

PROF VAN DER WALT: We first want to express our sincere and greatest gratitude for this opportunity, Your Grace, Mr Chairman, especially for the two Afrikaners who are very ashamed of your own past and also what we are submitting here, is in great humility.

We are not theologians as indicated on your programme, we are neither ministers, but we are ordinary lecturers at University of Potchefstroom. We are also members of the Reformed Church of South Africa and we are therefore here in our individual capacities and not officially representing either our church or the institution where we work.

We therefore cannot speak on behalf of either the church or the university and I must say we are sad that our own church is missing the opportunity of this occasion where we have learnt a lot and which have encouraged us to continue on the way ahead.

I will briefly answer on the three questions you have posed and the first one is to what extent have you suffered? Your Grace, the answer is simple. We did not suffer. At least if we compare it with the real sufferings of our black countrymen. We had ordinary check ups by the Security Police, we were ridiculed and rejected by our own people on many occasions, we were mentally tortured, but never physically.

We also by participating in apartheid, did damage to ourselves, because we benefitted from the system and we were not willing to sacrifice our careers in deliberating taking the side of the oppressed people. And for all these reasons and many more, we made a public confession of our guilt, of which you have a copy and more copies are available also in English translation.

May I read only a small part in the original Afrikaans. Confession of guilt. We hereby confess before God and our neighbour that we failed in word and in action in church and society, privately and publicly to testify adequately and unambiguously against the embodiment and execution of the ideology of apartheid which had an invidious and even ruinous effect on the lives of so many of our fellow believers and fellow citizens.

We confess that we were not courageous enough to testify that we did not pray faithfully enough, did not believe actively enough, did not love vehemently enough and did not have enough empathy in the context of individual and social injustices in which our country was plunged for four decades and more.

We acknowledge in great humility that we were guilty of the violation of fundamental human rights and we acknowledge that we had a share in the directionless movement of our country, during times of crisis.

We confess that we are deeply guilty in the sight of God and we seek forgiveness from God and the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but we also plead for forgiveness from our deprived and wronged fellow believers and fellow citizens for what we did to them.

From our side we undertake as far as is humanly possible, to make amends in word and action for the damage which we did to them through the unfair discriminatory system. It is only this small portion that I wish to read, I will continue in English.

May I add Your Grace, that in spite of the fact that only four people drew up this document of repentance, that we were not the only voices crying in the wilderness. We received many phone calls, letters and personal conversations and also in the press, positive reactions from people who said that they would like to sign this document, both from the Reformed Church of South Africa as well as from staff of the Potchefstroom University.

On the other hand, we must also say that we noticed a stubborn resistance of people simply ignoring us by keeping silent. This brings me to the second question, what have you done to oppose apartheid.

We were privileged at the Potchefstroom University in our education also overseas, that we were not educated in a narrow minded church view of the world and of society, but that we were educated in a Christian world view which indicated that as Christians, we had a calling to serve God in all areas of life.

Of course this makes us even more guilty that we have done so little in the past. An important part of this perspective was a Christian social analysis, you can call it Christian footwear and Christian clothing to appear in public and not only pyjamas for your personal life of faith or a Sunday suit.

And of course a Christian world view can easily derail and finally become an oppressive ideology, but from this perspective and from a Christian philosophy, we tried to open the eyes and the perceptions, change the perceptions of especially the white people in our church and also at the university and as far as possible, also outside our university.

I mention a few examples. The periodical Word and Action, Word and Deed, already criticised apartheid from the early 1970's. The publication in 1977 of the Koinonia declaration which had an international impact, and then all the publications of the Institute for Reformational Studies on socio-political issues as well as its comments on important documents like the Kairos document, Church and Society.

But what I would like to mention especially is our conferences where we try to get together people from all walks of life and all the different population groups in South Africa to discuss together issues of relevance for the whole country.

I had experience that during time of racial isolation, this encouraged people tremendously to continue in the struggle and at our conferences we also challenge the Potchefstroom University, we reprimanded it in our resolutions because of its stance, its policy about the admission as well as accommodation policies towards black students.

In all these ways, we tried to open the eyes of church leaders, lecturers, students and people blinded by the apartheid ideology and I must confess opening our own eyes more and more for the damage done by this ideology.

This brings me to a last point, what kind of expertise can we contribute in the future? I think there are three levels, personal, institutional and national.

Me and my family have done a few small things. I am not going to mention that. On the institutional level I only want to mention that we are involved in a variety of ways trying to transform the university and perhaps the Reformed Church of South Africa.

I think Professor Venter can mention more examples. I only want in conclusion to mention one thing on a national level.

I think we should pay even more attention than in the past to the whole issue which this whole meeting concentrated on, and that is what is the correct, what is the correct relationship between religion and society including of course political, economic and cultural and educational aspects.

You may say I am becoming to academic now, but I think we need clear thinking to have correct actions. Let me mention three things. The first thing, I think even during this meeting it was quite clear that the following question needs further study and clarification.

About this relationship between religion and society, on the one hand, we cannot identify religion and politics, then you get the unholy alliance again which we had in the past between church and State.

On the other hand again, we cannot separate religion and society, then you get a so-called a-political Christianity of which we also have examples at this conference because religion is something total, it is something integral, you cannot separate the two.

The question then is what is the correct relationship. Ideas about an independent prophetic role has been mentioned here. I think it is not enough. I think and that is only one suggestion, that we have to work out a comprehensive philosophy of society in which we concretise God's central love commandment so that we can see that justice is the form of love we need in political life.

There is not a clash between justice and love, that stewardship is the central norm in our economic life and what the implications thereof is, fidelity in marriage, etc, etc.

Second example, many Christians think that religion can only have a beneficial influence on society, more or less automatic positive influence. I think it has also become abundantly clear during this whole meeting that this is not the fact. Religion can play a double role. It can also simply legitimise an unjust status quo, it can act as opium because religion is a fallible human response to God. How can we therefore in future, and that is the question, enhance the inspiring, motivating positive impact of religion whilst neutralising its negative consequences. In other words, put very straightforwardly, how can we become more self critical?

And then lastly, and here I am including myself. Many beautiful promises have been made during this whole meeting of what people envisage to be doing in the future. My question is shouldn't it be monitored?

I think we need a kind of feedback in a few years from now. This may be one of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and because this Committee will no longer be in existence any more, I do hope that the religious communities will take the initiative.

Thank you Mr Chairman, my time is up and I hand over to Professor Venter.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you Professor Swanepoel. Professor Venter?

PROF VENTER: It is Chairperson, in itself a significant fact that we are here without mandate or institutional support.

The specific reformed Afrikaner community from which we come, and who were part of that privileged group who used the opportunity given to us by God, to lead this country used that opportunity for selfishness and extremely atrocious forms of oppression, still does not seem ready to confess its leading share in what has happened.

I am struggling with the question whether this indicates that the community such as that wants to continue in some way with the practices and attitudes of the past. I have asked myself many times, forgive me my intellectual style of doing, that is what I have been trained to and what I do every day, how it came that the Afrikaner and especially those in the tradition in which I am, went down the road of the ideology of apartheid.

And I see something in the history of the Afrikaner going back to a philosophy of Jan Jacques Rossouw, who though espousing consensus democracy, elevated the State into the position of God. Rossouw wanted to encompass all civil institutions in the aims of the State, even prescribe a civil religion and interestingly the only crime for which he explicitly prescribes the death penalty, is that you deny any tannate of the civil religion.

Seems to me and it is also clear from Rossouw's work that he went back to the ancient model of the Greek and Roman City States, where the State were God and Socrates dies for having doubted the gods of the State and the charge sheet brought before Pontius Pilot about one Jesus of Nazareth, said he says he is the King of the Jews, which of course relativised he pretended divinity of the Roman Emperor.

Conservative Christians often defend their complicity with an unjust state for their own advantage, using Romans 13 where Christians are commanded to obey the government. Too easily it is forgotten that Romans 13 provides no opportunity for any Christian less a fair policy. It does induce Christians to accept even an unbelieving government as the servant of God for justice which means amongst others, that Christians are not to take the law into their own hands.

At the same time it relativises the Roman Emperor and his pretended divinity to the position of a servant for justice no less, but no more.

As an Afrikaner striving to be a responsible Christian citizen, I felt liberated on election day, 1994. For the first time in decades that I had the vote, my vote counted for me alone. And I did not have to carry the unbearable burden of voting for millions of other people who had neither vote nor voice.

The arrival of democracy however, spells liberation but not salvation. Democracy in itself will not save us from a repetition of the oppressions of the past. Jan Jacques Rossouw's model of the State was eminently democratic, yet he substituted patriotic State education for parental education, he wanted to control public opinion, prescribed a civil religion and proposed full control of the economy.

It was a modernised version of the ancient god States. It is also not for nothing that he rejected Christianity as his civil religion, because he was afraid that people who believe you must love God, your neighbour and your enemy, may just be ambiguous citizens who would not kneel and adore the State finally and might just at some stage or other, come up for justice.

Democracy serves as one of the best instruments to call the State to book about justice, but it is not the only one. A very important instrument for this is exactly what Rossouw did not want, independent, non-political institutions, churches, universities, media which are critical and point to that higher norm which the State is supposed to serve, the norm of justice.

This is what brought us together here, our failure as religious people. My failure as a Christian citizen, my failure as a member of the Reformed Church, the failure of Christian institutions in this country to which I and we belong, to call the previous regime to book exactly on the obedience on that, on the question of obedience to that higher norm.

Democracy I say in itself will not save us. Hitler came to power through democracy. Pending on how one defines democracy, the apartheid State presented itself as a democracy of the Rossouw kind, a Volks democracy, Afrikaner churches, Afrikaner schools, Afrikaner universities in the days of the Reddingsdaadbond, even Afrikaner rugby.

The Afrikaner volk was identified with the Afrikaner State and the State encompassed all the other civil institutions. Afrikaners idealised their volk as embodied in the State.

Thus the Afrikaner churches, universities and other institutions acted as no more than limbs, the hands, the feet, the brain of the volk and the State.

Afrikaner churches married couples or refused to according to the unjustibles of the State. It remained silent when the black members who worked, paid taxes and obeyed the law, were denied their civil rights. They even justified this denial theologically.

It did not protest while blacks were living and working in such circumstances that family life collapsed. It sanctioned white greed through the theological justification of apartheid and remained silent mostly about its atrocious execution.

Let me just mention two examples of wilful cooperation between church and State. Young men who had just completed their studies for the ministry were conscripted into military service, in the chaplaincy services and there were references to that already during the past three days.

In spite of Reformed Church law, which places every minister under supervision of a local church council, almost nothing if anything was done, to protect these young men from the pressures of the total onslaught ideology espoused by their officers. The church did nothing to protect the few of them who dared to ask critical questions and landed themselves in serious trouble.

The second example, a few people in Potchefstroom following up on the national initiative for reconciliation in the 1980's and I suffer from a little bit of premature (indistinct), I cannot remember exactly when in the 1980's and I ask the Archbishop who was involved, but he couldn't help me either.

Those people in Potchefstroom started an initiative to provide study space for black matriculants in the afternoons during the unrest of the 1980's. They requested to use church halls and church buildings from Afrikaans churches in town. Direct communication from the Security Forces and I was a member of one such church council, there was a member of the Security Forces as an elder there, who came up with this story, branded this action as communist inspired because the national initiative for reconciliation, that was the origin of it and of course those were aligned to the communists, and no church council in Potchefstroom was prepared and I am referring to all three of the major Afrikaans churches, was prepared to supply such space.

The ideological blindness was so strong that the elders and ministers totally overlooked the fact that a black matriculant who did use this opportunity, was in fact jeopardising the short term aims of the struggle, how this could be communist inspired, I cannot figure out.

Pleading that we did not know about the atrocities being committed, is simply not valid. Enough persons were supposed to have jumped out of a window at John Vorster Square or died in some other strange ways, for us to have had to ask ourselves the question about the Police methods of interrogation and to have concluded that Steve Biko was not the only one ever to have been killed in Police custody.

And we surely knew what powers had been conferred by the Security legislation and the state of emergency on young men of 18 and 19 years old indoctrinated to see citizens calling for dignified treatment, as their enemies.

We took young men, we gave them guns and we instituted a state of emergency so we made them judges. They could apply the death penalty and they could execute it and they could do so in split second or in 30 seconds, on the spot. That is what the state of emergency implied, they could shoot.

We knew that if we did not know the details of what happened inside, either by silence or explicit support, reformed Afrikaner people acted in complicity with the State. Both academics and ministers who spoke out were few and far between.

Philosophically and theologically we in the reformed tradition, have no excuse either. We have a clear and good tradition of social criticism, based on two principles. All societal institutions are equally subject to God's law and societal institutions should guard their independence conscientiously so as to fulfil their own particular tasks and to witness prophetical to all of society about that law.

Our cosy relationship with the apartheid State went against our very reformed understanding of society. I am a member of the Reformed Churches who finally decided to denounce apartheid as a sin and its theological justification as a heresy but then, did it systematically start to oppose this sin and heresy amongst its own members, was any member ever reprimanded, any theologian called to book for voting for this policy or providing biblical support for this doctrine?

As far as I know, the answer is no. The sinner decided not to confess at least, not here before the TRC. This makes Prof Meiring's question how to get the Afrikaans churches on board the reconciliation process, very acute.

In part the problem lies in our discourse. In a sense we allow them to be separate by using the discourse of separation. There are in fact no Afrikaans or Afrikaner churches, all of them have black members too.

Getting reformed Afrikaners on board the reconciliation process, can be the product of a loving confrontation by their own black members. What does this all mean for the future?

Firstly without a real confession which shows a change of heart, we have a credibility problem. We want to do our civil duty whatever valid critical contributions we can make, will be read in terms of the sins of our past.

It is possible since the apartheid State touched on every aspect of life, it was a totalitarian State that presently we feel seduced into intervening from the side of the present democratic State into every aspect of life so as to transform it, which may if we are not careful, bring us back to the position of a State which intervenes in every aspect of life, but we can only tackle this problem at least from the side of the reformed Afrikaners if we have come clean on having done the same sin.

One reformed colleague, a theologian has criticised us for confessing and I am not referring to him in order to answer him directly, but in order to point to an attitude. He was calling this confession which my colleague Bennie van der Walt read, referring to old cows. Most of you know the Afrikaans expression "ou koeie uit die sloot grawe". If an old cow falls into the trench, well, then let her stay in the mud and die there, why dig her up?

He wants us rather to tackle the present government, focusing on corruption, incompetence and crime. I shiver at these expressions. It is an insult to the bereaved families, those murdered in atrocious ways, those who became the objects of suspicion and even necklacing. It is also an insult to bereaved parents, wives, who lost husbands and sons in military service, not knowing where and how, while we as Afrikaners were pretending to practise a foreign policy of non-intervention and non-interference in our neighbours' affairs.

Our critics wants us to attack the government for crime, corruption, incompetence otherwise he says we shall have to confess again very soon in the future. I fear he is both wrong and right.

He is wrong in since the past is very much still with us in its consequences and alive. There is no such thing as old cows in the trench. And also wrong about having to confess in future, since we already have to confess that we are failing and are insensitive about getting to grips with the present consequences of the past.

The past is very much alive in the demographic distribution of our church members and its geographical delineation of congregations.

The extremely poor are still hidden in the township congregations, while the deacons who do have the means to support them, are concentrated in the white congregations.



I have not yet seen any theological rethinking, also not by our colleague, who is a theologian, I am not of the office of deacon in a multi-cultural geographically divided society although cultural prejudice is at the very heart of the institution of the office of deaconship in the New Testament.

Family life has been destructed by the conditions of life under apartheid. The destruction of (indistinct) of morality is part of our present crime and greed problem. The Apostle Paul recognised the independence of family life when he encouraged Christian wives not to divorce their pagan husbands. All of us have to help emancipate family life as a healthy form of social life, not to be swallowed up by church or State.

We have to support it and not just break it up, even if we don't like polygamy from the side of womens' rights, we cannot just tell polygamist's wife to divorce.

I have seen and signed petitions against our liberal abortion laws but our responsibility for family planning, does not end with petitioning the government. How about the churches putting their deeds where their words are, providing shelters and or schooling for pregnant women who might otherwise consider abortion as the only option?

We are critical, so am I when government interferes with parental controls over their children's education. But thousands of teachers are out of their jobs. Why do we, Christians not hire some of those teachers to teach our children?

If private Christian schools at a fair cost ever had a chance of success, they do now. By taking the responsibility for the education of our children upon ourselves, those who have the means, the government does not only save on school places for the poorest of poor, but also costly control mechanisms.

Part of our divisions of the past came from the way in which Afrikaners tried to protect their cultural heritage. Is exclusivity the only way because we are struggling in some institutions with this? Isn't it time to swop the roles and protect not our own cultural heritage, but that of others and thus create goodwill for our own?

We cry that socialism works nowhere when government intervenes in economic life for the sake of affirmative action and I am nearly finished, Your Grace.

It is a well-known fact that even in hi-tech Japan the bulk of employment comes from small and mini businesses. Where are the Christian businessmen who will train mini entrepreneurs, help them to tools and contract them into their manufacturing line, so that they have a market for their products.

One last remark, government totalitarianism is not the only god, social god on the horizon. Late capitalist competitive totalitarianism is already wreaking havoc in our

country. We tend to, we seem to say well if the government cannot do it, then the market can and will, competition will care for us.

We are too happy atheist socialism failed, so competitive totalism must then be the Christian answer. The economy gains investment, the GMP grows, yet unemployment grows too. Suicide amongst young people is on the increase. Selfishness, corruption and greed crimes abound.

Yet, we blindly serve the capitalist god. A new kind of elitism develops. Those that can afford sophisticated technology are well off, the rest are without merit and not competitive enough.

It covers a new racism, poverty and being left behind in the market go together and more or less overlap with the racial divide.

We see no resistance or even analysis of this brutal philosophy from Christians yet, I hope that we will soon see it come.

Thank you Honourable Commissioners for having listened to us. We represent nobody accept that which we believe in.

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