

FIVE LONG YEARS IN THE OAC

Looking back over the last five years to see how the leadership of the OAC (Old Apostolic Church) coped with calls for long overdue and much-needed administrative reform in the Church. There has been no change and the question now is: won't they, or don't they know how? After five long years, denial of freedom of expression and difference of opinion still seem to be the great taboos doggedly sustained by top management.

It was exactly five years ago during the month of September (2009) that The FORUM raised - what was then regarded by the relevant OAC authorities as disgruntled, misguided, arrogant, belligerent, anarchical rhetoric and an act of insubordination - the issue of the necessity to set in motion a process for administrative reform in the Church. Today, five years later, the only response by Head Office seems to have been to ignore and reject out of hand any such notion and to rather dig in its heels, batten down the hatches and simply ride out the storm in pig-headed fashion.

Nothing to show

Five years later, that same storm is still raging; implying that hardly anything, or nothing, constructive got done at Head Office since 2009 to prepare the OAC for the transformation process which we all know is inevitable. Is there anybody out there in management to whom the best interests of the Church are still paramount? Who guards the guard? What about core issues such as accountability and dealing with allegations of corruption in a multi-billion rand empire such as the OAC? Important checks and balances to safeguard the management of hard-earned public funds are absent. The current system is not sustainable and, therefore, not in the best interest of the members/congregations (the Church).

So, what has the OAC to show in 2014 as far as growth and development are concerned; five long years since 2009, at a time when the whole world around it has undoubtedly moved on in the realm of human progress? Organizationally (new church halls excepted), the OAC seems to have stagnated, if not retrogressing. Therefore, this moment is opportune for the FORUM to revisit some of the salient challenges and proposals it highlighted over the last five years as its contribution to the much-needed debate and agenda for peaceful and orderly change in the OAC. After all, the FORUM is merely venting and amplify publicly what is being whispered and rumoured in the pews and backrooms of the OAC. Not being allowed to question the status quo, is the greatest taboo in the OAC.

Stronger

Five years ago, when the FORUM appeared on the scene, its critics dismissed it (and maybe rightly so at that time) as a flash in the pan or just a general nuisance to be ignored. However, five years later (and still fighting fit), the FORUM is reinforced and emboldened by a very useful track-record and a calculated drive to establish itself as a permanent feature on the OAC landscape until administrative reform is firmly rooted in the Church. From now on, it can only get stronger and its cause gain more traction in the public (OAC) mind. The label of troublemaker, or an instrument from hell, may now be proudly worn as a badge of honour.

The call for reform will not dissipate and top management could so easily have used this period (window of opportunity) to make such a process its own initiative. The call for reform has now been part of the public record for five years and the FORUM can therefore claim the moral high ground. And chances are that more militant formations could arise in the OAC to join the fray. Only a display of bold and visionary leadership in this regard will save Head Office from being branded as playing catch-up to the agenda of the FORUM and other significant proponents for change.

Olive branch?

But, let us pause for a moment!!! There has been some movement though, which, by the way, has nothing to do with administrative reform. Under-deacons have earlier this year been elevated to the status of anointed officers and may now take their seats on stage. Whether this was significant change, is a debate for another day. However, the apparent internet spin doctor of top management stridently trumpeted this development publicly (30 March 2014) as proof of radical change in the OAC, while taunting the FORUM to go into overdrive about it. How disgusting, how degrading, how ill-conceived! By the way, Head Office has yet to solicit the approval of members/congregations (the Church) to allow such a scaly character to command a “Dirty Tricks Department” on behalf of the Church. Is he on the payroll? What’s next? *Quo vadis*, Head Office?

Was this an olive branch? Nevertheless, top management should be commended for apparently realizing that they should at least be seen to be doing something about the general perception that they are averse to change. They should now go one step further and remove the prefix “Under” since there is no Deacon anyway. And why cannot the poor Under-deacon share holy communion with other officers on stage on a second Sunday of the month? Apparently, their ‘elevation’ is also conditional (last hired, first fired) because as soon as the stage gets too crowded by the ‘chiefs’ the Under-deacons (‘indians’) have to descend to their former seats below. In the case of the changes to the format for Holy communion, the formulary still needs to be edited accordingly so that it corresponds with what happens to the cup when communion is served – currently the cup is still blessed for members to drink from, as of old. Sloppy changes at best, not well thought through by a handful of ageing men who seem scared of opening up the debate to a wider circle of fellow believers.

However, these measures seem to amount to a subterfuge (if not sacrilege), as a perception seems to abound that leadership would rather play around with the sacred side of the OAC, than let go of the purse strings and the levers of exclusive administrative power – the real issue in question. Nothing new though, as it is one of the oldest strategies used (often with disastrous consequences for the perpetrator) by regimes in church history going back to biblical times.

Why the obsession?

Why the obsession with freedom of expression in the OAC? Simply put: the prohibition of freedom of expression and the supporting structures, becomes a blunt instrument in the hands of persons with an insular approach to governance, especially in a racially and culturally diverse environment such as the OAC. It is used to obviate any comment about, or inquiry into, motherhood issues such as racism and accountability as far as the administration of the OAC is concerned. And by formally excluding members/congregations from the administrative processes in the Church, unbridled power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of men who seem ill-equipped to provide the

required brand of leadership to champion the transformation of the OAC from its apartheid past to a democratic dispensation in order to enable the Church to enhance its apostolic mission in the 21st century.

More importantly, freedom of expression is a fundamental human right guaranteed by the constitution of the country. In this regard, the constitution of the OAC is in conflict with the national constitution. Therefore, the OAC leadership may be accused of violating the law. Ironically, in New Testament times it was the Roman authorities which were at fault, and in the year 2014 it is the apostles of the OAC that need to be reminded that we are living in a free society and that their policies and actions are suspect, if not 'criminal'.

Inappropriate?

Five years ago, the following perennial questions inter alia led to the establishment of a platform (The FORUM) from where the cropped up emotions and perturbed views of concerned (but voiceless and powerless) members/congregations could be formally aired and also directed at top management:

Therefore, why is it - after an existence of nearly a century, and in an age of sweeping democratic reform in the country - inappropriate (if not 'criminal') for members/congregations of the OAC to:

- Question the status quo, especially in regard to the administration of the church
- Have a different opinion to those in authority and to express it formally and appropriately
- Have a meaningful say over the affairs of their own church – congregational and Head Office
- Hold public office in open society or be active politically
- Have women in formal office in the church – here the OAC is in conflict with biblical tradition
- Call on the OAC as a corporate citizen and religious institution to meet its obligations as far as social responsibility, both inside the OAC and society at large, are concerned

Appropriate?

Why does it seem appropriate for a non-elected top management (paid officers) to:

- Hold absolute sway over - and only accountable unto themselves - the administration of the church. Without the universally accepted checks and balances to safeguard church (public/trust) moneys and assets.
- Deliberately and formally deny members/congregations a meaningful say over the affairs of their own church. Only they (top management) can change the constitution and in most cases only to suit their own agenda. Consequently, the best interests of the Church are not being served.
- Arbitrarily remove from office any dissident officer who rightly or wrongly flout 'their' constitutional dispensation. And there is no formal/suitable domestic structure (tribunal) in place for recourse by the victim to contest/appeal such arbitrary actions.
- Reward themselves royally (without sanction by a fully representative supervisory church authority) and maintain a cozy lifestyle that does not augur well for the public image of the OAC. A perceived plushy lifestyle the clergy of other mainstream churches can only dream of. And currently there is nothing members/congregations (the Church) can do about it in

terms of the existing church constitution. So, what about best practice principles of performance management and accountability?

- Constitutionally insulate themselves from any inquiry in the above regard by members/congregations (and non-paid officers). Probity as far as control over the seemingly unlimited budget for legal experts is concerned, therefore, becomes a vexing question.

Status quo

Central to the call for administrative reform, is the deliberate denial of a meaningful say to members/congregations over the affairs of their own Church. The church constitution formally excludes them from all the administrative processes in the church. No direct representation by congregations in statutory bodies, meetings and conferences. Not even truly representative, democratic governance within congregations. Top management (not elected by members/congregations) have the exclusive right to amend the constitution. Unfettered power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of non-elected salaried officers, comprising top management and the highest decision making body. They also have the dubious honour of determining their own remuneration packages without sanction by a body where members/congregations are directly represented. A classic case of the proverbial tail (paid officers) wagging the dog (church, their employer).

In the absence of the necessary checks and balances, the general well-being and vast wealth (money and real estate) of the OAC remain at risk. Who ensures probity as far as tender and other contractual obligations are concerned? What about capital expenditure and sound investment policies? Who walks the plank when major financial losses are incurred or disastrous policy decisions taken? What about alleged favouritism relating to the purchase of luxury motor vehicles, as well as bursaries/sponsorships, out of church coffers in respect of a select few? What about allegations of church houses clandestinely being sold to top executives at discount prices? What about the lack of transparency and the prohibition to be questioned about it? Until such time as members/congregations are formally accorded a meaningful say in the management of the affairs of the Church, a case can therefore be made that the best interests of the OAC are not being served by the current leadership.

In a transformed constitutional dispensation, anointed officers (especially apostles who are salaried officers) should ideally be relieved of their current status as sole custodians of the purse strings of the OAC. An appropriate oversight authority, where members/congregations are directly represented, should be the ultimate arbiter. The current status where anointed officers are effectively both employee (Klaas) and employer (Baas) leaves much to be desired and is not becoming of a church of the stature of the OAC. Concerned members of the OAC should, therefore, guard against their Head Office being perceived as a den of inequity.

Voting with their feet

Five years ago when the FORUM embarked on its initiative to address the issue of administrative reform, it was uncharted waters for a group of concerned members who took the unusual step of

trying to open up a public discourse in this regard in the Church. Five years later, with the benefit of hindsight, the FORUM may safely conclude that top management is either not willing to accommodate any moves toward administrative reform, or simply lacks the capacity to champion such a landmark development in the history of the OAC. However, this negative disposition on the part of top management now empowers the FORUM to confidently interrogate all options to move the OAC to a position where the question of administrative reform becomes a constantly burning issue in all quarters in the Church. And it should not be too difficult, because members (and officers) are increasingly beginning to question the status quo.

Contrary to the tranquil demeanour Top Management always seems keen to portray, it is no secret that the OAC is threatened by a growing mood of despondency among members (and lower ranked officers). It is also no secret that members have already started voting with their feet – growing inactivity and low attendance figures, apostasy, near zero intake of new members, and (worst of all) an increasingly frustrated (educated) youth wandering around aimlessly. To a casual observer, these symptoms would speak of a church that is heading for disaster; a notion Head Office seems to be oblivious to.

Own Affairs

Another structural flaw in the administrative architecture of the OAC is the absence of control by congregations over OWN AFFAIRS. No direct representation by congregations at Head Office meetings. They have to submit to (and is represented by) an Elder, whose allegiance is to Head Office first and then the congregation. No local church office, no own letterhead, no bank own account, no control over own finances. Also, the absence of locally elected church (congregation) councils. Under the current constitution, the administration of congregations (regardless of distance) is essentially conducted by remote control from Head Office. Perpetuation of this system can only lead to more dysfunctional congregations. While ‘white’ congregations may seem to be doing well, their counterparts (the majority) in the ‘non-white’ townships around the country are wallowing in the backwaters of our time.

Difference of opinion

Difference of opinion/freedom of expression in the OAC is traditionally being frowned upon by top management – even within their own ranks. Self-respecting serving officers who dare to cross this line, are threatened by arbitrary removal from office. The ultimate step is ex-communication. It is depressing to experience how this practice has over time become a mentality that inter alia defines the character of members of the OAC. “Do what you are told and shut the up”, is what members of the OAC essentially have to endure at the hands of officers, who seem to have no option but to slavishly, meticulously and diligently follow and implement orders from above. Therefore, it is a system that is open to abuse – apparently a phenomenon not foreign to many members (and officers).

It should never be forgotten that the OAC itself was born of a serious difference of opinion in 1915, which was only settled in 1926 by the Supreme Court of the Witwatersrand. In 1972, the OAC, in turn, became the mother body which spawned the now firmly entrenched Reformed Old Apostolic Church (ROAC). And history has the nasty habit of perennially presenting itself for repeat performances.

Meaning, the OAC of 2014, in its current state of “administrative decay”, is not immune to public disobedience and resistance from its members/congregations. In fact, a constitutional crisis in the OAC is always only a public stand away by one congregation, followed by a few others. Whereas it is still too convenient for Head Office to summarily remove an errant serving officer or even excommunicating a recalcitrant member, it would certainly meet its match trying to mess with a congregation that is on the warpath. A possibility that cannot be ruled out anymore.

Management style

The current management style in the OAC still reflects some of the worst traditions of governance of the pre-1994 era in South Africa. No wonder the ghost of apartheid (racist incidents) is reportedly still stalking the chambers, halls and corridors of the OAC in 2014, twenty years after the South African nation officially abolished the evil system which was an affront to the creation of the Almighty God, of whose gospel the leadership of the OAC unabashedly claims sole custody.

Consonant with traditional FORUM objectives as far as the transformation of the administration of the OAC are concerned, the sole purpose of this paper is again to try and ignite the start of an initiative towards establishing a culture of meaningful dialogue within congregations (first) and then between congregations and Head Office. In the year 2014, twenty years after the advent of democratic governance in South Africa and its institutions, members/congregations of the OAC are still trapped in an odious quagmire of totalitarian rule in their own church.

Not unreasonable

The call for transformation by the FORUM five years ago was not an ultimatum. Neither had there been any expectations of instant results. Fundamental reform, the kind that is required in the OAC, is ideally an evolutionary process. Gradual, but resolutely tied to clearly defined time limits and target dates. The FORUM only wanted the issue tabled for an open debate under the auspices of Head Office. Five years ago, Head Office had a free hand to decide as to how the issue could be accommodated. They spurned it. A golden opportunity forfeited through the actions of a group of small minds.

The year 2009 ushered in a new era in the democratization process in South African society. Therefore, it was not unreasonable then for concerned members of the OAC to surmise how their church would be impacted by these developments. A learned look at the status quo in the OAC administration at that time signaled the unmistakable warning that top management and the church constitution were out of step with the demands of our age and that the best interests of the church could not be served. Five years later, the world around us is a considerably different place and the OAC still seems to be held hostage by a top management which is stuck in a pre-1994 mode and mentality.

Vision

Five years ago, the FORUM pointed to an apparent lack of vision and the required brand of leadership to take the OAC forward. Today, five years later, that statement has still to be confounded by the church fathers. Sadly, the OAC has yet to count the cost of squandered

opportunities over a five year period that was conducive in so many respects to initiate the process for administrative reform. The next five years (even in national and global politics) look set to call for bold and dynamic leadership skills, attributes which seem to be patently lacking in current OAC top management circles.

The FORUM was very emphatic, and still is, about its approach to change in the OAC – peaceful, evolutionary, but deliberate and meaningful. The appeal then was for the creation of a climate and an environment that would be suitable for initiating the laborious process of fundamental administrative and constitutional reform. Above all, the call for a paradigm shift in the approach to the management of church affairs in the future, was couched in sentiments that were against the undue disruption of the spirit of love and mercy, values which the OAC hold very dear.

Five years of perceived inaction by the leadership, is a serious charge. The fundamental challenge to the leadership has always been, and still is: where do you want to take the administration of the OAC? How do you see the administration of the OAC five years from now? And more succinctly, how do you visualize the state of the balance of powers between Head Office and the congregations five to ten years from now? And whatever changes are contemplated, the build-up to that transformation must start now.

However, reality denotes that if the current generation of leaders do not have a positive adaptive response to these challenges, they should do the honourable thing by falling upon their own swords forthwith. The OAC can ill-afford a leadership that is seemingly intent on just marking time for another five years; essentially awaiting their respective retirement dates, golden handshakes and the dubious ceremonial status of “freedom of the city”. Incidentally, the concept of “freedom of the city” as it is practised in the Church, ought to be viewed as an anomaly that affords a failed leader an opportunity to rule from the ‘grave’, thereby often frustrating the efforts of successors who try to correct past mistakes.

Change

Why the apparent impatient/intolerant tone by the FORUM?

It was born of a growing perception at grassroots level that (a ‘white’ controlled) Head Office is out of touch with developments in a multiracial OAC. A congregation in a far-flung corner of a region cannot be micro-managed by remote control from Head Office. Like people or households, congregations/communities differ markedly from each other in character and needs and only they know best what works for them. If the proverbial chain is as strong as its weakest link, then the mighty OAC (bigwig financial empire and real estate giant) is actually only as strong as its lowliest congregations in the disadvantaged and socio-economically depressed non-white communities across this land. Inherently unstable, retrogressing and ideally suited for militant reaction. Neighbourhoods where negative social statistics and dysfunctional households predominate.

Given the perceived ultra-conservative socio-political disposition of the current ruling (‘white’) leadership of the OAC, it is unfathomable to expect of them to have any idea what the officers and members/congregations in the townships have to endure, let alone implementing a ‘white-oriented’ OAC agenda. Meanwhile, many of the townships have also virtually been turned into war zones where the law of the gun and drugs reign supreme. In this respect, ‘white’ and ‘non-white’

members/congregations of the OAC are surely not on the same planet, which in a sense explains the anatomy and dynamics of a post-1994 apartheid syndrome that still seems prevalent in many areas of the OAC society. Not to mention the loss of the noble pre-1972 spiritual paradigm to which only a rapidly decreasing constituency of current 'non-white' OAC members can still attest.

Unfinished business

The OAC in many respects is still a typical racially segregated entity, as if apartheid has never been scrapped – there are still wholly white, coloured and black insulated congregations operating as if they have nothing to say to each other across the colour divide. No deliberate attempts from Head Office to address old mindsets and attitudes across the colour line at grassroots level, in line with what government is doing to sanitize the old apartheid neighbourhood. What kind of a future are we bequeathing to our youth? In 2014, the status quo seems to suggest that the segregated OAC children/youth will spend their growing up years without any mutual interaction (in silos) and finally meet each other in their adult years as strangers trying to make their dear OAC work. What kind of a father (the bible invokes) would give his child a stone when it is bread that he/she requires and, likewise, a snake instead of fish? If OAC leaders were to continue on their present course, chances are that they might just qualify as that irresponsible and wicked father.

Five years after the FORUM raised the issue of unfinished business in the OAC as far as the legacy of apartheid is concerned, top management has yet to formally demonstrate that these matters are taken seriously by them. While 'white' congregations seem to be doing well, a sizable majority of the 'non-white' congregations are bordering onto dysfunctionality due to a lack of the required levels of leadership. Ironically, there is a pervasive upswing in the educational levels of the youth in those congregations and yet their leaders seem either unwilling or incapable of sensing that a radical changing of the guard looms on the horizon. Regrettably, the body language and rhetoric of the current generation of 'non-white' leaders in this regard generally are not inspirational and, therefore, also not in the best interest of the Church. It tends to aid and abet the status quo. On the other hand, Head Office, which seems to prefer running the OAC like a typical Cold War totalitarian regime, should take the rap for expecting its officers to manage their congregations with the one hand tied behind their backs.

And so the charge sheet can go on, and on, and on.

Of courts and lawyers

No strangers to despicable courtroom brawls, the past five or more years will also be remembered for the unseasonably high jurisprudence activity where apostles and members squared off against each other publicly in court over church-related matters. Tragically, members/congregations (and most officers) were left (and still are) in the dark about the substance of these embarrassing episodes. Being formally excluded from admin processes in their own church, they had to garner their information second-hand from newspaper reports and rumour. For all the uniqueness of the peculiar nature of life in the OAC, its leaders and members of their flock had to submit to judgment by persons from the so-called 'world', in order to settle in-house squabbles/inequities. Issues that could have been effectively dealt with by a competent statutory in-house tribunal.

These legal gymnastics inter alia involved the security (alleged fraudulent property deals, tender/contractual irregularities, etc) of the material assets of the OAC, as well as the propriety of certain high-ranking salaried officers of the Church. These activities also came with apparent unbridled high legal costs for the Church. The question here is: high legal expenses and assistance by whom to protect what and whom? And if borne in mind that the relevant decisions are currently taken solely by paid officers of the OAC, without any sanction by the Church (members/congregations), then the issue of constitutional and administrative reform comes howling back at us. Under normal circumstances, members/congregations (the Church) would have had direct representation in the relevant bodies mandated to sanction such legal action and expenses.

However, the Church ultimately (as usual) turns out to be the real loser in this saga. These court cases ought to be taken seriously. Even one court case is one too many for a church like the OAC. And then there seems to be the tendency in certain quarters to trivialize it, because Head Office ostensibly always has the financial and legal muscle to pulverize or obliterate any attempt at assailing its Jericho Walls. And yet it can be so easy for members/congregations to withhold their tithes and cooperation with Head Office until such time as the call for reform is taken seriously; and there would be nothing Head Office can do about it.

Serving as top manager in the OAC, therefore, essentially seems to amount to carving out a lucrative career for yourself without having to account to any authority other than that of your own design. Of course, there is a distinct name (and consequences) for such anti-social and irregular behaviour.

The court cases of the last ten years and especially the prevailing circumstances that led to it, ought to be revisited as part of a post administrative reform initiative to clean up the Augean stables of the Head Office of the OAC. The money trail since 1972 will also have to be retraced, losses recouped wherever possible and rogue elements (if any) brought to book. Painful as it might be, these are important building blocks for a process to achieve the kind of closure that would be required to enable the OAC to embark on a new path of reconciliation, harmony, hope and untold growth and development.

Centenary

The year 2015, will mark the first century of the existence of the OAC. A century during which the OAC had been indelibly scarred by the scourge of apartheid. And not by accident, but through deliberate acquiescence by its leadership of the time. A period during which its 'white' leadership declined to take a stand against the criminal and immoral impact of apartheid on life (non-whites) in the OAC. And since the abolition of apartheid (a crime against humanity) in 1990, the OAC has yet to formally atone and apologize to its 'non-white' members for the perceived tacit support the Church lent to the implementation of an evil social system. Like many other mainstream churches, the OAC had a choice as far as dealing with apartheid was concerned. Instead, the OAC leadership preferred to look the other way while the system exclusively benefited 'white' OAC members. This issue may yet come to haunt the current leadership.

After nearly a century of existence, the leadership of the OAC still seems incapable, or unwilling, of coming to grips with the tenor of the universally accepted norms for freedom of expression and democratic governance. It should be interesting to see what (theme) the OAC would be celebrating if 2015 were to be observed as the centennial of the Church.

Transformation

What was it that the FORUM tried to convey to the OAC since 2009? Following, are some of the salient issues raised in its paper of 15 December 2009, entitled “Let my people grow”:

- **Formal dialogue:** As indicated earlier, OAC members/congregations are constitutionally denied a meaningful say in the running of the affairs of their own church. There is an absence of the necessary structures, as well as the will by the leadership, to facilitate the establishment of a culture of formal and meaningful dialogue at congregational level in order to enable members to take ownership of the management of OWN AFFAIRS (congregation). This facility partially existed in the pre-1972 era and showed promise of steady evolutionary trends, until it was unilaterally obliterated by Head Office following the saga of the breakaway of the ROAC. No amends/progress since then. And whereas the rest of the country had made stellar progress with the accommodation of democratic governance since 1972, OAC congregations had not only been left behind but had actually gone backwards in time as far as OWN AFFAIRS are concerned. The FORUM is not calling for violent revolution. All it is essentially agitating for is the creation of a climate in the Church that will make it conducive for a culture of meaningful dialogue to take hold with a view to bringing the administration of the Church into line with current universal best practices for a legal person the size of the OAC.
- **Constitutional reform:** Transformation of the administration of the OAC, pre-supposes constitutional reform. It is essentially about a realignment of the balance of powers between Head Office and the congregations, giving content to the architecture and conduct of OWN AFFAIRS and GENERAL AFFAIRS (congregations and Head Office). Full, direct representation for congregations in all formal administrative bodies of the Church, especially at national conference which should be the highest decision making institution. A two-track approach is envisioned: an interim constitution to bring congregations into the mainstream, followed by the official version crafted by a fully representative church body and adopted by an absolute majority of the congregations. A new constitution also entails the restructuring of Head Office, giving rise to the establishment of an array of departments to give optimal effect to a new administrative dispensation.
- **Cultural development:** Multiculturalism is undoubtedly one of the strongest attributes of the OAC church community. It is also the most underdeveloped, if not neglected, dimension of life in the church. This is an area where a habitually power-drunk corps of OAC officers should take a backseat and let ordinary members with special skills transform and enhance the multicultural prowess of the Church. There will be ample input for officers via the traditional role of the clergy as supervisors. Song, theatre, and social decorum should be the cornerstones of a cultural development programme. Cultural development, under the auspices of a relevant department at Head Office, should be elevated to a pocket of excellence, thereby providing the OAC with a powerful marketing tool for its outreach activities.

- **Training:** The dearth of adequately trained officers and other office-bearers has long been one of the major drawbacks as far as growth and development in the OAC are concerned. The mighty OAC of 2014 is a far cry from its humble beginnings in 1915. Although Head Office seems to be staffed by capable salaried personnel, it is at officer and institutional levels in congregations where adequate training is glaringly lacking. Church administration should be a course module made available and accessible to any person aspiring for office or other formal duties.

Low bible literacy levels are embarrassingly all too prevalent at practically all levels (officers included). Since the removal of religious instruction from the curriculum of the formal school system, OAC children have virtually become illiterate as far as the bible is concerned because our Sunday School (and households) apparently do not regard it as important. The poor quality and skills levels of most of the current Sunday School personnel also need to be acknowledged as a serious drawback. Frankly speaking, Sunday School in its current form is a non-starter as far as realizing the long term interests and development of the Church are concerned.

Desperately needed, is a scholarly OAC-wide Sunday School structure/network enhanced by an equally sophisticated curriculum to adequately address the requirements for optimum bible literacy, OAC protocol and etiquette; all in due preparation for the confirmation class phase of the development of children. Also, a relevant and creatively structured youth development programme that should serve as a finishing school for adulthood and service in the Church. Training opportunities for adults who are desirous of acquiring new life skills, or honing existing ones, would in no small measure complement efforts to improve life and standards in congregations. OAC members (and officers) should be able to hold their own in any religious company outside the Church. Only the best (top spot) should be good enough for them.

If we are serious about giving real content to the concept of “an Apostolic way of life”, an institutional commitment to training and personal development should go a long way to enhancing the image and apostolic mission of the Church. The required structures will have to be in place and allowed to succeed. In 2014, the OAC seem to have enough academically and otherwise skilled members to conduct and maintain the aforementioned training programmes. And if we do not have them, the OAC should follow the examples of biblical Kings David and Solomon and source them from surrounding nations. We only have ourselves to blame if the OAC is seen to be lagging behind other churches as far as capable leaders and adequate training programmes are concerned.

- **Social responsibility:** The OAC is patently missing in action when it comes to assuming the traditional role of the church regarding social care both within and outside of the Church. It is often derisively noted by outsiders how other churches often also have to extend their social welfare efforts to members (and officers) of the wealthy and perceived ‘self-centred’ OAC. The OAC’s reputation in this regard should, therefore, be cause for concern among those of us who have the public image of the Church at heart. Of course, top management would not know about it because they studiously avoid contact with the outside world (what about the injunction by Christ about interacting with all people?). A transformed church

administration should be more inclined to make the OAC a socially responsible public entity. It is no secret that OAC members in the economically depressed areas of the country often constitute a sizable majority of citizens comprising the long queues at public social welfare facilities. The OAC sadly lack the necessary welfare structures other churches have come to accept as a normal part of their institutional outfit. This is another structural flaw in the current administrative architecture of the OAC, which impacts negatively on its potential to grow. As a result, the OAC also lacks the knowhow and empathy that are required to operate a sustained successful service in this regard. The time is long overdue for the OAC and its leadership to get their hands dirty as far as caring for the disadvantaged among us is concerned. After all, our heavenly reward is predicated upon: “for what you have done unto the least among you, you have done unto me”, says the Lord. So, let us put our energy and our money where our mouths are.

- **In-house Tribunal for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration:** As alluded to elsewhere in this document, brisk law courtroom activity seems to have again become common place in the OAC these days. However, this should come as no surprise, especially in view of the policies and strategies by top management to make its current archaic administrative dispensation survive in a fast changing environment of democratic and accountable governance. In order to democratize this sector in the administration of the Church, as well as regulating the apparent splurge of hard-earned church funds on high-powered legal teams, the establishment of an in-house tribunal in the OAC is long overdue. It is a system that works well in almost all other churches the size of the OAC. The present system is not serving the best interests of the OAC. The proposed tribunal could be underpinned by a network of smaller structures that are evenly distributed and located around the country. The OAC seems well endowed with the necessary in-house professional expertise.

Consequences

A consequence of the continued exclusion of a people, or refusal by a leadership to change, is that it might lead to a classic repeat of what happened so many times before in the history of the human race and regimes: a totalitarian ruler who thinks he has his finger on the pulse of his people, but only to discover too late that he had been dead wrong about it and was also to be the last person to know that his people had already prepared the gallows or guillotine for himself.

The single most damning charge against the leadership is that whereas opposition forces normally have difficulty extracting straight answers from a ruling party, members/congregations in the OAC, in an age of democracy, are not even allowed to ask questions about their own administration, money and assets. An interesting parallel to this is the Sanhedrin of High Priest Caiaphas who went as far as having Jesus and his apostles persecuted for apparently opposing/ threatening their authority. What is different today in the OAC (who supposedly represents Jesus Christ) is that the apostles in 2014 seem to find themselves in the position of High Priest Caiaphas, defending at all costs (and regardless) that which is temporal.

Closer to the religious scene, would be a comparison with the circumstances that preceded the epic fall of biblical Jerusalem. However, should such lot befall the OAC, its members will not be driven

into exile but top management would find themselves without a job and the cushy remuneration package and perks they so readily cherished during the good times.

Challenges

And when a new constitutional/administrative dispensation dawns upon the OAC landscape, there are formidable challenges the Church (leadership and members/congregations) will have to address in order to bring the OAC into the developed world. Challenges calling for bold and visionary leadership that will recognize the need for and importance of serious open debate of a sophisticated nature:

- **The Role of the woman in the OAC:** Currently, a glass ceiling still prevents a woman from ascending the stage in the OAC. Decades ago, they could hold the office of Deaconess – a status that has since gone the way of the dinosaurs. Throughout the bible (which the OAC holds dear) women have occupied key positions in church. In the year 2014, women are prominent leaders in Christian churches. In this regard, the OAC is out of step with both history and modern day religious practice. It is no secret that many women in the OAC today are better suited for duty and a leadership role than many a small-minded man who zealously hogs the stage in the church. And if it has not occurred to the leadership as yet, this anomaly to a large extent probably accounts for the inability of the OAC to grow and develop to its full potential.
- **Public office:** Official policy in the OAC currently forbids/dissuades members not only to hold public office outside the Church, but also to be actively involved in the politics of the country. Again, the OAC is way off base in its approach to this issue. Ironically, it has proved to be impossible for them to implement and enforce it. While ‘non-white’ members were apparently ‘held’ to this rule, it is public knowledge that several ‘white’ members in high office in the OAC occupied top positions in formal public life during the apartheid era and beyond.

Incidentally, since 1994 the apostle doctrine for the first time since its inception on earth is administered in a politically free environment – an element the apostles need to factor into their perception of the gospel in our time. Starting with Joseph in Egypt, followed by the prophets Daniel, Nehemiah, Ezra and several others who served in the courts of foreign kingdoms, it was always strategically relevant for the flock of God to be plugged into the political order of their time for their own survival and the work of God. Not to mention the vital roles played by Esther and Mordecai in the interest of their people. God even enlisted the services of foreign kings to facilitate the reconstruction of Jerusalem. The (well-paid) OAC leadership of today fall far short in this regard. They are clearly not serving the best interests of the Church in this respect. The continued prohibition by the apostles of the OAC as far as members holding public office are concerned, seems more like a ruse to prevent shortcomings/wrongdoings in their own domain from becoming more apparent and consequently a breeding ground for potential protest activism in the OAC. Unfortunately for Head Office, this rule won’t and has never ever worked, because it is an anachronism. Unless reform takes place, members/congregations of the OAC will sooner rather than later

start protesting and marching (as in the case of the walls of Jericho) for a better tomorrow in their church.

- **Social responsibility:** It is highly unlikely that the OAC leadership of the future would be allowed to continue shirking its social responsibility within the church and society at large. The OAC is respected as a major financial powerhouse and one of the biggest barons of church property in the country. However, in this regard the approach by top management seems to resemble the attitude of the High Priest and the Levite in the parable about the Good Samaritan. We should practice what we preach.

The establishment of a structure akin to a Department of Social Welfare at Head Office, supported by a network of smaller entities at regional and congregational levels, is a development that ought to be occupying the minds and time of top management at this stage. Just think about the possibilities (and rewards for ourselves) of having the OAC formally represented at the national table where the social welfare of the general public is being deliberated and formulated to eventually becoming the law of the land? The current OAC leadership (like Pharaoh) will, therefore, have to “let my people go/grow”.

- **Difference of opinion:** Until now, the OAC leadership could side-step this issue because dissidents invariably ended up breaking away from the Church. Not anymore. Dissidents in 2014 love their church and are equally passionate about its future and wellbeing. They are prepared to stand up and fight back and are not going anywhere. Therefore, an OAC leadership that fail to recognize this reality are not serving the best interests of the Church. Some of the finest and well-heeled South Africans happen to be loyal members of the OAC. No prophetic acumen is required to reveal to members/congregations as to how this issue will manifest itself in the OAC of the future. Therefore, all the more reason why administrative reform should be embraced and implemented as soon as possible. Nothing can stand in the way of an idea whose time has come, the age-old adage constantly reminds us. Transformation in the OAC happens to be such an idea.

Radical change

Radical change in the OAC would be the day its leadership take the bold step by recognizing and then proceed to create a climate in the church to allow for the genesis of a culture of open discussion and debate, especially at grassroots level. Such a development would be the catalyst for the quantum leap the OAC has to make in order to get back on course as far as pursuing its apostolic mission in this modern age is concerned.

The antics by the apparent internet spin doctor of top management about radical change in the OAC, are needed like a hole in the head at this stage. It is counterproductive for the image of the Church. The credibility of the apostles - and consequently the Church – is at stake. “Deeds, not words”, as OAC officers religiously pontificate to all and sundry from altars around the planet, ought to be the marching order at this juncture.

Lessons

What are the lessons to be learnt from the response by top management to challenges regarding governance over the past five years?

- They still seem intolerant as ever to any sign or notion of dissent or freedom of expression. Removal from office still seems to be the control measure that is invoked to serve as a deterrent for serving officers who refuse to toe the official line.
- Averse to any suggestions/proposals from outside Head Office regarding administrative reform. And yet there is no credible input either from within to match external inputs
- The best interests of the Church are viewed only from the perspective of Head Office.
- Jealously, zealously and exclusively guarding the purse strings (or the keys to the vault) of the OAC, are still the apostles (top management). Bearing in mind that this becomes a near full time operation, how much time is left for the apostles to attend to their primary calling? Images of Jesus chastising the “traders” in the temple immediately come to mind in this regard. The apostles of the OAC, therefore, cannot be regarded as untouchable or off-limits to scrutiny by members/congregations. And because ‘their’ constitution deliberately deny congregations a meaningful say over the administration and finances of the Church, they render themselves fair game for reproach. Their hands are therefore not clean, and the holy office they occupy compromised.
- It should never be forgotten that the OAC is also a legal person, a multi-billion rand financial and real estate empire; a hard-nosed business entity where power, money and human fallibility predominate. So, it is willfully evil on the part of top management to expect members (and officers) to focus solely on the spiritual and to view/discard the money issues of the Church as being detrimental to their aspirations for soul salvation. This ruse is wearing thin because members/congregations are far more astute these days. They are far more socially conscious and politically aware than top management would expect.
- The FORUM is still instinctively regarded as the enemy, whose message is automatically ignored and rejected out of hand, regardless of the substance or importance thereof. However, the message is unstoppable and chances are that the FORUM could easily be surpassed or replaced by a more formidable and militant formation in the Church.

The enemy

And if the FORUM is still regarded as the enemy, or the devil incarnate, it is hoped that the following disclaimer would be helpful:

- Our fervour for change and reform stems from a deep and abiding love for the OAC. Unlike members of top management who prefer to cower in posh offices, grand residences, shiny cars and regal lifestyles at church expense, while ordinary members (especially down-trodden women) have to face the insults and inconveniences on a Monday and Thursday nights on their behalf. Living conditions are horrendous in many of the ‘non-white’ townships, and the personal safety of members is constantly at risk. And to add injury to insult, Head Office apparently indemnified itself against any claims regarding injury or serious losses sustained by members and officers while on church duty in those areas. However, these issues need to be discussed and routinely reviewed. An official policy and

structures that guarantee an open and free discourse at all levels in the OAC, is all The FORUM is asking for.

- In a global environment where democratic rule is increasingly being entrenched in church administrations, it has become almost impossible to get people interested in becoming members of the OAC where authoritarian rule is the order of the day. And even if they accept the spiritual dimension, it is invariably the questionable administrative side of the OAC that so often torpedoes the efforts of the Under-deacons. Members have an inalienable right to know, and say, how the administration of their church is being conducted.
- Top management is not winning the war, thereby rendering the Church the real loser. Statistics, especially at grassroots level, do not lie. Biblical Jerusalem did not fall when it was at its most vulnerable, and so might the OAC if top management continues with a perceived “ostrich” approach to challenges that should be regarded as developmental by nature. However, it cannot be denied that they (top management) know that The FORUM knows that they know that they do not know how to get out of this mess without losing face.
- The FORUM recognize and appreciate that change/reform/transformation is never a smooth and easy undertaking. It invariably becomes messy, leaving in its wake a fair share of casualties. However, top management currently has two key factors in its favour – relative peace and goodwill among members/congregations, as well as a favourable political climate in the country. The prophetic cue to the apostles therefore is: make hay while the sun shines.

The way forward

By all accounts, it is an incontrovertible fact that the administration of the mighty OAC is in need of urgent reform/transformation. While its Head Office still seems cozy as far as the finances and real estate portfolio are concerned, many of the congregations are inexorably sliding towards a state of dysfunctionality. Especially those (the OAC majority) in the townships around the country. As indicated so many times before, the required structures to sustain a congregation (own affairs) are not there – not even the simplest of formal committees to take care of the daily business. And because the administration of the OAC is an exclusively centralized one, run from a single office in a province under the authoritarian command of the apostles, it is in that direction that the accusing finger should be pointed.

The way forward for a successful and prosperous OAC points to a church comprising congregations with an ever increasing degree of autonomy, governed by a considerably scaled down and lean outfit/operation at its Head Office. A dramatic decrease in the number of officers across the board – a kind of Gideon’s army – would be a logical consequence of this transformation. Financially, the OAC would also benefit from the savings generated by the resultant smaller Head Office payroll and other overhead expenditure.

Therefore, after all is said and done, the apostles should be called to account and forcefully reminded that “they ought to know better”. While they may hold the sceptre as far as the spiritual is concerned, it is in the realm of the temporal where the system is rapidly decaying and

chances are that they might eventually suffer a fate similar to the last moments (on the battlefield) of the mighty King Saul of Israel.

Five long years

In light of the above stated position, September 2014 in the OAC marks the end of five years of wasted opportunities, time and money. Five long empty years that might come to haunt top management. And when they finally realize and accept that administrative reform (radical change) is unavoidable, their dilemma would be to acknowledge that there is no alternative but to submit to the FORUM's way of thinking.

W Johanneson

Secretary: The FORUM

Bellville

3 September 2014