2019:122). Moreover, the language (Afrikaans)

progressed to a point where, well before 1994, a huge volume of literature had been translated into Afrikaans, which had also generated its own impressive corpus of poetry, novels, history and biography. There was a thriving Afrikaans press, television and radio and five Afrikaans universities (Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Potchefstroom, Free State and Rand Afrikaans universities) and another bilingual one (Port Elizabeth). Indeed, Afrikaner nationalism was by far the most successful form of African nationalism that the continent has seen, and by the end of the apartheid era, the vast bulk of Afrikaners were modern middle-class people (Johnson 2009:371–372). The black upper middle class that became South Africa's dominant political elite in 1994 was a class of intellectuals rather than of property owners. Their main objectives for acquiring political power were therefore not to protect their property or to develop such property, since they did not have any. Instead, their main objective was to bring about equality between the races and to redistribute some of the existing, white-owned wealth to the black population. To achieve economic equality, it adopted a policy of wealth redistribution. This redistributive orientation was articulated in detail in the ANC's first economic policy, the RDP, adopted in 1994. It had all the hallmarks of a populist exercise aimed at assuring the newly enfranchised poor that something was on the way (Pottinger 2008:74; cf. Mashele & Qobo 2014:47). While the country has made remarkable progress in these critical areas since 1994, there is, however, a downside to an economic strategy that is predominantly driven by wealth redistribution. It diverts resources from investment to consumption. This is already beginning to show with the growing de-industrialisation of the country's economy. Not only has this failed, but the ANC government has presided over an unprecedented period of de-industrialisation. In 1994, manufacturing accounted for around 23% of GDP. Twenty years later, this has fallen to 11.1%. Moreover, 105 000 manufacturing jobs were lost in the second quarter of 2018 alone as deindustrialisation gathered pace (Johnson 2015:15, 2019:198; cf. Mbeki 2011:8). It is worth pointing out that the popular narrative that seems to believe that white people possessed so much wealth that its redistribution would in one fell swoop deal with black people's poverty and unemployment is at odds with reality. According to Haffajee (2015:15–19), the numbers obtained through the 2011 census show that if you take all white people's resources (from wealth and education to housing, toilets and water) and distribute them to black South Africans, it would barely move the needle on national development. It is clear from the preceding paragraphs that the idea of black poverty is always presented as the outcome of white people's wealth, but what South Africa has is a poverty problem, not necessarily a black poverty problem, because it is a largely black country. In other words, nonracial struggle for justice always saw race, but unless we begin to understand poverty and unemployment as South African problems, not racialised issues only, then it would allow scapegoating and a rhetoric that fails to substantially tackle the policy and efficiency measures needed now. Moreover, our post-1994 government has yet to demonstrate its

capacity to cope with expectations of its role as an enabling state that promotes a climate for growth and development. It is puzzling that the glaring capacity gaps are being ignored in the quest for more centralised control of the economy by some sectors in the governing party. State-owned enterprises are struggling to become effective and efficient players in proving the key infrastructural needs of a sophisticated economy (Ramphele 2011:155). For instance, a survey in 2001 found that the price of electricity in South Africa was the lowest in the world, while the reliability and quality were excellent. The average energy available from Eskom power stations had increased from 76% in 1991 to 92% in 2000. Generation load factors had improved from 50% to 55% over the same period. Seven years later, the country could still boast among the lowest energy costs in the world, but it had entered a period of the most devastating rolling of existing infrastructure. So bad had it become that by 2008, the government was forced to declare a virtual state of emergency and Eskom, the electricity supply authority, was begging the government to dissuade further capital investment in major power-intensive new projects until at least 2013, on the grounds that it could simply no longer market itself as a low-cost energy source (Pottinger 2008:171). It is a startling fact that at the time of the May 2019 national election, the electricity public utility Eskom was in debt to the tune of half a trillion rand. Once one of the world's most profitable and largest energy utilities, Eskom's revenue is no longer sufficient to cover the cost of servicing this debt. In both cases, the result was to suppress economic growth in the rest of the economy (Gqubule 2017:194–195; Johnson 2015:147; Jonas 2019:7). The conclusion is inescapable that our post-1994 government has failed to tackle the challenge of systematic restructuring of the economy to lay the foundation for progressive realisation of socio-economic rights and inclusive prosperity. What our country needs now is to move away from the politics of convenience towards politics of the principles set out in our founding documents.

Implementing the ethics of the common good

How do we implement the common good in an increasingly diverse and cynical society? The following principles are suggested for the implementation of the ethics of the common good.

Accountability and responsibility

One of the traditional cornerstone of democracy is that that each political representative, as well as each public official, is subject to accountability (cf. Cloete 1988:63; Gildenhuys 1993:35; Van Wyk 1998:75; White 1980:83; cf. Cameron & Stone 1995:80). Williams (2002:213–214) laments that in the psychological culture of today this is ignored, and people are therefore encouraged not to blame themselves because they are not wholly responsible for their behaviour. Instead they see themselves as the victim of circumstances – a poor upbringing, a broken home, the legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

Accountability is one of the pillars of governance in democratic countries. We now need to guard against the erosion of accountability and insist on extending it into our present and future, to avoid setting ourselves up for the kind of demise several African nations have suffered in recent decades. Transparency, accountability and service are the ethics of good government (Mashaba 2015:197; Wallis 2014:239).

Ethical leadership

The other deal-breaker for realising the new consensus is leadership, and the extent to which leadership across all formations has the appetite and maturity to put the national interest above narrow sectarian interests. To unite opposing and disparate interests in society behind a common agenda – and to manage those who cannot or will not be accommodated – will require a special kind of leadership: one that is able to make hard choices, placate the growing impatience among our people and not succumb to populist solutions that may win the day but take us nowhere on the broader journey to reconstructing the common good, the economy and society (Jonas 2019:257; Mbeki 2011:1).

Moral development

The old dispensation and its atrocities eroded the moral fibre of the South African society. Parallel with the rise of criminality at a time of transition, public morality also seems to degenerate (Vorster 2007:36). Therefore, it is now of utmost importance that a new public morality should be developed. The core values of community life such as respect for life and property, human dignity, *ubuntu*, sexual morality, family life, the otherness of others, trustworthiness, honesty, diligence and many other values should be reconstructed in the society (Vorster 2004:283). Among the 'seedbeds' that can play a vital role in the much-needed moral regeneration include, among others, families, schools, universities, sports, clubs, civil societies, local community, labour unions and professional associations and churches (Meiring 2003:223).

Countering harmful gender norms

The ANC policy on the emancipation of women is very well articulated. However, South Africa has amongst the highest rates of femicide in the world. Young women too bear many burdens. Increasing sexual assault, often by relatives, including their own fathers or teachers, is often borne in silence. Teenage pregnancy is high, as is the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Caring for dying relatives and young siblings is becoming a common feature in the lives of young women, some of them barely 10 years old, and poverty and hunger are the daily companions of many. They also lack positive role models, and the notion of gender equality remains a distant dream in the battle just to stay alive (Altbeker 2007:85; Biko 2013:207; Ramphele 2011:56). We need programmes that should seek to counter harmful gender norms that lead to sexual coercion and exploitation of women and girls (Smyke 1993:57; cf. Greenway & Mashau 2007:15; Van Dyk 2005:102).

We need more capable and less corrupt government

We urgently need to return to the country's core values of democracy and directing government energy at service provision. Our work on state-building should include the following principles: disentangling party from the government and legitimacy. Progress will not be achieved without disentangling party and state. Over the first 28 years of democracy, the ruling party has entrenched itself as the primary decision-maker on employment and deployment, policy and even its implementation, often without having the technical wherewithal to assess the impact of such decisions. The problems besetting Eskom, for example, have their origin in the decision to cut down its engineering capacity because of a policy change made in the late 1990s. When this decision was later reversed, this capacity could not simply be wished back into existence and the result was a critical lack of capacity to oversee the building of Medupi and Kusile power stations, which have suffered from technical weaknesses and cost overruns (Jonas 2019:173). There is also what seems to be a general challenge with many people rising to senior position in government without the gravitas and experience required from such candidates. These concerns contravene the principle of a meritocratic recruitment in a developmental state (Gumede 2020:147). The reality is that positions in government bureaucracy require technical competence. Legitimacy issues in the state functions would mean placing properly qualified people in leading positions, regardless of race or ANC connections (Johnson 2009:624; Mashaba 2020:61).

Dialogue between the church and state should be encouraged

The common good is never just about politics, although in recent elections some have made the mistake of thinking that it is. There are systems and structures that undergird and shape the limits of the political agenda, and challenging those limits to get to root causes and real solutions is always the prophetic task. A better role for faith is to challenge politics and hold the public square morally accountable to values derived from a position of faith – even though it must be made clear that religion has no monopoly on morality. And we all must learn how the wisdom from other faiths, spiritual and secular moral traditions contribute to our understanding of the common good (Wallis 2014:18).

Family stability is essential to the common good

In actual fact, family life shapes the outcomes of society in all spheres of life, because it is the source of origin of any society (Greenway & Mashau 2007:17). Therefore, our households are critical places for the practice of human flourishing and for teaching the next generation the meaning of the common good. Our households are where we teach and learn family values, moral choices and the strength of close communities (Wallis 2014:18). Mashaba (2015:62) is of the view that family stability happens when parents provide for their children

and teach them the value of hard work. Family stability happens when parents work and live side by side with their children. Moreover, stable marriages are at the core of healthy households, and they are critically important for good parenting. Therefore, the restoration of a social ethic that drives us toward healthy marriages is essential for good parenting, which is a key for societal well-being. In general, the challenge facing the church is to revisits its purpose from the biblical point of view to be able to interact accordingly with a social ethic that drives us towards healthy marriages. In the meantime, our government must seriously commit itself to a religious liberty that fully protects the right of each faith community to work these issues out in light of their own scriptural interpretations and traditions (Wallis 2014:268).

Conclusion

A government is regarded as a dynamic promoter of social reform and distributor of social services to the individuals and groups in the community as a whole. To comply with this demand, the government is obliged to intervene in the economic and social domain of community life and especially in the liberty of the individual. The foregoing assumption implies that the state should adhere to the tenets of the Constitution, which guarantees equality for all. In reality, therefore, the functions of government reflected in the Constitution represent the government's envisaged actions and deeds for satisfying the values and needs of the community.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contributions

M.A.S. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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