

## The evolving role of the Rhema Movement in the South African public square

### ABSTRACT

The position of the Rhema Movement on law and religion in South Africa, and religious freedom in particular, can be understood by assessing their changing role in the public square. Underlying their role is the view that, public engagement and social justice are forms of religious expression, embarked upon within the robust religious freedom of contemporary South Africa.

The impetus for involvement in the political landscape of South Africa, by the Rhema Bible Church, a Charismatic Pentecostal Christian Church, and its' leader, Pastor Ray McCauley, has been widely speculated over in the media. It is the premise of this paper that by assessing the Rhema Movement's changing role in the public square in recent decades, as well as the theological and philosophical basis for such engagement, the position of the Rhema Movement on law and religion, and religious freedom in particular, can be understood. Underlying their actions, Marius Oosthuizen argues herein, is their stance that public engagement and social justice are forms of religious expression, upon which they seek to embark within the robust religious freedom afforded them by the constitutional dispensation of contemporary South Africa.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1998) describes the word 'evolve' as: 'to develop gradually' ... or 'to develop ... into forms that are better adapted to survive changes in their environment.' This is perhaps a suitable description of the position of the Rhema Movement on the relationship between law and religion in South Africa. This evolution has caused Rhema's role in the public square to change profoundly from its inception in the 70's. Its' role has grown to include various nuances and dimensions as it has adapted to the South African context. It is this evolution that we hope to explore. When we refer to the *Rhema Movement*, we are broadly referring to the Rhema Bible Church, its affiliated ministries and the *fellowship*<sup>1</sup> of Churches, associated with Rhema through the International Federation of Christian Churches (IFCC), under the leadership of Pastor Ray McCauley.

This paper is not a critical analysis of their position, but seeks to explain their position; introductory remarks about the field of law and religion, the changing relationship of law and religion in South Africa and Rhema's resultant participation in the public square. We refer to Rhema's position as the *Paradigm*<sup>2</sup> of the Rhema Movement, and focus on the engagement of this religious community with the state, since we are of the view that Rhema's engagement best embodies their position.

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1 *Fellowship*: by 'fellowship' we refer to a loose association of autonomous local churches that associate based on shared beliefs, practices and a common vision for their expression of the Christian faith.

2 *Paradigm*: by 'paradigm' we refer to the general point of view and frame of reference, including assumptions and parameters of thought from which the position of the Rhema Movement is formulated.

## 2. THE FIELD OF LAW AND RELIGION

In the field of law, religion as a consideration is not irrelevant as is often proposed by a secularist approach. In addition, Friedrich Nietzsche was clearly mistaken when proclaiming that 'God is dead'. (Wikipedia, 2011) Instead, scholars now argue that predictions of increasing secularization seem to have been misplaced and surprisingly, religious faith has strengthened worldwide. (Balcomb 2010:414) Growth in the Charismatic Pentecostal sphere of Christianity amounts to over 500 million in the last hundred years alone with tens of millions of adherents in Africa (Balcomb 2010:414, Maxwell, 2005:5). We can therefore assume that this group within society will increasingly play a prominent role in the public discourse. Furthermore, the sociological effects of this escalation in religion are staggering, resulting in the rejection of a 'compartmentalization' of religious faith into so-called 'spiritual' and 'secular' realms... and instead: 'God' is now seen to be significant to 'the whole of life...'. This has proven to be particularly true of 'fervently religious youngsters under the age of thirty... across the religious spectrum' (Balcomb 2010:417) alluding to further future implications for lawmakers and public officials.

While attempts and even strides have been made in the secularization of the law, law and religion seem, for the moment, to be intertwined and inseparable. Diane Winston pointed out that this was evident in a senator's response to a statement by President Barak Obama where he warned religious progressives that their secular counterparts would have to '...stop disdain[ing] people of faith if they wanted to have an impact...'. The senator responded by observing that 'some of the problem here is rhetorical', and that 'if we scrub language of all religious content, we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice' (Winston, 2007:985). Moreover, the same can be said of South Africans; religion is still part of their rhetoric and will continue to permeate public discourse, informing their sense of identity and remain vital to how they express their values. The perspective of the Rhema Movement is therefore that religion continues to be an elusive, *hidden hand* in public matters.

Therefore the question arises as to what the relationship between law and religion ought to be? As the religious community seeks to preserve 'religious freedom' while allowing the law to run its full course, it must aspire to prevent the law from stunting the capacity of religion. Religion must thus co-exist freely with the law, but how?

Smith (2000:61) alludes to possible answers in his discussion of the legacy of 'religious freedom' in the United States, identifying two principles that form a framework wherein religious freedom is possible amid secular laws: 'religious equality' and 'religious pluralism'. While highlighting some of the problems that arise when applying these principles to jurisprudence, Smith (2000:75) concludes that they do afford useful mechanisms as long as 'equality' does not overwhelm 'pluralism'. Smith reaches the conclusion that the pursuit of equality, when taken to the extreme, may erode the pluralistic tolerance required to accommodate the religious diversity inherent in society. In South Africa specifically, where equality functions as the cornerstone of the constitutional dispensation, it is Rhema's view that this is a danger we would do well to recognize.

### 2.1 Law and religion in South Africa

As a 'Constitutional Democracy', the relationship between law and religion and 'religious

freedom' in South Africa is determined by the specific nature of the South African Constitution and its disposition towards religion. It is said to be "...one of the most luxuriously democratic instruments in the world" (Balcomb, 2005:485).

Balcomb (2005:485) observes:

a democratic constitution, democratic institutions and substantially democratic practice have replaced the racial dictatorship of apartheid...South Africa's system of parliamentary government, if it works correctly, entrenches an advanced array of political, social and economic rights, is controlled by an extensive separation of powers (between legislature, executive and judiciary and between different levels of government), and is buttressed by an array of democracy-supporting institutions such as a Human Rights Commission, a Gender Commission, an Ombudsperson, and an Auditor-General's office.

Furthermore, South Africa has been a participant in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights since October 1994. South Africa has ratified the treaty without reservation and is thus mandated to ensure that her citizens enjoy 'freedom of Religion' as set out in Article 18 of the treaty. As such, the Rhema Movement is of the view that South Africans are legally assured of freedom of religion. The nature of that freedom, in Rhema's view, should consist of the three dimensions contemplated by Paul Taylor (1979):

- freedom of religious choice
- the right of conscience (or so-called *forum internum*), and
- the right to manifest religious beliefs (or so-called *forum externum*)

Rhema acknowledges that these freedoms exist in a dynamic tension within the '...permissible limitations on such manifestations' (Gunn 2008:763) by the state as it seeks to protect the freedoms of all citizens.

Since these three dimensions of religious freedom are interrelated, it follows in Rhema's view that, religious expression ought to be permitted in the public as well as private sphere. Furthermore, the 'right of conscience objection' should be afforded to religious adherents and as such the State may at no point inhibit such freedom through the coercion of any citizen to participate in activities that are deemed to be contrary to conscience on religious grounds. What is more, while the liberal nature of the South African Constitution assures the secular nature of the law, the role of religion and religious argument ought not be excluded from public debate. As such, it would be presumptuous, as is often the case, to expect religious arguments to be couched in secular terms as a pre-requisite to be afforded consideration in the public square. To clarify, Rhema does not propose a return to a theocratic dispensation, where secularists have to contend with the imposition of religion, but suggest the need for a new paradigm for the relationship between law and religion.

This view is contemplated by Mark C. Modak-Truran who in *Beyond Theocracy and Secularism. Toward a New Paradigm of Law and Religion*, observes that a new post-modern paradigm is evident. He argues:

[d]espite the secularization of the text of the law, this new paradigm results in a legitimate plurality of religious convictions implicitly legitimating the law and thereby *deseccularizing the law*. The trajectory for this new constructive postmodern paradigm of law and religion

has been shown to embrace legal indeterminacy as a necessary structural characteristic of law to provide for a pluralistic religious legitimation of law ... maintaining the secularization of law in the sense that the text of the law makes no explicit recognition of any official religious foundation. The plurality of religious foundations are only implied by the law. (Mark C. Modak-Truran 2008:233)

The implications are that diverse forms of religious vigour is freely engaged in the public domain without the encroachment of extreme secularism, while not subverting the needed secular neutrality of the law. Furthermore, religiously orientated political participation is permitted and members of the legislature, executive and judiciary are allowed to express their own particular religious disposition in the course of their public role. Rhema is of the view that this new paradigm is operative in South Africa. Yet in many instances it is the progressive and liberal segment of the South African society that has made use of the aforementioned avenues of public discourse to a greater degree than the religious community. *Equality* is thus potentially *overwhelming pluralism*. The issue then for the religious community is not the absence of freedom, but the failure to adequately mobilize itself to make use of the freedom enjoyed.

## 2.2 Prophetic theology in South Africa

Religion has historical significance in the national transformation of South Africa. For instance, Liberation Theology has more recently contributed to the demise of Apartheid as is widely documented. Yet, the contemporary role of theology in South Africa's public discourse does not appear to parallel the prominence of religion in society in general. Balcomb (2010:424-425) notes that Liberation Theology, while being thoroughly *prophetic*, amounted to a brief influence only, having been '...shaped by a particular political agenda...' and as a result of the dramatic political transformation... 'is hardly discernible', this is due to the fact that '...most of its erstwhile advocates are now sitting in political office'. Balcomb reflects on what he calls the 'seismic' shift in the political landscape in South Africa, observing that:

[f]orces that were on the left of the spectrum are now to be found in the centre, those that were in the centre now find themselves on the right and those that were on the right have fallen off the edge into oblivion. (Balcomb, 2005:484)

and:

[t]he 'magna carta' of prophetic theology in the early eighties was the Kairos document ... There was a left, a right, and a centre in theological alignment. 'Prophetic' theology was on the left, 'state' theology on the right, and 'church' theology in the middle. The signs of the times were clear: To be prophetic you needed to be aligned with the forces of the revolution on the left. To occupy any other position was to 'sell out' to the regime. (Balcomb, 2005:486)

Balcomb (2010:424-425) identifies the reason for this regression and failure of Liberation Theology to foresee the inevitable demise of Apartheid and the failure to craft a theology that would have significance long after Apartheid ended. The result, in Rhema's view, has been the creation of a theological vacuum and a loss of direction in public theology, amounting to the religious community losing its voice. When heard today, the Church represents more of a *murmuring in the promised land* than a *cry in the wilderness*. This has produced an action of *retreat* rather than *advance* and a disposition of pietism. The religious community is at risk

of forming a 'reactionary' (Balcomb, 2005:488) and protectionist agenda as opposed to a proactive, constructionist one. A *reactionary* response places religion at the risk of taking on a *fort* instead of a *force* mentality. This has resulted in the missional essence of the Gospel, which seeks to be the *light* and the *salt* of the world, turning inward upon the faith-community itself, at the expense of its prophetic relevance. While the use of the word 'oblivion' might be too strong to describe the role of religious right, there appears to be the danger of an *irrelevant* theology in the new context. What emerges is a reactionary theology which fails to engage the broadest issues in the most meaningful way: merely 'objecting to the liberalization of society' (Balcomb, 2005:485) at the expense of seeing the proverbial *elephant in the room*, namely the ongoing injustice of gross deprivation, poverty and inequality that undermines not only the dignity of their victims but brings to mind the question of the complicity of all bystanders.

In Rhema's view, South Africa today represents an entirely new context. This requires an equally dramatic evolution in the prophetic role of the church and therefore the theology that undergirds the Church's actions. In the new dispensation the Church's role entails not simply the dismantling of unjust structures, but the construction of a new, 'just society' (Balcomb, 2005:488). The action towards creating a *new* South Africa is simply not complete. This is supported by a member from the Institute for Security Studies, van Vuuren (2006:17). He quotes a statement made by Zenzile Khoisan, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) researcher, concerning the contribution of the TRC:

[a]s a start it was good, it was auspicious and audacious. It held open the door of promise to those who have been harmed by history. But it is up to us who live in the aftermath of the nightmare to wake gently and work tirelessly to realise the substance of that promise.

Should Christian movements or churches fail to make the required transition, the implications for the Church include an ideological 'drift' to the right or centre of society, providing a construct of escapism for the marginalized or a mere '... legitimation of the status quo for those in the centre' (Balcomb, 2005:493). The practical implications include the Church perpetually playing second-fiddle to the State, inept in shaping the nation's moral and spiritual landscape. The question that arises therefore is - how ought the Church to become more responsive to the newfound context of South Africa and express itself fully within the freedom afforded it? To answer this question, we turn to the power of Charismatic Christianity to bring about Social Change and thus the *Paradigm of the Rhema Movement*, outlining its background and theological development in order to interpret its current position.

### 3. CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Charismatic Pentecostal groups appear to have a notable sociological impact on the formation of norms and values, profoundly impacting the fabric of society wherein they operate. Pentecostalism has the '...capacity to redeem, restore and re-pattern the family...' and even provide a '... moral map ...' for those who find prosperity, assisting them in the navigation of the unique *temptations* that the contemporary society offers (Maxwell, 2005:15 – 16, 29). Maxwell continues to describe what he calls a '... inner ... 'transformation brought about by the Gospel message in '... believers ...' who are participants in this religious movement. Despite prior feelings of; '... low self- esteem, feeling wretched, despised and abused...' the Pentecostal community instils the conviction that adherents are '... not a nobody but a somebody'; and '...are no longer just citizens of a state ... they have new royal identity as members of the Kingdom of God' Maxwell (2005:4). He further notes that Pentecostalism appears to both to

satisfy a '...deep existential passion...' and '...aids those struggling to survive...'; instilling the acquisitiveness and flexibility into its adherents, providing 'security', 'capriciousness' and 'hope'.

Moreover David Martin (1996: 45) reinforces this view in explaining that *evangelical language* is able to address the person in their condition, confirming their dignity, worth and significance. Furthermore, Garner suggests that religion has '...immense power to bring about social change', often highlighted 'in Pentecostalism' and having particular bearing on the financial, social and cultural behaviour of its adherents (Garner, 2000:310). It follows that Charismatic Pentecostal Christianity, of which the Rhema Movement is an example, would naturally result in public social engagement since this is, in effect, inherent in the belief-system.

While Pentecostal leaders may seek to engage political players, Pentecostalism is therefore not about Politics *per se* but about social change. Pentecostalism challenges the political perceptions of social scientists as it is related to culture due to the profound effect it has on its adherents and how the effect translates into their participation in the socio-political dimension of their context (Hastings, 1979: 265). David Martin is quoted by Maxwell (2005:28) as saying:

Pentecostal religion offers hope and lived solutions to combat intensifying poverty, marginalization and insecurity, problems that arise out of structural conditions which are beyond the power of individuals to alter and which their political leaders are unable or unwilling to alter. Pentecostalism ... offers adherents the chance of changing their responses to the limiting conditions its macro-structures create.

While the Rhema Movement has not historically been the forerunner in the prophetic dimension of religion in South Africa, the current view of the movement as to its mandate as a community of faith within the broader South African *oikoumene*, is to take a stand and be a voice furthering the establishment of a just society. The Rhema Movement therefore does not seek to employ religion as a mere instrument for social change, but instead envisions social change as a vital outcome, central to its very essence and purpose.

#### 4. THE PARADIGM OF THE RHEMA MOVEMENT

It is in the *vacuum* of prophetic theology that the Rhema Movement, as one among various religious communities, tries to achieve relevance in addressing the real, spiritual and material needs of South Africans. Balcomb observes two dimensions of this endeavour with the following analysis of contextual theology in South Africa:

there are two kinds of contextual theology that have been operating in South Africa – theologies of bread and theologies of being (Balcomb 1998:54–73). Theologies of bread are those theologies that are concerned with material issues – including political and economic liberation. Theologies of being are concerned with the human issues of identity, dignity, and what Tillich termed 'the power to be'. Both are profoundly important. ... If the truth be told, it appears to be Pentecostalism that offers both bread and being, as well as God. (Balcomb 2010:425)

A shift has taken place in the theology of the Rhema Movement in response to South Africa's changing context. Rhema's view stems from the understanding that Christian truth always stands on the side of justice. As such, a failure to take note of the social, political and economic challenges of South Africa today, would imply that the democratic dispensation has resolved all forms of injustice in the nation. It goes without saying that this is simply not the case and calls for strong, long-term intervention.

## 4.1 Background of the Rhema Movement

The Rhema Movement forms part of the Charismatic segment of Pentecostal Christianity and is described as one of the 'fastest growing streams of Christianity worldwide' (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:118). The movement includes The International Federation of Christian Churches (IFCC), a voluntary association of Churches represented by an *umbrella* organization that seeks to facilitate the co-operation of churches with corresponding belief systems. A strong emphasis of *voluntary association* has been evident from the inception of the IFCC where *fellowship*, *loose cooperation* and *autonomy* were emphasized. (IFCC n.d., About) IFCC is led by an executive consisting of; a President, Deputy President, National and International Overseer, 11 regional coordinators nationwide, and four additional members. IFCC seeks to assist fellow membership churches with legal compliance and other forms of contextual support, including the provision of *covering*. This assures that self-governance is possible allowing the principles of *submission* and *accountability* to be facilitated without encroaching upon the *sovereignty* of the local congregation (IFCC n.d., National Overseers Report).

Significantly, IFCC endeavours to maintain a culture of diversity that is representative of the South African population. It is believed that the accommodation of the complexity of cultural diversity contributes actively to the *healing* of the South African nation. As such, values such as communication, respect and understanding are propagated while attempts are made to foster forgiveness, acceptance and reconciliation. Finally, IFCC seeks to facilitate the *prophetic voice* of the Church, formulating the views of the Church through the application of Biblical principles to everyday life situations wherever possible, and expressing these in public discourse in South Africa. (IFCC n.d., National Overseers Report)

## 4.2 Legal status of Rhema Bible Church

Relating to the law and regulatory bodies, the Rhema Movement endeavours to remain compliant to the legislation and regulations governing religious institutions (SAPA, 2009). An annual financial *commitment* of more than R100 million is made by the members of Rhema Bible Church alone. This places a high value on the importance of the legislative and regulatory framework, affording the movement the freedom to pursue their religious objectives.

As per the Constitution of Rhema Bible Church (2008) it therefore operates as a Public Benefit Organisation<sup>3</sup>, qualifying for tax exemption by virtue of conducting a Public Benefit Activity. This is a benefit that Rhema welcomes and recognizes as an accommodation of religious freedom. Rhema therefore, according to Constitution of Rhema Bible Church (2008) seeks to comply with the provisions of the aforementioned Act as far as: Public Benefit Activity, Fiduciary Responsibility, Use of Funds, Trading Activities, Donations Received, Financial Matters, and the Dissolution of the Church is concerned.

## 4.3 Public engagement of the Rhema Movement

Due to the Rhema Movement's engagement in the public sphere at a critical point during South Africa's transition to democracy, Balcomb contends that IFCC, Rhema Bible Church and its leader, Pastor Ray McCauley, became representative, though not exclusively so, of South Africa's Charismatic Evangelicals (Balcomb 2004:10). As a result, within the context of the Rhema Movement and IFCC, Pastor Ray McCauley embodied and represented the movement's position on law and religion, as Anderson (2005:72) aptly describes:

<sup>3</sup> Public Benefit Organization, explained under Section 10(1)(cN) of the Income Tax Act.

within SA, McCauley is President ... IFCC, the largest association of Charismatic and new Pentecostal churches in the country, and as such he is a significant Christian leader, very much a pragmatist in his approach to socio-political issues ... involved in high profile discussions with political leaders and was part of the 'Rustenburg Declaration' of 1990, a broad church-based document that confessed complicity in apartheid, called for political change, the creation of a democratic society and the end of apartheid.

While largely influenced by the *faith message* of American preacher, Kenneth Hagin, McCauley - a *born-again* Christian preacher - having initially emphasized the *prosperity gospel* of material wellbeing, became sensitized to the socio-political realities of South Africa in the late eighties. This exposure drastically changed the perspective of the movement on prophetic theology and the political dimension of the Gospel. Pastor McCauley's intervention in the socio-political arena began after he experienced a turning point at the aforementioned Rustenburg Conference. During this event, a large number of church leaders from various denominations acknowledged that Apartheid was a sinful process, they confessed their guilt in relation to it, and pledged themselves to the struggle for justice and equity. Pastor McCauley acknowledged that he had been *apathetic* to the political situation in South Africa and only then began to take an active role in shaping change in South Africa. As Anderson accounts:

Ray McCauley, representing the IFCC, confessed the shortcomings of white Charismatics who 'hid behind their so-called spirituality while closing their eyes to the dark events of the apartheid years. (Anderson 2005:73)

He thus embarked on political interventions which included working with Dr Johan Heyns of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Rev. Frank Chikane of the South African Council of Churches. In addition, Pastor McCauley participated in the steering committee for the formation of the National Peace Accord, an advocacy initiative working towards peace through negotiation.

The newfound political engagement by the Rhema Movement called for the clarification of their views on issues such as: abortion, pornography, freedom of expression, gay rights, interfaith dialogue, Christian political involvement and social transformation. These issues were addressed through a publication called *Power and Passion: Fulfilling God's Destiny for the Nation*. The position of the Rhema Movement, amounted to a support structure for the new government and the active promotion of democracy. While Balcomb amongst others conclude that McCauley represented a category of *pragmatists* that simply responded to the changing political landscape of South Africa, there was in fact a profound theological shift taking place within the Rhema Movement, bringing about an acute moral awareness of the socio-political and economic realities facing the nation. This has resulted in Rhema's view today which proposes that these realities, more so than any historic event, will shape the future of South Africa.

Furthermore strategic changes in the activities of the Rhema Churches which include initiatives aimed at economic and social upliftment of the poor, followed closely on aforementioned development. A paradigm-shift had taken place in the outlook and priorities of the Rhema Movement and its leadership in particular. One result of this the movement's expanded theological perspective is the Rhema Bible Church's social outreach program which consists primarily of a ministry called the *Hands of Compassion*. This organization runs soup kitchens and helps AIDS victims, alcoholics and drug addicts, among others. What is more, this transformation extended to the general political theology of the Rhema Movement

and resulted in a drive to encourage members to become involved in the transformation of society as well as racial integration of church services at all levels. While Balcomb (2004:15-19) concluded in 2004 that Rhema had little impact on the black community, this certainly cannot be said today: the majority of the thousands of congregants are black and the same change is evident in the staff contingent of the Rhema Bible Church in Randburg of which McCauley is the leading figure.

#### 4.4 Theological Development of the Rhema Movement

It is vital to note that the theology of the Rhema Movement is not dogmatic and static, but it can be understood to be fluid and adaptive to new contexts - Asamoah-Gyadu observes that it cannot be neatly categorized as is often done by western scholars in particular (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:119). Since it is understood to be a theology of *response* to the *living impressions* of God by His Spirit, it necessarily results in a variety of expressions. For this reason, the initial disconnect between the *white pentecostals* and their *black compatriots* has evaporated as the movement progressed (Anderson 2005:88). For instance, racial integration at Rhema has progressed, even promoting reconciliation. While the leadership of the movement was largely comprised of *whites* in the past, proactive steps have been taken toward integration and transformation, recognized by Ganiel as proof of '...cognitive identity shifts...' among whites who voluntarily and proactively seek to '...level the playing field...' in the social dimension of religion (Ganiel 2007:8).

#### 4.5 The Rhema Movement and 'morality'

Historically the Rhema Movement stems from groupings often categorized as *fundamentalist*. The challenge in the new dispensation has been to stay true to the fundamentals of what constitute Rhema's beliefs, while being open to additional perspectives on spirituality previously neglected. As such, an evolution has occurred in the Practical Theology of the Rhema Movement, especially where morality is concerned. This is embodied in a statement by Pastor Ray McCauley on the controversial subject of abortion:

[y]ou can't tell people not to have an abortion unless you have an alternative, so we work very hard at having these homes for unwed mothers ... The *church* is good at casting stones and they are very good at telling everybody what the problems are, [but] you can never deal with problems unless you have a solution. (Tolsi, 2009)

Rhema's goal has been to take a *merciful* approach to the issue of morality, understanding that immorality occurs in a context, and unless the context is understood and reshaped, a change of behaviour is unlikely if not impossible. This does not imply that the Rhema Movement takes no position on contentious issues, but suggests that *solutions* are sought as opposed to conflict and alienation. Yet, while the Rhema Movement seeks to be *Inclusive*<sup>4</sup> it is not without conviction as far as doctrine and morality is concerned. For instance, the Statement of Faith of the International Federation of Christian Churches reads:

the essentials of Church membership are the new birth and personal confession of faith in Christ. It is not merely the attending of Church services or having a name on the membership ... Only the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the

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<sup>4</sup> Inclusive: used here to refer to an approach to religious practice, that affords non-adherents to our beliefs access to our liturgy in order to encounter our belief systems, as opposed to excluding them outright based on a predisposed bias.

repentant sinner qualifies one for membership in the Body of Christ ... The Bible teaches the principal of being in submission to authority. As such, it is understood that Church membership shall be subject to submission to authority in matters pertaining to Church governance, doctrine and personal behaviour. ... The Bible teaches heterosexual relationships between a natural man and a natural woman within the confines of matrimony. Adherence to this stated principal of sexual behaviour is an inherent requirement for membership in this local Church. (IFCC, n.d., About)

In applying these principles practically, it is Rhema's view that issues of morality ought to be addressed from within a relationship of tolerance and patience while not undermining Rhema's right to address immorality from its' own perspective. Practically then, Church Membership for instance may be afforded to a person of any sexual orientation, provided that they recognize Rhema's moral view thereof and are submitted to the counsel and guidance of the church. In this regard Rhema's position could be argued to be discriminatory. However, Rhema's view is that as long as they do not pursue the non-conformer with the intent of coercion at the expense of their freedom, it is within Rhema's right to protect Rhema's own freedom by refusing them association or participation in the religious community.

The Rhema Movement has at times taken a 'remarkably liberal' position on some issues (Balcomb 2004:15-19). Therein again is indicated a profound shift away from a *fundamentalist* approach to religion, supporting the freedom of non-adherents who differ from that of the Rhema Movement.

This approach to remain true to Rhema's fundamental beliefs without becoming *fundamentalist*, is embodied in another tenant of the Statement of Faith of Rhema Church concerning homosexuality and how the beliefs are practically applied. It thus reads in the Constitution of Rhema Bible Church (2008) that, '...we believe in heterosexual relationships between a natural man and a natural woman within the confines of lawful matrimony.' In this instance, comments by Pastor Ray McCauley on the topic are enlightening as far as the application of this belief is concerned, using a *pastoral approach* he says:

Gays are welcome in church: 'I just love them [rather than condemn them] ... So we, in our church, we embrace them, and do not try to make them something that they are not ... (Tolsi, 2009)

It is in this context that Rhema Church therefore reserves the right to refuse, or revoke membership, as expressed in the Constitution of Rhema Bible Church (2008:5), requiring members to be *subject* to the church's stance on matters of '... governance, doctrine and personal behaviour ...' and as such may withdraw membership on the basis of misconduct.

Importantly, the Rhema Movement's position on the issue of morality ought not to be seen in isolation, but rather within the context of the greater beliefs captured in what is called the *ethos* or *four pillars* of the Rhema Movement. In summary, the Rhema Movement's ethos is captured in what it terms, *four pillars* which is being: Spiritually Vibrant, Evangelically Potent, Socially Significant and Prophetically Relevant. These pillars are clarified in the Constitution of Rhema Bible Church (2008):

1. The belief that the core of the Christian life is an inner attentiveness to the living God, attuned to His Spirit. This is called being 'spiritually vibrant' and it is from this core that all religious practice ought to be motivated and empowered.

2. The belief that evangelism or missions as it may be called, or giving people an opportunity to receive Christ as Saviour is a key imperative, recognizing the *Great Commission* of Jesus while emphasizing the need to *live* the Gospel, as embodied by the truism, 'We are all required to preach the gospel and where necessary to use words...'
3. The belief in social justice expressed by the Hands of Compassion ministry of Rhema Bible Church which is responsible for the church's social ministry or ministry of mercy. The question is often asked at Rhema, 'If your Church closed down, would the community notice?'. (Mona, 2009)
4. The view that Prophetic relevance is not about politics, but about morality and godliness. The goal of the Church's prophetic voice remains *justice*, the redressing and addressing of the most pressing needs of the most vulnerable in society, often through *speaking truth to power*. (Mona, 2009)

## 5. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT BY THE RHEMA MOVEMENT

the development of this socio-political dimension of the theology of the Rhema Movement described above, has resulted in the expression of new forms of engagement in the public square. When one considers the future of this dynamic, it presents potential opportunities for conflict and cooperation within the relationship between the charismatic church and the law in a liberal democratic South Africa.

Religious freedom being legally guaranteed by the constitution, as Dreyer (2007:7) argues, is at the centre of the consideration of the relation between religion and the law. Thus Rhema perceives their role and engagement in the South African public square as taking place within the context of the secular constitution and the religious freedom it affords. Therefore Rhema seeks to engage the state and participate in the public domain. The essential disposition of the Rhema Movement's approach to public engagement can be found in Pastor Ray McCauley's remarks about the role of the National Interfaith Leaders Counsel (NILK), which '... aims to ensure that religious leaders are proactive in offering interventions on policy issues ... bearing in mind the moral dimension' (Tolsi, 2009).

This approach to engagement is illustrated by the recent 'Police Appreciation Service' held by Churches in the Rhema Movement. Contact with the particular Police commander from the local Police Station was made by churches with the view to invite officers to attend the service in uniform, the purpose of which was to increase awareness of the importance of support, through prayer, appreciation and encouragement of police officers (IFCC, n.d., News). Beyond such initiatives, Rhema has long been open to engaging representatives from the political sphere and welcoming them to participate in services as illustrated by the much debated visit to Rhema Bible Church by the then presidential candidate, Jacob Zuma.

It is the view of the Rhema Movement that such visits provide the Church with an opportunity to '... minister ...' to decision-makers in the South African society (SAPA, 2011). Such visits have proved effective in bridging the gap between voiceless members of society and those who represent them at government level. This was illustrated by the residents of Zandspruit (a squatter settlement in Honeydew, Johannesburg) who had the opportunity to engage with Mr. Zuma on this occasion, and presented Mr. Zuma with a written plea for assistance for the 13 000 families living in the area in abject poverty, without houses, toilets, running water or medical care. They stated, '[i]t is not enough that we only see him on TV. We want him to come

to Zandspruit and witness for himself the conditions in which we are living. Our children are sick' (Ndaba, 2009).

Only two years later the situation in Zandspruit erupted into fully fledged riots; stones were thrown at motorists and roads were blockaded with trees and burning tyres. These protests were sparked by '... poor service delivery ...' as protesters '... hurled rocks at the police, who retaliated by firing rubber bullets.' (Symonds, 2011). This begs the question, had Mr. Zuma and the ANC heeded the plight of the Zandspruit residents in 2009 when the visit to Rhema Church facilitated a grassroots interaction, would these unfortunate riots not have been averted? The point here is not to defame a particular political party, but to illustrate the manner in which the religious community can be integral to the healthy functioning of the democratic state in a critical partnership of mutual benefit. It is therefore ironic that Mr. Zuma himself echoed the need for partnership during his speech at the Rhema Church that day, stating that prayer and cooperation were needed (Ndaba, 2009), regardless of ethnic, cultural or religious persuasion.

Moreover, this outreach of Rhema Bible Church has not been limited to politicians, and has included representatives of Sport and Entertainment industries as well as Businesses. It is Rhema's view that prominent individuals have the same spiritual needs as the rest of society. Thus, when empowered spiritually, they can make a contribution to beyond their field of expertise and be instrumental in society's betterment. Mr. Zuma's suggested the same in his comment during the same visit: 'churches have played a key role in the development of South Africa and ought to continue to do so' (SAPA, 2011). Thus engagement therefore goes beyond the moral dimension of critical engagement of Government, and implies active participation in the development agenda of South Africa.

The unpublished Human Resources Development Strategy of 2009 by the Departments of Labour and Education identified 5 key development challenges facing South Africa in the period until 2030: 'Poverty, Income inequality, Threats to social cohesion, Ongoing demographic (race, gender, age, class and geographic) inequities, and the impact of globalisation' (CHET, 2009). Prinsloo (2007:155) in addition, in her discussion of the implementation of Life Orientation Programmes in South African schools outlines the impact on the children of South Africa in particular, stating that they are '...at risk because of inadequate opportunities for harmonious socialisation in their communities ...'. The moral implications of these issues arise out of the extent of the absence of justice that they imply in South Africa. As such, the *status quo* is not sustainable and these issues are therefore crucial to the stability of South Africa and all the freedoms enjoyed, even the freedoms enjoyed by those only affected indirectly by these challenges.

In exploring solutions for these challenge Prinsloo (2007:168) concludes with a remark about the contribution religious communities need to make to combat 'rapid moral decline', recommending that the '...value of religion' be 'acknowledged' and 'focused on' since the 'internalization of a personal value system against the background of religious knowledge is a strong deterrent to moral decline'. This view was echoed by President Zuma, stating that the ruling party itself owes its founding moral vision largely to the Church. This statement was again followed by a call for partnership between government and faith-based organizations to 'release South African people from poverty...' (SAPA, 2011)

This is precisely the role that the Rhema Movement has envisioned for itself and the religious community in South Africa. Pastor Ray McCauley's participation in the National Church Leaders

Consultation held in Stellenbosch in 2009 confirmed this vision. At this consultation the Rhema Movement sought to improve the engagement of the Christian Church, challenging leaders to unite, partner and address the tangible issues South Africa faces today, as reported by the IFCC (n.d, News):

[t]he common thread in their presentations was the need for a proper reading of the times ....Ps Ray lamented the division that exists among Church leaders on a number of socio-political issues and urged the Church to speak with one voice, of course informed by the commonality of her faith. ... Ps Ray also called for an assertion of the Church's prophetic voice in the nation. (stating) The prophetic role of the Church in our society has diminished dramatically in the last few years. Whereas in the past we all knew what we stood against, today we [as Church leaders] don't know what we stand for, ... spoke about the need for a fresh vision; among South African Church leaders, a vision that will encourage action for the highest good and promote the prophetic voice/mission of the Church in our nation. He concluded his presentation by referring to the story of Jonah and his calling to Nineveh. In the face of the challenges we face as a country, the story of the reluctant prophet Jonah is relevant. Nineveh was a terrible and wicked city. However, the problem was not with Nineveh but with Jonah. He was afraid to fulfil his prophetic role in the city. It was not until Jonah obeyed God and cried out against the city ... that Nineveh was saved.

The vision statement formulated during that event indicated that there is intent on the part of the Christian Church to be united in their engagement on issues. The statement read as follows:

[a] new vision for Church leadership: We covenant to be a clear and fearless prophetic voice, giving moral direction to the nation and beyond; We undertake to build and promote a caring society which protects, honours and enhances life in all its forms as a gift from God; We will do this by following Jesus Christ, who through His incarnation, gave His own life to save life (John 10:10). (IFCC, n.d., News)

Engagement therefore implies partnership with other faith-based organizations and Government in particular: Pastor McCauley said of President Zuma upon his election, that 'partisanship' should not 'blunt our national consciousness', recognizing with approval the willingness of Mr. Zuma to enter into 'dialogue' (SAPA, 2011).

As an expression of the aforementioned theological and socio-political perspectives on contemporary South Africa, the Rhema Movement, largely through the work of Pastor Ray McCauley, is therefore currently engaged with the government of South Africa through various initiatives. One such initiative is the aforementioned National Interfaith Leadership Council (NILC), formed by Mr. Zuma to '...advise and aid the government on the delivery of social services' (Tolsi, 2009). It is important though to note that a close working relationship with Government does not preclude the role of the church to hold the state accountable. This is illustrated in Pastor Ray McCauley's response to the much publicized comments by President Jacob Zuma in which he suggests that voting for the ANC equates 'going to heaven', to which he responded: 'literal comparison' between political parties and religious notions such as 'heaven' are unacceptable and that an audience with the president would be sought in this regard (Vena, 2011).

Thus Rhema's view of the state subscribes to the notion that the state should be separate from

all religious institutions. This does in Rhema's view enable the state to see to the needs of the population in an unbiased fashion, irrespective of religious persuasion. However, as Schuppert (2011:14) argues, the State cannot operate existentially apart from the various institutions that constitute the society over which it seeks to exercise power. Schuppert goes further to touch on the ontological contribution of religion to the very existence of the state, saying:

... I depart from the notion that statehood is provided solely by the state. Instead, I suggest that we think of statehood as a product which is produced by the state in association with other actors.

Separation then is a starting point from which public issues are contemplated but *participation* becomes the only viable approach when solutions are sought. In this regard Dreyer (2007:10-11) quotes Hackett as saying, '... democracy and the global emphasis on human rights and religious freedom are among the factors that create space for the new phase of inter-religious and religion-state tensions taking shape across Africa'. Dreyer further observes the extent to which this partnership is a practical reality, where religious institutions in some instances 'take over' some basic functions of the state and thus require a re-imagining of the true nature between the two. He concludes with an admission of the irrelevance of the 'strict''dogma' of secularism in postcolonial Africa (Dreyer, 2007:10-11).

The Rhema Movement importantly does not view itself as a lone actor in this context, but a partner of government and of other religious groupings. Tolsi (2009) quotes Pastor Ray McCauley's comment concerning NILK:

as a multi-faith organisation, intervening on government policy is to concentrate on those basic ethical principles that are universal to all religions. These include issues such as the promotion of the rights of the poor; protection of human dignity; the sanctity of human life; and the support of anti-corruption and crime initiatives of the government.

The Rhema Movement's role is therefore understood as an attempt to promote universal values that are typical of the vast majority of religious groupings and compatible with the basic advent of Human Rights. It is therefore the role of NILK to facilitate dialogue about the position of faith-based organizations and their members on the moral issues in the South African society. The practical implication for the South African legal system, is evident in Nthabiseng Khunou's (an ANC MP) statement, that the council would be involved in revisiting legislation, legalising abortion and gay marriage, based on the premise that '...laws were very unpopular in South African churches' (Rossouw, 2011). It is our view therefore, that while it is the right of the *progressives* to agitate for the accommodation of an agenda that would include such laws, it is the right of the *conservatives* to do the same, ensuring that the minority does not infringe upon the religious freedom of the majority in the name of equality and liberality at the expense of pluralism and diversity.

## 6. CONCLUSION

There are obvious implications to the current forms of engagement of the Rhema Movement. There are the contending political agendas of participants from both within and outside the religious community and the legal implications within the constitutional framework of South Africa. The relationship between church and state is of particular significance, and ought to be separate. However, in Rhema's view since church membership and state citizenship coincide

within the individual, we ought to re-imagine the understanding of the relationship as one of *dual-citizenship*, whereby the individual has the responsibility of being a good citizen both in their religious practice (the *Kingdom of God*) as well as in the national sense.

The response to Rhema's engagement by civil society and popular media has been illustrated in their reaction to the establishment and activities of the National Interfaith Leaders Council and their description of the council as an occasion of 'intimate relationship' that 'blurs' the sphere of the Church and that of the State, supposedly causing '...increasing consternation among civil liberties and gay rights organizations...' who imagine the '...repealing of abortion and same-sex marriages laws, and a return of the death penalty' (Tolsi, 2009). Rhema's position is that these responses are both to be expected and welcomed in a public discourse that is tolerant and affording of religious freedom.

In Rhema's case, the development of the socio-political dimension of the charismatic Church's theology has brought about new forms of engagement in the public sphere and will continue to do so. Increasing political engagement by the charismatic church appears to be a trend that continues unabated, not only in South Africa but worldwide. Projecting this reality into the future suggests potential opportunities for conflict as well as cooperation in the relationship between the charismatic church and other interest groups who would seek to mould the law to align with their disposition. As Bush contemplates:

[t]hese developments in the sociology of religion do not require that we deny the existence of an expanding, rationalist world culture. But they do suggest that claims about world culture's relationship to secularism are over-determined, and that the capacity of religion to thrive in rationalized environments is underestimated. If so, rather than decline, we could expect either no relationship or even an increase in religious mobilization accompanying the rationalization of the world polity. (Bush, 2007:1649)

In recognizing the *transformative* power of religion, Rhema reflects critically on the manner in which they engage society, seeking both to *liberate* South Africans through empowerment by just means, while maintaining a consciousness of the need for justice for the most vulnerable in society. As long as justice in the South African society remains elusive, the need will exist to engage various social institutions. As such, we would agree with the observation of the World Council of Churches concerning the new dispensation in South Africa:

[h]owever miraculous, such sweeping change does not yet constitute justice. The deep-seated economic and social problems created by apartheid's multi-layered, highly structured system of exploitation, oppression and social fragmentation are even more resistant to change than the formal political structures. (World Council of Churches, 1994)

We do caution though that justice can only be sought through just means. The danger though, of the perpetual disappointment of the expectations of South Africans who hope for a better future is that hopelessness leads to an attitude that says, '...let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die...' as is thought to have been the pervading idea about the dying remnants of the Apartheid apparatus (van Vuuren, 2006:43). Along the hasted journey towards justice then, ruling powers in South African will be tempted, as the oppressive former regime was, to be influenced by outside parties in the hope of securing funds, notes and support through illegitimate means. This implies a vital role of the religious community to act as a safeguard against the easy, broad road<sup>5</sup> to reconstruction.

5 A Biblical reference to Matthew 7:13 wherein the choice between morality and immorality is depicted as a broad and narrow road, leading to destruction or life respectively.

It is therefore essential that civil society, and the religious community in particular, serve as both the memory and conscience of the nation, bringing to the fore lessons to be learned from the nation's collective national past.

The Rhema Movement acknowledges that the relationship between law and religion is problematic and complex, fraught with pitfalls and opposing extremes. It is our view however that shrinking back from engagement to avoid the difficulty is not an option. Where difficulties or even mistakes cannot be avoided or eluded our view is that they ought to be cautiously navigated as we embark on the pursuit of a just and equitable society. For South Africans, having survived our past we cannot afford to jeopardize our future by neglecting our responsibility to stand for truth, speak for the vulnerable and the voiceless and leave a legacy that embodies the best of our deeply held religious persuasions.

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## KEY WORDS

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