Reconstructing a civic moral fibre: 
toward an ideology of national integrity

by

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1. In spite of the advent of democracy and the partial experience of justice South Africa remains deeply divided and morally disintegrated. The nation’s ethical soul is increasingly being characterised as corrupt while its transformation agenda stutters along a hazardous path. What socio-economic factors prevail that prohibit the realisation of national reconciliation and to what extent is the reality of corruption pervasive? Why has the moral order collapsed and to which specific factors must we point as causal? In answering these questions an overview should emerge of the moral state of the nation.

2. The apartheid system has traditionally been viewed as racial domination exercised by a minority group with strong class interests. This has tended to obscure the hidden truth of apartheid as a form of state corruption or moral malpractice involving the extortion of money and the abuse of public trust. How has this legacy infiltrated the "habits of the heart" to the extent that misdemeanours remain a hallmark of public conduct. How have institutions attempted to channel their moral outrage against systemic injustice in the past and what were their strengths and weaknesses? Particular mention should be made about the historical role of the church.

3. To address the current malaise certain measures are being adopted in the short term by government, business and the church. These will be identified in terms of their possible impact and future promise. In the medium to long term one should expect an elaborate strategy comprising many elements of a new moral creed. The South African Constitution may provide the basis for such a creed with particular reference to its premoral Bill of Rights. How is moral failure linked to the national identity crisis and how should a new national integrity ideology take root among people of the "rainbow" seeking to reinvent themselves? The relatively strong support for the death penalty and abolition of abortion rights must be critically examined in this context.

4. Is the moral crisis we face directly linked to the rise of the autonomous self and the decline of the communitarian spirit? Extreme individualism is heavily loaded with justifiable claims of entitlement at the expense of the larger public good. In search of genuine community where human dignity is respected, possession, control, and the use of all forms of property "should be evaluated by their contribution to the formulation, maintenance, and quality of character of an open society". To forge the new identity indicated above requires that fundamental choices be made about moral values and ethical priorities to "direct" public conduct. The concept of ubuntu can serve as a middle axiom for clarificatory guidance in adumbrating the communatarian vision of society. Does ubuntu have the capacity to embrace all citizens and how is its possible impact to be assessed? It should clearly though not be a substitute for an interim ideology strategically chosen to advance a political blueprint.

5. Why ideology? The traditional pejorative connotations attached to ideology must be set aside in favour of appreciating its functional powers and pervasive influence. The ostensibly "absolute" faith of religion must be balanced by the vital ingredients of a new "political" framework whose outlook is morally invigorating for the public. How does an ideology of national integrity serve the common good and what are its cultural features? The scope of such an ideology should not, however, detract
from its limits and inherent dangers. The point must be stressed that some form of common culture around a concrete political programme must evolve for people to come together in search of realising a common shared vision of society.

6. Works of reconstruction assume that the surgery offered is not cosmetic but enduring. A new integrity framework for a nation requires a dynamic system of checks and balances to monitor its effectiveness. The role of every sector in society must be clearly identified in terms of national mandates and a performance index must regularly be issued to keep public perceptions in line with reality. Ultimately a national integrity system will only succeed in the midst of commitment rewarded by incentive and personal interest balanced by public good.

7. In the course of the discourse about moral challenges as described above it will be necessary to make particular mention of some of the following:

(a) The road to Rustenburg II / Prophetic Silence

(b) Business against Crime / Business and Bribery

(c) Code of Ethics for the Labour Movements

(d) Government’s response to corruption, e.g. Health Commission, Moral Summit

(e) Empowering the Poor against the odds / illiteracy

(f) Religious Pluralism / Interfaith Dialogue

(g) Efficiency and Effectiveness in Public Service

(h) Moral Leadership for Social Transformation

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