

THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

SUBMISSION TO THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa appreciates the invitation to make a submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In doing so, it wishes to express both its commendation of and its reservations about the work of the Commission. It affirms the Commission as a brave attempt to express the concepts of truth, amnesty and reparation in a political context and recognises that much good has been accomplished as survivors of apartheid have told their stories and perpetrators of human rights abuses have made confession. On the other hand, it believes that the essential elements of confession, repentance and face-to-face reconciliation should have been more adequately incorporated into the process. It is concerned that survivors of human rights violations are being expected to forgive while many perpetrators show little or no remorse and are not expected to make amends for their role in the past. Reconciliation is a costly process. We cannot, for the sake of political expediency, "(treat) the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace' when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6:14 RSV).

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa rejected the policy of apartheid from its codification in 1948 and consistently opposed discriminatory legislation and acts of injustice. It neither perpetrated nor excused gross violators of human rights of the kind unearthed by the TRC. Indeed, as an institution its life and work were crippled by massive abuses such as the destruction of its medical work and of educational institutions such as Kilnerton and Healdtown, the expropriation of the Federal Theological Seminary and the persistently cavalier attitude of government towards its representations.

Nevertheless it freely admits that, as a corporate body, it did not always live up to its prophetic vocation in the struggle against apartheid. Its opposition was comprised by fear of the consequences of radical action, by undue sensitivity to the views of its economically powerful white constituency, by insensitivity to the aspirations of the black majority, by undue respect for the institution of government and, above all, by a failure adequately to express at local level the principles which it proclaimed in its official Connexional pronouncements.

The Methodist Church is accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ for the quality of its life and witness. Conference resolutions as early as 1960 bear witness to the fact that it has consistently examined its life and confessed its failures. It did this also in cooperation with other churches, in the witness of the South African Council of Churches and later on in the work of the Rustenburg Declaration. /pp 1-2/

It will continue to do so in the new democratic era and will endeavour to be more faithful to its prophetic and pastoral calling.

The Methodist Church is a voluntary association whose membership is drawn from every section of the Southern African community. Among its members are people who suffered greatly under apartheid. Others known to us cooperated with the regime in various ways, and some may have committed serious human rights violations as members of the Special Branch or in other capacities. Yet others may have committed such abuses as members of liberation movements. The church encourages all such persons to appear before the TRC and to seek forgiveness from their communities and congregations. A great number of Methodists, ministers and lay persons in all sections of the community remained silent and uninvolved and many defended their inactivity by seeking to separate the spheres of religion and politics. The Methodist Church acknowledges its failure to convince such people of the integral link between the Gospel and justice and to make them aware of the socio-economic and political implications of Christian discipleship.

In conclusion, the Methodist Church commits itself to carry forward the work of truth and reconciliation within its own life, and is ready to cooperate with the other churches and people of faith in the continuing task of healing and genuine reconciliation in any way consistent with the Christian Gospel. It trusts that the state will recognise this willingness and enable the faith communities of this nation to fulfil a role for which they are uniquely suited.

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Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

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