

Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT)

FURTHER SUBMISSION

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

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Thank you, Chairperson, for inviting the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) to address this gathering.

Firstly, ICT feels privileged to congratulate the TRC on its achievements in the last two years. A number of acts against humanity have been uncovered within a reasonably short space of time. A normal course of justice would have been evaded by the perpetrators of atrocities. Credit also, is due in large part to the TRC method of investigation for all that has been uncovered. Families are now beginning to start a new life with the knowledge that those who killed their loved ones have at last admitted it and in most cases showed where they had buried them, painful as this discovery will always be.

Today marks the beginning of a very important chapter in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's process, when religious bodies which possess the power to influence the hearts and minds of the majority are called upon to account on how they have used or abused that privilege. Religious bodies, chairperson, hold considerable sway in society but they themselves are susceptible to all kinds of influences which at times lead them to commit abuses intentionally or unintentionally.

This moment, Chairperson, is also significant because for the first time in the history of our country, religious communities are called upon to give account of their understanding of their mission in the context of apartheid, and how they hope to do mission in the future. Standing behind blanket statements made by the SACC on behalf of the churches during apartheid has not helped us to understand the theological positions of some churches which we saw in practice, contradicting the mission of the SACC.

Incidentally, it was this factor, among others, that led to the formation of ICT. This leads me to the next point.

What is The Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT)?

The struggle in this country was for justice that would lead to liberation, restoration and reconciliation. The church, however, did not have an appropriate theology to undergird that struggle. As a response to this reticence or inability of the churches to act appropriately, ICT came into being in 1981. ICT fashioned itself according to the prophetic; tradition and

unapologetically advocates a theology of liberation as determined by the dynamics of the Southern African context. ICT counts itself among those working towards the establishment of God's reign on earth.

The first General Secretary of ICT was The Rev Dr Elia Tema who was then followed by the Rev Dr Frank Chikane who is now in the Deputy President's office. Dr Chikane was succeeded by the Rev Dr Smangaliso Mkhathshwa who is now Deputy Minister of Education. ICT wishes to pay tribute to these leaders who made highly significant contributions to contextual theology and to the liberation of this country. As the present General Secretary of ICT, I feel very humble before my **1-2/** predecessors. Whatever I do though, albeit in different circumstances, it is in continuity with the trend set by my predecessors.

ICT operates outside the status quo of both church and state, although its ultimate aim is to serve the state (which is wider than the governing group of people), and the church (which is much more profound than the institutional church). ICT nevertheless is proud to be an affiliate of the SACC.

Liberation Theology's biblical imperative is to be found in Isaiah 61:1-4, and as quoted in Luke 4:18-19, particularly the words: To set at liberty those who are oppressed. For this reason, a group of theologians met together at that critical time of South Africa's history, and using the process of wide and in-depth consultation, eventually came up with what came to be known as the Kairos Document. issued as a "**Challenge to the Churches**".

In its short life time, the Institute has suffered much at the hands of the previous government and from rejection by most churches who have misunderstood its vision and mission. Both government and the churches singled out liberation theology as the devil's theology and thus accused ICT of serving the interests of the communists. ICT would readily admit that, much as that criticism was not true, there was a lot in common between communism (barring atheism) and christianity than the church would care to admit. History, nevertheless did vindicate ICT. Some valuable contributions were made by ICT in spite of all the hostility:

- training of solid leadership during the lean years of apartheid when there was no overt political leadership
- change to the theological paradigm in South Africa
- publication of the Kairos Document in 1985 which accelerated the process
- promoting a worldwide theological reflection network, for example, The Road to Damascus (A document signed by Third World Christians from seven nations: South Africa, Namibia, South Korea, Philippines, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala)

- producing parliamentary candidates and church leaders who had close associations with ICT.
- providing a forum of sharing of experiences and knowledge amongst concerned pastors, theologians and christians in general.

Throughout its existence ICT has received overseas funding from organizations and church individuals who aligned themselves with the ideals of the Institute. A small but significant contribution also comes from its membership which is worldwide. It is these contributions which have enabled ICT to maintain its Independent status. /pp 2-3/

Prophetic Movement

ICT operates outside church and government structures in order that it could provide an ongoing independent critique. For this reason some people now label ICT as the "Institute of Critical Theologians" while others label it as an organization of "spoilers". Both labels have become unpopular these days whereas in the not so distant past, people gained popularity by being critical or by being regarded as spoilors to the system. But had it not have been for those critical theologians or spoilors, little progress would have been made. Today, the gradual disappearance of those kinds of prophets of old is leaving a vacuum that is difficult to fill.

In its critique of the church, ICT stated that some churches in South Africa were engaging in **State Theology** which meant a tacit support for the apartheid regime based on Romans 13 while conveniently ignoring Revelations 13.

And other churches resorted to **Church Theology - a very superficial** critique of apartheid, lacking in indepth analysis of the prevailing context, while stressing the need for reconciliation and peace at the expense of justice, ICT wanted reconciliation at the time, but not at the expense of the poor.

The prophetic movement was intended to be in continuity with the persecuted prophets of the past - those who never took anything for granted. Instead, they raised questions about the policies of both secular and religious leaders. That must have kept the nation lively and awake as the prophetic movement does today. But questions are not raised for their own sake. Their aim is to ensure a healthy public policy and just governance for all.

Chairperson, ICT is proud to say that throughout its existence in South Africa, it has done just that. For that it incurred the wrath of the previous government or was temporarily disowned by the church and regarded as a step child, because it made both religious and secular rulers uncomfortable.

With the knowledge that the resources of this country are enough to feed its people if equitably distributed, and that this was not the case as the apartheid government preserved them for a few, we too aligned ourselves publicly with the poor and oppressed. We then challenged and opposed, on theological grounds, anything that threatened the well being of the poor and oppressed, while we looked for a way out of their suffering. It is in this light that we published and campaigned against the status quo.

We also, with the knowledge that "apartheid", since it was officially endorsed by the then Orange Free State Synod of the Dutch Reform Church (DRC) in 1935, was implemented in full swing by Dr Verwoerd 1958, and that our non-DRC churches had not done much to oppose it, adopted a critical stance towards these churches. At the time, we thought that the problem was the wrong abstract theology which they inherited from Europe. But now, we realise that theology was used as a scapegoat in a situation where reality was that the churches, especially /pp 3-4/ white members of these churches had benefitted a lot from apartheid. Regrettably, one feels on hindsight, that when we talk of the problem of the churches during apartheid, we are essentially talking about those who controlled them - our white fellow Christians. We would like the commission to note this as it has a lot of implications for restitution and reconstruction. If Christians had raised a very strong voice from the beginning, and rejected all privileges, things would have been different.

Why ICT's Reluctance to Support the TRC

Chairperson, I now come to the most delicate part of this presentation. When ICT first received the invitation to participate in this hearing we wrote back to Dr Piet Meiring, stating ICT's reluctance to participate in the TRC process. This was not intended as a publicity stunt; nor did it arise out of ignorance of what goes on; nor was it motivated by attempts to encourage anarchy nor did it arise from a feeling of self-righteousness. ICT's reluctance to lend unqualified support to the TRC process stems from a deeper analysis and scepticism. Let me explain this briefly:

1. Equation of perpetrator and victim

We found the summons of both activists and upholders of the system to account for their actions confusing. To us this meant equating the perpetrator and the victim as if they are equally culpable. Although we did not expect the TRC to pass judgement, we at least expected it to distinguish between those who should give account of their deeds and those who should feel free to comment on the situation. This of course did not only apply to ICT and the Religious Communities, but to our former liberation movements as well. We felt that such an approach was trivialising the process. It has become clear, Chairperson, during some sessions of the TRC, that for some perpetrators the TRC process is a non-event and therefore of no consequence. ICT's problem was the message it would be

conveying concerning the prophetic movement. We changed our mind out of respect for the constitution upon which we all agreed, and out of respect for the members of the commission.

2. A concern about the society beyond the TRC process

While a lot of hidden activities have been uncovered by the TRC Investigating Unit, ICT is concerned that virtually all perpetrators of such gross violations are getting off with impunity. To the extent that we are not calling for executions or life imprisonments, we cannot be accused of expecting Nuremburg type of trials. Lack of any mechanism, however, that makes the perpetrators take responsibility for their actions is causing some resentment (to say the least). /pp 4-5/

ICT's concern, Chairperson, is about what happens beyond the TRC process. Are we all going to look back in the next five years with sadness at the waste of money, human resources and valuable time? If so, we wondered whether all these resources could not have been channelled to other uses which could better build communities which had suffered for so long from degradation and deprivation. It is clear that people on the ground do not understand what the National Reconciliation Act is all about since racism and exploitation still abound. The bitterness caused by our gory past has not yet subsided. All this cannot be ignored if our future is to be built on a sound foundation. To date, Chairperson and members of the Commission, we still have not found an answer to our question. Our AGM this year, however, has mandated ICT's Steering Committee to set up a task force whose task would be to work out guidelines for a society beyond the TRC process.

3. TRC for the churches

We had also thought that churches needed their own TRC instead of being called to account at this process, Our problem is that the present process arose out of a political settlement. As such it is limited by the terms of agreement in what it can do. Even the interpretation of the terms so familiar to Christian theology, for example, reconciliation, justice, truth, reflect these limitations.

Christians know very well what the meaning of reconciliation is and what its implications are. They also know what the biblical understanding of justice is and what its implications are. The present process has not mentioned terms such as restitution or penance or God's wrath which relate to the terms it uses. It would not be proper for us, however, to expect this of the present process. Rather, we thought that christians would talk among themselves and work out what they could do. The same would be expected of other religious communities.

4. Lack of the economic dimension

We also felt that the present process was silent about the economic dimension of reconciliation. We understand that there are other processes taking place as well as structures that deal with other issues. But when we talk of national reconciliation, we expect a body with the stature of the TRC to go beyond listening to killings and torture, to include the category of those who benefitted directly or indirectly economically. Chairperson, we are thinking here of both black and white South Africans,

We did not know at the time that the category of business people would be added. Our focus was not only on business people but on everyone who had been enriched by apartheid while others were dying in the hush and in the townships and police offices, We felt that these were the people who should be compelled to /pp 5-6/ plough back part of their wealth towards reconstruction and reparation.

In this regard, Chairperson, we align ourselves with the recent view expressed by the Stellenbosch academic who made a submission to this Commission, that those who possess more than two million rands in cash and assets should be taxed for reconstruction. But we wish to go further and reduce two million to every one million. We also want to make a call to others who benefitted in the same way, to make an extra contribution, These are the people who should be raising the three billion rands needed for reparations.

Chairperson, we do not think that this is unrealistic, A number of people are still homeless, poor and crammed in townships which were originally intended to be transit camps to fulfil the "white by night" dream promised to its voters by the apartheid rulers of the past. There is no hope that these "open jails" could ever be dismantled for the next half a century! This is not what the struggle was about. It would be different if we all were starting from scratch. For, the majority, unfortunately things remain as they were.

5. Lack of clarity about categories

Finally, Chairperson, the criteria for creating categories was not clear. Who should really be called to the TRC? Is it the foot soldier or the commander? We thought that all those in positions of responsibility needed to do the accounting. If ministers or leaders of religious communities were asked to make an appearance, why were teachers or university lecturers not asked to make an appearance? There are many ways of killing a nation.

One of the most cruel ways of doing this is by attacking the nation's psyche and by so doing, destroy its mind - putting it to sleep, driving it to drunkenness and violence, destroying children who are future leaders and future builders of the economy of that particular nation. Chairperson, we want to submit that the architects of much of this were academics who were in the employ of the apartheid system. Certain universities are known to have been factories of all the commodities apartheid needed in order for it to succeed. Besides, those who studied at the so-called "Bush colleges"

know what it means to be taught by "academics" who were actually soldiers or reserve soldiers. These people, Chairperson, were not under any duress; they were willingly upholding the ideology of apartheid. Yet these have been forgotten or have not been forced to account to this commission. Having clarified our reservations, the present process is a reality we cannot wish away. We would like to complement it by proposing a way forward.

A Way Forward

There is a need /pp 6-7/

- to devise a mechanism for reconciliation beyond the TRC process;
- to work out a way of restitution that will not tax the tax payer further
- to call on the religious community to have their own TRC
- to work towards the establishment of a national bank by the church.

We believe, as ICT that our submission will receive the attention it deserves so that whilst we work towards reconciliation, the essential tenets of justice will not be ignored.

Thank you Chairperson and members of the Commission.

Submitted by

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