


# The profile and manifestation of moral decay in South African urban community

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South Africa in which we are living is characterised by unparalleled social and political change and apparently enormous differences of opinion. However, there is one aspect of our society that most of us would probably agree about and that is the decline of morality in our cities. Apart from the economic and political crisis, and the erosion of the core competence to actually get things done in the municipalities, South Africa is an ailing society with disturbing pathologies in terms of indiscipline, violence, rape, assault, fraud and a failure to accept personal accountability for the high levels of crime, corruption, xenophobic attacks, gender-based violence and disintegration of families. The main aim of this study is to outline the profile of moral decay in the South African urban community and to define the calling of the Church towards moral regeneration. The conclusion arrived at is that there are definite signs of moral degeneration over a wide sphere of human endeavour in South African urban community, and that the church has a particular role to play as a driving agent for moral renewal.

**Contribution:** Whilst there are many positive things brought by urbanisation in our cities, however, moral decay in our South African cities is one of the biggest threats to South Africa's hard earned, freedom and democracy and merits closer attention. This study in ethics joins the voices of those people who are propagating moral regeneration in our times.

**Keywords:** morality; urbanisation; regeneration; theology; South Africa.

## Introduction

Historically, most observers have described cities in overwhelmingly negative terms. Writing more than 100 years ago, social critic and reformed minister in America, Josiah Strong, sounded themes that seem entirely except for the slightly quaint language in which they are expressed: Here is heaped the social dynamite; here roughs, gamblers, thieves, robbers, lawless and desperate men of all sorts congregate; men who are ready on any pretext to raise riots for the purpose of destruction and plunder; here gather foreigners and wage-workers; here scepticism and irreligion abound; inequality is the greatest and most obvious, and the contrast between opulence and penury the most striking (Popenoe, Cunningham & Boulton 1998:418). Numerous 19th and the 21st century writers, including some in South Africa (e.g. see Harber 2011:4; Van der Walt 1991:216) voiced similar sentiments, condemning the city as the incubator of every dark and sinful impulse in the human soul: dirty, disarray, riots, danger, diseases, crime and corruption.

In the same way, Woodbery, Elliston and Van Engen (1996:144) add that cities are like battlefields where issues of many kinds are raised and fought over daily. Opposing worldviews, value systems and lifestyles stand toe-to-toe in urban centres. From these same places emanates most of the negative and disintegrating forces that wage havoc on the natural environment and on human life in general. There are a number of other synonyms for the city: over-crowdedness, decaying tenements and housing in what were once good middle and upper-class neighbourhoods, omnipresence of noise from stereos, cars and people, fiscal dysfunction, rife with crime, violence, prostitution, disease ridden and drugs (Joslin 1982:39; Tonna 1982:79). It is worth pointing out that a negative view of the city has also been lodged for a long time in the evangelical subconscious. Hence, many churches were much more comfortable sending missionaries from suburban churches to the rural areas/villages. Christians feel alienated by the city and see it only as a dark and evil place to be avoided.

This goes hand in hand with some churches in the cities and their dismal record for assimilating the waves of new immigrants settling in urban areas. When changes come in the racial or social constituency or when social blight and deterioration sets in, some churches prefer to move out to a more congenial turf.

As Kyle (1998:76) put it, many of us fled the city just when God brought the whole world there. In some instances, the church's physical presence in the form of its building remains in the inner city. These appear to be the essence of urban life as viewed by generation after generation of social commentators. However, despite these negative concepts about the cities, the stream of new arrivals grew ever greater. Greenway and Mashau (2007:10) observe that South African cities are swarmed by more than 50 ethnic groups coming from the outskirts of our cities and from the international community. If one walks in the street of Johannesburg and other major South African cities, one is exposed to vast conglomerations of different races, tribes, cultures and languages. They have great hopes and dreams for the future despite the poverty and suffering they experience now. They firmly believe that if not the parents, certainly the children will enjoy better lives in the city. This causes immense pressure on the ability of the cities to provide for the social and economic needs of the new migrants. Of concern, the management of urban growth is often inadequate, a problem made worse by the lack of internal financial controls, incompetence and indifference of councillors, corruption in awarding of tenders, indifferences to the protests of the public and infrastructural collapse. Having delineated the context of this article, the focus of this research will endeavour to answer this question: What is the profile and manifestation of moral decay in the urban community, and what role does the Church have towards driving moral renewal in South African cities? In response, this article is structured as follows: (1) introduction, (2) definition of the concept urbanisation, (3) causes of urbanisation, (4) contemporary challenges facing the South Africa cities, with regard to moral decay, (5) the response of the church to the moral decay posed by urbanisation, (6) lesson from scripture for the cities and (7) conclusion.

## Definition of urbanisation

For Greenway and Mashau (2007:6), urbanisation is the process in which the number of people living in the cities increases compared with the number of people living in rural areas. It is a global phenomenon, caused by a combination of economic and social-cultural factors. A country is considered urbanised when over 50% of its population lives in urban places. Equally important, Beall and Fox (2009:7) are of the view that urbanisation refers to the unique social, cultural, economic and political dynamics that arise in densely populated human settlements. Pierli and Abeledo (2002:61) argue that urbanisation is the process where people acquire material and non-material elements of culture, behaviour patterns and ideas that originated in, or are distinctive of, the city. Urban growth, on the other hand, is the physical aspect of urbanisation. The term refers to the number of people actually living in urban areas, the increase of urban populations and the multiplications of towns. Almost 50% of the world's population currently lives in towns and cities and is considered to be urbanised (see McLaren 2006:129).

Why did South African cities grow so dramatically yet unevenly over the past years despite widespread anti-urban sentiments? In general, factors behind the relentless growth of South African cities are the following: Desegregation of South African cities; South Africa's integrated development plan; displaced agricultural workers affected by weakening sector (Beall & Fox 2009:216; Biko 2013:212; Bundy 2016:85–86; Harber 2011:16–19; Hoymeyr & Pillay 1994:252; Jeffery 2019:66–67; Johnson 2009:440, cf. 2017: 170–171; cf. Johnson 2019:119; Pottinger 2008:190; cf. Roberts 2001:93; Stott 2006:277; see Venter 1998:195). It is probably true to say that cities continued to grow because they became centres of industry, transportation communication, entertainment, information and health care. In short, they became the nerve centres of society (cf. Greenway 1989:110; Joslin 1982:23; Meeks 1983:14; Stevenson 2003:13; Tonna 1982:9; Troy 1995:128; cf. Turley 2005:57; Winter & Hawthorne 1999:553). In South Africa, the most rapid urbanisation is occurring around six large cities – Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni (the East Rand) Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth – and three small ones, East London, Bloemfontein and Pietermaritzburg. Some 20 million people live in these cities, their numbers increasing all the time and that urbanisation is irreversible: there is no circumstance in which these urban dwellers will return to a rural existence. All these people are wholly integrated into the international market (Greenway & Mashau 2007:8; Johnson 2015:225; cf. Venter 1998:196).

According to Tiplay (2003:2), when one speaks of cities and the nature of the urban environment, one largely describes what in contemporary parlance is called globalisation. However, globalisation is predominantly, though not exclusively, an urban phenomenon. Vorster(2007a:64) sees globalisation as the process of the integration of international economic structures across national borders and political entities. Greenlee (2003:100) notes with sadness that globalisation resulted in the breakdown of tribal and family life and an increased disregard for their social and moral norms, as well as economic, religious and mental insecurity.

Within the church, the harm of globalisation is also clearly seen. The importing of all kinds of foreign teaching and styles of worship means that churches in the cities are conforming to non-traditional values and imported behaviour and are not valuing their own cultural church heritage (Basu 2005:182; McLaren 2006:81). Delineation of South African urban community challenges with regard to moral decay.

## South African urban community challenges with regard to moral decay

Whilst there are many positive things brought by urbanisation in our cities, one notes with sadness the degeneration of morality as one of the consequences of urbanisation. Alarming social ills besetting the South African urban community are worthwhile considering in this regard.

## A spiralling crime rate

Altbeker (2007:54) observes that it is a common cause amongst criminologists that people who live in cities are much more likely to be robbed than are people who live in the rural hinterland. This is not because the rural hinterlands are better, more moral people than those who live in the city. It is because cities are uniquely prone to these threats given their economic, political and cultural significance (Beall & Fox 2009:171; cf. Berry 1996:59; Brown 2001:512; cf. Joslin 1982:40; Malan & Smit 2002:1; see Shelley 1981:8; Terreblanche 2002:401; Turley 2005:224). Moreover, these categories of crime, which strike terror in the hearts of all South Africans, have increased. According to Pauw (2017:277), around 17 000 people are murdered in South Africa every year. The country's murder rate is about 30 people per 100 000, which is amongst the world's highest. In Cape Town, however, it is much higher, at 55. The structural argument, dear to the heart of the African National Congress (ANC) administration, remains that crime is a consequence of poverty and unequal society because, as almost everyone knows, our Gini coefficient, the standard measure of inequality, is amongst the highest in the world. This may be partly true, but it fails to explain why societies with far greater poverty – and even greater inequality – experience less crime, particularly the violent variety.

The essence of the argument is that socio-economic conditions in South Africa, though always likely to produce crime, cannot tell us why South African crime is as pervasive and violent as it is. Whilst no one conclusively explained why South Africans were so prone to commit violent crime, there was no doubting that the core problem is during the ANC-led government 25 years in power, not once has the problem been politically elevated to that of a national crisis. Again, a primarily preventative policy has not been complemented with an effective detection policy. In connection to this, the raw material with which the police service works is currently institutionally incapable of carrying out the task of combating crime. This failure has many fathers, but probably the most important is the collapse of, or conversely the failure to inculcate, a high level of professionalism in the police service (Johnson 2009:447).

## Violent protest against poor service delivery

Concomitantly, protests against poor service delivery had become endemic in many townships, so unemployed youths were already in the habit of taking part in marches, burning tyres in protest and exercising mob rule. Water shortages and electricity disruption are currently widespread because of the lack of maintenance and failure to upgrade the ageing infrastructure inherited in 1994. More than 2 million South Africans have participated in service delivery protests since 2008. It has become so standardised that when a community is demanding housing or a road from government, they seem to feel that the only way to get government's attention is to burn the infrastructure that is in their area (Mashaba 2015:80). The government argued that a number of these protests were

incited by political factions within the townships seeking to advance their own programmes of self-enrichment. This was undoubtedly true, even if they were factions within the local ANC, but this could still not camouflage the fact that a growing wave of public anger was afoot. On the other hand, protestors often feel that the government is not listening to their demands and that they have no alternative but to engage in extreme measures (see Pottinger 2008:111).

A critical question is the extent to which citizens are willing to exercise their freedom to make ethical choices. Why would voters continue to vote for a party they accuse of not delivering on its election promises, and then stage protests against the party during which they burn and destroy public property? Such destruction in the name of public protest violates the rights of others, including those of taxpayers who have to dig deeper into their pockets to fund the rebuilding of damaged public property (Ramphele 2012:75). In reference to the above, Mkabela and Luthuli (1997:8) are of the view that the perception persists, though, that many Africans still experience alienation towards public facilities, manifesting itself in vandalising of essential resources by people who need those resources to survive. The origin of this attitude and its consequential sets of behaviour can be traced back to the political struggles of the 1980s that encouraged a revolt against public authority and public resources. The resonance with the past was amplified by the fact that the service delivery protests looked as if they were intent on making townships ungovernable, much as they had been in the years of protest that eventually led to apartheid's demise. What may have taken political commentators and politicians by surprise is the frequency and the increasingly violent nature of these protests (Plaut & Holden 2012:333). They have mostly been lumped into the innocuous category of service delivery protests which are curable by simply getting government to 'deliver'. The truth is that the reasons behind these protests are more complex. The remedy that is needed goes well beyond 'delivering'. One of the main characteristics of these protests is that they occur with far greater frequency in urban areas as opposed to rural areas. Between February 2007 and May 2010, 49% of all community protests were in the Western Cape and Gauteng. Municipal IQ has suggested that Gauteng's striking contribution to the number of community protests nationwide demonstrates that the protests are largely an urban phenomenon, resulting from relative deprivation members of a community feel when compared to their more affluent neighbours.

The prevalence of these protests in urban areas is the main reason why the term 'service delivery protests' is a misnomer because anyone familiar with the South African realities will tell you that rural areas have greater service delivery challenges than urban areas and should be the hotbed for violent protests if that is all that these protests are about. The inference that can be drawn from the above is that a long tradition of civil protests formed the backbone of the Anti-Apartheid Movement over many decades. Not unexpectedly, communities continued with this tradition after the 26 years'

honeymoon granted to the ANC-dominated government had run its course (Biko 2013:211). This has led Jeffrey (2019:12) to believe that the ANC's success in making South Africa 'ungovernable' in the decade up to 1994 is a major factor in the persistent vandalism, destructive protests and seeming contempt for authority that persist to this day. There can be no denial that if we fail to passably address these social ills, it will threaten the moral regeneration of our land. Evidently, there is sufficient reason for national concern and national campaign to first understand the phenomenon and second, start the process of dealing with it. Unless that is done, the slide towards acceptance of the abnormal as normal will be inevitable.

## Xenophobia

As it was already noted, protests against poor service delivery had become endemic in many townships, so unemployed youths were already in the habit of taking part in matches, burning tyres in protest and exercising mob role. It was an easy progression to turn one's anger against the foreigners in one's midst (cf. Johnson 2019:630; Matisonn 2015:14). As Johnson (2015:233–234) put it, the experience of urban unrest in South Africa is that once mob violence erupts, it turns very quickly in a xenophobic direction, whatever be its preceding cause. Indeed, the lesson of the May 2008 xenophobic riots was that the ANC-led government is capable of dealing with large-scale urban unrest. This was why many terrible acts of violence were allowed to continue for days in major South African cities and why none of the perpetrators were ever punished. In part, this is because both the police and the army are now mere shadows of what they once were, racked by brutality, corruption and incompetence. Ramphele (2011:131) argues that these attacks are the result of the government's failure to articulate a clear migration policy, to fulfil its primary role of securing our borders and to take corrective action in the light of weaknesses in both policymaking and implementation. This gross failure of governance had simply handed the problem of immigration control to people on the street, who dealt with it by predictably brutal and direct means, several victims even being necklaced with burning tyres. Our reputation as a country with a human rights-based national constitution has been severely dented by government failure in this regard.

It is clear that South Africa's inability to run a proper refugee programme that would enable skilled refugees to be placed in areas of critical skills shortages has created a lose-lose scenario. South Africa is host to millions of refugees who are prevented from being value-adders and instead have to eke out an existence in ways that often put a strain on our public services and create conflict with the poorest citizens who become resentful of foreigners as was demonstrated in the previous sections of this study. Urgent action is needed to address the reality of South Africa being a magnet for both political and economic refugees. Asylum seekers cannot just be left to fend for themselves in competition with citizens at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid of our unequal society. Having said this, it does not mean that this beautiful

country must not allow people from other nations to come to South Africa. That will be politically, socially, morally and economically unacceptable because no nation is an island. The most important issue is that people who cross borders have to be documented and be known to be around. They then have to be governed under certain laws and regulations developed internationally and locally.

## Lack of civic pride

It would appear that there are many self-destructive patterns of behaviour in our cities that is reflected in our lack of civic pride. This is true not just of Transkei towns such as Mbizana and Mthatha, but even of Johannesburg. Prior to 1994, Johannesburg was undoubtedly Africa's premier city (Johnson 2015:138; cf. Shorter 1991:14). It was known in the vernacular as 'Egoli' – the city of gold, money and opportunities (Meredith 2010:27). The main city, like the country, is now un-governed. The city of Johannesburg is so filthy that one can hardly recognise the Eloff Street that used to be its pride. The parking garage near Park Station becomes a dumping site in full view of anyone entering the city from Braamfontein, including the major of the metropolis. Pavements and streets are in an advanced state of disrepair in the heart of the city that is the financial capital of our country (Ramphele 2012:169). Dilapidated blocks of flats in the inner city are densely populated, disease ridden, rife with crime, violence, prostitution and drugs (Sekhauelo 2013:58).

## The government is paying no attention to local government

In the same vein, the government is paying no attention to local government, yet what actually determines the quality of life is whether people have adequate water, electricity, sewerage, garbage collection, hospitals, roads and schools – all local competence. Equally important, development projects only work if one can get local government to participate in them. In order to qualify this statement by 2007, 136 out of 284 municipalities were determined by the government to be unable to fulfil their basic functions and had to be helped by external interventions. Put simply, little more than 20 years of ANC rule had reduced nearly half of South Africa's local authorities and millions of citizens to a situation of semi-administered rule, not so very distant in principle (though very different in style) from the way black townships had been administered in the apartheid era. Across the country, these institutions had collapsed, one after the other, in a surge of underfunding, corruption, destructive internal politicking involving party factions, incompetency, nepotism and indifference. Delivery of services had been affected (Pottinger 2008:110).

Similarly, only 33 out of South Africa's 257 municipalities got a clean audit in 2018, a situation that is, moreover, steadily deteriorating: in that year, the auditor-general reported that 16 municipalities had improved and 45 regressed. No less than 78% of municipalities had submitted financial statements that included 'material mis-statements' and were simply not

credible enough to be used. Many of these municipalities were in a dire state, effectively bankrupt. Collectively, they were owed R138 billion by government departments, business and private households, often as the result of long-standing failures to pay rates and charges for water, electricity, etc. In effect, Eskom and the water boards are prevented by government from cutting off supplies to those who do not pay, which effectively legitimises these non-payers. However, at the same time, as of March 2018, the municipalities owed R43 bn and many suppliers were bankrupted by the municipalities' long-standing failure to pay. Inevitably, there is pressure for central government to step in and take over many of these bad debts (Johnson 2019:209–210).

The true socio-economic reality of today's South Africa is the dominance of four big metropolises (Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria and Cape Town). These are the centres of economic activity. Their populations continue to increase fast. Outside these big centres, municipal government is in a general state of collapse. This is very much the standard African pattern: usually only the biggest cities – Harare, Windhoek and Nairobi – manage to retain working city councils (Johnson 2019:202–203). A far greater improvement could be achieved if only the ANC would revert to its non-racist tradition and start employing all the human resources available on a meritocratic basis. This would mean placing properly qualified people in leading positions, regardless of race or ANC connections. Undoubtedly, this would be fiercely resisted both for the loss of political patronage it represented and by the black elite, which has come to feel it has a natural monopoly on all leading positions in the public sector (Johnson 2009:624).

## Corruption

When one talks about crime in South Africa, most people think of things such as burglary or car hijackings. However, there are other types of more subtle crimes, which probably cost more to society than the value of all the burglaries and bank robberies put together. This hidden crime is known as corruption and consists of two types of overlapping crimes: White-collar crimes where the employee uses his/her position in the public sector to steal and business crime, which is the routine abuse of the private sector in order to make greater profit (Brown 2001:518; Cox & Wade 1998:88–89; cf. Moore 1996:248). One reality already facing post-1994 South Africa is the stark fact that despite a new non-racial government and noble ideals, wastage and corruption still occur at the government level and in private companies. International and local companies see some prize pickings to be made in the development programme that the new government wishes to pursue. It has become an accepted way of doing business in many African nations and, if South Africa were to sink to the level of bribery and corruption of some of these states, the poor and needy will not see their expectations become a reality.

As part of the effort to deal with corruption, the following legal instruments were passed through parliament and

implemented accordingly: the Prevention and Combating of *Corrupt Activities Act* (Act No. 12 of 2004); *Protected Disclosures Act* (Act No. 26 of 2000); *Promotion of Administrative Justice Act* (Act No. 3 of 2000); *Promotion of Access to Information Act* (Act No. 2 of 2000); the *Public Finance and Management Act* (Act No. 1 of 1999) and the *Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act* (Act No. 56 of 2003). The *Public Service Act* of 1994 and the *Executive Ethics Act* were also part of the effort to combat corruption. More recently, government enacted laws such as the *Financial Centre Intelligence Act* (FICA), which is aimed at reducing access of criminals to financial services for money laundering. There were also policies and campaigns like 'Batho Pele' to encourage public servants to focus on the people they served before they thought of themselves (cf. Chikane 2013:228). Notwithstanding these measures, according to Mashele and Qobo (2014:96), South Africa's profile as a country tolerant of corruption has worsened. In 2010, South Africa was ranked 54 out of 183 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (1 is the cleanest and 183 the most corrupt). A year later (in 2011), South Africa lost 10 positions, falling to 64; in 2012, it dropped to 69 and in 2013, it lost a further three places – to 72. This means that since 2010, South Africa has become more corrupt.

Distressingly, we find ourselves at this point in contemporary South Africa where present interventions into our political malice are dominated by talk of state capture. 'State capture is not another name for corruption'; whilst corruption reflects moral failure of individuals, 'state capture is a systemic failure which occurs in a country without functioning checks and balances by design' (see Gqubule 2017:163; Johnson 2015:61; cf. Myburgh 2017:1–2). Basson and Du Toit (2017:271) opined that unlike contact crimes, financial crimes, such as corruption, fraud and money laundering, often do not have a direct victim. However, corruption in all its forms and manifestation constitutes a process that negates the democracy and development the ordinary people need to transcend the boundaries of their world of poverty, underdevelopment and disempowerment (Ackerman 1998:2; Feinstein 2007:248; Heywood, 1997:9; Lilley 2006:7; Monsma 2006:77; see Robinson 1998:1; cf. Vorster 2007:36). It is worth pointing out that corruption in the ranks of the ANC cannot be explained on the basis of apartheid, nor can it be rationalised on the basis of the existence of a corrupt 'capitalist' network, as others would have us believe: in effect, many of the post-1994 recruits to the public service had any experience of budgeting or managing a middle-class lifestyle; many rushed out and bought expensive cars and other consumer goods on credit, whilst simultaneously taking out large mortgages and only discovered too late that they were way over-committed.

The Public Service Commission expressed alarm that of the 1.2 million central government employees in 2008, no fewer than 216 857 (18.1%) had garnishee orders paid off their salaries – and most of these were middle-income

workers, though a few were senior managers. As the Commission commented:

[A]ny doubt about the ability of public servants to manage their own resources creates uncertainty about the level of trust, honesty and integrity with which they would manage departmental budgets and assets.

This is a rather delicate way of saying that the situation encourages runaway corruption. In a sense, the situation revealed by Schabir Shaik's trial – that Jacob Zuma was living hand-to-mouth on perpetual loans and hand-outs – was symptomatic of a quiet common phenomenon (cf. Basson 2012:54–57; Gordin 2008:100–101; cf. Holden 2008:134; see Johnson 2015:122–123). Equally important, Harvey (2012:174) mentioned that most of the ANC's cadres were never equipped for government, which today demands a high level of skills and experience. There is a powerful argument to be made that it is precisely in this situation – where many political appointees in government lack the most basic skills – that corruption, nepotism and cronyism tend to thrive most.

In equal vein, there is a sense of entitlement in the assertion that those who sacrificed their youth to the armed struggle have a right to lead and govern, and in the phrase which was to become commonplace, they did not join the struggle in order to stay poor. This sense of entitlement introduces a real dilemma in that those who fought hard for freedom and who feel strongly that they should enjoy the spoils of being in government do not necessarily have the capacity to govern. Their military training as guerrilla fighters has not necessarily prepared them for the value-based approach to governance, which is central to our constitutional democracy. However, few of the new black civil servants could be unaware that they had been appointed essentially because of the colour of their skin and their ANC affiliations. Thus from the outset, the connection between holding a job and merit or performance was weak. The standard excuse for poor performance of any kind was 'capacity problems', which broke down into skills shortage and the low capacity of many staff. One result was the massive employment of consultants, often former white civil servants who, having taken severance packages, were now in demand to do their successors' jobs for them. The reason one needed such people was that they were more competent than oneself.

If competence really mattered, after all, they would never have been kicked out in the first place. By entering the civil services, they were simply coming into their inheritance, earned by having suffered earlier discrimination and by being in the right place at the right time. Moreover, many armed with a strong sense of entitlement and a belief in their own 'big man' destiny saw their civil service jobs as platforms for further enrichment (Johnson 2009:455). The skills and competency discrepancies in our public sector become worse as one gets closer to the citizen. At the national level, the departments closest to people, especially vulnerable poor people, such as education, health, social development and correctional services, are often run by poorly equipped

people at the operational levels. Provincial and local authority structures are frequently found to have inadequate governance processes in place, resulting in ineffectual performance that robs the majority of South Africans of their basic needs entitlements. Poor people are thus trapped in poverty because of an ineffectual and unaccountable government. The failure to make the transition from liberation movement to political party in a constitutional democracy is a global phenomenon. The ANC needs only to acknowledge that it has fallen into the trap of pursuing the same failed pathway that has created such devastation in post-colonial Africa because acknowledgement is an essential first step to enable us to learn from our mistakes and to forge a new pathway (Ramphela 2011:115–125).

In general, the philosophy would be meritocracy: the best person for the job. It would need to be emphasised that this applied quiet equally to all races, tribes and religions, to men and women and to those of all sexual orientation. None of the gains in social equality of recent times need to be lost, and indeed, they would be greatly reinforced by having so many more people in jobs, with all that means in terms of social support and regained self-respect. It should be pointed out that broad-based black economic empowerment (BEE) and affirmative action were merely more recent varieties of social favouritism, akin to job reservation under apartheid, and that around the world most other countries had long since abandoned such practices (cf. Johnson 2019:165; Plaut & Holden 2012:230; Venter 1998:20). It is clear from the above that whatever is done, in the new political dispensation, one has to ensure that one does not confuse strategies for programmes and use means which are politically attractive in the short-term, but which would, in the medium and long term, compromise the vision of an equitable non-racial and non-sexist society (Ramphela 1996:2; Terreblanche 2002:447).

## Social disruption amongst South African children

Social disruption amongst South African children is multidimensional. The following can serve as examples of social disruption amongst South African children.

### Dysfunctional educational system

Education is without a doubt the bedrock for development and economic growth because it is from school that doctors, nurses, engineers and other professionals are produced. Sadly, 25 years later, our reality is that the education system has failed the most vulnerable in our society. It has failed to deliver equity, access and quality and is failing to include the basic capabilities, critical capabilities and communication competencies (Jonas 2019:85). A key reason for this is dysfunction in 80% of schools with teachers often not in class, not well prepared to teach and not competent to use the relevant teaching aids (Mbeki 2011:108–109; Ramphela 2012:3). Too many of our young people are being pushed out of the education system merely to be left out on the streets,

jobless, frustrated, bored and dangerously idle. These are the young people who are falling into the clutches of populist, misguided political elites; they are the lost generation. More than 20 years after our freedom, this should not be happening. To speak of our young people becoming a 'lost generation', a people with no future and hope is an indictment of the new South Africa (Malala 2015:58).

In reference to the above, Gumede (2015:112–113) opined that government has also not actively intervened to stop another generation from leaving school ill-equipped to be economically active because of being offered soft subjects like maths literacy at underfunded black rural and township schools. Seemingly, the Department of Education's primary objective is to maintain high matric throughput rates. Throughput rates are commendable of quality students secondary. Simply put, throughput rates are commendable only when they are achieved meritoriously. This misplaced focus neglects the development of pupils into strong candidates for tertiary institutions as some may be pushed through to maintain high throughput rates. Losing focus on excellence plagues tertiary lectures with students who are inept for tertiary level education, which stunts their academic development. There is a direct correlation between the performance of our education and training system and the level of skills shortage and unemployment amongst the youth (Ngcaweni 2014:432).

Without doubt, the poor quality of teaching in government schools is one reason why South Africa came next – to bottom (out of 149 countries) in maths in a recent survey by the World Economic Forum (Johnson 2015:117). How can we expect children to remain in schools that do not equip them with the basic skills required to advance them through the system and into working life? That education is the surest way out of poverty for the children of the poor cannot be over-emphasised (Mashele & Qobo 2014:69). Hence, one of the largest international organisations, the World Bank, invests a large sum of money annually in education projects in developing countries. This is because they are convinced that the improvement of education in these countries can help to alleviate poverty, either directly or indirectly (De Beer & Swanepoel 2000:80).

The key element of this argument is that centrality of the education system is clearly spelt out as a key institution in shaping growing young minds to become worthy members of society. A dysfunctional education system undermines development in any our society and in human young democracy, it also undermines the inculcation of the values of our founding principles as a society.

### Illicit drug

Drugs and alcohol seem to be easily accessible to many young people. Nearly a third of 12 to 14-year-olds said they had easy access to marijuana and 8% had easy access to crack cocaine. These statistics represent an increase in consumption of illicit drugs by the youth. Any illicit drug use has a negative

impact on education. Victims of this drug consider education to be a low priority. As it was already noted, currently, there is a shortage of skills in South Africa and illicit drug use is contributing to this. Illicit drug steadily paralyses the aspirations of young people and could have a disastrous effect on South Africa's future and affect all aspects of its development. It is heart-breaking to see girls falling pregnant at an early age and engaging in prostitution and boys committing a variety of crimes as a result of illicit drug use (Ngcaweni 2014:116; see Searll 2002:16).

### Health

Social disruption amongst children in South Africa also manifests itself in child mortality. Child mortality is one of the issues of great concern in the South African context. This is the case because the majority of South Africans are born and reared in unhealthy conditions that harm their health and put their lives at stake.

The well-being of South African children is an issue of major social concern amongst children of South Africa. South African children who live in poor communities, particularly in rural and informal settlements are the most at risk. Many suffer from malnutrition, malaria, typhoid fever, cholera and other dangerous diseases (Greenway & Mashau 2007:112; cf. Johnson 2009:470–471). Moreover, the delay in the government response to HIV/AIDS has created a major strain on our society and its fabric. A study by the Harvard School of Public Health published in 2008 estimated that by denying antiretroviral drugs to AIDS patients and to pregnant women had caused the premature death of 365 000 people, including 35 000 babies (Meredith 2010:587).

Furthermore, children growing up without the benefit of parental love and guidance are at huge risk of falling prey to social ills. The number of double orphans is increasing and in 2010 was estimated as more than 10 million in sub-Saharan Africa. An interesting UNICEF study found that just under 60% of double orphans lost both their parents between the ages of five and nine (Ramphele 2012:141). These burdens are made worse by the stigma attached to the disease, which amongst other effects prevents those affected from being able to grieve openly. On the other hand, many children affected by AIDS are left abandoned and vulnerable and in need of attention for care and support (Abdool Karim 2005:361; Barnett & Whiteside 2002:182). Equally worrying, children of HIV-positive parents dropped out of school, not only because they were needed at home to nurse their parents and perform other tasks, but also because family structure and discipline tended to collapse. In addition, health and funeral costs took the money, which would have gone on school fees, uniforms and transport (Johnson 2009:203).

### Urbanisation as a new frontier for the church

Worldwide trends indicate that all nations are becoming urbanised and that the church in every country must

solve the issue of ministry in urban areas or face great ineffectiveness (Mutavhatsindi 2008:92; Rogers 1989:2-3; cf. Sookhdeo 2008:165). Dawson (1989:35) remarks that the larger cities are filled with a multiplicity of ethnic peoples who have turned urban areas into one of the major mission fields of the world.

This move to urban areas creates overcrowding in slums and, until recently, has caused the migration of the middle class to the suburbs. Most important is how many people are forced to share the space with no privacy for either private or family life (interpersonal density). Interpersonal density may be related to poor mental health, poor social relationships in the home, poor childcare, high rates violent crime and poor relationships outside the home (Brigham 1991:508). This has led Mostert (1997:27) to believe that South African cities have changed since 1994. In the past, most decisions were based on a Calvinistic mindset anchored in the Bible and biblical principles.

This does not mean that all city council members were Christian, but the council functioned according to Christian values. In the new political situations, everything is moving in the direction of a secular state that is anchored in an African-Western, humanistic mindset which is basically in opposition to biblical truth. In other words, the city is at an intersection of cultures, and thus multicultural ministry is inevitable. No city mission can bear much fruit if city workers and churches do not understand the dynamics of cultural change (cf. Greenway & Mashau 2007:21). One of the positive developments within the South African mission's scene during the past 26 years is that many solid relationships have been built across various racial and cultural groups. Networks of mission/evangelism and church leaders are playing a meaningful role not only in creating a mission awareness in South Africa but also by providing South Africans with practical ways of involvement in the Great Commission, moving us significantly beyond what we could accomplish on our own (Greenlee 2003:122). Whilst many churches are succeeding in ministering to homogeneous groups, a new interest in applying the gospel to racial and urban problems as well as to personal salvation is being manifested by Christians (Cairns 1996:530). However, some churches are far too parochial and inward-looking, directing all their thought and energy to their own spiritual needs and hardly ever touching the world outside their doors. God does not change, the gospel does not change and people's need of salvation does not change either, but social patterns change from age to age and each generation brings its own problems. Today, especially with so many changes taking place in society, we must use our ingenuity and initiative in seeking to meet those changes, whilst at the same time asking God's blessing upon them if they are in line with his will (Williams 2004:69:70). Hence, Vincent (2000:3) is of the view that the church must not be discouraged by life in the earthly city. In our inner city streets, seeds get anywhere, unwanted and unplanned. Yet the seeds in the streets are sign of hope. They are signs of life in the concrete city. The conclusion is

inevitable that the urbanisation process is one of the most significant factors also in shaping South Africa. It is not only a quantitative challenge – with millions of people moving physically to the cities, creating logistical nightmares we are all aware of – but also a qualitative phenomenon: the city comes into people's blood and mind and changes them. The church in its mission should react to the problems of the large city and the small one, the comfortable materialistic suburbs as well as the squatter areas and townships, the inner city and the outer ring of informal urbanising people (Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman 1994:153–154).

This study is undertaken from a reformed ethical perspective, with special emphasis on the profile of moral decay in the South African cities. Whilst being conscious and aware of other Christian traditions and practices, my personal journey of faith as an African Christian ethicist and Minister of the Word, my faith has been formed and shaped by the Reformed faith (Calvinist tradition). Calvin's classic illustration speaks of the Scripture as eye-glasses we put on to correct our vision, which is distorted by sin. Growing out of their conviction that the content of Scripture could be understood and studied, the Reformed churches perceived that unless God's people have an absolutely trustworthy source of revelation, then there is no point in making claims of truth or rightness for any doctrinal or moral teaching that followers. It should also be noted that the Bible does not set out to answer our entire question – the purpose of such teaching in Scripture is not to satisfy our curiosity, but to support our faith. This brings one to the second aspect, namely the guidance of the Spirit. The Calvinist teaching about Scripture emphasises that the 'witness of the Spirit', rather than rational proofs, establishes the authority of Scripture. This means we finally submit to the Bible because the Holy Spirit within us bears witness to it as a Spirit-given Book (see Smallman 2003:8–10).

Today, multitudes of issues are challenging the church, to say nothing of moral degeneration in our society as a whole. How shall we deal with matters such as sexual orientation, gender-based violence, corruption, high levels of crime, tribalism and racism, environmentalism, human cloning and genetic experimentation.

The Bible does indeed have a pivotal role to play in our country, and can most certainly contribute to providing solutions and answers to the many problems and questions, which people have. To achieve this, we have to analyse the Bible properly, within its own context and against its own background and only then we can attempt to make it relevant for today (cf. Strydom & Wessels 2000:7). The third distinctive of Reformed churches in relation to social ethics is the kingdom of God. According to Ladd (1993:114), the church is the instrument of the Kingdom. The disciples of Jesus not only proclaimed the good news about the presence of the Kingdom, they were also instruments of the Kingdom in that the works of the Kingdom were performed through them as through Jesus himself. From this perspective, then, it is



reasonable to say that the church, both as an institution and organism, should be a visible expression of the Kingdom to those still in rebellion against it. It should show the good news of reconciliation by the relationships between its members of all social, ethnic and economic groups (cf. Allen 1995:287; Broocks 2018:3; Dake 1992:18; Monsma 2006:108; Van der Walt 1991:354). Given this context, the role of the church towards moral renewal of the urban areas will be investigated under the following elements. The following elements may not be exhaustive, but they include most of the means of grace that believers have access to within the fellowship of the church.

## Worship

Worship is the central and defining activity of the people of God. The worship of communities of expectant faith anticipates God's future and challenges they present. In worship, we receive a new identity, and we are formed morally. By encountering God, we learn to be disciples. We learn to love by being loved, we learn to forgive by being forgiven and we learn generosity by being treated generously. Therefore, worship expresses and creates community, *koinonia*, and in worship, one finds ethics, a life-style, embodied and sustained (Forrester 1997:57). According to Greenlee (2003:25), worship is never an end in itself unrelated to other aspects of our life. What leads on from congregational worship is lifestyle worship, expressed in loving obedience. The Christian's first responsibility to God is to worship him in a genuine personal response of humility, confession, repentance, devotion and praise. Such true worship may involve singing, Bible reading/studies, prayer, testifying and preaching, each in its own way a response to God. In order to fulfil this vital role and survive, the church needs to exercise meaningful stewardship or organise proper worship services in which the name of God is glorified.

## Prayer

In Christian life, prayer forms an indispensable part and should never be neglected. Yet, indeed, prayer is worship that includes all the attitudes of human spirit in its approach to God. It means meeting God, communicating with God and trusting God. Prayer gives God the moral and legal right to act on our behalf (Lewis 1992:28; Senkhane 2002:25). Equally important, Greenway and Mashau (2007:46) add that Jeremiah instructed the Hebrews exiled in Babylon to pray for the city, 'Seek the peace of the city ... and pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you too will prosper'. Prime (2007:108) asserts that corporate prayer should be the automatic response of God's people to situations which are beyond them to cope with, and which threaten the progress of the gospel and the honour of God's Name in the world. Of course, it is not possible to draw up a definite list of everyone for whom we should pray, but those in authority are to have a special place in our prayers, whatever their politics and whether we agree with them or not. We are also directed as to how we should pray for them: 'that we may live peaceful

and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness' (1 Tm 2:2). Shalom, translated as 'peace' proves when unpacked to mean, not just freedom from war and trouble, sin and irreligion, but also justice, prosperity, good fellowship and health and all round communal well-being under God's gracious hand (cf. Packer 1994:284).

## Edifying members

The church has an obligation to nurture or edify those who are already believers and build them up to maturity in the faith. To edify means to build up, to strengthen, to encourage, helping the members of the church to grow spiritually (Choate 2000:52). Paul told the church at Ephesus that God gave the church gifted persons:

[T]o equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:12-13)

In equal vein, first Timothy 3:15 calls the church the pillar and foundation of the truth. It upholds the kingdom by being the school, the equipping place and the place of support for world changers. The same balance is required in the local church today. There has to be evangelism and reaching out to the community with the Good News of the gospel, but at the same time God's people in the church have to be edified and taught the great doctrines of scripture so that they are strengthened in their understanding (Greenlee 2004:176; Williams 2004:103, 104).

## Evangelism

God is concerned not only with personal salvation and the training of individual disciples but also with the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. He wants us to become a new society, a living community that will demonstrate, by its new life-style, new values and new relationship (Watson 1979:135). As Greenlee (2004:176) put it, evangelism and discipleship complement each other. Neither can be healthy without the other. To stress only coming to Christ and neglect training eventually demeans the church by bringing in babies who do not grow. On the other hand, to emphasise education and neglect aggressive world outreach ultimately will stagnate the church by cutting off the flow of new life. To this end we go, baptise and teach, just as in other versions of the command, we are sent, we preach and witness (Jn 17:18; 20:21; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:48; Ac 1:8). Only as disciples are made can these related activities find their purpose. As disciples follow Christ, their understanding of ministry grows. Every member shares in the work of the body (Eph 4:11-12; Jn 14:12).

Hence, the present church is called out to all nations to do the same work of evangelising the world that Israel and others were called for in other ages (cf. Dake 1992:522; Senkhane 2002:27).

According to Grudem (2000:867–868), accompanying the work of evangelism is also a ministry of mercy, a ministry that includes caring for the poor and needy in the name of the Lord. Such ministries of mercy to the world may also include participation in civic activities or attempting to influence governmental policies to make them more consistent with biblical moral principles. However, such ministries of mercy to the world should never become a substitute for genuine evangelism or for the other areas of ministries to God and to believers mentioned above. The most important thing to remember in this regard is that unless people are converted and become true believers and live exemplary lives, lives that manifest the love and holiness of God, Christians will never be able to create a positive impact on their society and community (see Basu 2005:283).

### Teaching of the word

Grudem (2000:952) correctly states that even before people become Christians, the Word of God as preached and taught brings God's grace to them in that it is the instrument God uses to impart spiritual life to them and bring them salvation. We need God's Word to be saved, but we also need it to continually challenge and shape us. His Word not only gives us life, it also gives us direction as it keeps moulding and shaping us in the image of the God who is speaking to us. From this is evident that a sermon is not simply an edifying word, not a scientific treatise nor an eloquent speech or a moral lesson supported by one or more stories. It is a message of what God says, a proclamation deriving authority from the Son of God (De Bruyn 1998:154–155). With the current rise and popularity of cults, false teachings and non-biblical philosophies, it is imperative that Christians be grounded in the Word of God so that they can discern error from the truth (Warrant 2006:11).

### Ministerial etiquette

In spite of the media attention to some ministers' scandalous sins, most people implicitly trust their pastors.

They do not look at their pastors with the same discretion or suspicion that protects them from other harmful people in their communities. This enhances the pastors' power and gives them greater opportunity than any other civic leader to hurt or help people. There is a danger that 'abusive pastors' may manipulate wealthy contributors into making major donations or investing in schemes that will financially benefit themselves.

Alternatively, the pastors may borrow from parishioners and fail to repay them. An even more despicable form of financial abuse is deceiving people to believe that a miraculous covenantal offering to the minister will bring to them an exponentially larger amount of money than they gave (Green 1995:139). By promoting false hope about the prospects for overnight success through prayer and tithing, some of these churches take advantage of a vulnerable congregation that is often desperate for an improvement in their economic circumstance (Biko 2013:244).

Perhaps, the most devastating cases of financial abuse involve pastor who directly writes letters to other local churches and overseas Christians without informing his local church council, putting psychological pressure on them to pay his children's requirements or to build him the house without any sense of moral shame. If he is less than successful or is rebuffed, he may become spiteful and may make false accusations against church members, thus causing a divisive atmosphere (Richardson 2007:108). It is true that there may be occasions when we become involved with Christians who believe that they are called to serve God in a particular way and expect 'the church' or friends to support them practically. If they have gone ahead in that service without consulting others or having assurances of adequate Christian support, they may find themselves lonely, and questions about their original convictions may arise as people become troubled by their requests. However, Christian leaders must show trustworthiness and fidelity in all matters, whether it be business deals, professional transactions, education, ecclesiastical matters, at home and in every area of life.

### Lesson from scripture for the cities

On the basis of this discussion, one is of the view that this reflection on cities from a biblical perspective leaves the following impressions that can also be viewed as imperative for the church to rediscover the city in both the developed and the developing worlds.

#### The Bible views the cities as a place where systems are developed to benefit peoples

According to Bernard (2004:11), God wants cities to be places where systems are developed to benefit people. In other words, God has created, loved, preserved and redeemed the city so that it can be transformed into the city God intends it to be. In addition, as that transformed community, the city becomes a lighthouse to the world, the manifestation of God's handwork to the nation and the world. In modern missiological writing, they are important biblically and formed the framework of the strategy of the Apostle Paul as he sought to unite the people and fill the world with the Church of Christ. Thus, cities have spiritual gates, and in the Psalms, we are told to speak lovingly to a city, inviting her to open those gates for her King of glory to come (Bauckham 2003:41; Linthicum 1999:21; Walker 1990:334).

#### The Bible views the city as a network of extended family relationship

Cities are important to God because he is going for nations, and the backbone of a nation is its cities. One cannot read far in the letters of Paul and his disciples without discovering that it concerned about the internal life of the Christian groups in each city that prompted most of the correspondence (cf. Meeks 1983:74). The lines of family and friendship run from city to village and back again and across the cities.

Without the help of the evangelist to equip the group to develop bridging community, a local church's small groups will get stuck being a religious club. Effective groups must be coached to consider the lost as more important than themselves and to receive the stranger without the expectation that they will change (Green 1987:124).

### The Bible views the city as a place where spiritual warfare is going on

Cities are not evil because they are cities. Rather, cities maximise human potential for both good and evil. There is much that is beautiful and good in cities. By their schools, hospitals and productivity, cities enhance the quality of human life. God intends the city to be a place of shelter, a place of communion and place of personal liberation as its citizens practice a division of labour according to their own unique gifts. At the same time, the power of evil is evident. Sin expressed itself not only in the wrongdoing of individuals but also in institutions whose policies and actions exploit and oppress, as well as in the wrong use of the systems by which cities are managed.

### Conclusion

The church exists primarily to worship and adore God. It must praise his most Holy name. However, it can never use this as a form of escapism; it must take seriously the world he has created and which he loved so much that he gave his only begotten son (Jn 3:16). This means that the church in the city cannot afford to cut itself off from the rest of society, living a separate and enclosed life of its own. The people of the community may be morally decaying and may be in total spiritual darkness. In the midst of such moral decay, a Christian is expected to exert a preserving influence, like salt, and to have a guiding and healing ministry, like the light. They are to be like beacon lights living clean innocent and pure lives, shining amongst the crooked and stubborn generation, holding out to them the word of life (Phlp 2:15–16).

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