

.....We told you so!!!

The Yolanda Adams saga revisited. At last there is something tangible/concrete members and congregations of the OAC can work with in order to take ownership of their Church. This is only the beginning!!! Also, why constitutional reform and administrative transformation are inevitable

Truth

What do tabloids and whistleblowers have in common? No matter how much they are vilified or persecuted, invariably there is a vital element of truth in whatever they reveal. The upshot of the recent court case of Yolanda Adams vs the OAC is that a barnhouse door seems to have opened on the hitherto secretive world of church administration in the Old Apostolic Church, especially at its regional headquarters in the Western Cape. The horse has bolted the stable, or, the genie is out of the bottle. OAC executives at long last had to reveal and admit in court to what they, as a rule, deliberately keep away from members/congregations and the majority of church officers.

The only crime our **tragic heroine**, Sister Yolanda Adams, apparently committed was to refuse to keep quiet about what she regarded as irregular and corrupt practices regarding the management of church assets in the Western Cape region of the OAC. While certain aspects of the subsequent court case are still subject to due process, members/congregations are now privy to official public records that will at last enable them to learn firsthand about the details of what had until now been allegations/rumours about what really took place and how senior Head Office officials and top management conducted themselves within a system that constitutionally **excludes** members/congregations from meaningful participation in the administration of their church.

As promised earlier, The FORUM will, until such time as members/congregations have formal access to all administrative processes and salient information in the church, continue to publish on its website all available **relevant documents** *(see Adams labour court extract). Therefore, perusal of the text of the discourse during the relevant court sessions, ought to goad members/congregations into taking a more active interest in the management of their church. A **firm basis** now exists from where Head Office can be engaged regarding constitutional and administrative reform in the Church.

Vindicated

The real significance of the Adams saga is that it provided members/congregations with a glimpse of what is transpiring behind the seemingly insurmountable walls of Head Office, confirming much of what had been speculation and conjecture until now among members/congregations. Statements/comments/admissions by senior executives under oath during the court sessions, no doubt leave an alarming impression of the dismal level at which the assets and administration of the OAC seem to be managed, not to mention the obvious mindset and **management style** of the officers concerned. No wonder the current leadership appear to be vehemently opposed to administrative reform, because it would destroy their **comfort zone** of a lack of the required levels of accountability and transparent governance (to members/congregations).

It is obvious that if a democratic system were in place, the questionable actions/practices alluded to in the court documents would not have been perpetrated and the officers under review probably

*(Extract from text of dialogue during labour court session of 15 May 2013, pp268 – 318) Page 1

never granted tenure of office at headquarters in the first place. That is why the establishment of the necessary **checks and balances** in the form of direct participation by congregations at all levels of management in the OAC can no longer be denied or postponed.

Forensic audit

What if there had been no Sister Adams? When would members/congregations have learnt about how asset management was conducted in their church? Judging by the apparent casual approach (according to court records) by the relevant officers regarding the security of church assets, the obvious question that comes to mind is: **how long** has this been going on? Worst still, what is the scale of the **losses** the Church has possibly suffered over the years? Therefore, it would not be out of place to call for a forensic audit of all related transactions that have transpired (as a point of departure) over the last seventeen (17) years, the period denoted by the “CEO” in the Western Cape and during which 115 church buildings have been constructed under his command.

Regardless of the technicalities entailed in the anatomy of the Adams court case, it is the **lack** of public accountability and the cavalier attitude that reveal the kind of environment that prevails at headquarters. And if caught out, there seems to be no limits to the amount of church (public) funds expended to bail out errant officers, while the whistleblower has to pay for everything out of her own pocket. **No penalties** for the relevant officers who brought the OAC into disrepute, resulting in substantial losses and wasteful/fruitless expenditure. Not only unfair, but also immoral it would seem. The voiceless and powerless members/congregations (the real OAC) are the **ultimate losers** in this saga, which seems to bear the hallmark of an irregular state of affairs in the administration of the Church.

If there was no Sister Adams, the OAC would probably never have known about this cancer in its administration. The height of immorality in this regard is the fact that members (and officers) are as a matter of principle **not supposed** to confront their leaders with “difficult” questions, neither spiritual nor temporal. And while members still seem to be immune to retribution in this regard, officers who dare ask “intelligent” questions are invariably faced with summary and arbitrary removal (without formal recourse to appeal) from office. A **tyrannous** CHURCH ORDER that reigns supreme, reminiscent in so many respects of the system the High Priest Caiaphas and his Jewish Council exacted in their crusade against Jesus, His disciples/apostles and their followers way back then.

Reform

The dilemma for the OAC is that the current system of management and administration is **not sustainable** and, therefore, not in the best interest of the Church. The OAC seems to be increasingly losing traction in the rapidly changing governance landscape of the country and the world at large. Unless a conscious and deliberate effort is mounted forthwith to phase in a strategically staggered programme of administrative reform, the Church will not be able to survive unscathed if confronted by **precipitous change** due to a possible (and unexpected) outbreak of resistance/confrontation among congregations. Functionally, OAC members/congregations are among the most **illiterate/ill-equipped** entities in the religious world as far as church administration is concerned, due to the current diabolic system of deliberate exclusion and (Head Office) paternalism. It is immoral, if not criminal, to keep them that way.

As espoused so many times before by the FORUM and significant others, reform in the OAC is primarily about a realignment of the **balance of powers** between Head Office and the congregations – GENERAL and OWN affairs. Routinely elected local church councils run by members, with officers as members ex officio. Direct representation by congregations at congresses at regional and national levels. All the necessary institutions/organs, as well as the required checks and balances, to inculcate a culture of accountability and democratic governance. Sustainable governance, as well as economic prosperity, is the sound launching pad the OAC requires from where to optimally pursue its all-important apostolic mission. Judging by the current situation in the OAC, it seems to have slid back beyond the point of stagnation and is **retrogressing** at an alarming rate. The battle for survival will be won or lost in the socio-economically/politically disadvantaged congregations in the non-white townships around the country. The handful of **privileged** “white” congregations cannot save the OAC for much longer.

It is incumbent upon the **current ageing generation** of top leaders to initiate and introduce the reforms that are required. It is also incumbent upon them to rid (sanitize) the OAC public image and record of their **apartheid baggage**. Morally, the world around us is changing fast. The tide is sweeping out to sea and chances are that the OAC and its apostles might be caught naked in the bay. There is no escape. The odious apartheid baggage of the OAC was **introduced** by man and consequently has to be dismantled and eradicated by man. If left to a future generation of leaders to undo, it will be incumbent upon them to name and shame the current ageing generation posthumously for having failed the Church despicably. Which begs the **question**: “if the current generation is loath to correct matters in the church, why should they be taken seriously anyway” ?

Alarm bells

Studious perusal of the relevant court record (15 May 2013) of the Adams case, inter alia, tends to set off the following alarm bells:

- A **tender policy**, if any, that leaves much to be desired. Apparently no checks and balances to obviate corruption and sloppy management. Morality and ethics also need to be looked at.
- **Questionable practices** regarding the alienation of church assets and real estate – verbal approval, as opposed to formal/written approval, for official transactions appear to be accepted practice. And when cornered during cross-examination, there seems to be no compunction about trying to side-step the issue by stating that congregations have been consulted about the sale of assets, while it is common knowledge (and church policy) that congregations are excluded from participation in the decision making processes of the Church. The management of church assets has always been, and still is, an exclusive (and jealously guarded) Head Office function. Congregations, which are supposed to be shareholders, have to **unconditionally** abide by instructions from Head Office. They are often the last to hear about developments affecting them directly.

However, they will now know that:

- During cross-examination it became clear that approval for the sale of houses could be obtained by making a direct **phone call** to the Secretary of the Apostolate (top executive

of the OAC located in Johannesburg) prior to having the issue tabled at the Conference of Apostles (currently the highest authority in the OAC). It then appears that all the apostles later endorsed the approval given by the Secretary, by way of a **formal resolution**. Effectively, it would appear that a house is first sold to an official and then authorization for the sale is obtained afterwards. Therefore, it may well be assumed that no approval was sought from the Apostolate at all. However, it is now indelibly and incontrovertibly part of the **public record** that the Conference of Apostles (to the detriment of the Church) had been party to the sale of church property **below market value**. If borne in mind that all the apostles are salaried church officers, it implies that the Church – their employer and also the **real loser** in this deal – had no sanction whatsoever in this saga. Now, at what stage does the best interest of the OAC become paramount?

- OAC monies and assets are **public funds** and should be regarded as such by Top Management (all paid officers/officials). And since members/congregations (the Church) are deliberately kept out of the management and administration of their church, there rests an extra responsibility on Top Management to adhere to the highest moral and ethical standards, which implies accountability and transparency. The **best interest** of the Church requires that the houses in question ought to have been put out on public tender, hopefully for the benefit of a wider audience of OAC members. At face value, the nature of the transactions in question seems to amount to collusion among a select few paid officials (**endorsed** by a resolution of the Conference of Apostles), while members/congregations appear to have been kept in the dark about it. Again, **vindication** for the call for constitutional and administrative reform that will enable members/congregations to have a meaningful role in the management and administration of their church.
- Perhaps it should also be noted that the homestead of the CEO (District Secretary) was apparently renovated by a preferred contractor who **did not have** all the required documents to tender (see transcript of court session).
- The abovementioned actions refer to the conduct of **salaried** officials (also senior anointed officers) of the Church. Sister Adams was also a salaried official of the Church, who blew the whistle when she noticed the irregularities in question. Without deference to an appropriate **oversight body** (deliberately non-existent at this stage) representing the best interests of the Church, a handful of officials who are implicated in this same “mess” set about prosecuting her at church expense in order to exonerate themselves, also with the apparent objective to teach her a lesson which in turn should serve as a deterrent for any other person who would dare take on Head Office again. **The result:** she was summarily dismissed, slapped with the cost for the court order that was obtained against her, while the real culprits in the irregular sale of church houses below market value walked away **scot-free**. In addition, they also **benefited** from the tithes of members/congregations by having their legal expenses defrayed out of church coffers and **no action taken** against them.

- The relevant incidents (and official policy, if any) involving the sale of church real estate below market value to salaried officers of the Church, need to be **revisited**. In fact, a **Commission of Inquiry** seems to be the solution. The OAC apparently lost thousands of rands, for which nobody seems to be held accountable. Retrieval of the **lost revenue** ought to be pursued and all officers concerned put to the sword. What about serving the best interests of the OAC? Who guards the guard? Sister Adams appeared to have acted in the best interests of the Church, while her prosecutors studiously set about undermining the Church. The proposed inquiry should not be confined to the incidents at issue here, but rather be conducted in the widest possible context (regardless of year and status).
- More alarming is the performance of **senior executives** during cross-examination - uninspiring, insecure, embarrassing and clearly not in the best interest of the Church. Surely, the **OAC deserves more** “bang” for the big bucks the relevant officers coin each month in terms of remuneration. After all, they are entrusted with multi-million rand portfolios of hard-earned church funds. Again, no credible checks and balances to effectively cater for an oversight role in the interest of the greater good of the Church.
- Officers responsible for fruitless expenditure should be made to walk the proverbial plank. The seemingly **unlimited budget** for legal costs to keep a reproachable system in place, should be capped. Effective in-house structures should be put in place to deal with issues that currently seem too easily and frequently referred for outside legal counsel/processing. A possible solution may be a re-assessment of the criteria for the **filling of executive posts** at Head Office. The success of any corporate institution is largely dependent on the acumen and leadership qualities of its CEO. What we are dealing with here is the portfolio of the CEO of the Western Cape region of the OAC. It is obvious that the solution to this “mess” in the Western Cape, would be to put the establishment under **new management**. Any empirical study in this regard is bound to come to the same conclusion.

The social well-being, if not survival, of **corporate citizen OAC** calls for a particular brand (bold and dynamic) of leadership, a quality that is lamentably lacking at present. How sad! How disappointing! How self-destructing! How suicidal!

- The management and administration of the **Burial Fund** also need to be revisited with a view to reform and restructuring. According to records of the court case, there seems to have been certain irregularities and feeble attempts at redress, but that is about where it ended. No substantive review or overhaul of a system which seems fundamentally flawed. It needs to be underpinned by a **broad-based** management system where members/congregations are duly represented.

End of the beginning

The windfall brought about by the Adams court case for the FORUM and all other concerned members of the OAC, is the fact that for the first time we have **documentary proof** upon which to base several actions in this regard. For top management, the **battle** may have been won by dealing with a “difficult” employee, but the **war** to transform Head Office is far from over. Therefore, the struggle goes on.

The **substance of the “whistleblowing”** by Sister Adams still needs to be dealt with. The **losses** the OAC had suffered in this regard should be **recouped** and the perpetrators court-martialed. The last word regarding the personal situation of Sister Adams has, therefore, not been spoken. It seems safe to assume at this stage that this saga has only reached the end of the beginning.

The enemy

Sister Adams is not the enemy of the OAC. Over time, when the neighbourhood at Head Office has been sanitized, members/congregations will come to appreciate **her courage**, as well as the less conspicuous actions of others who also tried to act in the best interest of the Church. Thanks to the now available public record, it should become clearer to everybody as to who the **real enemy** of the OAC is.

Now, since the Conference of Apostles appeared to have been so **magnanimous** towards the relevant officials in this whole saga until now, the moral and ethical thing to do would be to write off the **legal bill** that was handed down to Sister Adams. It would not only be the moral thing to do, but also the right thing. If not, then all the pious sermons, celestial posturing and rituals for the remission of sins would ring hollow. Also, this development puts back onto **centre stage** the call for constitutional and administrative reform which would deliver, inter alia, the necessary checks and balances to **safeguard** the OAC and its members/congregations against the apparent odious and irregular conduct and management practices at issue here.

Why is it that as long as somebody makes the **“right”** spiritual moves and sounds that he/she is celebrated as the darling of the clan, with glowing prospects for promotion? But when that same person sincerely starts asking intellectually astute questions about the management of **church funds** and assets, as well as growth and development policies/strategies, **the system** (top management and their corps of officers) instinctively clams up and unrepentantly cast that person(s) as the “devil incarnate”, a false prophet, or a protégé of the anti-Christ. The best interest of the OAC dictates that a **healthy distance** (or rugby “daylight rule”) should be maintained between the apostles/other anointed officers and the cash register. It is a well-proven recipe for **disaster** when sole custody over church funds and assets is given to the clergy. They are supposed to be working for Jesus, who Himself had once demonstrated a distinct distaste for the antics of **money brokers** in the temple.

A realignment of the balance of powers between Head Office and congregations should bring about a **vast improvement**. Procrastinating (or refusing) to initiate the necessary changes, will ultimately **deny** the current Top Management the honour to be credited as the fathers of reform, because they would have been **scooped** by forces such as The FORUM and significant others.

Talk, the only viable option

Again, the obsession about reform, transformation and corrupt practices relates to the **future** and the best interests of the OAC. **Democratic** governance, which is in tune with the norms of the day and which makes for more sustainable, accountable and clean administration. It is not about breaking down or besmirching the Church; it is also about trying to get Top Management

to see and accept the **unavoidable** need for broad-based dialogue in order to prevent the OAC from heading down the same road as the biblical Jerusalem before its epic fall.

As far as the current administration of the OAC is concerned, members/congregations are **trapped** under the heel of a totalitarian regime. Fortunately, and as history has often proved, the people shall always be delivered from the **stranglehold** and oppression of tyrants who (in the case of churches and the Israelites of old) usually present themselves as Angels of Light. In Mark 7: 6 – 9, Jesus aptly referred to this dilemma the OAC seems to be handicapped by.

At this stage, the services of a **prophet** are no longer required to caution members/congregations that time and tide are not on the side of the current policies and management style of Head Office. It is becoming clearer by the day to a keen observer. For the OAC to ultimately fail in its **apostolic mission**, all the current leadership has to do is to continue resisting administrative reform. And the reason: the lure of money and the intoxicating effect of brute totalitarian rule seem to be overwhelming and incurable - phenomena which militate against the **doctrine** of Christ.

We told you so

There is **nothing new or unique** about the life and times of the “mighty” OAC and its leadership. It all happened before and had been repeated so many times since the earliest days of the human race. And true to tradition, we never seem to learn from our **mistakes**.

The administrative *Gordian knot* the OAC is stuck with at the end of the year 2013, is the direct result of what the first generation of apostles since the schism of 1972 should have done but **neglected/failed** to do. However, the democratic environment of the post-1994 South Africa ought to make it easier for the current generation of apostles to set the Church on a more sustainable path of growth and development. But then we (OAC) should start by having a pervasive **meaningful dialogue** – the alpha and the omega to all seemingly intractable human relations issues. A BOTTOM UP approach to management looks like the obvious panacea for the admin woes of the OAC.

What is at issue here is best captured in the perennial Afrikaans saying: *“al loop die leuen hoe snel, die waarheid agterhaal hom wel”*. And did we not hear some among us say: “we told you so”?

W Johanneson (also Secretary of the FORUM)

Bellville

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