

CHURCH OF THE PROVINCE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

FAITH COMMUNITY HEARINGS

EAST LONDON, 17 - 19 NOVEMBER 1997

Submission by Bishop Michael Nuttall

Chairperson, I count it an awesome privilege to address you and other members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I do so on behalf of, and at the request of, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane, who is unfortunately not able to be present here today.

The Church of the Province of Southern Africa has made a written submission to the T.R.C., dated 30 June 1997. I ask for my remarks to be received as an amplification of that submission. Responsibility for these remarks is entirely my own.

I begin with a clarifying and explanatory point. The church which I represent has within its title the phrase '*Southern Africa*' because it embraces within its life and structure the countries of Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and the English dependency of St Helena, as well as the Republic of South Africa. All of these countries, with the possible exception of St Helena, have been caught up in their different and often exceedingly painful ways in the policy of apartheid, and it is with all of them in mind that this submission is being made. We need to be concerned about healing, reconciliation and reconstruction not only within South Africa itself, but also in neighbouring countries where South Africa fought its wars, created serious destabilisation, and drew on migrant labour. Many of the millions of landmines lying in the soil of Angola and Mozambique are a telling and terrible reminder of that process in the apartheid period. It seems to me that the Churches which straddle these national frontiers in the Southern African region can play their part in promoting healing, reconciliation and reconstruction, in partnership with governments and others, in this subcontinent.

Chairperson, it is well-known, I think, that the Church I represent was clear in its official and public condemnation of apartheid, eventually joining those who declared it to be a heresy and a sin. These pronouncements came from our synodical structure of church government in which black and white Anglicans participated together, providing an alternative model in our race-ridden society, which helped to point the way to the model of true democracy which our country has at last embraced. During the last eight years of the apartheid regime (1986 - 1994) our Church was presided over, in its life and synodical government, by a black archbishop who, by sheer example, demonstrated once and for all how crazy,

let alone immoral, the alternative apartheid model was for our society. Yet this same archbishop - I hardly need to remind you, Chairperson! - did not have a vote in the land of his birth.

But the picture I have just painted of our Church, though true, is far too rosy. The whole truth contains compromise, complacency and complicity alongside examples, on the part of some individuals, of great courage and compassion. The fact of the matter as our written submission makes clear - is that the membership of the C.P.S.A. is varied and complex. Within the perspective of the T.R.C. it includes a clear majority - some two million people - who were victims of apartheid, and a minority who were its beneficiaries, including some who were even its perpetrators. I well remember a synod

resolution in which it was decided that any Anglican who was in the security police could not be elected to serve on a parish council. The opposition to this decision in some quarters of our Church was immediate.

Yet we did allow for the appointment of Anglican priests as military chaplains to minister to the pastoral needs of white conscripts and professionals in the South African Defence Force. This came to be a deeply divisive issue in our Church, with parents of conscripts complaining bitterly that we did not have enough chaplains to minister to their sons, and black Anglicans bitterly opposed to having any chaplains at all. In our Diocese of Namibia there was the particular embarrassment where the bishop there could not possibly approve of South African military chaplains coming to support what he and his people perceived to be an army of occupation. The liberation movements were also supported pastorally by Anglican priests, the difference being that they were not officially appointed to that role, by the C.P.S.A.

Here we touch on the difficult and sometimes painful interface between the pastoral and the prophetic in the life and witness of the Church. How does the Church achieve the balance between these two? In the closing years of apartheid rule, the bishops of the C.P.S.A. resolved to appoint no more military chaplains. At about the same time, the call for economic sanctions -which you, Chairperson, had issued much earlier in a singlehanded act of moral courage - was supported corporately by the bishops of the C.P.S.A. and, indeed, by its highest synod in 1989. It could be said - and I would include myself in this stricture - that we took too long to come to this place of a clearer, uncompromising witness. We allowed others to precede us and take the flak. Too late we conceded that they were right, and we owe them an apology for our compromising and often complacent half-heartedness, and sometimes for a hardness of heart that could be extremely damaging and hurtful. Archbishop, you yourself bore the brunt of this critique not only in the nation at large but even from the membership of your own Church. May I, on behalf of the C.P.S.A., offer to you a profound apology, ask for your forgiveness, and thank you for your extraordinary graciousness and magnanimity?

May I also, through you, extend a similar message to all our other prophets, both within the Anglican Church and beyond it, thanking them for their courageous witness in the name of Christ to the truth.

Chairperson, paragraph 10 of the C.P.S.A.'s written submission says that *'the C.P.S.A. acknowledges that there were occasions when, through the silence of its leadership or its parishes, or their actions in acquiescing with apartheid laws where they believed it to be in the interests of the Church, deep wrong was done to those who bore the brunt of the onslaught of apartheid'*. What aided and abetted this kind of moral lethargy and acquiescence was the fact that, in many respects, our Church had developed over many years its own pattern of racial inequality and discrimination. It was all too easy to pass resolutions or make lofty pronouncements condemning apartheid. It was all too easy to point a morally superior finger at Afrikaner nationalist prejudice and pride. English pride and prejudice was no less real, and it was never very far below the surface of our high sounding moral pronouncements. The Anglican Lord Milner must be as problematic to Afrikaner Christians as D.F. Malan the dominee is to us. In a strange way I think many white Anglicans in the C.P.S.A. owe an apology to the Afrikaner community for their attitude of moral superiority. I became aware of this need when, as Bishop of Pretoria from 1976 -1981, I got to know such fine Afrikaner Christians as David Bosch and Piet Meiring. Perhaps, Chairperson, I could ask Professor Piet Meiring in his capacity as a member of the T.R.C., kindly to receive this expression of apology from a bishop of *'die Engelse kerk'*.

But our chief expression of apology must be to our own black membership, and I am using the word 'black' inclusively. Here we are speaking of the overwhelming majority of the C.P.S.A., both in Southern Africa as a whole and in South Africa particularly. Interestingly, our black membership increased significantly in the early apartheid years, especially on the reef where the witness against the new ideology was strong. Ours is primarily a black Church and it has been, and still is in many ways, a suffering Church: suffering at the hands of the Church itself.

Chairperson, our so-called white parishes, like white businesses (I am thinking of last week's T.R.C. hearings), have unquestionably benefited from apartheid and its political predecessors. In their church facilities, including housing and transport for their priests, they have been bastions of relative privilege. So called black parishes by contrast, like black businesses, have been decidedly disadvantaged in these respects. Within the black Anglican community there has been a further disparity in that, very often, as in the secular apartheid scenario, the African Church has been worse off than the Coloured, and the Coloured Church worse off than the Indian. We have simply reflected the economic and social disparities at large. There was a time when even clergy stipends were paid on a racially different basis, with all kinds of clever justifications produced for what was essentially an ethically unacceptable practice.

Attempts are now being made to rectify these long-standing inequities within the life of our Church. Black advancement into leadership roles has been significant, but still within our Church's structures we are significantly dependent on white skill and expertise which can easily look and feel like white power blocking the aspirations of black people. A transformation process is under way, spearheaded by a recently created Black Anglican Forum. This will promote and facilitate an adjustment process for the C.P.S.A. as it moves into the new millennium, seeking to provide a new authenticity for our life together as a Church, setting us free to be more truly African in the broadest sense, to engage in our mission and ministry in a more authentic incarnational way.

Chairperson, this is one of the ways in which our denomination sees its commitment to the future of this country and this sub-continent: to be a transformed Church under God, serving a transformed society. Central to that task will be our desire to contribute to a continuing process of healing and costly, not cheap reconciliation. I speak as a church leader in a Province which has seen well over 15,000 politically motivated killings in a decade of traumatic transition. The healing of the resultant wounds, let alone the other wounds which are the legacy of apartheid, will engage the faith communities and others for a long time to come. One of the things which the KwaZulu Natal Church Leaders' Group is planning for 1998 is a series of pastoral visits to '*places of pain*' where, in the company of local communities, liturgies of healing and cleansing will occur, and symbolic actions will take place to facilitate reconciliation. Similarly, trauma workshops and workshops on repentance and restitution are available in our Province to enable people, bruised by a divided past, to come together in a wholesome, healing atmosphere in the presence of skilled facilitators, to find new hope for their lives.

Chairperson, I end with a final reflection or meditation on facets of the life of the C.P.S.A. which I represent here today, which I dearly love, and for whose failings and frailties I repent before God and this Commission.

I think of the mother church, St George's Cathedral in Cape Town, site of faithful witness and struggle over many years, beacon of hope to the people alongside the Parliament where so many draconian laws were passed.

I think, by contrast, of the faithful in Sekukuneland going on annual pilgrimage to the grave site, at the top of a hill, of Manche Masemola, their martyr and ours.

I think of the elderly member of the great Mothers' Union coming forward, slowly and painstakingly, to receive a certificate in honour of her 50 years' membership; and I hear her responding in grateful thanksgiving by singing in shaky voice a hymn from the depths of her being.

I think of a small child coming forward to be confirmed – '*Defend, O Lord, this thy child ...*' and how I am struck by the innocence of her eyes and her folded hands.

I think of a colleague as a teenager taking his critically ill father to hospital unaware that he would be refused admission because it was the white man's hospital, and going to another 'acceptable' hospital where there was only room for his father to lie on the floor, there to die a short while later; I think of this colleague carrying his pain into adult life, into the Black Consciousness Movement where he found his dignity was affirmed, and finally finding full healing when as a priest he was asked to be rector of a white congregation.

I think of our present Archbishop incarcerated as a young man for three years as a political prisoner on Robben Island, and there finding his vocation to be a priest.

I think of Zeph Mothopeng standing up, as a brave young layman in Synod in the early apartheid years, and challenging unsuccessfully the unequal stipends paid to the clergy.

I think of Trevor Huddleston's *Naught For Your Comfort*, and the costly intercessory prayer of the monks and the nuns, fighting apartheid on their knees, yearning for a new freedom to come.

I think of those who understood none of these things, who were lost in their own limitations, trapped in their own small world.

I think, and I think, and as I do so, I say '*Lord have mercy*', '*Nkosi, sihawukele*', '*Morena, re gaugele*', '*Kyrie eleison*'. And then I say also '*Thank you, God, for your faithful ones, those who were clear-sighted, those who endured against all the odds to the end*'.