

**The Prophetic Praxis in a Rapidly Changing Context:  
The Doing of God’s Will in Society – The Evangelical Task of the *Oikoumene* in  
South Africa**

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**Greetings:** We greet you all in the name of the Risen Christ whose resurrection awakens us to the power of the God who has called us to be both fully incarnated in our society and yet be witness to the alternative reality that he inaugurates with the Empty Tomb! It is a singular privilege to have the honour of the invitation to come to this innovative institution, the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary, to hazard a few ideas in honour of a great disciple of the Risen Christ – Prof. Peter Storey! To you Mr. President, Dr. Kumalo, the Governance body and the Management of SMS, please receive our humble gratitude, thank you!

I am unfortunately unavoidably out of the country on this very day that I thought I would be able to be present with you, please accept my apologies. I am grateful that my boss, the SACC President, Presiding Bishop Zipho Siwa will instead be reading my possibly heretical views and thereby be implicated when the Inquisition sits for my case!

**Introduction:** The title of our conversation today in honour of Professor Peter Storey is: “The Prophetic Praxis in a Changing Context”. Because I am going to say a lot of other things it will be helpful for all if I indicate up front what I wish for you to take away from this, and where my interpretive biases are in the use of this term *Prophetic Praxis*. The key lies in the combination of prophetic and praxis – I am here to say, please engage in the practice of praxis – progressive action reflection; and do so as part of your prophetic ministry. A prophetic voice without a disciplined action and reflection only has noise value.

The Jesus Manifesto of Luke 4, is a startling introduction of the Jesus prophetic model, for the benefit of the least in society: the poor, the captives, the blind, the brokenhearted. In Matthew 25: 31 – 46, we see again how the Lord will judge for the weak and needy. Therefore prophetic praxis is necessarily in favour of the underserved and least cared for.

For prophetic, I lean on Walter Brueggemann who makes a distinction between the theological champions of the status quo – holders of “the royal consciousness”, i.e., generally supporting the rule of the government, the reigning king (hence royal) – such as King Ahab and Queen Jezebel’s 450 prophets; this contrasted with the

those who like Elijah and Elisha, dream of alternatives with Prophetic Imagination. He makes two theoretical proposals:

“The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.” (Breuggemann, W., Fortress Press 1978, p.13)

And:

“The royal consciousness leads people to numbness, especially to numbness about death. It is the task of prophetic ministry and imagination to bring people to engage their experiences of suffering to death.” (Ibid. p. 46)

I seek to highlight this contrast between the moral weakness of the church that uncritically provides religious legitimation to the prevailing power structure – the royal consciousness; and the moral strength of the prophetic ministry that powers the emergence of an alternative life reality – the Prophetic Imagination.

This is very much of moment in today’s church in South Africa where clergy climb on top of each other to gain access to politicians and provide uncritical endorsement of their political positions, all in the name of God and Christ’s church whose image they represent. In the past in the Kairos Document, we spoke of the oppositional difference between State Theology – uncritically supporting the prevailing power structure, and the Prophetic Theology that analyses the current reality and gives hope for an imaginable life alternative. State theology was represented by those who believed that the government of the day was by all means and at all times to be supported and defended with the stamp of church approval. In South Africa there are two levels of this phenomenon, both uncritical:

- Being at the service of a political party like the ANC, DA or IFP – say as taking us a leadership or elected role or to serve in another way, like being a chaplain of the party.
- Being a non-stipendiary cleric who has a secular job with government, and generally being available to give blessings to government and political party apparatus, from the location of a government employee, and therefore lacking the critical distance necessary for an independent voice.

In the days of the struggle for democracy, the South African Council of Churches had no trouble being side by side with all other organisations championing justice, peace and the advent of the democratic order. On the eve of democracy in 1993, the SACC reflected on how to relate to a future democratic government, when our members would all be free to choose amongst parties that all have members in our churches. The decision was that it would be critical solidarity – *solidarity* because surely, there must be agreeable things with a democratically elected government; and *critical* because any human institution was never going to be perfect.

### **The Present Context of Our Calling:**

We are called to be witnesses to the love of God manifest in the birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection of God in Jesus of Nazareth. In short we are called to be active witnesses of the Incarnation (i.e. the birth, the living, the works and teachings) of Christ, and the Passion, the Glorious Resurrection and amazing Ascension of God the Son! The whole episode of the Christ event is an unbelievable feat, whose faith adherents can and should only be people committed to the extraordinary, the alternative reality ushered in by Christ – the Otherwise referred to as the Kingdom of God. We are called to this uncomfortable amphibian life – being at the same time both as dry land creatures and as water creatures; being of this world and immersed in our social, economic and political reality; but at the same time bound up with Christ in an otherworldly existence – somewhat mimicking his dual existence of being both human (incarnate) and divine. The one we are born with and the other we are born-again unto; and in St Paul's language, we grow in it "from one degree of glory to another." (1 Cor. 3:18)

Our calling is not just to the world of human existence, it is a calling primarily to a South African context where we mark 24 years into the democratic era, with fresh questions being asked in the year of celebrating 100 years of Nelson Mandela and Albertina Sisulu's lives. The South Africa of our calling has a political, economic and socio-cultural context that gives an immediacy to the call for us to read the signs of the times and respond after the manner of God's will.

*Our Political Context:* 24 years into democracy, we are seeing signs of the political cliff towards which we are blissfully hurtling as a society, as our political parties, absorbed in their immediate self-interests, are using us the citizens as dice to throw in their dangerous political gambles whose outcomes will extract their costs from Citizen MaDlamini. For she would not have used her authority to apply breaks and press the reset button for an alternative experience of being South African.

Time will not allow us to talk about how the governing ANC appears to have abandoned its original "for the sake of the people" value system, to become a "for the sake of the ANC" organization. That then has degenerated progressively to "for the sake of my faction" and "for the sake of the leader of my faction", resulting in the dangerous war-lordism that will make the tragic experiences of the 1980s look and feel like a Sunday School picnic.

Province after province is organizationally in disarray; the leagues hardly provide the relevance for which they were created, at least in terms of their sectors of youth and women. They are truly in the pattern of "for the sake of the ANC" "for the sake of my faction"; and "for the sake of the leader of my faction", and that, fueled and lubricated by a complex system of patronage, rent-seeking and corruption with political fat cats running these with menacing security and intelligence brigades. Things are moving in the direction of each political chieftain grabbing his/her piece of the political space,

hoping to make off with a sizeable enough part to control – hence the regionalism that points to a centre that is being hollowed out; *kutsala-tswalwa ingubo enye, ide ikrazuke, ingulowo ezikrazulela isicwili sakhe* and hope that they will walk away with a big enough piece to cover him.

So, Premier Mahumapelo takes leave of absence to go to the people to feed them his truth, abandoning all deference to the centre! A premier appointed to office by the State President, says he will only resign if the ANC Provincial Executive that he chairs, allows him to resign. The same phenomenon we saw in Gauteng under President Zuma, with Paul Mashatile's provincial leadership politically at odds with the then main line of the Zuma administration, now there are a bigger number of provincial chieftains who are politically at odds with the Ramaphosa direction. "When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled" And so it shall be with ordinary people who are the firing cannons, the ammunition and the targets all at the same time, leaving to the imagination what will be left of our beautiful land if ever the guns go silent!

*Our Economic Context:* In the meantime, the more political quagmire we wallow in, the deeper the economic pit into which we sink. Stats SA says that some 55% of South Africans live in poverty. The economic outlook of the country is not only about the percentage growth – recently very poor, leading to sovereign downgrades. But it is even more significantly about how citizens experience their quality of life and prospects of relatively satisfactory living. Some 30% of the population is on social grants – living off the State budget; some 10 million people live in shacks called informal settlements, with little or no hope for decent living any time soon. Poverty and economic insecurity becomes a pathology that defines how society behaves; this is especially significant for young people whose lot informs where the country is going into the future for which they must be equipped.

Focusing on the situation of young people, we note that each year we throw into the "job market" some 500,000 (half a million) young people who get out of high school with no capacity for any meaningful role in the economy – unemployed and unemployable, but ready for any action: marches and looting, rallies, T-shirts, sloganeering and soundbites. Stats given by the South African Youth Development indicate that we have:

- **52.4%** rate of youth unemployment (aged 15-24) using the official definition
- **64%** if we use the expanded definition.
- **32.2%** of youth are **Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)** 71% of them female and 29% male
- **42.2%** of youth live in households without an employed adult
- **63.3%** of youth live in households with no access to internet

The extent of poverty amongst young people is also telling:

- **62.2%** of South African youth live in income-poor households
- **33.1%:** Youth are multi-dimensionally poor; relating to extreme and multifaceted deprivation in education, health and economic opportunity; as well as matters of the living environment such as what type fuel they use for cooking, and heating (paraffin, wood, amalongwe i.e. dried cow dung, etc.) sanitation (perilous pit latrines), water access and type of dwelling shelter.

*Our Socio-cultural context:* We have a huge social and cultural dissonance, with a potentially destructive dissatisfaction harvest. The socio-cultural context determines in many ways how the political and economic contexts are going to turn out, for this is the design chamber of South African society. Here in the main, is decided what type of person will govern the institutions of the various sectors of our nation. It is here ironically, where the church could have a major impact for “The Otherwise”, the alternative reality in obedience to the Revolutionary God whose will for society is at odds with the abnormal norm that we have assumed.

South Africa is a wounded and emotionally disturbed society on account of our history, a history that we churches have a significant part in creating and legitimizing over centuries. Churches have not consciously and systematically sought to challenge themselves to address the cultural causes of injustice. This in order to help counter the “can’t we just move on” narrative. We have not sought to cause an interruption between the unconscious and the conscious woundedness or unfair social advantage, involving the identification of the problem, information dissemination of the problem and the effects of such a phenomenon e.g. the social capital of the white skin, of maleness; and the socio-economic disadvantage of being black, female, disabled, foreign African.

Indeed, the churches have a huge socializing influence that made racial and gender discrimination a social and moral norm. Do we not even now have church schools culturally and economically established for the elite to the sufferance if at all, of less privileged children, who upon admission as an exception, will always know how fortunate they are? This church-induced social stratification defines the power relations for the future and for all time.

Having had centuries of socio-cultural power and influence, the church finds itself today in a different reality:

- In the past church largely referred to one colonial church or other – a synodal church with a recognisable body of canon law.
- Today there are churches mushrooming everywhere, and a church up the street as opposed to the church down the same street is no different to the locals than one fish & chips shop or the other.

- There is no longer an established church mindset, the Dutch Reformed Church, successor to the Anglican Church as a semi-official national church, was the last; and with the new secular State, churches: large churches, small single pastor churches, entrepreneurial churches, they are all the same in the eyes of the State, and they have to justify their existence before the citizenry.

The “main line” churches’ relevance had become associational with the custom of the State giving it visibility – schools using the church’s model and teaching for religious instruction; the church’s space on public radio and television was protected; and socially people were respected because they were leading members of one main line church or another. The church is not accustomed to being irrelevant; maybe the time will yet come when our relevance will be because of our obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**\*\* THE FOLLOWING PART IN BRACKETS MAY BE SKIPPED AND NOT READ\*\***

[To achieve that gospel relevance in South Africa, we may need to find the appropriate way of relating to the many significant social and cultural challenges, such as:

- The demise of the family fabric with brokenness and the vulnerability of children in their helplessness. SACC commissioned research by the HSRC showed that only 38% of South African families live as mama-papa families, meaning that a whopping 62% are either child headed or woman headed in the main. What parent there is has to work doubly hard with long hours, to put food on the table, and may fall short in the other priorities of parenting.
- The emotional and social challenge of multigenerational humiliation and shame for millions who have inherited the stigmatized mark of racial and ethnic “inferiority”, and the attendant impact on their lifestyle, life expectations and that of their subsequent generations. This is the lot of black South Africans, to escape which requires enormous strides and sacrifices of much of what makes up their identity – going to white schools where the price of entry is to leave your language, your cultural and social idiom, identity and heritage in order to fit in, while you are increasingly alienated from your roots into a state of cultural limbo.
- The corollary of this is the social impact of the legacy of privilege and cultural dominance of by those for centuries have taken for granted the social standing of cultural and social privilege – permeating every aspect of social, religious, political, governmental and economic life in the nation. This is the reality of being born white in South Africa.
- The all-consuming grind of gender based violence of various kinds: institutional violence, culture-based violence, and the all-pervasive social and physical violence, affecting mainly the girl children and women.

- The otherness phenomenon of those who are different in various ways: people with disabilities, autistic children, people with albinism, the LGBTI communities and all those considered to be less than the norm
- Race, ethnicity and class barriers in our socially stratified society; and the need for a conscious drive for a common national identity, dealing with the issues of decolonization and social cohesion. In essence we are living with the unresolved question of what does a healed, just and reconciled society look like in South **Africa.**]

The context of our time in South Africa is, sadly, quite depressing. In contrast to the apartheid days before 1994, this is of greater concern because it does not have the energizing hope for a “future” in the promise of a post-apartheid society. South Africa is in a state of flux, with much that has changed and is changing in the political, social and economic contexts. With the challenges of our context where we now add the huge contestation over land; and where religious escapism by especially poor people gives rise to much abuse, it seems good to open up the question of what it means for the church to do God’s will in such a society. Walter Breuggemann suggests that the church’s preaching is “a chance to summon and nurture an alternative community with an alternative identity, vision, and vocation, preoccupied with praise toward a God we Christians know fully in Jesus of Nazareth.” (Breuggemann, W. “Testimony to Otherwise”, Chalice Press, 2001, p.5)

In pursuit of the Otherwise, the alternative, please allow me to quote from an extract of correspondence by Steve Bantu Biko to the then King Williams Town Anglican priest, father David Russell, who later became Bishop of Grahamstown. They were exchanging letters (there were no emails back then!) on the place of the church, and obedience to God in the context of apartheid injustices. Biko wrote:

Obedience to God in the sense that I have accepted it is in fact at the heart of the conviction of most selfless revolutionaries. It is a call to men (sic) of conscience to offer themselves and sometimes their lives for the eradication of an evil. To a revolutionary, State evil is a major evil, for out of it flow countless other subsidiary evils that engulf the lives of both the oppressors and the oppressed. The revolutionary sees his task all too often as liberation not only of the oppressed but also of the oppressor. Happiness can never truly exist in a state of tension, even if the tension is only of conscience. The South African society abounds with fear and is constantly in a state of frenzy. The revolutionary seeks to restore faith in life amongst all citizens of his country, to remove imaginary fears and to heighten concern for the plight of the people. To the revolutionary the Church is anti-progress and therefore anti-God’s wishes because long ago it decided not to obey God but to obey man (sic); long ago the Church itself decided to accept the motto “white is value”; etc. (Steve Biko quoted by A. Stubbs in “Martyr of Hope“, in Steve

Biko, I Write What I Like, p. 213 – 214)

Being a Methodist audience, you will remember *Obedience '81*; and the purpose of Biko's call will not be unfamiliar with you. One could say that in these reflections Biko was simultaneously expressing his personal views while yet seeking reassurance that his untrained understanding of God and obedience to God is not at odds with the truth about God's active involvement through human agency in history. In a way he might well have been saying with the Psalmist:

My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me,  
saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:10)

*Uphina kaloku uThixo wakho!*

A quest for God's self-disclosure at a time of great trouble – and Biko intimates this psalmist-like quest while declaring his own understanding of obedience to God as a readiness to lay down his life for the sake of others (compare, Jesus at John 10:11 & 15:13). Father Richard McBrien, Catholic theologian, says that God is disclosed in these very contexts as he writes:

"God is disclosed in the historical 'praxis' of liberation. It is the situation, and our passionate and reflective involvement in it, which mediates the Word of God. Today that Word is mediated through the cries of the poor and the oppressed" (McBrien, R.P. "Catholicism" Harper Collins, 1995, pp. 249–250).

"The Word is mediated through cries of the poor and the oppressed"? An interesting proposition! In the language of John's Gospel, Christ is the Word, and in that sense, McBrien is saying that Christ is mediated through the cries of the poor and oppressed. In different words, Gustavo Gutierrez wrote: "To know, that is to say, to love Yahweh is to do justice to the poor and oppressed." (Gutierrez, G. "A Theology of Liberation" SCM Press, 1974, p194)

If the Word, Christ, the very revelation of God, who "is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), is mediated through the cries of the poor and oppressed; and if to know Yahweh, God as so revealed, "is to do justice to the poor and oppressed" (see Matthew 25: 31-46), then to be a disciple of Christ, to be one who is in the continuous discipline of knowing Christ must live out the dual fundamentals of faith and love. Of this Gutierrez says: "love is the nourishment and the fullness of faith, the gift of one's self to the Other, and invariably to others... Faith is the total response of man (sic) to God, who saves through love." (Gutierrez, G. op.sit. p7)

Victorio Araya makes a strong link between praxis and faith:

"Praxis is integral to the very concept of faith – and not merely as the result and expression of faith, but as a dimension of faith itself. Believing praxis is

faith – faith acting in concrete deeds of love and hope.” (Araya, V., “God of the Poor”, Orbis, 1987, p. 137)

This revolutionary thing is mounted on the axis of faith and love, and cuts a discernible and politically significant pathway through the change-making process of praxis. This is what Biko regards as the task of the revolutionary – maybe, just maybe, Biko will yet instruct us that it is a revolutionary thing to be a Christian and obedient to God who turns things upside down through the combination of faith and love. “This”, Gutierrez quips in, “is the foundation of the praxis of the Christian, of his (or her) active presence in history” It is a way of being Christian, of being church in society, so as to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

The question to ask of the church in society is where it locates itself between those at the top and those at the lowest level of the social pile. We said earlier, that we are called to be active witnesses of the Incarnation. We pointed out that prophetic praxis is necessarily in favour of the underserved and least cared for. This means that the church in prophetic praxis must be incarnated in the context of the least of the people. Again, in the safe Methodist Seminary I take liberty to share a Methodist example of the church’s option not to contextualise. In the case of the last verse of Lizalis’idinga Lakho, a key point made by the author Tiyo Soga was lost to millions of South Africans who merrily sing the changed Methodist version of the hymn. Soga was better no taunted by whites in Port Elizabeth upon his arrival with his new Scottish wife in July 1857, and they told him Africans would come to nothing. He wrote a rebuttal hymn, based on his own covenant with God about himself as the first ordained African - Lord God of truth fulfill your covenant, umnqophiso! The last verse said:

Nkosi khawusikelele  
limfundiso zezwe lethu  
(Lord please bless the teachings of our country)  
Uze usivuselele siphuthume ukulunga!  
And revive us to restore goodness!

I believe he was pleading for the restoration under God’s blessings, of that which was good in the teachings and socialization of Africans - maybe the essence of Ubuntu?

Because the Methodist musician was not entering Soga’s “cry of the oppressed” in this hymn, he failed to appreciate its profound significance as a nationalistic prayer of even greater theological import than Sontonga’s Nkosi Sikelela. To this day the hymn falls short of its revolutionary message before God, to subvert the curses of the Port Elizabeth howlers. Could it be that the editors of Soga’s hymn were equally unable to appreciate the concept of God blessing Africa’s teachings to restore and uphold what is good in African culture? Was it a case of the elite writing?

The revolutionary act that Biko calls the church to, is not for the elite, it is for those at the lowest rung of opportunity, whom the Jesus Manifesto of Luke 4 champions. From that position the church reaches all to be revolutionary salt and light of the world.

Of course, occasioning light in a pathological state of darkness is revolutionary! To act as salt and preservative against corruption and rotting is a revolutionary thing; it acts against the expected norm, it presents an alternative to what has become the bad normal.

David Tracy highlights the change-making aspect of Christian praxis, which he describes as “the critical relationship between theory and practice whereby each is dialectically influenced and transformed by the other.” (Tracy D, “Blessed Rage for Order, Seabury Press, 1973, p. 243). Writes Tracy, “The task of philosophy (here theology) is not to interpret the world but to change it. That task is best fulfilled when critical theory always informs, and is informed by, actual economic, social, and political practice”. Thus theology must engage the economic, social, and political context to which the theologian is called, not just to interpret reality, but to change it in a dynamic critical relationship between theory and practice – between the hearing of the Word and the doing of the same. (see James 1: 22).

This change-making dynamism in Christian praxis as observed by David Tracy, implies a hope-inspiring spiral movement towards a constantly emerging utopia – the desired goal, say a progressively growing experience and manifestation of Kingdom values. With the changing life reality as more life demons are cast out through active faith and love, more of poor people get to hear Christ saying “the Kingdom of God has come upon you!” (Matthew 12:28) This inspires the church of poor people, or the poor people inspired by the praxis of the church, to hope and to believe. And Gustavo Gutierrez sums it up and says it is a way of being church, “that does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed.” (Gutierrez, p. 15)

This is where the change-making praxis for an alternative life reality gets to be truly a prophetic praxis. How are we to prepare leaders for the prophetic praxis in a shifty environment that changes as capriciously as it seems to in South Africa? On the minimum, much care must go to institutions of training such as this seminary, to equip future clergy, not to be overwhelmed by the power of the dominant “royal consciousness” that they will find in society. They need to go out reasonably equipped with the independent mind that is essential for a prophetic praxis. Richard McBrien, offers some ideas of the necessary minimum qualities for a rounded ministry (McBrien R.P., “Ministry: A Theological, Pastoral Handbook”, Harper Collins, 1987, pp.51 – 74).

It is worth considering them; and even if the institution does not offer enough of them, ministers would know that they have a responsibility to equip themselves as their training and learning does not end before their day of retirement. These qualities, according to McBrien, are:

1. Basic Human Wholeness: this refers to mental and physical state of health to measure up to the demands of ministry, and with that we could add the cultivation of a healthy lifestyle.
2. The Theological Virtues: these are faith, hope and love.
3. The Moral Virtues: these are prudence, justice, temperament and fortitude.
4. A Positive Sense of Church: We often run into clergy who have nothing positive to say about their church, or the church at all, and you wonder what seems to have entrapped them into the ministry of the church.
5. Communication Skills: this should go without saying, but should never be taken for granted.
6. Sound Theological Competence and Vision: a sound balanced theological outlook is essential; and not be demagoguery, idiosyncratic or hold extreme theological positions and be unable to carry community because they are too self-absorbed in their thinking ghetto.
7. Social, Political, and Cultural Awareness: McBrien reminds us that the importance of the social, economic and political context of ministry relates to our Johannine statement of faith: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us..." We serve and represent an incarnate God in Christ. We have to be rooted in the situation of the life of the people.

Social, economic and political awareness requires tools to work with in order to be able to exercise a ministry of the prophetic praxis in an context that will always be shifting depending on the currents at play. From Catholic Social Teaching we have the model of SEE, JUDGE, ACT. In the 1961 Encyclical Letter - *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII affirmed the process of **See, Judge, Act** as a way of reading and responding to the signs of the time. He wrote:

*There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgement on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge act. (Pope John XXIII, Mater et Magistra, 1961, Paragraph #236)*

I have lifted a guide to the SEE, JUDGE, ACT, for those who may not be familiar with this process. It is helpful because it has a section on social analysis, where the hard questions must be asked and for answers speak for themselves; and then the prophetic courage is required in order to go beyond the challenges, towards a prophetic praxis. The social analysis that is part of SEE, includes such questions as:

- i. **Economic factors:** Who owns? Who controls? Who pays? Who gets? Why?
- ii. **Political factors:** Who decides? For whom do they decide? How do decisions get made? Who is left out of the process? Why?
- iii. **Social Factors:** Who is left out? Who is included? Why?
- iv. **Historical Factors:** What past events influence the situation today?
- v. **Cultural Factors:** What values are evident? What do people believe in? Who influences what people believe?

The South African Council of Churches has sought to be specific about the prophetic inspiration in its approach to public ministry. Prophetic is often identified after the manner of Elijah speaking truth to power. Certainly, Walter Breuggemann seems to base his Prophetic Imagination on the Elijah model. The SACC has used this model in its relationship with the administration of President Jacob Zuma as it became necessary. However the SACC also uses two other prophetic models.

The Daniel Model: The righteous man who was approved by the angel Gabriel (Daniel 9:23), prayed a confession on behalf of his people (Daniel 9: 1 – 19). The church in South Africa has much to confess on its own behalf. It is only appropriate that we should humbly offer prayers and supplications for the sinfulness of our society. After all, if South Africa is rotten, and it is 75% Christian, then the Christian community that populates the country has to own up to the rottenness. But the Daniel Model makes for a humbling experience.

The Jeremiah Model: In this model the SACC embarks on acts that inspire hope in a future we can help create. Jeremiah was in prison, with Jerusalem under siege, his cousin came to request him to buy his piece of land. Jeremiah bought the land, saying:

“For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.” (Jeremiah 32: 15)

In this model the SACC engages in hope-inspiring projects. The major undertaking is the South Africa We Pray For, implemented now through the National Convention of South Africa. The SACC National Convention is the process for building public consensus on the minimum standards necessary as a strong foundation for basic public values and standards, in the best interests of every South African. This with regards to the challenge of poverty and inequality, the culture of corruption, greed and inordinate self-interest in the private sector, and the lack of constitutional accountability and impunity in the public sector. It not only serves to mobilise, but to also to set value positions, and standards that are acceptable to meet the requirements of life and governance anticipated in the rights culture of the South African Constitution. It is a process to coax the diverse sections of the South African

population to move toward a common centre of South African social and economic mutuality, towards a general win-win mindset. In this regard, the National Convention functions through four focused thematic areas as follows:

- **Anchoring Democracy** – for the integrity of the governmental systems.
- **Economic Transformation** – to modernize the economy and deal aggressively with poverty, inequality and the economic marginalisation of the majority.
- **Comprehensive Quality Education** – to modernise education and have it promote a cohesive citizenry while deliberately articulating well into economic productivity and innovation.
- **Healing and Reconciliation** – dealing with the deep South African woundedness of racism, ethnicity, gender, family brokenness, intersectional identity and the need for public consensus on national values and standards of being.

The Convention Process goes beyond analysis, criticism and blaming, but proactively seeks to focus on the practical desirables for our society - to ***Reimagine, Redesign, and Reorganize*** for an alternative social and economic experience in South Africa. The work to be done in this regard is three-pronged:

- Convening and public engagement.
- Implementing practical solutions and programme in selected parts of the country.
- Rapidly organising local-level church and community structures for both public engagement receptivity and implementation of the programmes.

There are four working teams for the four themes. We want to have a fifth, the theologising group that will apply theological tools to the process. That meeting should be in early July. Maybe SMMS might consider offering to lead the theological process.

This is in pursuit of the Jeremiah Model of hope-inspiration and solution-creation. This is the evangelical task of the *oikoumene* in South Africa. Otherwise Biko's charge against us church will stick: "To the revolutionary the Church is anti-progress and therefore anti-God's wishes because long ago it decided not to obey God". We are called to be witnesses to the love of God manifest in the birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection of God in Jesus of Nazareth the doing of God's will in our society – and together with others, it is the evangelical task of the *Oikoumene* in South Africa.

God's grace is sufficient for our path of obedience! Amen!!

**READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

**See, Judge, Act: A process for social justice groups  
FROM AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL**

**[[http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/files/Social-Teaching/Reading\\_the\\_Signs\\_of\\_the\\_Times.pdf](http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/files/Social-Teaching/Reading_the_Signs_of_the_Times.pdf)]**

## 1. See:

**Seeing, hearing, and experiencing** the lived reality of individuals and communities. **Naming** what is happening that causes you concern

Carefully and intentionally **examining** the primary data of the situation. What are the people in this situation doing, feeling, and saying? What is happening to them and how do you/they respond?

What do you **know** about this issue or what did you **observe**? What specific **facts** can you cite about this issue or experience? What did you **learn** or **observe**?

How do you **feel** in the face of this issue or experience?

How does it **touch** you personally?

## 2. Judge

The word 'judge' is used here in a positive sense – to **analyse** the situation and **make an informed judgement** about it. Judging involves two key parts:

- a. social analysis
- b. theological reflection.

**a. Social Analysis:** Social analysis helps us to obtain a more complete picture of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. In this step, we attempt to make sense of the reality that was observed in Step 1 - See.

**Why does this situation exist?**

**What are the root causes?**

To answer these questions, we need to examine:

- i. **Economic factors:** Who owns? Who controls? Who pays? Who gets? Why?
- ii. **Political factors:** Who decides?  
For whom do they decide? How do decisions get made? Who is left out of the process? Why?
- iii. **Social Factors:** Who is left out? Who is included? Why?
- iv. **Historical Factors:** What past events influence the situation today?
- v. **Cultural Factors:** What values are evident? What do people believe in? Who influences what people believe?

Social Analysis assists us in naming the 'heart of the matter' which we then take to the theological reflection.

## b. Theological Reflection

Theological Reflection explores the experience and its deeper analysis, in dialogue with the Christian tradition.

From this conversation we gain new insights and meanings.

Two important sources of this tradition are the Scriptures and Catholic social teaching. How do they serve as a measuring stick for this experience?

What **Scripture passages** can help us to interpret this experience?

How do **biblical values** help us to see this reality in a different way?

What does **Christian social teaching** say about this issue? What key principles from Christian social teaching apply to this situation? (For example: human dignity, the common good, human rights, the option for the poor.)

**Insights** from the theological reflection lead to **ideas for action**.

From your **information** (Seeing) ...

and **analysis** and **theological reflection** (Judging) ...

what **action** needs to be taken –

- to change the situation?
- to address root causes?  
If no action is clear, what **additional research** is needed?
- How would you transform the structures and relationships that produce this situation?
- How can you act to empower those who are disadvantaged in this situation?
- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your action?

### 3. Act

**Planning and carrying out** actions aimed at transforming the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice.

