

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Rev. James Buys at the Microphone

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Abstract

On October 19, 1997, Rev. James Buys presented the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa's submission to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). He firstly reported on the extent to which URCSA, through its theology and activities, contributed to the violation of human rights during the years of apartheid, especially referring to the church's stance on the notorious Group Areas Act, the government's Labour Policy, the Mixed Marriages Act and the chaplain services. For all of this, a heartfelt apology was rendered. Buys, secondly, reported on the decisions and actions taken by URCSA during the 1970s and 1980s to resist apartheid, ranging from prophetic statements by individuals and synods, to eventually taking an active part in the struggle against apartheid. The role that the ecumenical community inside as well as outside South Africa had played to encourage and empower URCSA to define its message and actions, was also mentioned by Buys. Concluding his statement, Buys discussed URCSA's recommendations for the process of reconciliation in South Africa. The author, who was present at the Faith Communities Hearing when Buys addressed the TRC, added a number of personal remarks pertaining to URCSA's statement and to the role that URCSA is called to play on the road to reconciliation and nation-building in the country.

Keywords: apartheid; James Buys; reconciliation; religion; South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)

East London, November 17–19, 1997

There was an air of expectancy in the hall when Rev. James Buys took his place at the podium. It was the final day of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Faith Communities Hearing in East London. Much had already happened during the day. The Zion Christian Church with Bishop Barnabas Lekganyane in the lead opened the



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proceedings—one of the rare occasions that the bishop appeared in public. The joint leaders of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Frank Chikane and Isak Burger, were next, telling the story of the recent unification of the denomination’s black and white sections. Then it was the Dutch Reformed Church’s turn, with the moderator Freek Swanepoel sharing the church’s deep regret over its apartheid history, asking forgiveness for the sin and heresy of the DRC’s theological defence of apartheid, causing untold harm and pain to millions of fellow South Africans. When Buys was invited to the microphone, many in the audience readied themselves for drama. Of all churches and communities in the land, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) arguably had the closest experience of the pain caused by the DRC over many years (Meiring 1999, 265–285; cf Boraine 2000, 179–183; Allan 2006, 344–371; Meiring 2000, 123–121; Meiring 2005, 121–131).

The TRC’s Faith Communities Hearing (East London, November 17–19, 1997) was the last in a series of special hearings at which different sectors of the South African society were invited to address the commission on their respective roles during the past: political parties, the media, academia, the medical fraternity, the lawyers and the judges, the military, the police and correctional services, big business, women, and the youth. Invitations to attend were sent to different churches as well as to other religious communities, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, African Traditionalist and others. The Faith Communities hearing was held in the port city of East London, the venue where 17 months earlier the first of the TRC victims’ hearings took place (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report 1998, Volume 4, 59–92).

For three days, religious leaders, congregants, international guests and human rights specialists met to evaluate the role of the faith communities during the apartheid era, and to discuss the contribution that these communities may bring in the process of national reconciliation. In response to the TRC’s invitation, 41 faith communities presented their submissions. Each of the churches and faith communities was asked to address primarily four questions: To what extent has the community suffered under apartheid? Were there some in the community that overtly or covertly supported the racist policies of the past? Was the community—or some in the community—involved in the struggle against apartheid? Lastly, what contribution may be expected from the community in the process of nation-building and reconciliation?

Day one belonged to the South African Council of Churches, the mainline Protestant Churches, as well as the Catholic Church. Day two was devoted to the other faith communities who had many stories to tell and many experiences to share of having to live and survive in a so-called “Christian country.” Day three, the final day, was set aside for the ZCC, the AFM and the DRC Family.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu warmly welcomed Buys, with whom he had shared many experiences during the struggle against apartheid, inviting him to submit his report—totalling 23 pages, one of the most comprehensive statements presented to the TRC

(URCSA 1997, 1–23). Contrary to the expectation of some, Buys, who authored the submission, did not start by pointing a finger at the DRC, listing all the indignities and injustices meted out by the “mother church” towards the “daughter churches” in the DRC family over many years—albeit that he had every reason to do so. Instead, in the spirit of the truth and reconciliation process, the moderator of URCSA chose in humility and with integrity, to take his place in front of the mirror of history, reporting on the painful road URCSA had travelled during the years.

After a brief introduction on the history of the church, on the fateful decision taken in 1857 because “of the weakness of some” that eventually resulted in the one DRC being torn apart, establishing different churches along racial lines,¹ Buys reported on the reunification of the DRCA and the DRMC in April 1994:

The amalgamation of the two churches represents a watershed in the history of the DRMC and the DRCA. This union represents a Kairos moment in the life of the church in which it departs from apartheid and contradicts the justification of racially divided churches. The event of unification furthermore had great symbolic value in view of the historical context in which it took place, namely 10 days before the first free and democratic elections in South Africa. (URCSA 1997, 2)

In his submission Buys took care to describe events that took place in the DRCA, the DRMC, and after unification in 1994, in URCSA.

Violation of Human Rights

The first question put to the faith communities was about the extent to which the denomination, through its theology and activities, contributed to the formation of motives and perspectives of individuals, organisations and institutions that led to gross human rights violations—either by opposing or by upholding apartheid.

In answering this, URCSA’s report referred to the popular slogan of the eighties: “The Church—Site of Struggle” (URCSA 1997, 4). The church, Buys said, was one of the institutions that did not remain unaffected by the all-encompassing influence of apartheid. The slogan led to the realisation that the same contradictions prevalent in the

1 Much has been written on the Synod of 1857 and its aftermath. A good account, as well as a comprehensive reference to other sources on the subject, is to be found in Johann Kinghorn (1986, *Die NG Kerk en Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Macmillan, 70–94. Resulting from the 1857 decision, the NG Sendingkerk (Dutch Reformed Mission Church, DRMC) was established in 1881. In 1910 the first Black Synod (Orange Free State) of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa was established, followed by Synods of the DRCA in Transvaal (1932), Cape Province (1951) and Natal (1952). The four synods were brought together to form the General Synod of the DRCA in 1963. Mission work among the Indian population resulted in the formation of the Indian Reformed Church in 1968. The name was subsequently changed to the Reformed Church in Africa. In 1994 the DRMC and the DRCA united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. During the same year a number of congregations broke away from URCSA to re-establish themselves again as the DRCA.

apartheid society were present and reflected in the teaching and the life of the church. The struggle was right within the church!

Did URCSA contribute or incite people to violent acts? It is difficult to say. But it has to be recognised that for many years no strong guidance on the issue emanated from the church's leadership. During the struggle it was mostly left to the conscience of individual members whether to involve themselves in violent offensives of the military wings of the liberation movements. "Whilst it may be said that the church called for peaceful protests," Buys said, "the absence of clear decisions inevitably did not prevent nor condemn violation of human rights in the struggle against apartheid" (URCSA 1997, 5).

Yes, URCSA had been critical of apartheid, and eventually publicly did speak out. From time to time the church's stance—and synodical debates around the issues—exposed URCSA members to persecution. But did we do enough to prevent and oppose these violations? The emphatic answer is "No!" Looking back, the report stated, we have to admit that the criticism was slow in coming. Researching the minutes of synodical meetings of the DRCM and DRCA up to 1971, there is a marked absence of prophetic witness—reflecting a theological poverty and a betrayal of the reformed tradition. "On the contrary" the moderator added, "we need to admit that many decisions of the church extolled certain aspects of apartheid policy and even sought the acceptable implementation of apartheid legislation" (URCSA 1997, 6).

One example of this was the church's stance on the Group Areas Act when it was promulgated in 1954, and with regard to the enactment of the Homeland Policy. Many congregants suffered horribly from the results of the policy: forced removals, loss of places of worship, denial of ownership rights, et cetera. But at synodical meetings little attention was given to the issue. Under the leadership of white missionaries the DRCA indeed went further, viewing the homeland policy as an acceptable alternative to the negative results of migrant labour.

Eventually, during the 1970s, things started to change. With the emergence of indigenous leadership in the church and the breaking of the influence of the white missionaries, a greater urgency and clarity on these issues emerged.² At the 1978 synod the DRCA rejected the policy. And in 1982 the DRCM followed suit, calling for the repeal of the Group Areas Act (URCSA 1997, 6).

A second example is the church's reaction to the government's Migrant Labour Policy. Although many members of the former DRCA were adversely affected by the policy, no protest came from the church. At the 1971 Synod the DRCA even noted with

2 Much has been written in the past years on the role of missionaries in South Africa. A good overview is to be found in Willem Saayman, 2007, *Being Missionary, Being Human*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 9–13, 75, 128–129.

gratitude what government was doing with regard to housing for migrant workers as well as the establishment of border industries. It was only in 1983 that the church declared this policy to be in conflict with the norms of Scripture—a decision that was reaffirmed at the Synods of 1987 and 1991 (URCSA 1997, 7).

The church's attitude to the notorious Mixed Marriages Act is another example. Ministers of the church, for many years, fell in line with government regulations being registered as marriage officers within the different race departments. Moreover, little reference is found in the decisions of the church outrightly rejecting the Immorality Act. It was only in 1987 that the General Synod of the DRCA noted with gratitude the repealing of the Act (URCSA 1997, 7–8).

A very controversial issue during the apartheid years was the establishment of chaplain services by the security forces, the SA Police and the SA Defence Force. The duties of the chaplains went beyond pastoral care of the members of their churches. The war, according to the authorities, was waged against “terrorists, communists, and anti-Christian forces,” and the chaplains were required to prepare and spiritually undergird their members for the “holy war.” Although individual members of the synods opposed the idea of participation in the chaplain services, the DRMC and the DRCA continued to avail ministers for this service. Thus the church participated in this “holy war” and even blessed it. It did not resist it nor guided its members in opposing it. The URCSA submission put it bluntly: “Thus the church contributed to gross human rights violations, polarisation and indescribable suffering and grief” (URCSA 1997, 8).

A final example of the church's involvement in the violation of human rights during the apartheid era was its co-operation within numerous apartheid structures of the time: local town councils, the Coloured Representative Council, the Tricameral System, the President's Council and homeland governments. Decisions of the church in this regard were often ambiguous and members and clergy at different times participated in these structures, which, in the words of the submission, “left a blemish on the history of the church” (URCSA 1997, 9).

Failure to Remain True to the Church's Principles

The TRC asked the faith communities to report on the possible failure of the denomination to remain true to the principles of their faith that oppose human rights violations. Addressing this issue, the URCSA submission briefly discussed the main tenets of our Reformed faith, especially referring to John Calvin's teaching on church-state relations. The state is regarded as God's servant to the benefit of its subjects, to promote justice, restrain chaos and fight evil. But if the state diverts from this calling, resistance against the unjust state and tyranny is not only justified, it becomes an obligation (URCSA 1997, 9–10).

Sadly, URCSA failed in this regard, not living up to its faith convictions. It did not renounce and resist apartheid and the human rights violations resulting from apartheid.

Rather, the church often got caught up in debates on the right to resist the authorities and on the legitimacy of the armed struggle—and this at a time when some church members had already joined the armed wings of the liberation movements. Moreover, when the necessary decisions were eventually taken, the church found it difficult to implement those decisions. There was no challenge to action. Up to the 1980s the church was not an efficient instrument of justice and care. When local resistance in the country emerged, for instance when the United Democratic Front started its campaign, some presbyteries did come out in support, but the synods missed the opportunity to give positive guidance.

For all of this, for by its failure to oppose human rights violations by acts of commission or omission; for its subtle recognition of the illegitimate apartheid regime through liaison, representation and negotiation; for its silence and conscious and unconscious lack of clarity in word and deed, URCSA confess[es] unreservedly its and, vicariously, its members' guilt. "We herewith plead for forgiveness of our fellow citizens and the Supreme Triune God." (URCSA 1997, 11)

Decisions and Actions in Resistance of Human Rights Violations

However, this is only half of the story of URCSA. There is much more to report. The time did come when the DRCA and DRMC—and after the unification of the churches, URCSA—took an active part in the struggle against apartheid, when the wider community inside and outside the country became aware of URCSA and its role in the struggle. Again, Buys spoke in humility: "We do not boast, neither are we haughty in presenting our actions for scrutiny. Even while we confess gratitude to the Lord for some of our decisions and actions, we simultaneously acknowledge our weakness in this part of our submission" (URCSA 1997, 11).

The emergence of contextual theology in the 1970s and 1980s—with its strong imperative of the indivisibility of word and deed—had a predominant influence on the life and witness of URCSA. Generic expressions of contextual theology in the form of black theology and black consciousness, as well as Latin American liberation theology, had a marked impact on the church. It forced the church to reflect on the essence of being church (ecclesiology), the recognition of God as the God of the poor, the oppressed and the suffering (theology), the social, political and economic implications of God's liberating acts through Jesus Christ (doctrine of salvation), and the calling of the church to be partners in God's liberating mission through its praxis of liberation and the opposition to injustice (missiology). "The acid test in doctrine and life," the submission emphasised, "is grounded in the preparedness of the church to obey God and to suffer as a result of said obedience" (URCSA 1997, 12).

Three particular moments in the life of URCSA illustrate this:

- *Dr Allan Boesak's letter to Minister Alwyn Schlebusch (24 August 1979).* The minister launched a scathing attack against the SA Council of Churches which

had issued a call to civil obedience in the country. The church is called to proclaim the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. “This salvation pertains to the healing of the whole person. It is not intended for the ‘inner life,’ the soul of people. The Jesus proclaimed by the church, was not purely a spiritual being with spiritual qualities foreign to the reality of human existence. No, He was the Word incarnate, complete in human form, and his message of salvation is intended for the whole person in the sense of his/her whole humanity” (URCSA 1997, 13).

- The adoption of the *Confession of Belhar* (1986) which in Articles 4 and 5 strongly states that God unequivocally sides with the poor and the wronged, that he brings justice to the oppressed and frees the prisoners. “Therefore we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel” (URCSA 1997, 13).
- The *Kairos Document* (1985) was signed by many members of URCSA who identified with the document’s critique of state theology and church theology, choosing instead for a radical prophetic theology. God is not neutral, the *Kairos Document* confessed. He is the liberator of the oppressed. Within the Christian tradition a tyrannical regime has no moral legitimacy. It is, therefore, illegitimate and cannot be reformed. The follow-up to the *Kairos Document*, the *Road to Damascus*, went one step further, declaring that solidarity in the struggle against injustice and the promotion of God’s mission in this world is not optional. It is an imperative of the gospel (URCSA 1997, 14).

The Struggle in and of the Church

The church—as said before—reflected the contradictions of the South African society. This was the reason for the formation of a number of movements in the church with the twofold goal of resistance against apartheid as well as the transformation of the church itself. Some of these initiatives were (URCSA 1997, 14–14):

- The *Christian Institute (CI)* that was established in 1961, in the wake of the Cottesloe Conference (1960), under the leadership of Beyers Naudé. The CI which sought to serve God’s justice under compulsion of Scripture, was banned in 1977 and its leadership placed under house arrest.
- The *Confessing Circle (Belydende Kring)*, initially called the *Broederkring*, was constituted by black and white clergy, evangelists, church council members, and lay members. Its goal was to guide and pressurise the church in its struggle against apartheid, and to campaign for church unity. The Confessing Circle did not refrain from taking the church leadership to task on these issues, being accepted by many as the authentic voice of the oppressed within the DRCA and DRMC. Members of the Confessing Circle often had to bear hardship,

suspicion, and in the case of some ministers, having their financial subsidies revoked by the DRC.

- The movement as well as the philosophy of the Confessing Circle found extension in the formation of the *Association of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRESCA)* in 1981. Constituted by members of the black DRCA, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, it reflected on the implications of the Reformed faith in opposing apartheid inside and outside the church.

Touching upon the struggle of the church against human rights violations over many years, Buys took his audience way back, to the year 1881, when resulting from the DRC's infamous 1857 decision to allow for separate communion services, the first of the racially separate churches in what was later to become the DRC Family, was established: the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. Already at the 1881 meeting a strong voice of protest was heard in the form of a boycott. Twelve churches were expected at the meeting, but only six representatives of four churches attended (URCSA 1997, 16).

A second protest—with all its weaknesses and contradictions—came in 1948, when Rev. I.D. Morkel registered his protest against the equalisation of “blacks” and “coloureds” in the aftermath of the 1948 election that brought the National Party, with its apartheid ticket, into power. Coloureds, he argued, were culturally closer to whites. At a meeting of the Presbytery of Wynberg, support was registered for Morkel, with a resolution that rejected the unbiblical implementation of forced apartheid that discriminated against coloureds, and in doing so destroyed “Christlikeness among coloureds.” At the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument (December 16, 1949) Morkel called for a day of prayer in supplication to the Lord, to deliver the land from the evils of apartheid. When the DRMC in 1950 decided to refrain from discussing apartheid, “because it will only lead the church into the labyrinth of political discussion,” Morkel, together with 26 church members, severed their ties with the DRMC to establish the Calvin Protestant Church (URCSA 1997, 16).

The DRMC, having scrapped a number of restrictive rules in its constitution in 1961, became “independent,” enabling the church to think and to act according to its convictions and principles. Two years later the four separate synods of the DRCA united to form the General Synod of the DRCA, with its own distinct identity, and in a position as well to express a unified resistance against apartheid (URCSA 1997, 16–17).

During the 1960s and 1970s South Africa was in turmoil. The South African government was adamant to continue implementing apartheid, impounding on the lives of millions. Opposition arose from many quarters, from the labour unions, from student bodies and from the religious community. The independence of Mozambique brought hope to many, rekindling the expectation of the liberation of South Africa. And then, in June 1976, the students of Soweto arose.

Members of the DRMC and DRCA, students at the time, were at the centre of these events. On the campus of the University of the Western Cape theological students, L.A. Appies, H.R. Botman and P. Gelderbloem played a leading role in the SRC. They, with some student colleagues, had to pay a price for their actions. Appies and Gelderbloem, together with others, were detained, later escaping into exile. Conviction and imprisonment waited on others, inter alia on L. Seleka, L. Courtries and Rudolph Knight, who were convicted of sabotage and imprisoned on Robben Island. Some young activists forfeited their academic careers, others lost their lives.

All of this had a huge impact on the life and message of the church. At the 1978 Synod the DRMC took a clear decision, bemoaning the fact that South Africans were living in a dispensation in which irreconcilability was being elevated to the level of societal norm. Buys summarised synod's decision on the issue (URCSA 1997, 18):

Despite so-called good intentions, the greed and prejudice of the powerful and privileged is [sic] entrenched at the expense of the powerless and underprivileged. The church further declared that this policy of irreconcilability leads to polarisation and conflict. This conflict is then used as an alibi to maintain the separation of people at all cost. The church concludes that apartheid is a pseudo-religious as well as political policy. It affects church and state. It influences structures and state. It influences and structurally determines SA society as a whole.

The DRMC's stance and resolutions made a huge impact, also on the international Christian community. At its Ottawa meeting (1982) the World Alliance of Reformed Churches sided with the DRMC and the DRCA, stating that the apartheid situation constituted a *status confessionis*, and declared the theological justification of apartheid to be a heresy.

Back home the DRMC at its next synod adopted the Ottawa decision—and started to draft its *Confession of Belhar*, the first confession from the soil of Africa. The formal adoption of Belhar in 1986, on equal status with the other confessions of the church, was indeed a high point in the history of the DRMC. Buys told the TRC audience that “the adoption of this confession represents an important correction in the misuse of the Reformed tradition to justify apartheid. It represents a historical moment in the church's return to the reformed tradition” (URCSA 1997, 18). Moreover, the adoption of Belhar emboldened the DRMC at every synod that followed, to speak out against the atrocities of apartheid, calling for radical change.

Buys gratefully acknowledged the role of the ecumenical community inside and outside South Africa, in helping the DRMC and the DRCA—and after 1994, URCSA—to define its message and actions. Membership of the SA Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches was of crucial importance. Partnerships were formed, and a collective witness against apartheid and a demand for the restoration of human rights were created. In all of this, Boesak played a key role as president of WARC (1982), moderator of the DRMC (1986), and founding

member of the United Democratic Front (UDM), ensuring that apartheid and human rights violations remained in sharp focus nationally as well as internationally (URCSA 1997, 18).

Again, there was a price to pay. The church's struggle led to the persecution of officers and members of the church. Together with the names of the student leaders mentioned above, Buys paid homage to many others: Revv. P. Moatse and K.E. Leputu who were detained after a debate on apartheid in the Northern Synod of the DRCA, Dr A. Boesak, Revv. L. Mabusela, L.M. Matsaung, E.M. Tema, elder N.J. Matlakane, Revv. A. Beukes, H.R. Botman, J.D. Buys (who had a chemical substance injected into his car in Oudtshoorn, J. de Waal (who partially lost sight in one eye after a baton attack by the police), E. Leeuw, B. Leuvenink, R.J. Stevens, J. Thyse and A.J. Visage (whose house had been damaged by a firebomb). And then there were the clergy who refused to serve in the chaplaincy, and who were convicted and sentenced to community service: the Revv. D. Potgieter, B. Nel, N. Theron, C. Krause and brother B. de Lange (URCSA 1997, 18–19).

The Road to Reconciliation

In presenting his submission, Buys, due to time constraints, had to highlight only some sections of URCSA's report to the TRC. The rest of the comprehensive submission was considered to be read. The moderator, however, spent ample time discussing URCSA's recommendations for the process of reconciliation in South Africa. The recommendations were wide-ranging: pastoral counselling for victims and perpetrators; the development of rehabilitation programmes; special worship services with reconciliation liturgies; the erecting of a memorial for the victims; and the holding of an annual week of reconciliation.

Buys's recommendations were presented under three headings (URCSA 1997, 21–22):

- Church actions with a view to reconciliation.

Four actions that the South African churches may undertake, were mentioned:

1. Pastoral counselling of victims and perpetrators aimed at confession of guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation and bringing the involved parties to public acts of reconciliation.
2. Development of reconciliation liturgies, transforming worship into acts of reconciliation.
3. Reconciliation services for local, regional and national groups.
4. Development of rehabilitation programmes, holistically seeking the renewal of perpetrators.

- Theological/religious community statement, memorial and collective visioning.

In this regard Buys had two recommendations to make:

1. The formulation of a profound theological/religious community statement. In addition, the Christian denominations/religious community can erect a memorial in remembrance of martyrs and as a reminder that such violations of human rights should never happen again.
2. The implementation of a process of collective visioning. The aim of such visioning is a broad-based ownership of a vision of a new nation and renewed and transformed community. The vision should inform policy and strategy development and implementation.

- An annual national week of reconciliation.

Lastly the moderator of URCSA called for a national week of reconciliation to be instituted. The following public symbolic acts of reconciliation could be instituted:

1. The presentation of a report of a civil audit and social comment on the part of, progress in and promotion of human rights by the authorities, followed by a policy declaration (manifesto) of intent by the state.
2. Vicarious confessions of guilt by political parties and the security forces with symbolic acts of restitution (i.e. the initiation or participation in community projects).
3. A national service or meeting in remembrance of human rights violations and public commitment to the promotion and maintenance of human rights.
4. The development of symbols of reconciliation as a sign of the will and the taking up of civil responsibility for the promotion and the defence of human rights as well as the prevention of and resistance against human rights violations.
5. The burning of candles in windows and the wearing or display of national reconciliation symbols.

“The Best of all Hearings”

There was high appreciation for URCSA’s submission. Tutu gratefully acknowledged the role of URCSA and its predecessors, DRCA and DRMC, in the Christian community and in the church’s role in the struggle against apartheid. Many of the names mentioned in the submission were of revered and respected comrades-in-arms.

The third day's hearing concluded with two brief submissions. Firstly, Prof Nico Smith who co-authored, with Dr Beyers Naudé, an Open Letter to the TRC, signed by a large number of ministers—from the DRC family as well as other denominations—was called to the fore. Looking back, Smith said, we as ministers of the church should have done much more. In our preaching and in our prophetic witness we were slow to react to the injustices of apartheid. “We as *dominees* are more guilty than our members. We should have known better!” (Meiring 1999, 281). Lastly, two *Gereformeerde* (Reformed) theologians, Proff. Amie van Wyk and Alwyn du Plessis brought a personal submission. Although the *Gereformeerde Kerk* declined to appear at the TRC hearing, the two academics wanted to add their confession to the many that were brought during the three days (Meiring 1999, 265, 281–285).

The Faith Communities Hearing ended on a high note. Tutu hailed it as “the best of all hearings” (Meiring 1999, 265, 281–285). The faith communities' submissions helped the TRC to understand South Africa's painful past. Their commitment to lead South Africans on the road to forgiveness and healing and nation-building, gave Tutu hope for the future (Tutu 1999, 177). Boraine, vice-chair of the TRC, was of a similar opinion (Boraine 2000, 179–183). In all of this, the submission of URCSA played no small part. In the TRC's final Report, mention is made of Buys's submission, of the information and analyses that he had provided (TRC Report 1998, 69). And when the combined recommendations of the Faith Communities were tabled, many of URCSA's suggestions were included (TRC Report 1998, 91–92).

A Personal Postscript

Having been tasked by the TRC to convene the Faith Communities Hearing, it was my privilege to attend the three days, and to lead some of the submissions. Listening to the statement of Buys was a humbling and inspiring experience.

May I, by way of a postscript, offer three remarks?

1. To me, a member of the DRC, it was significant that Buys decided not to use the opportunity to publicly castigate the DRC, the “mother church,” for her treatment of the “daughter churches” in the DRC family over many years. He had every reason to do so. By doing this, the moderator followed the example of virtually all the other church leaders who opted not to point fingers at one another, but to stand humbly before God and the nation, relating the stories of their past, presenting their hopes for the future (Meiring 1999, 269–271). In this, the hearing in itself became a healing and reconciling experience: faith communities, Christian as well as non-Christian, listened to one another, reached out in empathy and understanding, eventually to embrace one another.
2. Listening to the story of Buys, I was reminded of the many heroes of the struggle, hailing from the ranks of URCSA. Some of the names are well known: Beyers Naudé, Allan Boesak, Russel Botman, James Buys himself, Jan de

Waal, Lukas Mabusela. Many are lesser-known, and their names risk being lost in history: L. Seleka, L. Courtries, Rudolph Knight, L.M. Matsaung, E.M. Tema, elder N.J. Matlakane, A. Beukes, E. Leeuw, B. Leuvenink, R.J. Stevens, J. Thyse, A.J. Visagie, D. Potgieter, B. Nel, N. Theron, C. Krause, and B. de Lange all of whom, at their cost, stood up for what they believed. I am asking myself: is URCSA doing enough to keep their stories and their testimonies alive? Has it ever been recorded in publication? What about the many others, the mothers and the daughters, who also suffered? Buys proposed that a memorial be erected in remembrance of martyrs. Should we not, while celebrating URCSA's history, do something in this regard? Remembering the heroes in our midst—is that something that all of us, members of the DRC Family, may do together? Will this not be an act of reconciliation in itself?

3. Lastly, in 1996 each of the faith communities committed themselves to continue to work for forgiveness, for justice and reconciliation in South Africa. That was what gave Tutu hope for the future. But in the two decades that followed a cloud of disappointment settled upon the country. In spite of the efforts by many, the TRC, politicians, community leaders, as well as by the faith communities, it seemed that we had lost our direction. South Africa was still a very fractured society: abject poverty and injustice, corruption, racism, violence, were still the order of the day. The “rainbow” had lost its colour! Who were responsible?

Tutu, who over the years has agonised at the direction the country was heading, was of the opinion that the faith communities were co-responsible. In October 2014, Tutu called all who were present in East London back to a re-enactment of the TRC hearing, this time to Stellenbosch, to once again discuss their role in South Africa (Meiring 2018, 51–53). We need to put the reconciliation process back on the main agenda of the faith communities, Tutu said in his letter of invitation. We need to re-affirm our role and discuss the contributions we may offer to develop responsible and realistic strategies on how to address the challenges of reconciliation and nation-building in our land.

Tutu, who had aged over the years, but who had not lost his prophetic voice nor his enthusiasm, was once again chairing the hearing. Again it was my privilege to be at the table, and to invite URCSA to submit its testimony. Buys had sadly passed on, but two new leaders, the Rev. Pieter Grove and Prof. Mary-Ann Plaatjies-Van Huffel, accepted the microphone. Again, they brought comprehensive statements, analysing the current situation URCSA and the DRC family found themselves in, reporting on URCSA's efforts to answer to the TRC's recommendations, and describing the many challenges we all are facing.

But this, URCSA at Stellenbosch, is a story for another day.

Suffice to say that the two spokespersons, unequivocally re-committed the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa to help guide our land on the way of justice,

forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. Tutu, as 18 years earlier, was again smiling broadly when he thanked the URCSA leaders.

My final question: Will our discussions during the 25th Anniversary of URCSA and our commitment to carry on with the work of healing and reconciliation today, give reason for Tutu—as well as to the South African community—to smile, and to hope?

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