

# SOUTH AFRICA

## Seven Potential Snares for the Rainbow Nation



South Africa, richly and abundantly blessed by a gracious God, has, over the years, often been seen as the hope of Africa: resourcefully, economically and especially spiritually.

Sadly, the past 20 years of democracy has not brought the results hoped for, but rather an increase in polarisation, fractured societies, broken promises and disillusioned communities.

This country is, in a sense, 'fighting for her life', and Christians are needed to take a stand at this critical time.

The issue before South African Christians is to **speak TO** the great moral issues of the day and **not only ABOUT** political scandals. Allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom must take precedence over any other loyalty in every part of life. In his address entitled '*The Sin of Silence*' (<http://www.hiswayministries.org/fdsilence.htm>), Dr Laurence White said the following: "God has not called us [the Church] to be social agitators or reformers, He has called us to be faithful spokesmen for His Word. Politics is the art of the possible. Christianity is the art of the impossible." A Christian must always have his eye on eternity.

Landa Cope, of the *Template Institute* ([www.templateinstitute.com](http://www.templateinstitute.com)), articulates Scripture in a way that addresses eight social domains: government, church, science and technology, business, family, education, arts and entertainment and the media. From her Scripture-based studies of the domain of government and church, Cope concludes the following:

**"From the earliest days in the wilderness God made it clear that government and the priesthood were two different and distinct institutions, both with clear Kingdom purpose and function ... Understanding the institution of the church is foundational to understanding the unique, God-given functions in the domain of government ... The church calls society and governance to the accountability of God's Word.**

**The danger is that the church confuses moral and spiritual issues with political issues. The confusion of political authority and priestly authority in Scripture resulted in severe consequences. The prophets were advisors to the king, but they were not kings. God did not give all authority in His kingdom to any one domain or person. The priesthood had authority, but not all authority. The political authorities in Israel had authority as well, but it was different from the priests'. Under God, they had to work together in a system of checks and balances. All of Israel was to be holy, but the priests were to be models of holiness to the community. The book of Leviticus contains instructions primarily for the priesthood regarding how they are to live and how they are to conduct themselves. They had a unique role in the community, but they did not have the only God-given role."**

When one contemplates the above, and understands the role of the Church in the political domain, it is important to consider the following potential snares:

# 1. THE SNARE OF SILENCE

*Proverbs 31:8-9 "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."*



Dr White, in the address mentioned above, quotes Martin Luther as declaring: "The preacher who does not rebuke the sins of the rulers through God's Word spoken publicly, boldly and honestly, strengthens the sins of the tyrants, and becomes a partaker in them, and bears responsibility for them." (Dr White's paraphrase)

According to Dr White, moral decay (which can be seen in South Africa) is often met with silence from the pulpits. Dr White believes that eroded morality and lack of decency could have been countered by addressing the issue of righteousness from the pulpit. He also quotes Alexis De Toqueville, the French political thinker and historian: "By our apathy, by our acquiescence, and by our ignorance, the church of Jesus Christ has consigned itself to irrelevance and

impotence in the ongoing struggle for the soul of [our nation]."

In a polarised society like South Africa, it is not only important to **WALK THE TALK** but also to **TALK THE WALK**. There is a Biblical mandate for people of influence to voice their discontent with practices that fall short of a morally healthy society. However, only voicing discontent over issues that affect one directly, while neglecting issues that affect the majority, is as wrong as voicing no discontent at all. And simply voicing discontent is not enough: one needs to '**speak up**' about issues that matter from a Biblical perspective (injustice, poverty, morality, etc.). On a national level, a Christian perspective (voice) on such important issues is sadly missing.

There has been no shortage of groups voicing their discontent with the current leadership of South Africa. Leaders across a broad spectrum of society have united their voices against corruption in the current ANC leadership. The '**ZUMA MUST FALL**' campaign became more than just a slogan – it became a movement to restore values and ethical leadership. However, the case of those that suffer most as a result of corruption – the destitute, the poor and the needy – is seldom fought for with equal passion. The Christian community in South Africa is yet to launch a campaign along the lines of '**POVERTY MUST FALL**'.

There is no doubt that many churches have excelled in reaching out to the poor. Christians in South Africa have contributed generously, both in human resources and financially, towards alleviating poverty in South Africa. However, the silence in addressing the ongoing social inequalities has mostly been deafening. It would appear President Zuma's Nkandla residence has hijacked the attention of most South Africans and distracted their attention from issues of greater importance.

# 2. THE SNARE OF SELECTIVITY

*Matthew 7:3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"*

People often have 'selective hearing' and 'selective memory'. We only hear what we want to hear and disregard the rest. This is evident when Christians are hypocritically severe towards the faults of others, while overlooking their own. Christians often want to take the moral high ground when it comes to politicians, while corruption runs rampant in many churches. In the book of Revelation, there is a clear warning that judgement begins with the Church.

The Church clearly needs to be a prophetic voice in addressing ethical and moral irregularities in society, and in this regard, it has been encouraging to see leaders from different Christian denominations speaking out against corruption and calling President Zuma to accountability. However, there has been a certain selectivity in addressing corruption in

South Africa. During the past decade there has been a dangerous shift in focus as, more and more, Christian leaders seem to focus on political corruption at the cost of addressing moral, ethical and spiritual corruption (especially within their own ranks). Ironically, it seems like the government is now taking on the role of addressing corruption in the Church, while Christian leaders are taking up the role of addressing corruption in the government.

In 2015, the *Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities* (the CRL Rights Commission) launched an investigative study into the 'commercialisation' of religion and the abuse of people's belief systems in South Africa. There was a call to investigate religious practices in the country, in response to some pastors making people eat grass, rats, snakes, and drink petrol, while others abuse their position to manipulate the poor out of their money, for selfish gain.

In April 2016, Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng of the Incredible Happenings Church in Katlehong, claimed that he visited God. After this supposed visit, he sold photos taken of himself 'in heaven' for R 5,000 (\$333) each. There was very little response from church leaders (at a national level), calling a fellow pastor to accountability and declaring these actions unbiblical and un-Christ-like.

This creates the perception that religious corruption is permissible, while political corruption is unacceptable. The fact that the government has to intervene in religious corruption is an indictment against the Church.

### 3. THE SNARE OF SECURITY

*Galatians 5:13 "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love."*



There seems to be a greater concern, among Christian leaders in South Africa, to **preserve** freedom of religion rather than **using** it. The irony is that once the Church starts demanding her rights, she runs the risk of losing them. Freedom of faith should always be viewed as an instrument, a vessel to be used, never as an ornament, something to merely behold.

There has been a worrying shift in the attitude of many believers during the past 22 years of democracy in South Africa. Many messages on social media often portray Christians in the role of victim, instead of victor. Emails refer to Christian holidays being abolished ([click here](#) for

report), Christian schools being closed ([read here](#)), and the state taking control of South African churches ([read here](#)). In all of these rumours, Christians are the victims. However, the fact is that South Africa is still a nation where nearly three out of every four people confess to be Christian. According to the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, South Africa is one of the 10 countries in the world with the least interference by government in religious affairs.

Trying to ensure freedom for the sake of living a trouble-free life is unbiblical. Using freedom for Kingdom purposes, however, will never be fruitless.

### 4. THE SNARE OF SUSPICION

*1 Timothy 2:1-3 "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour."*

Matthew Henry sums up the Biblical approach to dealing with political leaders of a nation, as laid out in the verse above: "supplications for the averting of evil, prayers for the obtaining of good, intercessions for others, and [this is often the difficult one] thanksgivings for mercies already received." Christian teaching promotes prayer for political

leaders, but sadly, many prayer networks and prayer groups (under the guise of petition and prayer) play a role in creating or spreading suspicion and fear.

False messages and hoaxes ran rampant within South African prayer networks last year, further polarising an already fragmented society. The content of most of these messages referred to specific racial, religious or political groups. There was always a distinct, political agenda and the message created suspicion, fear and hatred – countering the virtues of trust, boldness and love.

Timothy tells us that the Holy Spirit gives us “power, love and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). And Paul tells us that God has made us new and has given us the “ministry of reconciliation”, making us “Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

Any message that creates suspicion and fear – whether delivered from the pulpit, the computer, the phone or the media – is contrary to the message of a crucified Christ, who came so that man could be reconciled to God and with one another.

## 5. THE SNARE OF SUPERIORITY

*Mark 9:35 “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.’”*



Authority in the Kingdom of God is often misrepresented or misunderstood. Biblical authority involves a life laid down in servanthood, not a voice demanding respect and special privileges. A sense of superiority, within a Christian mindset, will ultimately create an unhealthy approach to a multi-cultural society. This is a highly sensitive and controversial issue, but spiritually, it is a critical component for a balanced community. The Christian ‘superiority complex’ comes into existence when Christians begin to think that they are somehow more deserving of special privileges in a society, such as Christian education, Christian holidays and Christian rights (which are, ironically, exactly the opposite of Jesus’s teachings).

Christian faith calls believers to serve others like Christ did, unconditionally. In South Africa, where Christians are in the majority, there needs to be an understanding of the fears and concerns of those who may feel victimised, simply because they are in the minority.

There is a difference between assertions of Christian supremacy and Christian privilege, and both can cause harm. Both insist that Christianity is superior and should be privileged in law, as well as culture; demands for privilege, however, are often motivated by numbers more than influence, while demands for supremacy are motivated by self-righteousness and a belief in the illegitimacy of others.

If the Church in South Africa demanded less and served more, the hearts and minds of a nation could change.

## 6. THE SNARE OF SQUAWKING

*Numbers 14:27-29 “How long will this wicked community grumble against Me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: In this wilderness your bodies will fall - every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against Me.’”*



“Squawking” – the making of a loud, irritating and harsh noise – is used informally to describe “complaining”.

In a nation where God intervened to such an extent that even secular media referred to the peaceful elections in 1994 as “a miracle from God”, it must be an abomination to God to hear His people complain, murmur and grumble. In Numbers 14:26-29, it is clear that God views complaining in the midst of provision as complaints directed squarely at Him. The consequences thereof are severe.

Instead of thanking God for 22 hours of electricity a day (a privilege that one in every four people in the world lacks), we complain about the two hours lost during load-shedding. Instead of thanking God for the abundance of spiritual privileges we enjoy as a nation, we complain about inflation

and food prices.

For many South Africans, ‘squawking’ has become a national pastime, and ironically, the grumbling often takes place around the ‘braaivleis vure’ (barbeque fires) of abundance.

Grumbling, complaining and murmuring reveal ungrateful hearts, which are offensive to God.

## 7. THE SNARE OF SKEPTICISM

*Romans 12:12 “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*

Skepticism is a snare that stretches beyond personal borders and reaches into communities. Negativity feeds on negativity and eventually spirals into social discontent. In all conversations, it is inevitable that the communicator will either **give life** or **drain life** (*Proverbs 18:21 “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit”*).

As servants of the **Father of all compassion**, Christians are called to be comforters and life-givers (*2 Corinthians 1:3-4 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God”*).

Believers’ conversations should **NEVER** be rooted in fear, but in “love, power and a sound mind” (*2 Timothy 1:7*). These three elements serve redemptive purposes in society, and cannot co-exist with hatred, suspicion, apathy and self-centred fear.

Any conversation that does not point to a crucified and risen Christ should not be entertained as a valuable perspective; and any message contrary to His should not determine our actions (*Luke 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised”*).

Christians are called to be messengers of hope.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, consider the following poem, “*Why I Love South Africa*”, by Ian Macdonald:

*I love her for the perfection of her days  
The crisp Karoo morning  
The Joburg winter noon  
The late summer Cape Town sunset  
The star-filled Free State night*

*I love her for her people  
For our warm smiles  
For our resilience  
For our I-am-because-we-are*

*I love her because she delights my senses  
Highveld thunderbolts  
Jacarandas in bloom  
Sunday braais  
African sun  
Icy sea  
I love her raw power, her intensity, her strength  
I love her because of how she makes me feel*

*Sometimes angry, sometimes joyous  
Sometimes fearful, sometimes love-filled  
Sometimes frustrated, sometimes hopeful  
Always alive*

*I love her because she intrigues me  
And challenges me  
The Chinese have a curse: "May you live in interesting times"  
I see it as a blessing*

*I love her because she helps me keep things in perspective  
By reminding me how privileged I am  
Every day*

*I love her for being a microcosm of the world  
A world in one country  
For what we can teach the world  
About compromise  
And sharing  
And forgiveness  
And tolerance  
And hope*

*I love her because she's imperfect  
And full of opportunity  
And potential unfulfilled  
I love her because she has come so far  
And has so much further to go  
And whether we ever get there  
Will all depend on us*

*I love her because she's been so good to me  
And she inspires me to return the favour  
I love her because she's my country  
No matter what  
I love her because she's my home  
And where my soul is at rest*

## SOURCES:

<http://www.hiswayministries.org/fdsilence.htm>

[www.templateinstitute.com\](http://www.templateinstitute.com/)

[http://www.awesomesa.co.za/?article&global\[\\_id\]=23&global-Why%20Do%20I%20Love%20South%20Africa?](http://www.awesomesa.co.za/?article&global[_id]=23&global-Why%20Do%20I%20Love%20South%20Africa?)



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