

Breaking the silence: Is the church failing to address South Africa's sociopolitical problems?

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This article investigates why the Ecumenical Church in South Africa has not responded effectively to social issues such as bad governance, corruption, inequality, crime, and ethical decline. It uses contextual and comparative analysis to examine the historical, political, and theological factors that influence the church's role and identity. It draws on missiology, practical theology, and ecclesiology to argue that the church is neglecting its moral and prophetic duty to uphold human dignity and value, and to offer hope and healing to all. The investigation identified six reasons for the church's social failure and proposes some practical and theological ways to improve its social responsibility and witness.

Contribution: This article challenges the church to be a prophetic voice and witness for social transformation in South Africa. It calls for a national convention of Christian leaders to craft a unified vision for the country's future and foster dialogue, cooperation, and social responsibility among diverse and complex churches.

Keywords: silence; misgovernance; mismanagement; advocacy; action; service.

'A church silent in the face of evil is no church at all'.

Boz Tchividjian

Introduction

One of the most striking features of the current social and political landscape in South Africa is the apparent lack of a coherent and consistent Christian voice and action on the matters that affect the nation. Despite more than 80% of the population identifying as Christian (Schoeman 2017:6), this demographic strength has not translated into a cohesive and impactful presence in the public sphere. The church ecumenical, traditionally called to bear witness to the Kingdom of God through both word and deed (Fjårstedt 1983), seems conspicuously silent or indifferent to the myriad of challenges facing the country. The term ecumenical means 'of or referring to or representing the whole of a body of churches or tending toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation', according to Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.). Ecumenism is a way of seeing, doing, believing, and acting together. It shows the wholeness of Christianity, influencing how Christians relate to their religion, the church, and the world. Those who join in ecumenism share in ideas, activities, and institutions that reveal a spiritual truth of common love in the church and the human family. Thus, the Ecumenical Church (henceforth referred to as 'the church') is not a separate entity, but rather a vision of the Church as a communion of all Christians who share the same faith in Jesus Christ.

The African National Congress (ANC), in its 1994 election manifesto, pledged to deliver a better life for all, emphasising principles of equality, non-racialism, non-sexism, inclusive economy, jobs, housing, healthcare, education, and the establishment of a peaceful and secure environment free from fear (ANC 1994). The post-apartheid democratic Constitution of South Africa, adopted in alignment with the values and aspirations of the nation, is a testament to uphold the rights of all citizens irrespective of race, gender, sex, religion, language, or birth (Republic of South Africa [RSA] 1996:6). Serving as a cornerstone of democracy, it stands as a guarantee of respect for human dignity and worth. However, three decades later, South Africa has failed to live up to its promise and potential. Tondi (2018:96) argues that the main problem is not the lack of resources to aid the poor and protect the vulnerable, but rather a deficiency of urgency and moral integrity among some of the leaders in politics, the economy, and society.

Note: Special Collection: Interreligious Dialogue, sub-edited by Jaco Beyers (University of Pretoria, South Africa).

Structure

This article is structured as follows. Firstly, it provides an overview of the current state of living conditions in South Africa, based on various indicators such as income, employment, education, and safety. Secondly, it examines the historical and theological factors that have contributed to the current situation. Thirdly, it provides an examination of the church's challenges in responding to these issues from theological and ethical viewpoints. Lastly, it offers some recommendations for enhancing the social responsibility and witness of the church in a diverse and complex South African society.

Methodology

The investigation relied mainly on secondary documents as sources of information, such as official reports, speeches by key actors, articles from newspapers and journals, and academic works related to the topic. The methodology consisted of a critical analysis and comparison of these sources, in order to identify the main arguments, perspectives, and evidence on the topic.

A brief overview of living conditions in South Africa

Some of the challenges that South Africans face are economic inequality, high unemployment rate, corruption and nepotism, violent crime, weak rule of law, and social fragmentation. These are discussed briefly below.

Income and inequality

South Africa has become one of the most unequal countries in the world, with a Gini coefficient – an indicator of inequality that ranges from 0 = perfect equality, to 1 = perfect inequality – of 0.63 (World Bank 2023). This figure underscores a deeply divided society, characterised by a small elite enjoying substantial incomes, a struggling middle class making ends meet, and a vast majority living in poverty. Notably, the wealthiest 10% of the population possesses a staggering 71% of the total wealth, leaving the poorest 60% with a mere 7% (Sulla, Zikhali & Cuevas 2022:11). This situation is rooted in historical and structural factors that limit the opportunities and prospects of many South Africans, especially those who are black, female, rural, or young (Lephakga 2017:4). According to the World Bank (n.d.), as of 2022, 62% of South Africans were living in poverty, and little improvement is anticipated in the coming years. The persistent trend of the rich accruing more wealth while the poor facing increasing hardship widens the gap in both economic resources and opportunities. This disparity poses a threat to overall economic growth and macroeconomic stability. Additionally, it concentrates power in the hands of a few, potentially leading to political and economic instability (Dabla-Norris et al. 2015:5). Davids (2021:n.p.) underscores the urgency of the situation, describing it as a 'ticking timebomb' that threatens social peace and stability.

Unemployment

South Africa confronts a formidable challenge with its elevated unemployment rate, reaching 32.9% in the first quarter of 2023, a particularly concerning issue for the youth who experience higher rates of joblessness compared to the older generation (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA] 2023). Compounding this issue is the shortage of skilled workers in key sectors such as health, engineering, construction, public service, and transportation. Allianz (2023), a global financial services provider, identified skills shortages as the eighth most significant risk in South Africa.

Misgovernance and mismanagement

The Corruption Perception Index, according to Transparency International (2022), ranks South Africa 72nd out of 180 countries. This ranking underscores the pervasive nature of corruption across all sectors of society. Corruption undermines fair governance, as self-interest often takes precedence over public interest among both public officials and private entities. The allocation of contracts, services, and public funds becomes influenced by bribery rather than merit, resulting in adverse consequences, particularly for the impoverished. The poor bear the brunt, experiencing higher costs and diminished quality and quantity of basic needs because of corrupt practices. Corruption also hampers economic development, as it encourages wasteful spending on capital goods that do not create growth, but only benefit the corrupt (Evans 1999:8). Public entities such as Eskom, South African Airways (SAA), South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), and many more, have faced financial losses, operational failures, scandals, and controversies because of their poor management and governance (Commission of Inquiry into State Capture n.d.).

Safety and security

South Africa is one of the most dangerous countries to live in, with six of its cities featuring in the top 20 most dangerous cities globally (NUMBEO 2023:n.p.). In the first quarter of 2023, the police recorded thousands of murders, rapes, and robberies (South African Police Service [SAPS] 2022). Many factors are linked to crime and violence, such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and historical trauma (Bhorat et al. 2017:3; World Population Review 2023). However, these factors alone cannot explain why South Africa is one of the poorest and most crime-ridden countries in the world (Sekhaulelo 2021:3). Other causes that need to be considered are the country's history of violence, the rise in the availability of firearms, the expansion of organised crime, and the ineffective criminal justice system (Adam & Grobbelaar 2022:4).

Lawlessness

Lawlessness endangers the lives and property of people, which are vital for human dignity and development. It also undermines public infrastructure and services intended to enhance people's quality of life. In an article titled 'The

reasons behind service delivery protests in South Africa' from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Today, Burger (2009) warned that:

[I]t would be fair to conclude that if this situation is allowed to continue over a prolonged period it has the potential to spread and develop into a fully-fledged revolt. (n.p.)

Burger also highlights the case of the mini-bus taxi industry in South Africa, frequently flouting the law and demanding special treatment. He contends that there is a pressing need for improved governance and accountability to rebuild trust and compliance among the people of South Africa.

Moral decay

In addition to the aforementioned challenges, there is a notable issue of moral decay within the country. The condition of South Africa's urban areas is distressing, marked by widespread problems such as garbage accumulation, debris, clogged drains, and overflowing sewage (Schenck et al. 2022; Southall 2018:n.p.). Only a handful of cities, including Cape Town and possibly a few others, have managed to maintain a semblance of cleanliness and order. The broader deterioration of urban environments is starkly at odds with South Africa's former status as the pride of Africa and a global model, signalling a loss of the country's once-renowned beauty and charm over the past three decades.

Swart's (2013) analysis of the service-delivery crisis in South Africa highlighted the diminishing allure of the notion that South Africa is a distinct and exceptional nation. A decade later, the issues outlined in Swart's paper have not only failed to improve but have, in fact, worsened. Further and contrary to Swart's (2013:2) claim that the challenges in South Africa stem from social factors beyond the direct influence of the Christian church, I argue in this article the opposite: that the challenges in South Africa are within the direct influence of the Christian church. Since the majority of South Africans, including leaders in business, government, and civil society, are predominantly Christians, it is posited that the country's current state is a direct outcome of their collective actions or inactions as the majority.

There is hope, however, that the country's future course, which has been suffering from dishonesty, poor governance, and unfairness for three decades under the ANC rule, will be greatly influenced by the 2024 national and provincial elections. The ANC, the party that has held power since 1994, is grappling with internal conflicts and scandals that erode its legitimacy and effectiveness. Concurrently, opposition parties have yet to articulate a cohesive and compelling alternative plan for the country. The current situation indicates a need for change.

Firstly, the Democratic Alliance (DA), the main opposition party, formed a coalition of parties with similar ideologies, called the Multi-Party Charter for South Africa, to contest 2024 elections (Pillay 2023). The leader of the DA, John Steenhuisen, announced this coalition in his re-election

victory speech on 02 April 2023 (DA 2023). He said that this was a 'Moonshot Pact' to bring about a new era of democracy and prosperity in South Africa. At the time of this article, the coalition pact consisted of seven political parties which, based on the 2019 election results, represent only 26% of the voters. This percentage does not take into account any changes in each party's popularity over time and the influence of new parties in the pact that did not contest 2019 elections. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the second largest opposition party, was not invited to join this coalition because of major ideological differences with the other parties in the coalition (Harper 2023).

Secondly, the current political landscape in South Africa seems to favour the maintenance of the status quo, which means the ongoing leadership of the ANC under President Ramaphosa (Moeng 2023). This inference is drawn from a significant event on 06 June 2023, where Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) from 150 companies, many of which are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), convened and pledged their commitment to collaborating with the government to address the socio-economic challenges facing the country (RSA 2023). One might contend that since Mr Ramaphosa took office, organised business has been optimistic and supportive of the president (Opperman 2023).

Thirdly, writing for the *Daily Maverick* on 11 July 2023, Mark Heywood voiced his concern about the marginalisation of the majority in these dialogues – political and business. He wrote that what is troubling is that the people who matter the most in an election – the vast majority of the poor, the 18 million people who depend on social grants in some way, the people who suffer the most from the ANC's misgovernance – are largely being left out of the conversation. In the same editorial, he denounced the quietness and passivity of civil society, saying that the latter remains confined in its niches, inflicting mostly minor wounds on a government that has little remorse and has learnt how to cope with its challenges and criticisms (Heywood 2023).

Where does the church feature in these conversations? Why does it seem silent, especially considering that a significant portion of the population, and consequently, a large number of marginalised individuals, identify as Christian? Regardless of their individual political affiliation, their most common factor is their religion, which, in this case, is Christianity. Is there a disconnect between the majority of Christians, sporadic protests, and lamenting voices that seem to have no coordinated ideology or national agenda? Has the church lost its moral and ethical credibility by supporting corrupt leaders, instead of holding them accountable? Have these shortcomings diminished the church's role as a reliable institution and a positive agent for social change in South Africa?

These are some of the urgent and critical questions that the church needs to address and answer. They cannot be resolved by bulletins and press releases. They demand a serious and sustained dialogue and agenda that can only be achieved

through a nationally coordinated convention where all religions participate equally and freely.

The church's silence on socio-economic and political issues

In an article entitled 'State of the Nation: SA coming apart at the seams', published in March 2023, Pieter du Toit (2023) wrote:

The economy is shrinking and unemployment is increasing, our collapsing electricity parastatal is causing untold national harm, infrastructure across the land is failing, and criminality — including institutional corruption facilitated by the ruling political class — seems rampant. Not to mention the state of healthcare and education, where the country spends billions of rand without improving outcomes. (n.p.)

John Endres in an address to the Cato Institute, Washington DC, United States of America, on 20 July 2023, put it bluntly as follows:

As the state becomes less and less capable, it is being increasingly bypassed by private actors. ... Those who can afford it rely on private healthcare and schooling, of a quality far higher than that provided by the state. In the absence of reliable electricity from the state-owned utility, those who can afford it install solar power on their rooftops. ... Calls to the police often go unanswered, ... In response, South Africans make use of private security companies that are highly trained and effective ... In urban areas, residents' associations are fixing potholes, while in rural areas, farmers do the same. Civil society organisations like Solidarity are building technical schools and universities. Trash recyclers control traffic intersections when the lights are out. Large corporations provide security along freight rail corridors, while mining companies build clinics and provide housing and water near mines. Providers of mediation and arbitration services help resolve disputes without the involvement of the courts. Farmers help repair the water infrastructure where state neglect has left it derelict. (Endres 2023:n.p.)

South Africa's former president Mr Thabo Mbeki, spoke at the 22nd National Conference of the South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM) on 25 September 2023. In his speech, titled 'State decay opening door to counter-revolution', Mbeki challenged the conference delegates to reflect on two crucial questions: How have the public administration and management contributed to the rapid deterioration of South Africa? How can and should the public administration and management help to reverse this deterioration and put South Africa on a different path? (Mbeki 2023). These questions are not only relevant for the public administration and management sector, but also for the Christian church. Therefore, I want to ask the same questions to the church: how has the church contributed to the rapid deterioration of South Africa? and, how can and should the church help to reverse this deterioration and put South Africa and its people on a different path? In response, I herein consider possible reasons why the church appears to be silent and inactive in addressing the current crisis, while other stakeholders, such as business and civil society, are taking decisive actions to address the situation.

Historical and theological reflections

Notwithstanding the reality that South Africa is a secular state, the church's theological reflections should be dialogical, ecumenical, and contextual, seeking to foster mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration among different audiences. Some examples of topics that the church could address from a theological perspective are discussed below.

The legacy of apartheid

The theological debate surrounding apartheid did not conclude with its downfall; rather, it persists, exerting a lasting influence on the discourse and practice of reconciliation, justice, and healing in post-apartheid South Africa. Some of the questions that arise from this debate are: How can the churches and religious communities that were complicit in apartheid repent and make amends for their role? How can the churches and religious communities that resisted apartheid forgive and reconcile with their former oppressors? How can the churches and religious communities that suffered under apartheid heal from their trauma and restore their dignity? How can the churches and religious communities that share a common faith, but have different histories and experiences of apartheid, coexist and cooperate in a pluralistic and democratic society? These challenges require a critical and constructive engagement with the past, an honest and compassionate dialogue with the present, and a hopeful and prophetic vision for the future.

The structure of the economy

One possible way to approach the structure of the economy from a theological perspective is to consider the different levels of economic activity and how they relate to the divine plan and human dignity. The structure of the economy can be considered at three different but intertwined levels:

1. At the *macro level*, the economy is a system of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, exerting a profound impact on the well-being of individuals, communities, and nations (Hayes 2023:n.p.). The theological perspective on this level would examine how the economy reflects the values and principles of justice, love, solidarity, and stewardship that are rooted in the Christian faith. For example, how does the economy promote or hinder the common good, the preferential option for the poor, the integral development of persons, and the care for creation (Karakunnel 2005:83–87)?
2. At the *meso level*, the economy is a network of institutions, organisations, and actors that shape and regulate the economic system (Levin 2018:6). The theological perspective on this level would evaluate how these entities embody or violate the moral norms and social teachings of the church. For example, in what way do businesses, governments, unions, markets, civil society, and international organisations uphold or neglect human rights, dignity, and the active participation of workers, consumers, citizens, and stakeholders?

3. At the *micro level*, the economy constitutes a sphere of human action and decision-making that involves personal and interpersonal dimensions (Hayes 2023:n.p.). From a theological standpoint, this perspective delves into how individuals and groups wield their economic agency and responsibility in accordance with their faith and conscience. For example, how do people use their talents, resources, and opportunities to serve God and others, as well as express their creativity and freedom, fulfil their vocations, and grow in holiness?

The quality of the public service

Public services, such as education, health care, social welfare, and security are essential for the well-being and flourishing of human beings, who are created in the image and likeness of God (Parsell et al. 2021:473). Therefore, public services should reflect the values and principles of God's kingdom, such as justice, mercy, compassion, and stewardship (Mi 6:8). However, public services are also subject to the limitations and challenges of human sinfulness, such as corruption, inefficiency, inequality, and violence. Therefore, public services need to be constantly reformed and improved in light of God's will and purpose for humanity. These theological perspectives can offer valuable insights and resources for evaluating and enhancing the quality of public services in various contexts and situations.

The role of power

Pfeffer (1992:30) defines power as 'the ability to influence behaviour, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things they would not otherwise do'. In South Africa, power is highly concentrated and unequal among different groups and individuals. Theological reflection on power can help Christians to discern how to use it wisely, justly, and humbly in various contexts and situations. Additionally, it empowers the church to advocate for the prudent use of power by those individuals in positions of authority within politics, the economy, and society. Some of the questions that theology can address regarding power are as follows: What is the source and purpose of power? How does power influence our participation in God's mission and kingdom? In essence, the theological perspective on power urges the church to actively interact with God's power in its various dimensions and manifestations. Through this engagement, the church can develop the capacity to wield its own power in ways that mirror God's character and align with his will, thereby contributing to God's glory and the common good (Bell 2014:108).

Theology is not only the study of divine truths but also the practical application of those truths in the world. Therefore, the church should extend an invitation to everyone to participate in this journey justly, fairly, and equitably.

Factors that hinder the church's response to social challenges

The church has a long history of involvement in social and political issues, especially during the struggle against

apartheid. It has traditionally been regarded as a moral compass and advocate for human rights and dignity. However, in recent years, there has been a growing scrutiny of the church's role and relevance in light of numerous challenges confronting the country, such as corruption, poverty, inequality, violence, and, most recently, the aftermath of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Kumalo 2009:250). Why is the church silent when so much is going wrong?

- A possible answer is that the church is not silent, but rather its voice is not heard or heeded by those in power. There are many reasons for this possibility: the rise of secularism and religious pluralism in the country; the loss of credibility and moral authority of the church, because of its involvement in scandals, corruption, abuse, and division (Abraham 2023 Makhudu 2018; Mdakane 2023; Miya 2023); and the failure of the church to address the socio-economic challenges facing the country.
- An alternative explanation for the church's silence could be internal divisions and weaknesses stemming from conflicts, scandals, and differences of opinion. Accusations have been levelled at some churches for being perceived as either too aligned or too distant from the government, excessively conservative or overly progressive, too complacent, or too confrontational. Some churches face allegations of being complicit or supportive of the corrupt and oppressive regimes, while others have been criticised for being too radical or confrontational (Forster 2016:n.p.). Instances of abuse, fraud, and mismanagement plague certain churches, while others grapple with financial and pastoral survival challenges (Mdakane 2023).
- Another possible answer is that the church in South Africa is not a monolithic entity but a diverse and complex reality, comprising various denominations, traditions, doctrines, and practices that may clash or compete with each other. Disparate opinions and positions on controversial issues, such as abortion, homosexuality, gender equality and ecumenism, contribute to the multifaceted nature of the church, potentially resulting in a lack of unified voice or action.
- Another plausible explanation is that the church is silent because it is in the process of searching for a new identity and role in a changing context. The church in South Africa has experienced substantial transformations since the end of apartheid, both internally and externally. Dealing with the legacy of complicity or resistance to apartheid, grappling with loss of influence and credibility in society, adapting to democracy and diversity, engaging with globalisation and secularisation, and responding to new challenges and opportunities have all been part of its evolution. The church is perhaps still finding its voice and vision in a post-apartheid era.
- Another conceivable explanation is that the church is silent because it is overwhelmed by the magnitude and complexity of the problems facing the nation. Confronted with a multitude of social, economic, political, and environmental issues that demand urgent attention and action, the church may experience a sense of powerlessness

or inadequacy in addressing these challenges. Limited resources and capacity may hinder effective intervention. Moreover, the church could be discouraged by the lack of progress or resistance to change encountered in its efforts to promote human dignity and worth. This may lead to a state of despair or apathy rather than a sense of hope or proactive engagement.

- Another potential explanation is that the church's silence is, in part, because of the integration of the prophets from the old system (pre-democracy) into the new system. According to Morris (2018:143), Rev. Frank Chikane admitted that he had been unable to speak out during his time in government because he was part of the system. Dr Allan Boesak was cautioned by Archbishop Desmond Tutu that it is not possible to be both a prophet and a politician simultaneously. While prophesying against a system in which one participates may be challenging, some church leaders or members may choose to enter the political sphere for other reasons, such as influencing change from within, representing the interests of their communities, or exercising their democratic rights.

These potential explanations offer insights into the factors and dynamics influencing the relationship between the church, civil society, and the state in South Africa. They may also serve as reasons why the church is perceived as inactive and/or ineffective in addressing critical societal issues.

Recommendations: A call for advocacy, action, and service

Van Wyk (2017) advocates for the Second Reformation, urging Christian churches in South Africa to play a more active role in addressing prevalent social problems and moral decay. He contends that Christians, constituting the majority of the population, bear a responsibility to speak up for the oppressed and the poor while confronting societal ills such as rape, crime, drug abuse, corruption, and other immoral acts. Van Wyk questions why the church, once a powerful force against apartheid, has become seemingly silent and complacent in the face of these ongoing atrocities. He calls for a rediscovery of the core message of the Scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ, emphasising the need to apply it to the evolving and challenging contexts of contemporary society. According to Van Wyk, the church must reclaim its role as a prophetic voice and witness, championing a relevant and transformative community in what he terms the Second Reformation. He underscores the importance of unity, asserting that local churches must overcome their differences and collaborate to combat injustice, promoting justice and a fullness of life for all.

In a similar vein, Sanou (2020:46) argues that Christian leadership is a call to serve. Drawing parallels between God's service to humanity, providing everything needed for well-being and even participating in creation, Sanou contends that Christian leaders achieve success by selflessly adding value to the lives of others.

Building on these insights by Van Wyk and Sanou, this article urges the church to redefine its commitment to social action. This is a call for advocacy and service. It is an appeal for Christians to actively and ethically address the challenges confronting South Africans. It is grounded in the belief that theology is not only a theoretical discipline but also a source of guidance and inspiration for action. This call transcends the mere issuance of newsletters and press releases by the church; rather, it embodies a commitment to active involvement, attentive listening, and decisive action. It carries the responsibility to educate, raise awareness about issues and challenges, and mobilise support for solutions. It encapsulates a vision to create positive change, enhance lives and well-being, and foster social justice and equity. A call for advocacy, action and service is, above all, a summons for leadership, passion, and unwavering dedication:

- It is a call for the church to be *prophetic* and *pastoral*: This means speaking the truth in love to both the powerful and the powerless, to both the oppressors and the oppressed. Being prophetic involves challenging and confronting the structures and systems that perpetuate poverty, inequality, crime, corruption, and mismanagement. Being pastoral involves caring and comforting the victims and survivors of these injustices and evils, providing hope and facilitating healing. Balancing between being prophetic and being pastoral means not compromising or diluting the message of God's justice and mercy, but also not neglecting or alienating the people who need God's grace and compassion.
- It is a call for the church to be *critical* and *constructive*: This involves analysing and evaluating the situation or context in South Africa and actively seeking or proposing ways to enhance or transform it. Being critical involves identifying and exposing the problems or issues that affect the nation, and questioning or challenging the assumptions or practices that cause or sustain them. Being constructive involves finding or proposing solutions or alternatives that are feasible, effective, sustainable, and ethical. Balancing between being critical and being constructive means not being cynical or pessimistic about the possibility of change, but also not being naive or unrealistic about the challenges or obstacles that the church may face.
- It is a call for the church to be *faithful* and *relevant*: This means living out and sharing our faith in a way that connects with our context and culture but also transcends them. Being faithful requires steadfastly holding onto and following the core beliefs and values of the Christian tradition, remaining loyal and obedient to God's will and word. Being relevant involves adapting and applying our faith to the current situation or context, demonstrating responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and concerns of society. Striking a balance between faithfulness and relevance means resisting compromise or conformity to the standards or expectations of our culture, while also avoiding isolation or separation from it.

A call for advocacy, action, and service is an invitation for the church to undergo continuous transformation, reassert its

commitment to the message of Jesus Christ, and collaborate with other partners and agents in society. Together, they can pursue a shared vision of a better future for South Africa.

Conclusion

The church plays a crucial role and offers a distinctive response in addressing the socio-economic issues that impact the lives of individuals and communities. Beyond attending to spiritual needs, the church recognises the interconnectedness and interdependence of material and relational aspects. The church's role and response is shaped by theological and ethical views, which are based on the scriptures, traditions, and the experiences of the Christian faith. These are not static or fixed, but dynamic and contextual, as they respond to the changing realities and challenges of the world. The church in South Africa can draw on its theological and ethical perspectives to provide a prophetic voice and a practical action in response to the challenges of poverty, inequality, corruption, misgovernance, violence, crime, and injustice.

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Author's contributions

T.E.M. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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