

# Why kill the Messenger?

## Tackle the issues

**(A perspective on the absence of the much-needed dialogue within the Old Apostolic Church (OAC) regarding the reform and transformation of its administration and the impact of an interest group such as The FORUM as a catalyst for change)**

“Taking out” the bearer of what you perceive to be bad news, will not make the news better or go away. In addition to rendering yourself more vulnerable, you may also have a corpse to dispose of. The corpse of the messenger, who most of the time turns out to be a friend you never knew.

This timeless scenario appears to be the backdrop against which initiatives are currently being designed and perpetrated to silence (neutralize), if not eliminate, The FORUM. Equally timeless, are the repeated mistakes that have similarly been made in this regard since the dawn of time by some of the greatest leaders that have ever traversed this planet. And even if the messenger perishes, the message will endure long enough to witness the receiver capitulating in ignominy. OAC members should therefore guard against being sidetracked by an undue focus on The FORUM itself. A public review of The FORUM could be beneficial for its own ideals and strategies. However, the real debate that has to take place and the kind of dialogue The FORUM is campaigning for is a meaningful ongoing discussion among OAC members about themselves and the administration of their beloved Church. Congregations need to be in charge of own affairs, as well as having a meaningful say in the administration of general affairs (Head Office and the church at large). So, say *no* to oppression and *take* back your church. This is a war our detractors cannot win, and they know it.

The message of The FORUM is primarily about the future. About growth and development. About the urgency to address issues that are crucial for the future well-being of the Old Apostolic Church. It is about giving hope for a better tomorrow to an increasing number of members (and officers) who are beginning to despair about their current voiceless and voteless status in their own Church. It is about the obligation upon the present leadership to bequeath to the next generation of Old Apostolics a church that is fundamentally sound of both body and mind.

### **Still standing**

After the last gun will have fallen silent and the smoke cleared in the current crusade against The FORUM, members (and officers) of the OAC will come to realise and accept that the issues raised by The FORUM will still be glaring at them. The FORUM is not the problem. The problem stems from an apparent unwillingness by the powers that be to recognize and address the issues they are confronted with. The FORUM is an indestructible organism, because it is only an idea that is shared by a growing body of self-respecting concerned individuals who are staunch OAC members with no intention of leaving their beloved church. An idea whose time has come. And history will attest to the fact that nothing can stand in the way of an idea whose time has come. The FORUM in its present form is a peaceful instrument, whose role could very easily be supplanted by a militant one or other extremist formations. FORUM members are only exercising their inalienable God-given

right to ask the kind of questions they do and to express the kind of views they have about the way they are governed by fellow human beings. Therefore, they wear as a badge of honour the title of “rebellious troublemakers” assigned to them by their detractors, because history has often proven that today’s rebellious troublemakers invariably become the hallowed leaders of tomorrow. Jesus and his apostles were also branded as rebellious troublemakers; not that FORUM members are aspiring to leadership positions. In fact, they are far more influential in their present roles. The uncomfortable reality the leadership of the OAC has to get use to is that “disgruntled” members will in future not leave the Church, but stay put to redress the situation by whatever means required.

### **Losing the initiative**

Members of The FORUM are driven by an abiding deep-seated concern about justice and fairness in the current system, as well as the need for the re-positioning of the administration of the Church to ensure sustainability and the attainment of the required levels of growth and development that will enable the OAC to live up to its potential as far as its apostolic mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is concerned. It is about the empowerment of members/congregations, as well as leadership acumen at the strategic level. Its detractors, on the other hand, seem to be mired in an all-out attempt to preserve the status quo which at best is antiquated and therefore not sustainable. Precious energy and time seem to be devoted to initiatives to obliterate the messenger (The FORUM), instead of tackling the issues that constitute the source of the “bad news”. The FORUM not only protests, but also offer solutions and thereby effectively take away from its detractors the initiative to define and lead the process for change. Therefore, having missed this golden opportunity, its detractors will henceforth always be seen to play catching up to The FORUM in the ideas and leadership departments.

### **Status quo**

The status quo to a large extent denotes stagnation, as well as a constant repetition of strategic leadership blunders that have been exacted upon the Church since its inception. The leadership of the OAC seems to pride itself on the fact that its members/congregations in the year 2011 still have no meaningful say in the running of their own affairs, let alone the Church in general. Difference of opinion is treated with disdain and there is no due process to ensure recourse for the victims of arbitrary action taken against them by the leadership. It looks like another Titanic locked in on a collision course with an iceberg. The FORUM’s call for transformation is primarily about introspection and creative contemplation about the future by the entire Church – congregations and Head Office together as equal partners. The real enemies of the OAC are the detractors of The FORUM who, in shortsighted fashion, seem hell-bent on protecting by all means their hitherto brittle comfort zones. A constant worry for concerned OAC members is the niggling fear that the leadership is out of touch with the devastating impact of its current ruthless top-down management approach on the body of the Church, especially in lesser developed communities. Also, the apparent failure to understand that the OAC cannot be immune to the gravitational pull of the societal changes taking place in the world in which the Church has to operate. The hymnal from which members of The FORUM are singing generally cause people to stop, listen and draw hope and inspiration from it; while the jittery defence of the status quo by its detractors only appeal to the worst fears and fatalistic disposition of a people bereft of the space and instruments to cherish their hopes and dreams of a better tomorrow.

### **Image problem**

The OAC (especially) in the Western Cape have a profound public image problem. Its executive appears to be unable to provide the Church and its members with a credible response. And yet, the solution is a very simple and inexpensive one – just turn off the oxygen supply of The FORUM. All that is required is the necessary degree of empathy, intellectual capacity and emotional maturity to address the issues that constitute the oxygen supply of The FORUM. It is a sad day for the OAC in the Region to witness how its executives seem to have abdicated from their responsibility to protect and promote the public image of the Church, leaving it to zealous third parties (outsiders) to define the identity, administration and well-being of the OAC. And to think that the relevant executives are paid royally to do just that? It may be perceived as a reckless approach to duty and security of the Church. If there is no improvement, how much longer can the Church afford their incumbency and at how many millions more of hard-earned public (trust) funds?

The inherent danger of allowing third parties, such as the relevant blog site, to stridently campaign (apparently) on behalf of the leadership, is that the OAC irretrievably loses the initiative to manage and contain the negative fall-out. And it is going to be almost impossible for the leadership to distance itself from the scope and content of the campaign material and modus operandi of these doubtful characters. The likes of them almost always introduce a new set of problems for the perceived benefactor/beneficiaries of their predatory expeditions. Bearing in mind its fundamental evangelical mission, a Church such as the OAC cannot afford to be seen to be (apparently) associating itself with the antics of what appear to be swashbuckling hired guns and senseless street fighters, social lepers who are usually shunned by sophisticated company. The OAC cannot hope to exit the fray as a winner because the campaign can only serve to heighten public scrutiny of all the documents The FORUM has put out so far. And that is exactly the purpose of those papers; to get as many people as possible to sit up, take note and let their minds roam. Free publicity/reflected glory for The FORUM. Possible instant gratification/sweet revenge for certain individuals at Head Office it might well be for now, but wry long term consequences for the Church in the Western Cape. This is a serious error of judgment. In the propaganda industry, this will be tantamount to handing your megaphone to the opposition. The OAC deserves better management as far as its public relations portfolio is concerned. With apparent friends such as the relevant blog writer, Head Office should rather guard against the unintended detonation of limpet mines stashed in its own precinct. The FORUM is not the enemy. It is merely a messenger whose head is probably wanted on a platter for the daughter of King Herod. The Zealots were a major part of the problem for the Sanhedrin during the persecution of Jesus and his followers way back then, and zealots could very well be responsible today for the downfall of executives in the OAC if they are not astute enough to heed the warning signs.

### **Turnaround strategy**

A turnaround strategy is required. Unless the rot is quarantined, the situation will continue to fester and eventually spin out of control. Until the relevant issues are being looked at, it will not go away; and neither will The FORUM cease to ventilate them. No, the relevant FORUM members are not disgruntled for having been removed from office. They are, inter alia, displeased about the absence of the instrument of due process in a system that still prevents scores of currently serving officers from exercising the right of self-expression and mobility as leaders of their respective

constituencies. And if the relevant FORUM members are disgruntled, then it is about the fact that they did not establish The FORUM much earlier to take on what still seems to most OAC members (and officers) these days as the unassailable, impenetrable and insurmountable bulwark that shields the apostolate and Head Office from the legitimate aspirations of the members (and officers) to have a meaningful say in the administration of their own Church.

### **Starting point**

The obvious starting point to look for a solution has to be the Office of the Regional Secretary, the incumbent of which is paid to do exactly that. From a strategic perspective, the focus should shift to the incumbent in the position of Apostle: Administration. These two executives should also be held accountable for the dismal performance of the Regional Head Office thus far regarding the image problems of the Church. However, closer scrutiny of this malaise will reveal that they themselves could be regarded as the victims of a constitutional dispensation that outlived its usefulness and has now become the proverbial Frankenstein monster that is turning on its masters. Hence, the indefatigable clarion call by The FORUM that the current system of administration of the OAC is not sustainable and therefore not in the best interest of the Church. Also, that constitutional reform is a prerequisite for a turnaround strategy.

Now, where do we start? First, let us stop the name-calling. Then, acquire the necessary skills to coalesce in relaxed conference mode (at all levels) to develop a culture for robust and constructive dialogue about the issues that are important for the preservation of what we believe “An Apostolic Way of Life” should entail. Looking back to the earliest days of the OAC, it should be admitted that Old Apostolics have never had an opportunity to develop to their full potential. In light of the particular gifts and talents that we profess to have been endowed with, we (as a group) are supposed to reach the highest levels possible to the human race. Which means that if we can get our act together, the best in life on this earth is yet to come for us. Just as the Israelites when they first set eyes on the promised land after a tumultuous forty years in the desert where they, in a sense, experienced all of what OAC members (and officers) have encountered since 1927.

### **Break the silence**

What does The FORUM want? Very simple: break the silence and let us start deliberating in a meaningful way about improving the manner in which we run the administration of the Church at the various levels. Develop a democratic culture in order to replace the current debilitating autocratic mindset Old Apostolics are still subjected to. The introduction of systems and programmes aimed at improving the skills levels necessary to facilitate the proposed change to a new era in the history of the Church. It would be disastrous though if the process were to be driven by the apostles alone, as the OAC has become used to over time. It has to be a broad-based movement that draws on the best available professional skills in the OAC, women included. The demand of our time/situation and the well-being of the OAC is for cool heads, common sense and commitment, but decidedly not foolhardiness and myopia. And when the first concrete signs of these developments become discernible, The FORUM will recede faster than the morning mist in the face of the rising sun.

### **Salient issues:**

- **Image:** Image is everything to the OAC. For a Church that persistently knocks on doors on Monday and Thursday evenings to bring the good news to the world, a particular brand of leadership is required to ensure sustainability in this regard. A festering image problem seems to be the Achilles heel of the Western Cape Region. Therefore, a commensurate degree of expertise and responsible management in this regard should be seen to be demonstrated by the relevant executives at Head Office. We cannot afford to be associated with bounty hunters who also seem to revel in taking side bets on the issue.
- **Constitutional reform** that will give congregations/members a meaningful say (participation) in the governance of their Church. Access at all levels that will eventually provide the checks and balances required to ensure transparent and accountable administration. OAC members (and officers) should be introduced to the culture of regional, national and international conferences because of the federal nature of the structure of the Church.
- Organs and instruments to deal effectively with the all-important cornerstone of a democratic dispensation, **conflict resolution**. Due process should be a fundamental principle, and be kept inviolable. The customary hiring and firing of officers in the Church is in many instances nothing more than the unbridled abuse of power and authority. Falling from grace is a traumatic experience, not only for the incumbent but also his family and quite often the congregation. The OAC has yet to put in place credible programmes to deal in-house with the realm of social ills in the Church. Old Apostolics and their leaders constantly talk about love, grace and mercy, but through their actions often demonstrate that they have yet to understand and internalize the concept of empathy (one of the fundamentals of the gospel of Christ).
- The development, introduction and coordination of customized systems, structures and processes aimed at all-round **growth and development** in the Church. The proverbial chain (also the OAC) is only as strong as its weakest link. Planning for the future should have the years 2021/31 as short to medium term target dates. And whatever the OAC has in mind for those dates, the required discussions and planning must start now. Inclusivity and transparency should be cardinal elements of the process.
- Restructuring and the optimum development and administration of the **Welfare** Structure and related programmes of the Church.

### **Not overnight**

The FORUM is mindful of the fact that all these ideals cannot be achieved overnight. Nor perhaps in our lifetime, but at least let us begin. There is no better time than the present. A new approach to management in the Region is required. The OAC belongs to all its members (The FORUM included) and they should therefore, especially in the lesser developed communities, be allowed to grow and acquire the necessary skills to take charge of Own Affairs (congregational), as in the case of almost all other churches whose leadership are serious about sustainability and moral rectitude as far as administration is concerned. But if we procrastinate and vacillate, chances are that we may be overtaken by events and end up with a different result. A result the Israelites of Old Testament times often had to reconcile themselves with under trying conditions for lengthy periods of time.

**Politics**

Albeit frustrating most of the time to hear from The FORUM, do not blame the messenger!! While the apostles, in an age of democracy and human rights, still prefer to be the exclusive administrators of the temporal side of the OAC, the simple message (expectation) from the people is: do the right thing. Tackle the issues. Politics, the “thing” The FORUM is being accused of, is essentially about the livelihood and well-being of a people and their institutions, including their beloved OAC. So, as long as the Apostolate chooses to persist with the current questionable system of governance, it is to be expected that party politics and political ideology will always find their way into any topic under discussion, even as menial as the regular cleaning of church halls and defective water taps. The real challenge the leaders of the OAC must face up to is the fact that the chickens of an archaic system of governance should be coming home to roost any day now. The FORUM believes that we can already hear them crowing and cackling. And that is the simple message its members are trying to convey to the VVIP’s (Very Very Important Persons) in the OAC.

Why kill the messenger? Church leaders (especially) are expected to be conversant with this appeal because they ought to know better. And just because the messenger always comes from the source of the “bad news”, he/she might just be in a position to provide an element that could be pivotal to the receiver’s decision to adopt a suitable adaptive response.

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