

SUBMISSION BY AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION TO THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

REFLECTIONS ON GROSS HUMAN VIOLATIONS OF THE PAST

1) From non-existence to the margin

African Religion had not only suffered oppression from white racism but it also suffered severe attacks from Christianities, both white and African. Because Christianity had been used and is still used as a weapon to destroy what most Africans can claim to be theirs, African Religion was forcefully removed from the public eye and a false image was given that all Africans are Christians. Entry into school and workplace as a proof of being religious was forced to be a Christian baptismal certificate, outside that was taken as abnormal and heathen. The adherents of African Religion were not even recognised as being existent, they were ignored and were regarded as irrational subhumans. They were silenced and forced to imitate what the government of the day dictated to them. Religion, theology, doctrines, ritual, myths, etc. are the terms that were assumed not to be fitting in the vocabulary and the study of African Religion. African children were brainwashed to think that 'religion' only refers to Christianity and what their parents were doing was non-progressive, primitive, unholy and heathen, and what the whites brought to this country was progressive, modern, and holy. All these resulted in a psychological brain damage to most Africans, and as a result most African Religion practitioners also suffered from a withdrawal syndrome to avoid further harassments from this foreign religion whose standards of analysis are European imports that are imposed on the indigenous black people of this country. As a result some victims of colonialism and apartheid preferred to be known as non-religious than to be Christian. That is why even in the census analysis it is sometimes assumed that African Religion adherents could have been classified under "other" or "no religion", what a pathetic situation? Today other religions came forward to the TRC and with African Religion none came forward (except a Roman

Catholic on behalf of African Religion). The reason is that these other religions had a preferential treatment even in the apartheid era, and as a result they are always informed of the current developments even in this 'democratic government', they still get preferential treatment.

African Religion also finds it difficult even today to share its feelings with the present government as the attitude and stereotypes that were inherited from the colonial and apartheid governments still exist. There is still 'window dressing' that there is freedom of religion as African Religion was never included in the 'rainbowness' of this country. The TRC itself is Christianity at prayer, no representative of African Religion, yet in its formation it was publicly claimed that there should be representation of all faiths, but only to mean the inclusion of

Judaism, Hinduism and Islam, all these other religions that were shipped into this country, a country that claims to be democratic and liberated, yet the worst oppressed religion was never taken into consideration as an independent religion. African Religion is still at the margin because, though one may hear whispers about it, it is forced to be under the umbrella of the oppressive Christianity if it wants recognition even by the so-called black government.

In such a situation how can the oppressed (adherents of African Religion), ever think of reconciliation with the people who still oppress them, deny them of their identity, their independence, their freedom of speech and participation? How can African Religion stand in front of their oppressors (Christians) and talk about healing when the TRC itself is full of people with "white collars" who always remind us of the cause of our wounds which are still septic because these "people of Go&" are still regarding African Religion's fight for its independence from Christianity as still irrational, the same thing that the past governments did.

Issues that also needed participation by African religion adherents, like reburial of "bones" of the deceased, were discussed by African Christians, the ministers in particular, who force themselves in representing African Religion when opportunities arise, but also represent Christianity on the other hand, yet African Religion has got its own representatives but are ignored.

2. THE ROAD TO RECONCILIATION

i) Public confession (verbal and practical) of the perpetrators and those who are responsible for gross human rights violations, in this case, the Christians who are still stumbling blocks to the liberation of African Religion. ii) Full recognition of the religion without being apologetic to Christianity iii) Full participation of African Religion as an independent religion, in all government activities and education programmes without any prescriptions in any form by Christians- black or white. iv) Without the above; the new constitution, freedom of the country, democracy and the truth commission itself would be a failure because African Religion is still in exile.

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