

HATFIELD CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Chairperson of the Human Rights Violations Committee

Truth and Reconciliation

P O Box 1158

Johannesburg

2000

Dear Mr Malan

Thank you for your letter of 10 June 1997 inviting a submission from Pastor Ed Roebert of the Hatfield Christian Church.

As you are no doubt aware Pastor Ed passed away early in July on the grass in front of the Union Buildings preparing to march with Christian leaders from 133 nations to demonstrate the love of God in the cause of reaching every person in the world with the good news of Jesus Christ by the year 2000. I enclose a short obituary for your information.

Please find attached a three-page submission from the Hatfield Christian Church. May the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ rest on your deliberations, and on the future of our great country.

Yours faithfully

Dr Graham Catto

For: STEERING COMMITTEE

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

REFLECTING ON GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF THE PAST

The Hatfield Christian Church has always been open for membership to all people, while its Training Centre has trained people from all races since its inception in

1980. Black students were accommodated in student housing in spite of laws to the contrary. This stand was taken not in defiance of government, but in conviction of the truth.

The approach of the church has been to produce a people whom, by their wholehearted commitment to Christ, would show the way ahead as a Christian people of all kinds living together in real love. The church has also sought to take hands with pastors of all races and denominations for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. We have always sought to do these things in submission to government and, wherever possible, meeting the requirements of the law.

In dealing with the political evils under which we lived, the Hatfield Training Centre has emphasized the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God, and has exposed the contamination of the truth in both apartheid theology and in liberation theology. The errors in these teachings have been exposed in an unbiased and very direct fashion, with people from both right and left wing backgrounds coming free from years of bitter hatred and misconception. Real healing of individuals and reconciliation has been a mark of this training. At a time when the motion picture "Cry Freedom" was controversially introduced to South Africa and quickly withdrawn from circulation, the Training Centre used the **/pp.1-2/** reality.

The church however failed to fully investigate the truth behind the activities of the apartheid regime and to adequately teach its people as a whole the Biblical response. The church's prayer on occasion for the "Boys on the Border" was motivated by a concern for the safety of our own sons, and marked a naivete about the real battle. The link between the ANC and the blatantly atheistic and violently anti-Christian Communist Party of those days clouded issues. We could not condone the activities of a group such as the Communist Party that had proven itself internationally as brutal and unjust in the extreme, even if it was opposing the injustice of apartheid.

While we did not respond to the injustice of apartheid as thoroughly as we should have, it would be wrong to paint the church as supportive to the apartheid regime. We continually experienced prejudice from the government and its church allies in our attempts to preach the gospel and spread the good news about Jesus Christ. Our naivete did contribute to *de facto* acceptance of some aspects of society that should have been more effective as the salt of the earth in the marketplace. For not doing what we should have done, we request forgiveness. **/pp.2-3/**

In our view the institutional church has no role in direct confrontation with the institutions of society as change is brought about by individual members making a difference in their areas of responsibility and activity.

REFLECTING ON THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE: THE ROAD TO RECONCILIATION

We believe that the road to the future is a positive one. We plan to:

continue to allow the Holy Spirit to bind our hearts together as a people from all backgrounds, without guilt and manipulation

trust God for His wisdom for our people to contribute in their fields of activity to the future of our great country

continue with healing and reconciliation as we have been for decades

encourage restitution among our members for specific and general wrongs they have committed

continue more fervently with a critical analysis of the ideological forces in society in order to keep our members informed.

We note that a free press is vital for the dissemination of facts and interpretations to prevent a recurrence of past wrongs.

OBITUARY

PASTOR ED ROEBERT

"Pastor of Pastors", determined to follow the Holy Spirit

Edmund Roebert and his friend Kevin Doran began 16 years of prayer for the city of Pretoria on the hill behind the Union Buildings when he had a church of 100 members. He died at the age of 57 on the grass in front of the Union Buildings preparing to march with thousands of Christian leaders from 133 nations to Sammy Marks Square to demonstrate the love of God in the cause of reaching every person in the world with the good news of Jesus Christ by the year 2000.

It was a fitting occasion and place for a man who gave his life wholeheartedly to the purposes of God from the age of 18 years when he was born again. Within weeks he had thrown himself into activities vital for the nurture and growth of the church – Sunday school teaching, and street corner preaching with his building contractor father who established and built the Greenfields Baptist Church in East London. Ed grew up in East London where he attended Selbourne College. He left the Eastern Cape to study at the Baptist Theological College in Johannesburg. He also completed his Theology Degree at UNISA.