

African Traditional Religion, Represented by D. K. Koka. Testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, East London, 18 November 1999. [disclaimer](#)

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MR D K KOKA: I must here submit the truth that I tried my best to scrape the bottom of the barrel in search of the drops of my guilt by my goals, not me as an individual but in a collective single plurality and I failed to find one in the course of the struggle. This puts me to a point where I say, we can remark that the guilt of the oppressor and the oppressed shall never be the same and shall never be faced from the same angle, for they are operating on different levels and therefore the structuring of forums where the two sectors can express themselves sometimes needs to be reconsidered.

Here, when I was coming to this forum here, at the airport, a little girl who was serving me with the ticket at about 5 'o clock in the morning because I came very early. She was serving me and a white man who was standing in front of me and we were following each other. Then while she was serving, she remarks to me, "Can't you stand in the queue?" and I looked, and there was nobody, I was the last in the queue, because people had not arrived. Simply she meant couldn't I go to the end where everybody stands, instead of going nearer. I examined myself, I said what's wrong? I actually smelled my armpits and thought that I had forgotten to put on the deodorant! But truly I had. I didn't forget. The white man in front of me said to her "What is the difference?" and I smiled and though the cheek of it is that I am not just going to a forum to plead her cause, I am actually flying to that forum in order to plead her cause and bring about reconciliation. The only note that went deeper than I had thought is that she does not see me or categorise me as an integral part of her humanity. They I deserve her respect. She is a remnant of the apartheid mentality that breeds falsehoods in the human society, the falsehoods of superiority and inferiority and that man did not belong to the same category.

Here Chairman, let me remark that for the last 500 years, the black community, African people in particular, have been subjected or have been fully engaged in a programme of self defence and self preservation, guarding themselves and their children against Europe's rape and this meaning that is Europe's encroachment and violation of Africa's territorial sovereignty, cultural value systems, political freedoms and autonomy, economic development, religious, philosophical thought and ethics. Africa has been fully engaged in that category. And while engaged in this category, Africa's genius that once created civilisations and cultures was destroyed, numbed or frozen to nothingness.

Chairman, let me just say again, the process of Africa's advancement was folded. Then we got all us engaged from sanctuaries in this battle of liberation. There could be some errors and omissions but not as agreed upon from institutions, but out of sheer human frailty. That's where I said I failed to find my guilt and in the omissions of fully

being engaged in the struggle for liberation. Let me point out that apartheid is not in any manner a recent product, but it is a continuity of eurocentric thinking that culminated in the murderous barbarous acts that were committed on the African people, in particular on the Southern parts of Africa. By so saying, this continuity, started on the very, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the Italian sects laid out a doctrine where they said: being without form and nature, that is man is nothing but matter without form, and being without form and nature, man is not constrained, feted or determined to any particular destiny by an alien supernatural power. In this way, his distinctive characteristic becomes his freedom. He is free to make himself in the image of God or in the image of beast. This was said by the Italian humanists and I, as an African adhering to an African source, if I fail to correct that hierarchy then my Lord, I am guilty. And I, if as an African, if I did not argue my point of the internalisation of God in the human activity, at that moment, then I am guilty. Because that gave power to the apartheid protagonists, who had a freedom of choice. Either to carry themselves and manifest the image of God and his likeness in us. They had a choice and thus they chose the way of the beast. That we are suffering from now.

What is our point at this stage of speaking? I can say, brothers and sisters, we are unfortunately at this moment of our living that we are living in a time of cultural disarray and moral decay. Sound social cultural ethical and spiritual values have been destroyed by the evangelised policies of apartheid without any replacement. As a result, we find ourselves ushered into an age filled with the ruins and fragments of morality. Hence our intellectual landscapes are littered with ...[indistinct] tales of deterioration in human relations, rather than dramatic narratives of humanness, reconciliation, justice and peace. This reality has been brought out to us clearly in the deliberations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The most inhuman institutions and ideological hierarchies ever recorded in the pages of human history are nothing but slavery, Nazism, apartheid and others that to state here would make the list rather too long. [TAPE 3] ...[inaudible] Apartheid should not be seen in isolation, but must be seen as a final product of the Eurocentric spiritual thinking and faith that separated divinity from man. And therefore it could not have taken any other path

We are here today to look at the actual living products, we are here to look at the protagonists of Nazism and fascism, the rapists and murderers of Bosnia, the genocists of Ruanda, and the epitomes of apartheid in South Africa, these including the third force gangsters who terrorised, maimed and slaughtered thousands of innocent train commuters in Soweto and other places. In those who raped women and killed innocent children, all these including the Gestapo murder squads of Vlakplaas, the Mamaselas, De Kocks, Coetzee and those of the killing fields of Natal. Including all that, we find that all of them "hulle is sonder menswaardigheid". They do not have a humanness, Ubuntu, that is the problem. Now this immediately takes me into the second part of our question: what did we do in the face of what was going on? Did we become conformists or collaborators? What are we to do in the face or in the light of the information that has been brought to us by the TRC? What

contribution can we make to right the wrongs and bring about a meaningful transformation of our beloved democratic South Africa? What are our objectives and plans - practical to avoid future recurrence of these historic tragedies? Are we to play the fiddle while Rome is burning? Or are we to stand shivering like a hypnotised rabbit before the python of apartheid? What are we going to do? That is the question. What practical things are we to do? From my tradition of faith and culture I cannot have the freedom of choice and this is based on the concept of communalism that I subscribe to. It is almost impossible for me to isolate or distance myself from the suffering of the human society. We have a very good saying that was written by ...[inaudible] "When you bleed, my handkerchief is full of thy blood, when you twitch with pain, I feel the sting in my loins for you and me, dear black brother, are but one." That sums up our involvement. There is no way that we could not have been involved. We believe here in the commonness of humanity that we all share, we believe in the validity of the human person, we subscribe to the concept that we are all an integral part of each other, we hold onto the philosophical concept of the other for our being in the world presupposes the existence of the other. We are therefore sharing the commonness and the intertwines of aspirations, interests and objectives, purpose and hope. Thus the suffering of one unit of the whole affects me for I am because you are and you are because I am.

This puts me into now the final phase, the philosophy that we come to think that it is inevitable for this country to resort to that philosophy. Let us not forget this very vital point that the TRC is founded on the universal concept of truth, justice, prudence and righteousness. These are in turn attributes of the philosophical concept of Ubuntu, which is a modality of the divine spirit. Here we find that we are to carry this philosophy into the next century and centuries to come. Let me say in short: after the war, the two Germanys were divided, I mean Germany was divided into two. A wall was built, and now a wall has been broken. For the communist Germany to mix with the capitalist Germany, they are enjoying the same economic resources, but recently it was published that the mixing does not work. They can not just go on smoothly, as envisaged. Why? Let us note here that Germany, the citizens of Germany, they need a philosophy, a philosophy that they can all subscribe to. A philosophy that can be touching to the Jew, to the German, to the Hindu, to the Moslem, the black and white, a philosophy that is making us to start to recognise each other as an integral part of each other and not just to harmonise. I can harmonise with my dog, it can lick my lips, it can jump and caress, but the fact is that I am not an integral part of a dog, it is still a dog and therefore we need a philosophy that can bring us together.

This is the philosophy my Lord that I wish to present at this moment in short. It is a philosophy that comes from my faith that on the day of the creation when the spirit of the Lord moved over the waters, it disseminated the waters and disseminated a consciousness in the waters and there was life. And the same spirit came up when God created man when he said let us make man in our own image and likeness, he modelled him from the slime of the earth, from the dust of the earth, and made a statue and what did he do? He breathed into the nostrils and as soon as that breath entered the nostrils, man became a living soul.. Therefore he shared something,

something in common with God, for he carried the God head in him. And which is when we asked is a human, is a person there a human man, a statue, a mud, a slime of the earth but as soon as God came "ntu" in our language, that "ntu" meaning God and which is you would say Jehovah, the same as you would say Nata in Egyptian, the same as you would say in all the various languages.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much, I thought you were going to give us a little time so we would have had some questions, now you have about five minutes. Do you want to get to a proper full stop.

MR D K KOKA: Yes. Well let me for a final thing to say...this is the philosophy of Ubuntu, which we think the TRC as a structure when it stops being a commission but declare itself into an institute to carry on this philosophy of humanness to all over. Can I put a stop there? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Wonderful. That is a very nice place for a full stop. If you would please switch off your - thank you very much. Thomas?

MR T MANTHATA: How do you see all what you are saying, you know being either crystallised to be handed over to any structure that shall be implementing what the TRC shall have recommended to the State?

MR D K KOKA: We have already tried by all means to actualise it, that is we are giving now lectures even in universities. We are giving lectures and mostly amongst the workers and where companies were, this is being preached, we see a difference. For the whole thing is that the employee and the employer must recognise themselves as but one, belonging to one humanity. What I am saying is a result of the field work that we are doing at the moment.

MR T MANTHATA: Is there no way that this could be so simplified that it could be taught either in the families or even at schools? At the lower levels, because this is where we are being confronted by real moral decay.

MR D K KOKA: This is where we are inviting the TRC as a commission to embrace the philosophy and to work with us in simplifying that philosophy for acceptance. Anyway, just how are we going to say it, because amongst the black community, that philosophy is there, is operating. Among the white community, we are still to prove that they are one with us. And that this philosophy is not a peculiarity of the African people but as created beings, I do believe that the divine spirit was breathed into their nostrils.

MR T MANTHATA: You keep saying "we" are you perhaps an institution of some kind, with scholars or with people who have learnt with clear understanding of what you are talking about, to transmit it to the communities?

MR D K KOKA: I belong to the transformation forum of South Africa, which we are extending into Africa and also I belong to the Ubuntu school of philosophy and all of us we are trying to do research that we take it upon ourselves to propagate this philosophy. Let me say to you we failed in the past, simply because we were not doing our own work. We realise that as long as the lions, we say until the lions can have their own historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter. Until we, ourselves, can take it upon ourselves to bring out our philosophies and concepts we shall always be underdogs.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much Dada we are very deeply grateful...are you distributing?

MR D K KOKA: Sorry Mr Chairman. I did not submit my - because I said I'm never sure of what I will say until I have said it.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes, thank you very much. We appreciate - we hope you will be able to remember what you said and can write it down.

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