

CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN SOUTH AFRICA

From the Presiding *Bishop*..

RECEIVING FAX 011 333-0832

SENDING FAX 031 701-5519

The Chairperson of the Human Rights Violations Committee

P.O. Box 286 Truth and Reconciliation

Pinetown 3600 PO Box 1158

JOHANNESBURG

2000

18 July 1997

Dear Sir / Madam

SUBMISSIONS BY CHURCHES TO THE T. R. C.

Thank you for your fax of 10 June 1997, inviting the Church of England in Southern Africa to respond to your questions about post human rights violations and to give suggestions of ways to foster reconciliation in this country. May I make the following comments:

1. Our denomination has been in this country since 1806, since which time we have always maintained an Evangelical and Protestant position, believing that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and Man, and recognising that the Bible is the only authority and the final standard for faith and life. These spiritual roots have influenced our style of worship, our concern for unbelievers and our attitude to social justice for all racial groups.
2. Our denomination suffered greatly as a result of the split that took place in 1870 in the Church of England in this country. This saw the emergence of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa. We were constituted as a new denomination only in 1938, with almost no buildings or ministers. Our struggle was one for survival, with few resources and little manpower. Our situation has improved since then. Numerically, our largest following is among the Zulu-speaking people of this country, while we also have members whose homelanguages (among others) are English, Afrikaans, North-Sotho, South-Sotho and Xhosa.

4. Our denomination has always divorced itself from party political activities, but we encourage our members, as individual followers of Christ, to become involved in public affairs. There probably were some of our members who belonged to political parties that supported the previous system, but there were undoubtedly other members who opposed discriminatory legislation of any sort.

5. The following statement was made in 1985 by our national Synod, and this reflects what our stance has been regarding these matters over the years:

'This Synod expresses its grave concern at the terrible violence in South Africa at the present time.

It expresses abhorrence of all violence and all oppression and prays for everyone suffering therefrom.

'Synod totally rejects discrimination on grounds of colour, sex or race as contrary to the Bible.

'Since the root cause of every evil in human society is sin and that before God all are sinners regardless of whom they are and where they are, Synod affirms that the only answer to sin has been provided by God in the death of His Son on the Cross. He died for all men that they might be reconciled to God by faith in Him.

Because reconciliation to God means reconciliation of man to man, it also means the regeneration of society and is the only answer to South Africa's needs.

Every endeavour has been made over the years to remove any suggestion of discrimination in our Constitution and structure.

7. A delegation of our senior leaders met with Mr PW Botha when he was President, to express our concern about wrongs in our country, and on several occasions I personally encouraged Mr FW de Klerk, when he was President, to hasten change in our land.

8. As a Church and individually we confess our imperfections and seek forgiveness from God and our fellowmen where our actions or omissions have caused grief, pain or want. In repentance we pray that God will so unite us together as a nation that oneness, peace and reconciliation in Christ will be the result.

9. With hindsight, no doubt we should have been more aggressive in campaigning for government reform, more vociferous in opposing violence, far more active in our programmes of evangelism, more diligent in social upliftment programmes and more persistent in calling upon God to have mercy on us.

10. The massacre at our congregation at St. James Church, Kenilworth, while causing us enormous pain and ongoing agony, has taught us something of the

suffering that others have experienced; and also given us the opportunity of showing forgiveness and of dealing with those who have sought forgiveness from us in a God-honouring way. We pray for them, as Jesus Christ has taught us.

11. As we face the future, we believe that we need to recommit ourselves to the urgent tasks of evangelising, extending our social upliftment programmes and calling upon Almighty God to make us a nation of broad vision, godly action and deep compassion.

Yours sincerely

JOE BELL

(PRESIDING BISHOP)

JB / cab