

The Role of Christians in a Changing

South Africa

Rhodes
Public Lecture

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Introduction: The theme of my 2 lectures is the above. Before dealing with "The Role of Christians in the Constitutional Process" or with "~~The Role of Christians~~" "Post-constitutional Role of Christians" I need to make 2 introductory remarks:

1. The nature of the change taking place in South Africa
 - Never in South Africa's history have so many changes taken place in so many spheres affecting so many people as is happening in S.A. today.
 - Never before in our history were issues raised and being handled which affects our political, educational, economic and social life so deeply and so fundamentally as to-day.
2. There is serious difference of opinion about the role of Christians in this process of change. A wide variety of differing and contradictory answers are being given by Christians in answer to these questions. These different answers reflect the lack of unity and understanding between Christians - all claiming to adhere to the same faith. They also reflect the lack of open dialogue and discussions between Christians about these issues.

I hope that my address to-night may in a small way assist in clearing up some of these confusions and giving some direction to the churches as institutions and to Christians as individual citizens, especially as we are now wishing to consider

I The Role of Christians in the Constit. Process.

I believe we have to distinguish very clearly between the ^{role of the} church as an institution and the role of individual

Christians. As far as the church as institution is concerned we need to emphasize the following:

A.1. - The church as institution has no right or mandate to act as a political party. ~~Therefore~~ the church as institution has ^{also} no right or mandate to participate in the actual process of negotiation dealing with the draft constitution. It is not the task of the church to draw up a constitution or to prepare a draft for such a constitution - that is, or should be the task of political, legal, economic and educational specialists.

A.2. - But the church has a specific and very important task in this process:

2.1. - The church has to define and spell out to the community the concepts of justice, of human rights and responsibilities, of neighbourly love and concern which reflect the ethical and moral demands of the Christian faith. Furthermore the church as institution has to test any draft constitution over against these criteria and these standards.

In order to be able to do that properly there should be:

as a proper prior study of such drafts to determine which standards or criteria are possibly jeopardised, threatened, subverted, neglected or forgotten. And for such a study to be properly undertaken the church needs the knowledge ~~of~~ and experience of specialists: political, legal, economic, educational & social.

These experts or specialists need not be Christian - they could be of any faith or of no particular faith. But the final judgment, the test for the criteria should be made by Christians - based on their understanding of the message of their faith as related to these issues

b) A process of education of its membership to explain to them what is at stake, which moral values have to be applied. As Christians this will include:

b.1 - A proper understanding of the freedom of religion which implies that S.A. has to become a secular state with the freedom of everybody to worship or not to worship as he/she wishes

b.2 - A proper understanding of the concept of democracy: e.g. the issue of human rights, freedom of association, freedom of the press & media, justice in dealing with resources, land, wealth

A 3- What should be the duty of the church in case a cardinal Christian concept or truth is threatened and eventually rejected? If such a moment arrives the church has the duty to the government and to the community, if all other steps had been taken to no avail, to say: in obedience to a higher authority than state or government or party or people - we have to obey God even if this implies that we have to disobey the state.

B. Individual Christians: They belong to different polit. parties (or to no particular party), different racial, ethnic or cultural groups, with loyalties to these parties, groups or groups. Some Christians as individuals will feel that they have other interests and don't see this as their duty to participate in such discussions. Their interest may be in other directions: science, art, agriculture, sport, technology. I believe they should have the freedom to choose whether to participate or not. But when a country's constitution (which we must remember will affect the life of millions of people for decades, generations + even centuries) jeopardizes the deepest Christian convictions of justice, love, peace, human rights + human relations then they dare not remain silent, dare not stay innocent. If they do that, it amounts to a betrayal of Christ their Lord.

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At no other time in the history of our country is the Christian church so privileged - and so strongly challenged - to assist in guiding our nation, our people towards a new future, a new world. Our response - or lack of it - as Christians and as a church will prove whether we really understand what it means to be the church and to be a Christian community, part of a wider community.