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### **DEVELOPMENTAL WORSHIP IS ABOUT MORE FACTORIES THAN BUILDINGS OF WORSHIP**

In my recent visit to Gqeberha, I couldn't help but notice that a considerable number of the township cluster of grocery stores have been converted into the places of worship. Some of the remaining stores are run by people from outside the country, if not outside the Continent. On making some casual enquiries, I was told that the locals were even renting out their car garages to be repurposed into spaza shops by the foreign nationals.

This phenomenon got my mind into overdrive as I was busy trying to make sense of all this. At the height of unemployment and poverty in the townships and villages, the locals are selling their business properties and renting out their home garages. Why are the local Black people not intensifying their entrepreneurial efforts to help themselves escape poverty and, where possible, employ fellow Black people?

This phenomenon of converting commercial buildings into places of worship is not limited to the townships and villages. Some business properties in the cities are bought by faith organisations and converted into places of worship. As far as I know, faith organisations do not necessarily create employment opportunities as they are not directly involved in production activities. There is perhaps no choice between a place of worship and a source of resources, which may also be a remunerated job. There are at least 5 bare necessities for a human being's survival: food, water, clothing, shelter and sleep. Worship of God or involvement in politics is not possible without an income or resources to meet the basic needs of life. For the majority of Black people who don't own the means of creating wealth, a remunerated job is the very same resource that may make worship possible. Many worship buildings need to be rented, while the faith organisation's programmes need to be funded. One is making the point that worship can take place without a building. However, worship without a sizeable number of gainfully employed members is a serious challenge for that worship's survival.

As a matter of fact, Black people's spirituality renders them beings of worship. They conduct this in one form or another. Indigenous cultural forms of worship are no exception in requiring resources for their practice. A beast must be slaughtered, while umqombothi (sorghum beer) has to be brewed. Some member of the family needs to have resources for this worship to take place. For Black people, that usually means somebody must be gainfully employed. Tithes and a plethora of financial obligations have

to be contributed by a worshiper to the house of worship. It should now be clear just how undesirable is the closing down of commercial activities in the Black communities. No suggestion is here made that there is a causal relationship between the closing down of commercial buildings and their conversion into places of worship. Nonetheless, society, or government to be precise, needs to develop interventions to save the productive activities that take place in the affected commercial buildings. Black people need more productive industries than they need places of worship.

Of course, Black people generally find it easy to turn every available space into a place of worship. Under a tree, they will worship. They will worship even at a riverbank or seashore. In trains or buses on their way to the plantation, Black people are creative enough to turn those narrow mobile spaces into temporary places of worship. While there seems to be no compatibility between a place of worship and a tavern, Black people never consider it blasphemous to switch off the tavern music and sing church hymns and call to God to remember them. However, no recent stories have been related where manna dropped from heaven for the people to feed themselves. While we pray and worship, it seems we need to take a keen interest in productive activities for our own real development as a people.

Even where other nations indulge in religious activities, those activities have developmental dimensions where the members are helped to set up businesses, while their children are offered bursaries to educationally develop and serve the religion and its members. Where a particular religion is of a national character, the religious activities may be directed at developing and even defending the nation in war situations. The worship is practical and developmental. It is people-centred. The religion doesn't begin and end with worshipping a Supreme Being, or some escapist worshipping for a dwelling place next to the Supreme Being away from Planet Earth. The constructive and developmental worshipping entails summoning the divine power of the Supreme Being to help and support the people in their developmental efforts here on earth.

Black people need to be vigilant against the misuse of religion or worship to convert them into prisoners of faith. They need to believe that they have the power to change the world, and proceed to summon divine support as they act towards the realisation of that liberatory belief. There must be a reason why Bantu Biko made this strong caution to the Black folks: "I would like to remind the black ministry, and indeed all Black people, that God is not in the habit of coming down from heaven to solve people's problems on earth". Put differently, the statement is "Black [person] you are on your own"; "You are your own liberator".

One hopes that this message will not be misconstrued as a prayer for the reduction of the places of worship. On the contrary, the central message is about the development of the local economies and the multiplying of businesses in the townships and villages in favour of the development of Black people. The government and business federations could play a pivotal role in ensuring that funding is mobilised to invest in business ventures by Black people in the Black communities. The encroachment of the Malls in the townships and villages is not the solution because the ownership and control of those Malls seldom reside with Black people. All those Malls do is to contribute to the destruction of the spaza shop endeavours by Black people. Perhaps there might be a direct correlation between the invasion of the township and villages by the Malls and the closing down of the cluster of our grocery stores.

Somebody might suggest that the Malls are not a problem per se. The problem is in the absence of Black ownership and control of those Malls. However, the time has come for Black people to be lenders of

money, rather than borrowers. That means we must own the banks. Black people must aspire beyond being job seekers or labourers. Nothing should stop us being entrepreneurs in a country of our forebears. While we will be patients from time to time, we must be doctors as well. The stereotype of prisons being associated with Black people must be changed in the direction of Black people also swelling the ranks of lawyers from which the judges are recruited. The change of this negative narrative will happen when there are more schools than taverns in the Black communities. But those schools have to be functional and optimally resourced. We need no street kids, but more children at school in an education system where education is free up to the first tertiary qualification.