

# Reimagining How Urban Theology can be used as a Theological Tool that Links Faith and Justice in South Africa

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## Abstract

The commercialisation of religion and abuse of people's belief systems, addressed by the *Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities* (CRL Rights Commission), prompted the author to write this article. The author explored how the South African church and government can work together in safeguarding the abuse of people's belief systems. A common theological guideline regulating all churches in South Africa regarding their basic training that qualifies them as church leaders to practice was suggested. Urban theology was reimagined as a theological tool that could link all the churches collaboratively to safeguard the abuse of people's belief systems. This article sturdily proposed that the South African government and church need to form a significant collaboration in uprooting abuse of the congregants in their church fellowship.

**Keywords** Freedom of Religion South Africa; South African Council of Churches; Urban Theology

## 1. Introduction

The central focus of this article is to investigate how urban theology can be used as a theological tool that links the churches' praxis in South Africa with the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission). The document, *Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems: CRL Rights Commission*, dated 27 June 2017, has exposed theological and legislative gaps that need to be investigated and covered in an effort to protect the church congregants in their religious praxis. This article, therefore, innovatively strives to find sound and practical ways in which the dignity of a human being is protected from pastoral/spiritual abuse.

Religious denominations have different doctrines, and this article does not attempt to convince any denomination to be in union with any other. However, it dwells on the premise that a human being, irrespective of denomination, is created in the image of God; hence their dignity is to be protected in religious worship. The

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article argues that South African churches must have a common and precise theological guideline that safeguards Christians from being abused pastorally by their church leaders. It further debates that the CRL Rights Commission could also take part in the composition of such a common guideline by the churches and complement it from the legislative point of view.

Urban theology can be used as a theological tool that links South African churches and the CRL Rights Commission in composing the proposed guideline in discussion. In addition to urban theology, the circle of praxis is proposed as a methodology for composing the common church guideline. The Circle of praxis is borrowed from Holland and Henriot (1980:31); the praxis in discussion links faith and justice; it is a systemic approach used in this article to reflect on the human predicament regarding faith and justice. The proposed methodology is significant to this article because it is a framework that creates a sustainable and human solution in response to the communities. The article uses the circle of praxis to find a solution which prevents church congregants from being pastorally/spiritually abused by their church leaders.

The article presents the CRL's recommendations to the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and then shares some reactions of the Freedom of Religion South Africa (FORSA) to these recommendations. Based on the recommendations of the CRL to the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and some of FORSA's reactions, the article notes a tension between the two and firmly believes that this tension needs to be resolved to protect the congregants from being abused pastorally. Furthermore, it is argued that there seem to be severe legislative loopholes in the CRL Rights Commission and theological gaps in South African churches. These legislative and theological loopholes seem to create some opportunities which some church leaders exploit to abuse Christians in the name of the church. Therefore, there is an urgent need to identify and cover these legislation loopholes and theological gaps.

## **2. Background to the research**

The author argues that there is an indispensable relationship between God and the people He created in His image. This indispensable relationship intrinsically urges people to seek God and develop an intimate relationship with Him. Unfortunately, this central relationship seems to be severely destroyed by some church leaders who deceive their congregants by means of claiming to raise people from the dead. These are the church leaders who claim to raise the deceased. They also abuse their congregants by making them drink petrol and eat grass for spiritual healing. According to Carter (2019:1), scandals involving the abuse of church leaders over their congregants are increasing. Pastors hold an authoritarian rule over their

congregants, and their leadership style is rooted in a hunger for power, control and self-fulfilment, which is wrongly defended on biblical grounds. Carter is ricocheted by the *Sowetan-Live* (2017:11-41), which reports the following six incidents of abuse by pastors:

In 2014, Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Centre inculcated dozens of his congregants to eat grass during church praxis in Garankuwa, North of Pretoria. The pastor told the congregants that eating grass would bring them closer to God. According to Pastor Lesego, eating grass was part of a ritual to demonstrate that the spirit of God can control human beings.

In 2015, the End Times Disciples Ministries congregants in Soshanguve were made to eat snakes by Prophet Penuel Mnguni. Mnguni claimed that he turned rocks into bread and snakes into chocolates.

In November 2016, Pastor Rabalago of the Mount Zion General Assembly sprayed his congregants with Doom Super Multi-Insect Killer.

In January 2017, Prophet Bongani Maseko of Daveyton's Breath of Christ Ministries made his congregants drink a dubious fluid.

In February 2017, a congregant was fed water mixed with RatX poison by Pastor Light Monyeki of the Grace Living Hope Ministries.

In April 2019, a South African Prophet, Pastor Alph Lukau of the Alleluia Ministries International, claimed to have raised a dead man named Vandermillen Brighton Moyo. Seemingly, Moyo died for the second time, and there was no miracle performed.

Considering these instances, there seems to be a lack of theological and governmental legislative guidelines that regulate the operation of South African churches. According to these cases, it appears that anyone at any time is free to start a church without following basic regulations, such as church registration and theological training—the lack of such basic regulations results in possible pastoral/spiritual abuse. The author asserts that the instances in discussion suggest that there ought to be a commission of theologians from South African churches who come together, debate theologically, and come up with a sound theological stand which will protect every Christian of all denominations from being pastorally/spiritually abused.

The fundamental questions posed in this article in regard to the extraordinary questions in discussion are:

- From the theological point of view, where is the human dignity of a congregant who is made to eat grass during church praxis?
- From the legislative point of view, at what point/degree does the government intervene to protect the dignity of a congregant/congregants from being abused spiritually by the church praxis?
- From the laity point of view, how critical are the congregants to their faith and the pastors who feed them with snakes and petrol, and spray them with Doom?

- Considering that church congregants are spiritual beings who belong to both their churches and the State, how can the South African churches collaborate with the South African government to protect the congregants from being abused spiritually during church praxis?

The above questions are rhetorical and are posed to make congregants critique their faith and church praxis.

The author applauds the South African government, which did not turn a blind eye to the strange and shocking incidents reported by the Sowetan-Live; it set a commission known as the *Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems: CRL Rights Commission*. The CRL Rights Commission investigated these incidents, compiled a preliminary report presented to the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance, and made some recommendations. Unfortunately, some contents of the CRL Rights Commission's preliminary report did not sit well with FORSA, as seen in the following conversation between the two (CRL Rights Commission and FORSA):

### 2.1 Freedom of Religion South Africa

"Please pray for a key meeting that is taking place this morning at the CRL Rights Commission at 11am. They have produced a report recommending the State regulates religion. There is a huge groundswell of objection to this proposal from across the denominational and faith communities of South Africa, as it is a blatant and unacceptable erosion of our constitutional right to freedom of religion. Please pray that their eyes and ears would be opened and that they would listen to the alternative solutions that will resolve the issues and problems they have identified. Please pray that the Body of Christ in South Africa would fully awaken and stand against this assignment of the enemy to silence our witness and our freedom to believe, teach, preach and live out our faith in Jesus. While the CRL claims that they are not proposing State regulation, it is our sincere belief that the CRL recommendation will do just that. For a State empowered peer review council to decide what is acceptable within any religion is a gross interference in religious freedom and we must resist it" (Carrim, 2017).

### 2.2 Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities

"It is important to note that the proposed report currently has no reference or intention to limit constitutional freedom of religion and the Gospel of Jesus Christ spreading in South Africa, as mentioned in the messages. There is no intention to regulate religious freedom in South Africa, nor are there any proposals that anybody would be sentenced to prison for 'reading or quoting certain passages from the Bible'" (Mdakane, 2017)

### **3. Critiquing the nature of the conversation between FORSA and the CRL Rights Commission Freedom of Religion South Africa**

The article highlights that FORSA and the CRL Rights Commission are essential in resolving congregants' spiritual abuse during church praxes. It is important to note that whilst FORSA and the CRL Rights Commission are different boards, they have a common role in safeguarding church congregants from spiritual abuse by their church leaders. On the one hand, whilst FORSA is concerned about the State legislation and emphasises freedom of religion, it should not focus on protecting the human dignity of the spiritually abused congregants. On the other hand, the CRL may not necessarily separate itself from the church because the church, when well conducted, promotes the dignity of a human being. The article argues that a human being is created in the image of God, the head of the church, and the State. The church and the State have the moral duty of protecting church congregants from being abused spiritually; hence the two should collaborate in this regard.

Whilst this article applauds the relationship which already exists between FORSA and the CRL Rights Commission, it recommends that there ought to be an ongoing healthy debate between them in which they harmoniously reflect together on the importance of the congregants' human dignity both in the church and the State. The author debates that neither the church nor the State is above the importance of the human dignity of the church congregants; the two of them have an ethical duty to ponder practical ways and legislations that protect the human dignity of the church congregants. Additionally, the church and the State need to develop healthy working relationships to build a better South Africa, limiting the abuse of church congregants by their churches.

In regard to the interaction of FORSA and the CRL Rights Commission currently critiqued, the final report of the CRL Rights Commission was eventually presented to various departments, such as the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), the Department of Social Development (DSD), the South African Revenue Service (SARS), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and the South African Police Service (SAPS). The findings of the report are as follows:

There was an official enquiry by the CRL Rights Commission into religious practices in South Africa in response to unbiblical practices in 2015 when pastors from independent churches encouraged believers to drink petrol, eat grass and even snakes (various individuals were harmed as a result of these practices). The CRL Rights Commission also launched an official inquiry into the use of religious practices that solicit money from members in return for blessings and miracles. The CRL Rights Commission further investigated the legal framework of religious institutions in South Africa as a result of tax evasion and other illegal financial practices.

The main reason for the outcry against the proposed regulation of religion in South Africa (as per the proposal from the CRL Rights Commission) is the proposal that religious organisations and their leaders (clergy) must be registered with a 'Peer Review Council' and obtain a licence before they are allowed to practice and teach their religious beliefs.

The proposed legal framework reads:

"There must be a Peer Review Council, which will consist of peers from each religion that will give permission to operate to individual religious leaders. No licence may be withheld on the grounds of doctrine unless such doctrine is deemed potentially harmful, physically and mentally, to those who practise it, or if such doctrine is not found in the tenets of the religion and which bring the religion into disrepute" (Mdakane, 2017). 2).

The CRL Rights Commission presented its report to the Portfolio Committee on Co-operative Governance, and made recommendations to various departments, such as DHA, DSD, SARS, DTI, and SAPS.

#### **4. The CRL Rights Commission's recommendation to the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance**

In order to allow the flow of the discussion, the article first presents the recommendations of the CRL to the Portfolio on Cooperative Governance and then critiques these recommendations.

##### **Recommendation 1**

CRL Recommendation to DHA

The CRL recommends that the DHA is to ensure that foreign religious leaders should make applications for a work permit based on a quota system practised in other professions. The Commission further recommends that foreign religious leaders have a letter of recommendation from the CRL. The CRL further proposes that foreign religious leaders who apply to become marriage officers should have a letter of recommendation from the Commission.

##### **Recommendation 2**

CRL Recommendation to DSD

The recommendation to the DSD was that the registration of religious institutions (places of worship) should be carried out by the Commission to ensure that all relevant laws, such as municipal bylaws, were adhered to.

### **Recommendation 3**

#### CRL Recommendation to DTI

The CRL recommends to the DTI that its relevant entities and structures ensure that severe action is taken against those persons and institutions involved in advertising substances that do not adhere to advertising standards. Misleading advertisements, testimonies, and ‘miracles’ in print, broadcast, social media and online presence should be halted. The Commission also recommended that the registration of religious institutions should be moved from the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) to the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities Rights Commission (CRLRC).

### **Recommendation 4**

#### CRL Recommendation to SARS

The Commission recommends that SARS partner with the CRL to conduct an in-depth investigation into tax evasion by some religious leaders and religious institutions. The Commission further recommends that SAPS enforce the law when complaints are lodged about religious practitioners because it has found that there is a reluctance to act when there are complaints against church leaders simply because they are church leaders.

Of the four outlined recommendations, only the two considered more relevant to the article are critiqued. These are recommendations 1 and 2.

#### **4.1 Critiquing recommendations 1 and 2**

### **Recommendation 1**

#### CRL Recommendation to DHA

Whilst the article applauds the CRL for coming up with a report with recommendations, it discusses that not all the recommendations may need to be implemented at once. Some of the recommendations need time to be scrutinised. Implementing the recommendations without a profound examination of the core of the matter may cause more harm than good. The first recommendation, for example, seems too shallow. The abuse of congregants spiritually is a severe human matter which may not be removed by mere regulation of foreigners’ permits to a quota system practised in other professions. Uniformalising the system does not necessarily solve the gravity of the problem under discussion.

One has to identify the root cause of some pastors abusing their congregants. In as much as it is true that some pastors abuse their congregants for personal gain, one must also be objective that there are also church leaders of goodwill who strive to lead their congregants genuinely. Therefore, there should be a clear way of iden-

tifying the abusers without protecting them so that they are liable for their actions and face the law when a clear investigation is undergone, and they are found guilty.

## **Recommendation 2**

### **CRL Recommendation to DSD**

The CRL's recommendation requires that the places of worship by religious institutes be registered, and that municipality bylaws are in order. Accordingly, this recommendation is fundamental even though it's not new because the current law (Marriage Act 25 of 1961) requires precisely that. The recommendation could be reinforcing the current law to ensure it is followed accordingly. According to this article, registering a religious institute before registering the place of worship is essential. One has to note that the danger of not registering places of worship based on infrastructure is less dangerous than not registering religious institutes because this leads to a higher risk of spiritual abuse of congregants.

The author debates that registering a religious institute requires professionalism in its leadership. The more church leaders are well-trained professionally, the more they become knowledgeable of their church doctrines and respect the dignity of their congregants, thereby minimising spiritual abuses in the church.

## **5. Professionalism: The importance of training church leaders/preachers/pastors**

Professionalism in the context of this article refers to training church leaders. Accordingly, anyone who aspires to be a church leader or feels called to be one must undergo educational training. Adequate theological knowledge is a tool that broadens the mind of the one who aspires to be a church leader. Furthermore, it increases one's theological worldview through the study of theology in which one is trained to understand the formation of the Bible, which includes the following questions:

- Is God the author of the Bible?
- Did God get a pen and paper to write the Bible?
- If God did not get a pen and paper to write the Bible, then who wrote it?
- What inspired the ones who wrote the Gospels?
- In which context was the Bible written?
- What message did the ones who wrote the Gospels want to communicate to their addressees?

In order for one to be a church leader, to read and be able to interpret the Gospel adequately, one needs to have a fairly sound knowledge of the above questions; otherwise, as a church leader, one may easily read and interpret the Bible literally, which could be dangerous to oneself as a church leader and the congregants. The importance of an adequate interpretation of the Bible is also noted by Pastor



Hayford (1999:5), who stresses, “Our preoccupation is with the outburst of the prophetic content of the message as opposed to the detailed structures within that analysis of the Word.”

Professionalism/priestly training reduces the challenge of abusing people’s faith belief systems. Faith praxis without adequate scientific training or training of the church leaders is dangerous and misleading. Training of church leaders empowers them to practise their faith professionally and critically. The author posits that a sound theological mind respects human dignity and protects congregants from spiritual abuses.

The author further converses that professionalism is not meant to be a mere certificate that one acquires as a requirement of being a church leader or registering a church institute; it is a means which ought to transform one’s life spiritually, socially, psychologically, and emotionally. It is, therefore, argued that one’s spiritual, social psychological, and emotional intelligence is to be transformed through the training of church leaders. However, this does not necessarily mean that when professionally trained as a church leader, one cannot be a possible spiritual/pastoral abuser. Being professional does not exclude one from being a spiritual/pastoral abuser, but reduces it by widening one’s pastoral/spiritual view. The more one’s spiritual/pastoral worldview develops and gets integrated as a church leader, the more one becomes a caring and well-balanced church leader who could hardly abuse congregants pastorally. It is as well argued that basic theological training also provides one as a church leader with a sound ethical pastoral understanding in the ministry, as highlighted by Gula (1996:1), who debates that:

From the theological point of view, a moral ministry must be closely related to experiences of God and convictions about God. God is the ultimate of value, the fixed centre of value, and the source and goal of all moral striving. An ethical, moral ministry articulated by Gula is an essential value that church leaders need in their pastoral ministries. Such a value safeguards the congregants from being spiritually/pastorally abused by their church leaders.

When church leaders, through training, become more transformed and integrated morally, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and psychologically, they can form a solid collaborative system which closes the gaps in which some church leaders abuse their congregants. To be integrated morally, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and psychologically refers to the well-being and maturity of one as a church leader in one’s moral, emotional, spiritual, social, and psychological life. A lack of integration in any of these areas in the church leader may result in abuse. Sperry (2003:82) posits that several types of abuse can be described as physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and spiritual.

Sperry (2003:82) identifies several types of abuse, thus, suggesting that church leadership requires more than professionalism. Church leadership is more of a

vocation than a profession. Both profession and leadership, however, need to be integrated and become a tool which helps a church leader to respect the human dignity of the church congregants and spare them from spiritual abuse. John Paul II (1994:11) defines vocation as “The expression of a redemptive love which embraces the whole person soul and body, whether man or woman.” In the milieu of this article, the Godly calling defined by John Paul II implies a church leader who is called in God’s love, and in response to that love, the one called by God fully dedicates themselves to serving God’s people. The Godly calling in discussion is also echoed by Leahy and Mulvey (2010:9), who affirm that the core of Christian faith is in the Christian image of God and the resulting image of humankind’s destiny. These profound words of Leahy and Mulvey clearly express the importance of a human being created in God’s image. God calls one as a church leader to dedicate themselves to saving God’s people with dignity and without abusing them spiritually.

Cozzens (2000:14) also highlights the effort the church leaders strive for, as he stresses that the vast majority of people called by God as church leaders prize their loyalty to the Gospel and the congregants they are called to serve. Based on the zeal some church leaders portray to serve God’s people, a distinction should be made between church leaders who intentionally abuse congregants spiritually and those who strive to grow spiritually with their congregants, even though they may abuse them due to a lack of theological training. It may, therefore, not be generalised that all the church leaders abuse their congregants spiritually/pastorally. At the same time, it may also not be generalised or taken for granted that church leaders are men/women of the cloth and, therefore, don’t abuse congregants. However, as a church leader, one should be taken as an individual and should they abuse a congregant/congregates, the legislation must be applied accordingly.

Another factor to consider regarding being called a church leader is that, even though church leaders are called to be ministers, it may not be taken for granted that anyone who aspires to be a church leader is called to be one. A church leader’s calling may be subjective, making it difficult to discern who is called to be a church leader. When one gets up and says they are called to be a church leader, the following questions are posed:

- How does one know that they are called to be a church leader?
- In which form is one called to be a church leader?

The above questions are rhetorical, and bring one to the realisation of the importance of discernment in which one discerns God’s calling. Discernment is a two-way process. On the one hand, it is a subjective process; on the other hand, it is an objective process. A subjective process refers to the self-discernment of the aspirant who inspires to be called by God. The aspirant is to have an inner spiritual connection with God; they must listen to the inner Godly voice and discern God’s call from

that inner voice. God may speak and call one to the ministry through a voice, as seen in 1 Samuel 3:1-10. However, one may not be able to listen and discern God's voice on their own and needs the help of other people, such as spiritual directors or friends. The above questions are rhetorical and are posed to make congregants critique their faith and church praxis. When one feels inspired to serve God, they may not take for granted the events which happen in their life. For example, God's voice may be in the sign of one's life experience, as seen in St. Ignatius' life.

According to Traub and Mooney (2015:1), Inigo Lopez de Onazy Loyola, known as St. Ignatius, is the founder of the Jesuits. He was born in 1491 in the Northern part of Spain during the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. St. Ignatius was brought up in a family culture of high Catholic piety. St. Ignatius was the youngest of 13 children. His mother was Marina Saenz, who died when Ignatius was a child. Ignatius, therefore, hardly knew his mother. Don Beltran Yanez de Onazy Loyola, Ignatius' father, died when Ignatius was 16 years old. Ignatius is said to have been a fancy dresser, dancer and womaniser. In addition, he was a soldier, and his leg was injured during the war. The injury of Ignatius' leg was the beginning of the change in his life.

During his injury, he spent much time in bed reading the Book of Saints Legends. He became spiritual and could hear the inner voice of God calling him to serve souls. Ignatius founded the Society of the Jesuits, which was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540 and became an official Religious Order.

The life experience of St. Ignatius portrays a subjective discernment in which one listens to God's inner voice in the events of his life when called to serve God. When one commits oneself totally to serving God, the subjective inspirational calling becomes objective through visible spiritual/pastoral works. Therefore, even though the denominations may differ in their doctrines, this article alludes that church leaders of different denominations may learn from inspirational spiritual giants like St. Ignatius on how to listen to God's inner voice in their life event experiences.

The objective discernment of being called by God to serve His people refers to one who may be called, but is unaware that they are being called. This can be seen in the case of Samuel, who was called by God without recognising His voice (as already noted) (1 Samuel 3:2-10). Samuel was called three times by God without recognising His voice, and someone had to help him listen to God's voice. This article emphasises that from the objective point of view, there could be clear visible signs that one is being called by God, and one may simply not be aware. Therefore, it is essential for those who are already in the ministry to help in the discernment of those who are subjectively and objectively being called into ministry.

In the view of this article, there is no one way in which God calls His people into ministry. One must be aware of the signs and events in their life and discern

God's voice in them. When proper discernment is undergone diligently, it is debated that the commercialisation of religion and abuse of people's belief systems is minimised. Furthermore, there are two categories of spiritual/pastoral abuses, which are discussed below.

### **5.1** 5. 1 Spiritual ignorance leading to the abuse of people's belief systems

Spiritual ignorance pertains to the lack of training of one called to serve God's people. One may be called by God, but the theological background of their denomination may be poor. In extreme cases, one may not even belong to any denomination and without any theological background, they may feel or think that God is calling them to be a church leader and start their own church. Even though one's intentions are innocent, the lack of theological training may land not only the one who starts their own church into a spiritual ditch, but the congregants they lead as well (hence basic theological training is necessary, as already noted).

### **5.2** Intentional spiritual abuse to scam congregants in God's name

In this second category of spiritual abuse, the church leader intentionally and deliberately abuses the congregants in any form in the name of God. It is an abuse in which one uses the church's name to abuse the congregants for personal gain. The difference between the first category of abusing the congregants with the second category is that in the former category, as a church leader, one is genuine in leading the congregants, but due to a lack of pastoral training, they abuse or mislead the congregants, especially in their spiritual interpretations. An example of such an interpretation could be seen in Ephesians 5:21-25, where St. Paul talks of the submission of wives to their husbands. A church leader who interprets the text in discussion without theological training may translate it literally and perpetuate the abuse of women in marriages. It is important to note that in this biblical text, the emphasis is on verse 21, where Paul communicates to both the husband and the wife to "Submit to one another in the fear of Christ." In this view, the submission of "one another" is a mutual obligation for husbands and wives to respect each other. This means wives are to submit to their husbands, just as the husbands are to submit to their wives, in the sense that they serve one another and put one another's needs before their own. In the second category, one has no intention to lead the congregants in faith, but is intent on scamming them in God's name. A confusing, complex human environment which favours church leaders in the second category to abuse their congregants

We live in a rapid, corrupt society which forms a vicious circle of human confusion and crookedness. Corruption is not only a cause of poverty, but also a cause of unemployment. Corruption encourages a few individuals to only think of them-

selves, hoarding society's richness for themselves whilst leaving the poor to survive in a hand-to-mouth existence, leading to a deep level of poverty in which some people are forced to take shelter under bridges. The people forced to live under bridges find themselves resorting to drugs. Substance abuse of drugs and alcohol results in murder and gang rape. Corruption leads to a lack of employment; the unemployed are forced into criminality, killing one another, theft, looting, and vandalism of public properties such as malls, schools, and hospitals.

Unemployment gives birth to fraudulent ways of life. The fraudulent way of life leads to a deep level of poverty that forms a thick cultural system of human exploitation. The thick culture of human exploitation leads to the exploitation of the poor, who become victims of human trafficking and poverty. For example, the level of poverty in the African context is highlighted by Bohan and Kennedy (2003:48), who posit that more than 13 million people in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from starvation. Bohan and Kennedy are echoed by Shorter (2011:7), who argues that the poor in Africa are appalled by the selfishness and individualism of their affluent ruling classes, which often shows itself through corruption.

Corruption does not end in itself. It is like a cancerous disease affecting the function of the whole body. Corruption affects the whole system of humanity, including marriages and family life. The fraudulent culture formed by corruption does not support marriage systems, but destroys them by corrupting the human mind. A corrupted and fraudulent mind destroys marriage systems, the married couples of corrupted and fraudulent minds live under the same roof, eating together and planning how to exploit and blackmail each other. Corrupt and fraudulent minds lead to the culture of scamming each other in marriages to the extent that the two married individuals can kill each other for money. The destruction of marriages and family lives by corruption is a human disaster. Marriages and family life are the fundamental bedrocks on which human values and ethical lives are formed.

The above vicious circle of abuse significantly promotes the abuse of people's belief systems. Moreover, it opens gaps in the abuse of congregants in the second category. Therefore, it is sad to observe that the poor, pushed to the grassroots by the culture of corruption and individualism, are abused in their churches, where they ought to find spiritual consolation. Therefore, there is an urgent need for national legislation and common church theology that safeguards congregants from abuse.

### **5.3 Critiquing the congregants**

It is essential for the congregants to note that churches are not immune to the vicious circle of human confusion and crookedness. Churches are composed of human beings who are not living on a different planet. Churches exist in the cor-

rupt environment of today's society. Therefore, congregants ought to be vigilant, not gullible and naive. The confusing environment in which one may find it difficult to see the purpose of one's life should not make one desperate and blind to the point of practising any religious praxis without questioning it. Congregants may also safeguard each other against any form of abuse they experience in their church praxis by sharing among themselves the abuse they experience and taking appropriate and legal steps as needed. Faith praxis in the church should not be followed gullibly and naively, and it should not take away one's rationality.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the article posits that a human being is created in the image of God. Human dignity is to be safeguarded by the church leaders in their church praxis and ensure their congregants are protected from any spiritual/pastoral abuse. Church leaders of different denominations must collaborate to find a basic theological ground and guidelines. The CRL Rights Commission could collaborate with the church board representing all churches in South Africa and have an ongoing relationship in matters of abuse of congregants during church praxis and other important matters.

Urban theology could be used to construct a basic theology that theologians of various denominations can critique. The construction of urban theology will not be based on a particular denomination. In collaboration with competent top theologians of different denominations, such as Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, some Pentecostals and Charismatics, the Institute of Urban Theology should conduct a joint theological work to develop a sound theological guideline for those who aspire to be church leaders.

There is an awareness that many denominations already have theological training for their aspirants; these denominations may not see the relevance of this proposal. One must bear in mind that theology is not static, but dynamic and responds to the signs of its time. In this era, where people drink petrol and eat snakes, theologians of different denominations are to be one, reflect and discern together: what is God saying to the people of this generation? It is posed that an injury to one is an injury to all; a spiritual injury to one denomination is a spiritual injury to all denominations and to society as a whole. Finger-pointing at one another and blaming each other as denominations is not a solution. Joining hands as denominations and being collaborative in striving to construct a sound theology, which could be used nationally as a guideline to safeguard the abuse of people's belief systems, is the solution.

Ultimately, the protection of human dignity should be the link that inspires church leaders of different denominations to work together with the CRL Rights Commission and strive to build a better spiritual and legalised society in South Africa.

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