

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa

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Truth & Reconciliation Commission

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CAPE TOWN

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Dear Sirs

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa comprises 403 churches (excluding roughly a similar number of fellowships), with an active membership of 42 000 (not including adherents or children), within six geographical regions. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa is culturally and racially diverse, evangelical in its theological persuasion, and congregational in its system of government with each local church being autonomous.

We forward this submission on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. We are conscious of our responsibility to lead the denomination and to take a stand on the critical issues of our time without attempting to speak on behalf of every Baptist or each member church.

The Baptist Union is deeply grateful to God for the removal of statutory apartheid and the transition of our country into a democracy. We are convinced that what has happened in South Africa is nothing less than a miracle. We also recognise that the effects of apartheid are not easily undone. The process of reconciliation, which presupposes genuine repentance, and re-building in our nation will be long and demanding. We acknowledge the positive role which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has played. It is our desire to be part of this process which underlies this submission.

During the years of apartheid there were many Baptists, Individually and collectively, who confronted the evils of injustice and ministered to those who were suffering. On numerous occasions the Baptist Union condemned the wrongs of apartheid, commissioned correspondence and sent delegations to the government.

-2-

In retrospect we confess on behalf of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa that we did not do nearly enough. Sins of omission are no less serious than sins of commission. We did not sufficiently challenge the legitimacy of unjust institutions and sometimes we hid behind our own structures. All too often we did not translate our resolutions into resolute action.

Apartheid has affected us all in ways that are both obvious and subtle. Making a submission on behalf of a mixed body is therefore difficult - but necessary.

Within the Baptist Union we acknowledge sadly that some of our decisions mirrored the political status quo in that they were motivated by paternalistic attitudes, or feelings of inferiority, or reflected the economic and racial disparity within our country. As a result, at least in part, painful divisions have occurred within our ranks. Finally, we acknowledge that our worst sins could well be those of which we are barely conscious.

Despite our failures God has been working in our midst. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa has become increasingly a "rainbow" denomination which embraces all the colours and cultures of our country, and for this we are grateful. God's Word teaches that "righteousness exalts a nation". As a Baptist denomination we wish to play our part in building our country on values which are pleasing to God.

The Executive of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa welcomes this opportunity to make a submission.

Yours faithfully

TERRY RAE

GENERAL SECRETARY