

Afterword Confession?

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It was none other than Gustavo Gutiérrez who once commended Seventh-day Adventists for having “in the face of severe injustice, suffering, and oppression . . . identified with the poorest of the poor and incarnated the gospel in ways which profoundly impacted the spiritual, social, economic, and political life” of the community.¹ If only this was consistently true! Of course, as the chapters of this book have made abundantly clear, the story has not been quite that simple or pretty, particularly with regards to our attitudes toward race and racism. If truth be told, “the house is on fire in a burning world.”²

So, what now? After reading these insightful and provocative chapters, it would appear that at least two pressing questions loom large: will we acknowledge how seriously Adventism has been complicit in both structural racism and acts of racial discrimination? And, if so, what can and will we do about it?³

Perhaps it might be useful to take a glance sideways to an example in the relatively recent past when an official entity of the church made an extended public statement of confession in response to the church’s sins of commission and omission during the racist apartheid era in South Africa. But a couple of caveats are in order:

- no two situations are exactly the same, and specific details and contexts matter;⁴
- the statement is nearly 25 years old, and we now have a clearer understanding of:
 - how deeply Christendom and systemic racism have been entangled;
 - the way structural racism is grounded in the very epistemology of Western European modernism and scientism itself;⁵ and
 - how unjust ideologies become part of complex social reality and strongly resistant to change.⁶

But the statement, for better or worse, is now embedded in the public record and thus a permanent part of history.⁷ So in the hope that

something might be gained, I will give some background to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, followed by a brief look at the origin and development of the statement. I will point out a few of its features and then append a significant portion of the text.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The establishment of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by an act of Parliament in 1995 was a political act designed to help solve a political problem. After nearly 50 years of apartheid⁸ and three centuries of colonialism, the anger, frustration, and hurt felt by the majority of South Africa's population had reached breaking point. The violence of the armed struggle and its even more violent suppression by the governing Nationalist government had risen to new levels. A bloodbath was widely thought to be inevitable. But with the release of Nelson Mandela on February 11, 1990, after 27 years in prison, and the unbanning of the African National Congress and other parties to the liberation struggle, a ray of hope emerged. Against the background of a rapidly changing global geopolitical and strategic landscape, Mandela and De Klerk set the country on a new path toward a possible negotiated, democratic, and peaceful future. Mandela's call for reconciliation and his personal example of lack of bitterness went a long way toward setting the agenda for the intense multiparty negotiations that led to the interim constitution and first fully democratic election in 1994.

Of course, this was going to be a difficult process. Gross violations of human rights had occurred. People had been tortured, gone missing, or died under suspicious circumstances. And even when there was not direct physical violence, forced removals, harassment, abuse, loss of citizenship, and loss of dignity were the lot of the vast majority of Black South Africans.⁹ By 1989, the armed struggle had intensified to the point where significant numbers of people were being killed or maimed in car bombings and shootings. The cycle of violence seemed unstoppable. So one of the most crucial questions to be negotiated in the run up to the 1994 election was what to do about the past.

Normally, when countries move through the difficult transition from oppression to democracy, they deal with the past in one of two ways: either the leaders of the old order are put on trial and dealt with summarily, or previous events are swept under the carpet and the suffering of those subjected to violence is ignored. The first option—"Nuremberg" or retributive justice—was impractical or impossible in the South African situation for three reasons. Unlike the surrender of an oppressive regime, the

South African government was negotiating from a still considerable position of strength. Its members would never have agreed to give up their power if the threat of prosecution hung over their heads. Second, the attempt to find out what had actually happened, then charge and successfully prosecute the culprits in a normal judicial process would have drained precious resources away from nation building and dragged out the process to almost absurd lengths. Finally, the Nuremberg option seemed unlikely to promote national healing and reconciliation, a primary goal of Mandela's administration.

What then about the other option: general amnesty? Why not just call bygones bygones and turn one's thoughts to the future? This was certainly the option desired by the white Nationalist Party at the time. But then what of the suffering and the unhealed wounds? Would they not fester into a new and perhaps even worse sore, over time? One is reminded of the famous words of George Santayana over the entrance to Dachau's museum of Holocaust horror: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Unless the South African past was acknowledged and dealt with adequately, it could blight the future that the forgetting was meant to secure.

What South Africa decided, therefore, was to follow a unique "third way" by means of a pioneering experiment, with a potentially far-reaching effect on the way we deal with conflict.¹⁰ To those who had committed politically motivated crimes, including gross violations of human rights, it offered amnesty in exchange for public disclosure of the full truth about their crimes—and to the victims, it gave an unusual opportunity to be heard, as well as hope for reparations where possible and practical. In return for the truth, there was the promise of limited amnesty, the prospect of nation building, and the hope of personal and national reconciliation, perhaps even a chance for forgiveness and solidarity. In essence, this was what the TRC was to seek to accomplish.¹¹ No small agenda indeed.

It was Mr Dullah Omar, long-time opponent of apartheid and then Minister of Justice, who introduced the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34, 1995, which called for the establishment of the TRC. To quote from the act: "a commission is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation." It is both ironic and symbolically meaningful that in the course of this very commission

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Dullah Omar discovered that he himself had been on the death list of a South African government hit squad (they had tried to swap the tablets he took for a heart condition). As Desmond Tutu put it, “the legislation he piloted through Parliament would enable the men who had tried to kill him to apply for amnesty.”¹² Such was the tragic mix of horror and hopefulness that characterized the whole of the commission’s work.

The TRC was to effect its mandate through three committees: the Amnesty Committee, Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, and Human Rights Violations Committee.¹³ And a final report was placed in former president Nelson Mandela’s hands on October 29, 1998. The report itself is in the public domain and available online. The full record of all submissions, transcripts of public hearings, and research done by the commission (filling many volumes) will be permanently kept in the national archives.

Of course, the process has elicited both praise and critique. But be it to praise or to blame, more than anything else, it has generated considerable national and international interest and scholarly study. Some have argued that it has accomplished nothing new. All was already known before.¹⁴ Others (I believe correctly) have pointed out its successes in getting to the bottom of things for the first time.¹⁵

But what particularly interests us here is not so much the TRC’s political but its theological character. Of course, *overtly* it had none. This was a constitutionally mandated tribunal, appointed by an officially secular and explicitly pluralistic state. Its commissioners were drawn from all sectors of South African society, all ranges of political opinion, and—despite the numerical preponderance of active or former Christian clergy—most major religious persuasions. It was not a religious body. However, as was clear to friend and foe alike, the TRC traded heavily in spiritual, theological, and even explicitly Christian content and symbolism. Its major concepts—memory, conscience, truth, reconciliation, confession, forgiveness, restitution, hope—read like entries in a dictionary of Christian theology. *Implicitly*, and substantively, the TRC could almost be mistaken for an agency of the church. At times it seemed more like an extended pastoral counseling session than a court of law. Victims wept. Perpetrators wept. Commissioners wept. At other times, it seemed to evoke images of the final day of judgment. Life stories were narrated. Scenes reenacted. Masks lifted. Lies exposed. Truth revealed at last. While, in theory, the commission occupied a liminal space somewhere between a confessional booth and trial court, in practice, one could never quite ignore the symbolism of the cross that hung around the chairperson’s neck.¹⁶

It would be wrong to think that all this was merely accidental. The

role of the churches in the struggle against apartheid was repeatedly acknowledged and appreciated by the new government. It was President Mandela himself who appointed an archbishop as chairperson of the commission.¹⁷ Desmond Tutu muses that:

The President must have believed that our work would be profoundly spiritual. After all forgiveness, reconciliation and reparation were not the normal currency in political discourse. There it was more normal to demand satisfaction, to pay back in the same coin, to give as good as you got, to believe it’s a dog-eat-dog world. Most politicians were not there to heal, to redress imbalances and to reduce differences. They were elected because they were different and they existed to accentuate difference. Forgiveness, confession and reconciliation were far more at home in the religious sphere.¹⁸

Tutu goes on to comment that “very few people objected to the heavy spiritual, and indeed Christian, emphasis of the Commission.”¹⁹

Thus it was on April 15, 1996, at the first public witness-hearing session of the TRC, held in the Eastern Cape—the scene of so much atrocity in the past—that after the singing of a hymn (*Lizalis ’idinga lakho*, “Let Your Will be Done”), Archbishop Desmond Tutu prayed this prayer:

Oh God of justice, mercy and peace, we long to put behind us all the pain and division of apartheid together with all the violence which ravaged our communities in its name. And so we ask you to bless this Truth and Reconciliation Commission with your wisdom and guidance as it commences its important work of redressing the many wrongs done both here and throughout our land.

We pray that all those people who have been injured in either body or spirit may receive healing through the work of this Commission and that it may be seen to be a body which seeks to redress the wounds inflicted in so harsh a manner on so many of our people, particularly here in the Eastern Cape. We pray too for those who may be found to have committed these crimes against their fellow human beings, that they may come to repentance and confess their guilt to almighty God and that they too might become the recipients of your divine mercy and forgiveness. We ask that the Holy Spirit may pour out its gifts of justice, mercy and compassion upon the Commissioners and their colleagues in every sphere, that the truth may be recognized and brought to light during the hearings; and that the end may bring about that reconciliation and love for our

neighbor which our Lord himself commanded. We ask this in the holy name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.²⁰

It's hard to get away from the analogical significance—at least—of the TRC for the church.

Coming to terms with the truth: Adventism in the public square

Apologize? Why? What for? This was the majority response, perhaps ironically, of both Black and white Adventist church leaders during 1995 to 1997, when the establishment of the TRC challenged all South Africans to take responsibility for their own actions and/or lack of action during the apartheid era. To the question “does the Adventist *church* have anything to apologize for” there were three major responses: (1) the church, *per se*, has nothing to apologize for since it always stays “out of politics”; (2) it would be inappropriate for victims to apologize on behalf of a minority who had benefitted and prospered through apartheid; and (3) yes, the church did indeed have cause to repent for establishing racially segregated church conference and union structures that mirrored the political dispensation of the time and entrenched the economic discrimination built into the denominational wage scale, with all its accompanying injustices. These differences—together with the union's preference for focusing on pragmatic, economic, and institutional reasons for change, rather than highlighting the more divisive moral, ethical, or theological reasons—led to the result *that the church essentially did nothing*.

It is important to note that even when fault is admitted, it is seen by most strictly in terms of *intra-church* policies and practices, rather than in terms of a *prophetic social responsibility the church might have in the public sphere*. Do we not, as Adventists, have a responsibility to speak out against racism, discrimination, injustice, and oppression in society at large?²¹ The disquieting reality is that the answer generally given—at least in South Africa until very recently—has been “No.”

How can we account for this?²² I see three general problems that have put obstacles in the way of a more positive answer: obstacles arising from an inadequate hermeneutic; a limited theological perspective; and serious ignorance of social and historical dynamics. While I here speak from experience about the church in South Africa, I suspect these problems are not uniquely South African.

Obstacles arising from an inadequate hermeneutic

We like to think of ourselves as “people of the Book.” But this self-characterization has often done much to limit our awareness of the social

implications of the gospel. Our *biblicism*—the tendency to focus exclusively on the Bible—has served to isolate us from developments in wider Christianity, from the social gospel movement of yesteryear to the various liberation theologies of today, that could have helped us to see how much the Bible has to say about social ethics.²³

Furthermore, our *hermeneutical naiveté*—as illustrated in a “proof-text” approach to the meaning and message of the Bible—has insulated us from recognizing the dangers of reading the Bible through the filter of our own assumptions, expectations, interests, and prejudices. The result has been that the Bible was “domesticated,” its radical social implications spiritualized away, so that wittingly or unwittingly it became a perfect instrument by which the status quo could be propped up. A similar inadequacy showed up in the typical out-of-context emphasis on Ellen White's comments in *Testimonies Volume 9* that were used to justify segregation, in spite of the overwhelming weight of evidence to the contrary in her larger corpus.²⁴

This same inadequate hermeneutic is illustrated in *an almost exclusive focus on, if not obsession with, personal ethics* in contrast to public ethics. For most Adventists in South Africa “ethics” has to do with the development of personal virtues. Lying, stealing, anger, sexual impurity, intemperance—these are the issues of personal morality we typically deal with. The closest we come to dealing with social ethical issues is when we tackle public problems such as the use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, which are rooted in personal ethics in any case.

Perhaps even more important is the widespread conviction that the New Testament presents a *radically apolitical Jesus* and a corresponding *largely spiritual interpretation of the mission of the church*. Several of my Black students related how it was explained to them that political involvement and being a Christian were mutually exclusive. What was somewhat more surprising was that for some it was precisely this legitimized escape from social activism that actually attracted them to Adventism.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, the naturally *respectful, if not submissive, attitude to authority*, so characteristic of the South African temperament, was given biblical warrant by appealing to the conventional reading of Romans 13. Obey the authorities. God is responsible for the establishment and removal of political authorities. It is not the business of the church to interfere. Of course, this reading was deliberately reinforced by

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the then-dominant Nationalist Party and Dutch Reformed Church. Ironically, it was not Adventists but Christians from other traditions who drew the authorities' attention to that other chapter of the Bible—Revelation 13—where a very different attitude to oppressive civil/religious authority is portrayed.

All too often, we tend to see only what we expect and want to see. Without critical hermeneutical awareness, we are liable to do little more than vest self-interest with scriptural authority.

Obstacles arising from a limited theological perspective

Throughout the apartheid era—from the 1950s to the 1990s—Adventist evangelism in white communities was largely molded on the Australian “archeological” approach. Over the course of a nine-month-long campaign, every nook and cranny of Adventist belief and lifestyle would be thoroughly expounded on and inculcated. Yet the closest anyone would ever get to our own endemic situation of injustice and oppression would be a lecture entitled, “Can Communism conquer?” and possibly the vaguest of allusions to present troubles as “signs of the times”—hopeful portends of a better world to come. With Black evangelism continuing the traditional strongly doctrinal approach learned from the missionaries, the net effect was a church *preoccupied with apocalyptic otherworldliness and doctrinal purity* while the house burned, so to speak.

To the degree that Adventist theology did engage with the wider Christian world, it was almost exclusively with conservative forms of *evangelical theology* rather than with the more *ecumenical theology* of the mainline churches. This isolated Adventists from the way other Christians related their faith to public witness and reinforced the strong demarcation between the so called “spiritual” message of the gospel and the strictly “secular” issues of social concern.

The one area where engagement with public authorities did take place was over the issue of religious liberty. Given the traditional Adventist emphasis on the *separation of church and state*—part of the Free Church legacy deriving from radical Reformation/Anabaptist roots—the church kept a watchful eye on Sunday legislation, Sabbath privileges for military conscripts, and the right to non-combatancy. But religious liberty was largely a matter of protecting our own interests rather than an issue for public engagement. Essentially, it became a matter of *quid quo pro*—we will stay “out of politics” in return for special minority favors and privileges. Awareness of the pacifist tradition, also part of the Anabaptist legacy, was largely non-existent, to say nothing of passive resistance, civil disobedience, or even “just war” traditions.

What would have lessened the ease with which most white persons were able to ignore the situation around them would have been direct contact with the plight of the Black majority. Unfortunately, the *institutionalization and compartmentalization of the caring ministries* (including welfare, health, and other social services) contributed significantly to a situation where few whites came directly into contact with the awful conditions in which the majority of the country lived.

Finally, a word concerning the theological understanding of the relation between the church and the civil community. To the degree that there was any explicit theological reflection on this topic, the prevailing approach took the line of a version of a scholastic, nominally Lutheran “*Two Kingdoms*” doctrine. God entrusted spiritual matters to the church and temporal matters to the state. The church must operate on the basis of love and grace, but the state needs to use the “sword” so as to ensure the “law and order” necessary for the spread of the gospel: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17, ESV). What is ironic is that this dualism does not fit well with the Adventist philosophy of history, or its wholistic anthropology and soteriology. Furthermore, there seems to have been little awareness of the more Christological reformed understanding that saw the state and the church as analogous concentric circles with Christ as the center of both. On this reading, both the state and the church are called to serve the coming kingdom of God—though in different ways and to different degrees—thus both must be held accountable to the same ethical principles.²⁵

In essence then, it was our very preoccupation with a limited range of in-house theological issues, a very un-Adventist dualism between body and soul, and minimal contact with wider theological developments that prevented us from even attempting the kind of prophetic witness we should have been giving.²⁶

Obstacles arising from serious ignorance of social/historical dynamics

It would be remiss of me not to quickly look at things from another perspective—that of social location. Adventism in South Africa—particularly white South Africa—saw itself as an almost insignificant minority. Nothing it would or could do would appear to make any difference. One can see clear evidence of a *minority survival syndrome*, in which the church became so preoccupied with its own place in society that it had little time or energy for anything else. This coupled with a *socio-political naivety*, stemming from traditional Adventist ignorance and even avoidance of these disciplines, amplified the problem. Without

any other input, Adventism in South Africa quickly conformed to the fundamentally conservative ethos of the world around it, for which the preservation of the status quo was the highest good.

Finally, of course, we must take the Marxist critique seriously, at least in South Africa. Was the Adventism of white (and largely bourgeois) members not merely an instrument of socio-economic and class self-interest? And did not the Adventism taught to the Black (and essentially proletarian) masses function as a narcotic to both dull the pain of oppression and keep them dreaming apocalyptic dreams of future bliss so as not to demand their due in the here and now? These are serious questions and glib answers will not do. Time will tell.

The one point I will make is that the history of the struggle for justice is not yet over in South Africa. There is still a small window of opportunity for Adventists to affect the verdict of history. But to do so will mean that the church will have to find a new voice, a voice that can speak effectively in public. Of course, it goes without saying that this voice will have to have arms and legs, hands and feet, and—above all—heart, if it is to be heard. It will also have to relearn the connection between justification and justice, righteousness and truth, atonement and reconciliation, if it is to be both fully Adventist and fully relevant.

The process that led to the Statement of Confession

The surprising fact is that within a relatively short space of time the church was able to make an about-face—from “we have nothing to apologize for” to a “public confession”—and take first steps in a different direction, by facing the past honestly and committing itself to a specific vision for the future. As time has shown, the story is not yet over. There are still those fighting against the “truth.” But at least this event was a turning point—perhaps a historically significant one at that.

I shall now turn to the events that led to the church’s *Statement of Confession* concerning its past response to apartheid and its vision for the future—as a hopefully illuminating illustration of both the problems and the resources inherent in the Adventist community.

The broad outline of the story is as follows. In 1991—under some pressure from the General Conference and other regions of the church—the two racially segregated unions in South Africa merged. The merger was sold largely on the pragmatic grounds of greater efficiency and economic savings. Conference mergers were supposed to follow. However, by late 1997, things were largely bogged down, despite significant change being underway at Helderberg College, one province of South Africa having a

fully merged conference structure, and another having partially merged conferences.²⁷ In 1996, the Helderberg administration led the college faculty in formulating and accepting a statement of apology to “those former students and alumni” it had hurt by its actions during the past era. But this still focused exclusively on “internal” matters. When the theology faculty and students requested that the college urge the church as a whole to prepare a statement for submission to the TRC, it was argued that this was unnecessary and potentially divisive.

Then, in mid 1997, the TRC extended invitations to faith communities to make written submissions regarding their past relationship to apartheid and their future vision for national reconciliation.²⁸ For some reason, Adventists were overlooked,²⁹ and nobody seemed intent on doing anything about it until some of the younger (Black) church employees and conference leaders requested the union to look into the matter. Subsequently, with a formal invitation from the TRC for a submission in hand, the union president, Pastor Wakaba—a Black South African—took the opportunity at the November meeting of the Helderberg College Board to sound out the “conference brethren” and college administrators. This time, he gained their strong support and had a brief document hastily drawn up in the union office to meet the TRC deadline. He circulated it for comment to all the conferences, fields, and institutions in the union.

Reaction was swift and overwhelmingly negative. For some it was far too weak, for others too strong, for others the whole idea of a statement of confession was anathema. The union was now in an embarrassing situation. Having requested an extension of time from the TRC, and having already submitted a preparatory one-paragraph confession statement, it did not want to pull out of the process completely. One of the conferences, in their response, had suggested that the document needed to be more biblical, theological, and Adventist to boot, and to that end the theology department at Helderberg was asked to work on the multi-page document.

Thus began an intensive two-month experiment in collaborative theological work—with all the give and take, urging and listening, writing and rewriting that is inevitably involved.³⁰ We came up with a new framework for the longer document. In collaboration with colleagues and students, both Black and white, I urged that we speak with an authentic Adventist voice—and with an apocalyptic accent at that—rather than producing a conventional statement couched in the minimalist language of human rights or general ethical concepts.

I believed this to be important for two reasons. First, I hoped the

statement would be accessible to our own church members and that it could serve as a starting point for further progress toward reconciliation within Adventism itself. Second, I believed that speaking in our own voice would be an act of honesty and that it would only be by being authentic that we could possibly make an ecumenical contribution.

In writing the document, I tried to include or reformulate as much as possible of the brief earlier statement (particularly in the second part of the document, where specific questions posed by the TRC were answered), while taking account of the criticisms leveled against it, and the insights and concerns of students and faculty—its first readers. An important resource for our work was a recent publication by two Black Adventist pastors, who had raised important substantive questions about the church and racism in South Africa.³¹ As a theology faculty (representative of Black and white, both English- and Afrikaans-speaking, conservative and more liberal political perspectives), we wrestled over specific wordings. The college administrators reviewed the document and suggested some factual changes and additions, as did the union.

The final product was voted by an available-members executive committee of the Southern Africa Union Conference, with minor changes, and officially submitted to the TRC, where it now forms a permanent part of the historical record. At the next full meeting of the union committee, the process and sentiment of the document was approved and endorsed by an overwhelming majority, with only two members dissenting out of more than 100.³²

The most frustrating thing is that once the statement had been made, it was supposed to be sent out to all the conferences and churches as a starting point for further deliberation and action—but this hoped-for deliberation did not happen. While many of the commitments made in the second part of the document have undoubtedly come to pass, it has largely been by implicit pragmatic changes rather than changes made explicitly in response to the demands of the gospel, as outlined in the document.

Two kinds of confession

The document itself is built upon two kinds of confession. In the first sense, we “confess our faith” and, in the second, we “confess that we have failed.” As Protestants, we have been leery of anything that could be misconstrued as supporting the notion of a priestly role of mediation between sinners and God. We need no human confessor to hear our prayers. We confess directly to God through Christ. However, we should be cautious lest a too jaundiced view of confession blind us to the important role it plays in Scripture and church history.

Positively, *confessing* means to publicly “profess” and to “witness to” something, typically to one’s faith. In the early church, many martyrs confessed their faith with their very lives. In later church history, a “confession of faith” was understood to be a public witness of the church to the truth at a time of particular crisis or threat of heresy.³³ To avoid any suggestion of creedalism, Adventists have referred to their own witness to the faith as “Fundamental Beliefs,” but properly understood it could just as well have been called a “confession of faith.”³⁴


Negatively, of course, the Bible is full of calls to “confess our sins” both to God and even to one another. We need to remember that the confession of sin in Old Testament times involved the public act of sacrifice. In the New Testament, James calls us to “confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed” (James 5:16).

The statement seeks to make explicit that there is a connection between the confession of our faith and the confessing of our sins. Note that in the first paragraph we “confess our faith in the Coming God,” the One who as such “calls for ‘the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus’ (Revelation 14:12).”³⁵ In the second, we confess “that we have failed by our sins of omission and commission to properly evidence the endurance of the saints, keep the commandments of God, or hold fast to the faith of Jesus.”

In the sphere of the church, confession of sin is not so much about individual failure in terms of character development, deficient virtue, or excessive vice, but failure to live up to our confession of faith. We can never properly profess our faith in Christ, or preach the truth, as a merely intellectual or verbal assent. Act must follow profession. Confession must follow act. Failure to do so must be recognized as “thereby misrepresenting the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ.” All this is authentically Adventist, not merely in its textual base in Revelation 14, but in its link between word and act, and “confession as profession” and “confession as repentance.” Thus, we can hardly object, can we, when the document goes on to practically exegete Revelation 14:12?

At least this is how the Adventist church officially framed its public submission, in the aftermath of apartheid. Statements of confession—in particular, on racial matters—are rare in the Adventist church.³⁶ In South

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Africa, at the time, we felt it should be specific, detailed, substantive, and long enough to hopefully provide resources for congregations and church entities to take up the discussion. Should it have been the other way round? Started at grassroots level and percolating its way up (like the African National Congress's Freedom Charter)? Ideally, yes. But in the moment, it was do *something* or nothing would be done. So, here it is, for better or for worse.

What follows over the next few pages is the text of the statement.³⁷

Document submitted to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission by the Southern Africa Union Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists

“Statement of Confession”

As Seventh-day Adventists we confess our faith in the Coming God (the One “who is and who was and who is to come” Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8) who as such calls for “the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:12; cf. 12:17; 13:10).³⁸

In the face of the heresy of apartheid, we confess that we have failed by our sins of omission and commission to properly evidence the endurance of the saints, keep the commandments of God, or hold fast to the faith of Jesus, thereby misrepresenting the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ (Revelation 14:6,7). This has been hurtful to our society, to the identity and mission of our corporate church, and to the lives of its individual members. Therefore, in deep repentance we seek for forgiveness from God and our fellow citizens, and commit ourselves to reformation, justice and reconciliation.

As members of the church we are continually called upon to confess our faith in Christ. However, we recognize that we cannot confess faith in Christ without also concretely confessing our failures in reflecting the form of Christ in the world.

Since as Seventh-day Adventists we frequently use eschatological formulations like the one quoted above from Revelation 14:12 (cf. also 12:17; 13:10; 19:10) as summary statements of the identity and mission of the church, it is appropriate that we put these “identifying marks” of the church to the test in regard to our own attitudes and actions during the apartheid era.

The enduring patience of the saints

Just as the church in the time of the Roman Empire was called upon to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21; cf. both Romans 13; Revelation 13) so the church in our day is called to insightful discernment of the spirit of

the times and to responsible action in light of the present but not yet consummated Kingdom of God. Both then and now this calls for the patient endurance of suffering for the cause of Christ. We confess that we were altogether too caught up with maintaining our traditional a-political stance with regard to the separation of church and state to effectively combat the viciousness of apartheid. Under the pressure of the times we allowed the structures of the church to gradually become patterned along the lines of apartheid, by providing separate church regional organizations for different racial groups within the church. We failed to realize that the state demanded of its citizens things to which it had no claim and that, as Christians, we should have resisted this usurpation of God's authority to the uttermost.

All this happened *despite* the fact that officially the church claimed to be opposed to racial discrimination, and that at the highest levels it remained organizationally one body. This demonstrates how easy it is for us to basically conform to the pattern of the world in spite of our intentions to do otherwise. In attempting, rightly, to stay out of party politics we ended up getting involved more than we knew in the national politics of the status quo. Without any means of properly critiquing what we were doing because of our socio-political ignorance, we tragically misread the "signs of the times". This must not happen again.

Although it is true that as a church body we never officially ascribed to the ideology and doctrines of apartheid, we now recognize that we failed to fully acknowledge that apartheid, in any of its forms, flies in the face of the gospel of "God with us" and must therefore be reckoned a heresy. As a church we failed to truly *be* the church (the "called-out ones") by both our tendency to avoid the suffering that accompanies true discipleship, and our silence in the face of the suffering of others.

Keeping the commandments of God

Seventh-day Adventists believe that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. But such grace is not cheap, and it leads to a life of loving obedience to God. We confess that despite our zeal for the commandments of God we failed to adequately contextualize just what the righteousness of God meant in practice in South Africa. Can we honestly say that we obeyed the injunction to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27)?

1. Did we not all too often put the god of expediency before the Lord God the righteous judge (Exodus 20:2–3; Deuteronomy 5:6–7)?

2. Can we be sure that we did not make for ourselves "an idol" (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8) of this or that doctrinal tenant or our own self-interest as a minority religious community at the expense of the poor, oppressed and needy of our land (Isaiah 58)?
3. Did the proscription against "making wrongful use of the name of the Lord" (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11) not compel us to resist those who would attempt to misuse that Holy name for an evil purpose?
4. But, perhaps most poignantly of all, we have to ask how we could claim to properly keep the Sabbath holy without heeding its explicit demand for practical justice, co-humanity, deliverance and healing (Isaiah 1:10–18; 56:1–7; 58; Matthew 11:28–12:8)? Do we not have to explicitly confess that precisely as *Seventh-day* Adventists we should have done more to exemplify the meaning of the biblical Sabbath both within our own community and in our external dealings with society? Furthermore, in the light of the biblical extension of the humanitarian implications of the Sabbath to the jubilee year, should we not have realized that we are not at liberty to treat the land itself as an inalienable possession, but rather as a trust for responsible stewardship (Lev 25)? For surely true Sabbath-keeping and keeping silence in the face of oppression are mutually exclusive (Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15).

Respect for family, life, marriage, property, truth and limits make up the second table of the law of God (Exodus 20:12–17; Deuteronomy 5:16–21). Once again we have to ask whether we did enough to honor the law, and uphold the righteousness of God in the face of the rampant lawlessness and disregard for every one of these principles in our country:

5. How could we not have realized that to honor our parents means also to honor the culture and traditions of our ancestors, and to respect the land they gave us?
6. Should we not have recognized in the institutionalization of systemic violence, and the brutalization of the innocent, a direct transgression of the commandment not to kill?
7. How could we not see that the Group Areas Act and Pass Laws attacked the very fabric of family life, destroying parental and marital relationships?
8. How could we not have appealed to the prohibition against stealing in the face of forced removals, expropriation of land, and the exploitation of labor?
9. Surely the command not to bear false witness demanded that the

church speak out against the lies, deceit and distortion that became endemic in our society? For Jesus said “you will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32).

10. Do we not have to admit that we coveted security, peace and quiet for ourselves, with public respect and acceptance, rather than risk raising the wrath of a state running amuck with the exploitation of the poor, and the enrichment and corruption of the strong?

We now recognize that to restrict our attention merely to the so-called “spiritual realm” belies the physical, social and very practical intent of the commandments. We resolve to be more biblical in relation to the balance between the spiritual and the social in the future.

In the light of all this, we cast ourselves on the mercy of God and appeal to the grace of Jesus Christ for forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration.

Holding fast to the faith of Jesus

At the heart of our faith is the reconciliation accomplished in the person and by the work of Jesus Christ. We, together with all Christians, confess that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female;” for all of us are “one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28; cf. Ephesians 1–3; John 17). As adopted children of God, unity with God and each other is not an optional extra—it is what salvation means. As our official statement of fundamental beliefs declares:

“The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.”—Fundamental Belief #13 [SDA Church Manual, 1980]

We have to confess that, in appearance and reality, our practice in South Africa gave lie to the very intent of this tenant of our own fundamental beliefs. We were out of step with the stated principles of our worldwide church.

In Revelation 12:17 the saints are identified as “those who keep the

commandments of God and *hold the testimony of Jesus.*” According to Revelation 19:10 “the testimony of Jesus is the *spirit of prophecy.*” For a church that has made much of the “Spirit of Prophecy” as an important spiritual gift within the body of Christ, we have to confess that we have been singularly at fault in failing to address the tragic distortion of human rights, and the systemic misrepresentation of Christianity in our country—*prophetically.* The prophetic task of the church demands that we not hesitate to “speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute,” to “speak out, judge righteously, [and] defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8,9). For one cannot separate the evangelistic imperative to proclaim the testimony of Jesus, from the critical task inherent in the spirit of prophecy. The church needs to proclaim both the good news of God’s saving “Yes” contained in the gospel of Christ *and* the prophetic warning of God’s righteous “No” which will be uttered finally and decisively on the day of judgment. But the prophetic No must always be articulated and understood for the sake of the gospel Yes—the good news of God’s lavish, astonishing and reconciling grace!

We commit ourselves, therefore, once again and all the more earnestly to the proclamation of the “eternal gospel” of the universality of God’s love; the denouncement of the “Babylonian captivity” of the church in which it sells its soul to the state; and the articulation of a more effective and clear warning against the worship of the “beast”—that civil-religious concoction of blasphemy, coercion, human arrogance and injustice that seems to find root all too easily in our midst (Revelation 14:6–11).

In Answer to the Questions of the TRC, we reply:

1. *To what extent has your denomination/community suffered from apartheid in the past?*

Apartheid hurt both oppressed and oppressors, albeit in different ways. As a denomination we have been affected by both forms of hurt. However, the vast majority of the members of the Seventh-day Adventist church in South Africa, by virtue of the simple fact that they belonged to disadvantaged communities, were victims of a governmental system that rode roughshod over normal human rights in many areas of everyday living. Legislation enacted during these years has been well documented. Laws were fashioned to govern practically every aspect of life from the cradle to the grave. The effects of these societal manipulations impacted on

all sectors of our membership. We list a few of them, but by so doing we do not and indeed cannot quantify the human emotion, pain and sorrow involved.

A. *Group Areas Act*

Hundreds of Seventh-day Adventist families were forced to leave their homes. The overall impact of such actions on the lives of those involved might never be fully calculated. However, the cascading effect on society was devastating. Congregations were forced to sell their churches to the Community Boards set up by the state. No profit was allowed. Therefore new church buildings could not be afforded and the world Seventh-day Adventist Church was called upon to subsidize the funding of replacement church buildings. This process by itself took many years and during the interim period members were forced to worship in classrooms and inadequate community halls. Demographics led to increasing segregation in local churches. Nokuphila hospital in Alexandria township was forced to close. Schools were closed or relocated. A widening gulf separated the “haves” and the “have nots”. Unequal distribution of resources, unequal pay, and unequal opportunities hammered home the hard reality of injustice. Even before the apartheid era, black church members had experienced the stereotypes, cultural biases, paternalism and patterns of discrimination so characteristic of the colonial period. Now they had to face its explicit and systematic extension and proliferation. A further unfortunate feature of this process was that scores and scores of our better educated and talented members left the country to settle in less threatening environments.

B. *So-Called “Immorality Act”*

Not a few church members were forced to leave the country in order to marry the one they loved, just because the draconian and unbiblical “immorality act” declared it an offense to marry or even to fraternize across the “color line.” Many others were forced to give up important friendships; families were split; and others had to endure dehumanizing racial classification and re-classification ordeals.

C. *Job Reservation*

Thousands of church members were adversely affected by discriminatory practices such as segregated amenities, restricted access to education, training and health care, and job reservation.

D. *The Draft System And Compulsory National Service*

The draft system of military conscription and later the compulsory national service system set up by the state to maintain the establishment, created much anguish amongst a sizable proportion of our membership. Young men struggled with conflicting calls to duty. Not only the traditional dilemmas of whether to take up arms or not, or whether to request special privileges for the purpose of Sabbath-keeping or some other activity considered by the system to be a minority religious practice—but for many whether they could have any part in the “unjust war” being waged against their disenfranchised fellow citizens in apartheid South Africa. Some of those who did participate voluntarily or otherwise in the security apparatus of the times (particularly during the “total onslaught” period), were schooled in thought patterns that affected their ideas, ideology and value system. Several church members on both sides of the divide were physically and emotionally scarred by the terrible effects of war. Some lost life itself.

2. *What have you done to struggle against apartheid—or to support apartheid—in the past?*

We did not do enough to struggle against apartheid. Due to the intricate political system in force in South Africa, in which ideology was systematized and given Biblical and theological support, effects of the system rubbed off on the thinking of some, even among our church leadership. Many in the church imbibed, wittingly and unwittingly, the political philosophy in vogue at the time. This undoubtedly had an effect on the creation of structures which mirrored the political structures of the times. The church was divided into two Union Conferences with separate administrations, one to cater for the Blacks and the other for Indians, Coloreds and Whites. Indeed the two structures did not communicate with each other all that much except for certain essential times such as when formulating certain broad church policies. Secondary and tertiary educational institutions (such as Union College and Spion Kop College) which had served all races in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, soon became segregated along racial lines. Separate Welfare structures were created. To the degree that the church patterned itself after the thinking of the politicians, significant inequalities soon became apparent. The level of theological training, the preparation of teachers, the quality of educational standards at every level, salary structures, and pension provisions, all reflected the inequality of the structural arrangements and impacted on the level of service offered our members.

We are ashamed to admit that by and large the church acquiesced, through its silence and often times by its example inside and outside South Africa, to the injustice suffered by some and the injury done to our

church community as a whole. The emotional and spiritual damage to our membership can only be estimated. Our sincere hope is that all persons in this fair land both within and without the ambiance of our influence will grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who understands our mortal frames and the frailties of our beings and offers compassion to all of his children. (Matthew 9:36)

However, this is not the total picture. There were also a significant number of those in the church at all levels that did what they could to resist the injustice and totalitarianism of apartheid. There were church administrators who opposed and spoke out against the creation of separate Unions in the 1950s. The church opposed the strong attempt in the 1960s to create a separate conference for Afrikaans speaking members because of the perception of an underlying political and racial motivation. After such a breakaway conference was formed, the church held its ground and eventually most of the members and ministers who had left recognized their mistake and returned to the church. During the 1970s the separate administrative structures for colored and Indian members in the then Transvaal and OFS/Natal regions were disbanded and these members and churches merged with the “white” Transvaal and Oranje-Natal conferences. Individual ministers here and there spoke out more or less forcefully against the mirroring of apartheid within the church. From the 1980s on, we have academic papers, articles and books from both white and black Seventh-day Adventists incisively critiquing the apartheid system. As already mentioned, a significant number of Adventist conscripts chose jail, community service or exile rather than serve to defend a system they believed to be unjust. Many SDA families and young people left the country because of their opposition to apartheid. Many thousands of white church members opposed the Nationalist government of the time. Thousands more, in their own personal contact with members of other races, demonstrated Christian care and charity.

Although it is hard to determine the figures, a significant number of Adventists, or those with an Adventist background or exposure to the church through Adventist schools, played an active part in the struggle itself. Special mention should be made of the role of the extensive network of church-run schools (from primary to tertiary level) which, regardless of their limited racial inclusiveness, provided a rare alternative to the ideology promoted in state-run schools. With a distinctive philosophy of education, Seventh-day Adventist schools followed a curriculum somewhat different to that of the public school system, and were able to maintain some degree of financial independence from the state. Together with the Catholic

parochial school system, Adventist schools provided a real alternative to the “National Christian Education” of the government of the time. From 1990 on the church has been in the process of dismantling its discriminatory structures and policies. The world Seventh-day Adventist church set the direction with the “Perth Declaration” of 1990, followed by the merging of the two Unions in 1991. Seventh-day Adventist church members have also played important roles in the process of peace and reconciliation, together with reconstruction and development, particularly in the build up to the 1994 elections and since.

Of course, looking back we have to acknowledge that none of this was particularly significant or sufficient. We could and should have done so much more. But it is both proper and important that we give recognition to those who had the insight, foresight and courage to swim against the stream during the stormy days that are now behind us.

3. What is your denomination’s/community’s commitment toward the future? How do you see yourself working for reconciliation? What expertise and experience are you able to bring to the process of reconciliation and nation building?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has now begun a process of unification. Following on from the merger of the two Unions in 1991, the church now has a fully representative conference structure in Kwazulu-Natal, and partially merged structures in the Free State, Northern, Eastern and Western Cape. While challenges still remain, we are committed to a complete removal of any vestige of racially motivated segregation at all levels.

Officially all our churches are open to full membership and participation rights. All educational institutions admit students without regard to race, salaries are being equalized irrespective of race and gender over a phase-in period. Our Community Service programme is working under a revised constitution approved by the Department of Welfare. This service is under constant review by our national body and our stated aim is to provide a more efficient service to the poorest of the poor.

A vision for the future

As a church we commit ourselves in our proclamation and practice of the gospel in the context of South Africa:

- to endeavor to never again be silent in the face of injustice to any of our fellow citizens.

- to ensure that our structures, policies and personal lives evidence an acceptance of all persons (regardless of race, gender or any other such distinction) as neighbours with a right to be treated with full equality.
- to work toward the completion of the process of internal church unification by loving persuasion and by example. To urge that, where appropriate, sub-organizations and entities of the church follow the pattern set by Helderberg College in 1996 and consider making a direct statement of apology to those hurt in some way by specific actions or lack of them during the apartheid era. When we have hurt another it is our Christian responsibility to ask forgiveness and make matters right.
- to become re-incorporated into the normal world structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- to speak out on public issues effecting the broad society when moral, religious and other matters of conscience are at stake.
- to use our resources and expertise in the Welfare programme, Meals on Wheels Services and the Adventist Relief Agency (ADRA SA and International) to assist in the reconstruction and development of South Africa. We will encourage all our churches and members to become directly involved in demonstrating real compassion to people in need, and active in answering the needs of the community around them.
- to continue to serve the healthcare needs of our citizens through our Adventist Health System, church-owned medical practices, and public health programmes.
- to continue to ensure that our educational institutions are multi-cultural and multi-racial environments where diversity is valued, and respect, tolerance and understanding promoted. Our tertiary institutions should play a leading role in the reconciliation and development process, by graduating leaders in business, arts and sciences, and theology with the integrity, courage and wisdom to make a positive difference in the new South Africa. Through our educational system we will also continue to train health educators, teachers, child-care givers, and pre-primary teachers to serve in areas where help is needed most. Our long-standing commitment to a philosophy of service must be maintained and concretized in the life of every student.
- to extend our literacy programme to help with the backlog that currently exists.
- to strive to better reflect the love of God for every man, woman and

child so that the healing of mind, body and soul will continue in our beloved land, and the hope of the establishment of God's Kingdom might become a reality in our time

As members of Christ's body, we can do no other than love unconditionally, care compassionately, and live prophetically in joyful expectation of the Coming God.

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- 1 Gustavo Gutiérrez, Peruvian theologian and author of the groundbreaking book *A Theology of Liberation*, made these comments in 1997 in response to the work of Adventists Ana and Fernando Stahl among the people of the Peruvian highlands almost a century ago. His statement continues as follows: "The experience of our friends Fernando and Ana calls us to live with the tension of enacting the 'now' of God's kingdom while recognizing that the 'not yet' fullness of that kingdom eludes human history." See "The Stahl Center for World Service at La Sierra University" bulletin.
 - 2 To use Gregory Hoenes's take on the title of the book. See also the opening chapter "Burning Bethel" by Janice De-Whyte. Indeed, Seventh-day Adventism has been something of an enigma when it comes to responsible Christian ethics in the public sphere. The historical record speaks of occasional—sometimes even remarkable—instances of individual insight, foresight and quiet heroism, together with modestly effective, though episodic, examples of strong corporate prophetic witness. Unfortunately, the record also reveals, in too many cases, our abysmal failure to even recognize moral and theological implications of socio-economic and political situations, which results all too often in abject conformity to the status quo or, worse, corporate complicity in injustice, discrimination, and oppression. The largely untold story of the Adventist Church's ongoing struggle with colonialism, classism, sexism, racism, and now economic neo-colonialism in Africa from the 1880s to the present, proffers many examples of each of these kinds of response. In what follows, I shall merely highlight one small episode of this larger story.
 - 3 Several contributors, including Kendra Haloviak Valentine's chapter, suggest some specific actions we can take in the here and now. Among others, Mark Carr, Andy Lampkin, and Siroj Sorajjakool pointed out the power of narrative to open our eyes.
 - 4 While observers might think the situations in South Africa and the United States seem similar, the differences are significant. For example, in the United States, a white majority has struggled to accept a Black minority, while in South Africa a white minority has ruled and oppressed a large—more than 80 per cent—Black majority. Also, slavery has played a smaller role in South Africa (there were 38,427 slaves in the Cape Colony when slavery finally ended in 1834), while subsequent legal discrimination was much more explicit in South Africa (resulting in the rigid apartheid system of laws from 1948 to 1994).

- 5 See the chapters by Yi Shen Ma, Siroj Sorajjakool, and Hans Gutierrez.
- 6 See Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 7 See <http://www.religion.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/113/Institutes/Archives/submissions/DOCUMENT_TO_THE_TRUTH_AND_RECONCILIATION_COMMISSION.pdf> for the Adventist *Statement of Confession*. Of course, any such statement will have its ad hoc features, and clearly can and should be critiqued and improved. For the full TRC report on Faith Communities, see Vol 4, Chapter 3: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/volume_4_0.pdf>
- 8 A system of legalized racial discrimination, aimed at the radical ethnic partition of South Africa under the overt justification of the United Nation's principle of self-determination but covertly degenerating into a vicious system of oppression and injustice in which the rights and wishes of the Black majority were repressed by a white minority, intent on nothing more than "divide and conquer."
- 9 In a submission quoted in the TRC's main report, Justice Pius Langa, later Deputy President of the Constitutional Court, told of his everyday experiences growing up as a Black person in South Africa: "It was [as a young work-seeker] that I experienced the frustration, indignity and humiliation of being subject to... the provisions of the... discriminatory legislation of that time. . . I could never understand why race should have been the determinant of where I should live and where I could work. I was never able to understand why, whilst still a teenager, I was expected to live at a men's hostel and needed a permit to stay with my parents in the township. . . The pass laws and influx control regulations were, for me, the focal point of the comprehensive network of laws and regulations which dominated my early working life. . . . As a 17 year-old, I remember having to avert my eyes from the nakedness of grown men in a futile attempt to salvage some dignity for them in those queues where we had to expose ourselves to facilitate the degrading examination. . . . It was one thing, however, having the overtly discriminatory and repressive laws on the statue book. Their ugliness was exacerbated to a large degree by the crude, cruel and unfeeling way in which many of the officials, black and white, put them into operation. There was a culture of hostility and intimidation against those who came to be processed or for assistance. The face presented by authority, in general, was of a war against the people who were un-enfranchised, and human dignity was the main casualty."—quoted in Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), pages 15–16.
- 10 In a strict sense, the TRC was not completely novel. According to Anu Kulkarni of the Department of Political Science, Stanford, "Since 1974, 19 truth commissions—investigative institutions grounded in international human rights law—have been used in 17 states, including El Salvador, Chile, South Africa and, most recently, Guatemala. Several more are under discussion." What makes the TRC unique is its linking of truth and reconciliation. See also Priscilla Hayner, "Fifteen Truth Commissions—1974 to 1994: A Comparative Study," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 16, 1994, pages 597–655.
- 11 It was a member of the African National Congress (ANC), Professor Kader Asmal, who suggested in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Human Rights Law at the University of the Western Cape, that South Africa should look not to a Nuremberg-type trial, but to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as a means of addressing its past. Thus, it was that a postscript was added to the interim constitution, under which South Africa's 1994 election was to be held. It stated: "National Unity and Reconciliation. This Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided

society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of color, race, class, belief or sex. The pursuit of national unity, the wellbeing of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society. . . . In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past. To this end Parliament under this constitution shall adopt a law determining a firm cut-off date. . . . and providing for the mechanisms, criteria and procedures, including tribunals, if any, through which such amnesty shall be dealt with at any time after the law has been passed." *Interim Constitution of South Africa*.

- 12 Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, page 44.
- 13 From 1996 to 1997, the Human Rights Violations Committee held more than 80 hearings in civic centers, town halls, hospitals, schools, and churches all around the country. Thousands of ordinary citizens—and some famous ones—testified about past abuses. This process received wide national media coverage and brought ordinary, mostly Black, experiences of the apartheid system into the national public space. Some of it was dramatic, all powerful. The South African TRC took more statements than any previous truth commission in history (more than 21,000) and the Human Rights Violations Committee faced the daunting task of checking the veracity of each testimony, choosing which would be retold at public hearings and passing along verified cases to the Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee. The TRC also took on a limited investigative role, and by issuing subpoenas and taking evidence, it constructed a significant (albeit fragmented) picture of the past. In its final report, the TRC produced findings on the majority of the 21,298 cases brought before it, and it named 400 perpetrators of violations, unlike the Argentine and Chilean commissions.
- 14 For example, "The 'truth' of the South African truth commission lay in its officially confirming and bringing into the public space what was already known, rather than discovering hitherto 'hidden truths'."—Richard Wilson, "Reconciliation and Revenge in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Rethinking Legal Pluralism and Human Rights," paper presented at the *The TRC: Commissioning the Past* conference held at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, June 11–14, 1999.
- 15 Desmond Tutu, when asked whether his commission had uncovered the truth about apartheid's dark past was apt to respond, "After many post-mortems, judicial inquiries, inquests, etc, which failed spectacularly to solve the riddles, we now know through our amnesty process what precisely happened to Steve Biko, to the Cradock Four, to Stanza Bopape, to the Pebco Three and others, because the perpetrators told us."—"The TRC has Helped lay Foundations for True Reconciliation" *Cape Times*, August 4, 1998, page 4. Steven Robins thinks that "like the 1986 German historians' debate (*Historierstreit*) that raged among German public intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermans and Ernst Nolte, public debate of the TRC's findings could indeed contribute toward the creation of an open and democratic public sphere in South Africa after apartheid."—Steven Robins, "Wrestling Phantoms of Apartheid: The TRC and the Making of a Post-apartheid Public Sphere," Department of Anthropology, University of the Western Cape, paper presented to the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1999.
- 16 "When I asked before our first hearings... whether I should preside over the proceedings in my purple Archbishop's cassock, part of my public *persona*, the

- Commission said I should, with my Hindu colleague insisting.”—Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, page 72.
- 17 “It is interesting that the President appointed an Archbishop as chairperson of the Commission and not, for instance, a judge, since we were to some extent a quasi-judicial body. Seven of the Commissioners were lawyers, the legal profession thus possessing the largest representation. But there were . . . four ordained Commissioners [three active ministers, all former national heads of their respective denominations] and that was bound to have a marked influence on our deliberations and on how we carried out our work.”—*ibid.*, page 71.
- 18 *ibid.*
- 19 *ibid.*, page 72. See John Skrzypaszek’s chapter where he discusses the need for “an antidote for spiritual racism.”
- 20 *ibid.*, page 86.
- 21 See the chapter by Nathan Brown on this “silent church” phenomenon.
- 22 We need to address these problems with deeper theological analysis. See Maury Jackson’s chapter where he draws a helpful analogy between how we understand and deal with Sin/sins on the one hand and Race/racism on the other.
- 23 Our entanglement with fundamentalism is a related problem. See Michael Campbell’s chapter.
- 24 See Matthew Korpman’s chapter on Ellen White.
- 25 For a now classic example of this kind of Reformed thinking, see Karl Barth’s 1946 essay “*Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*” in *Community, State and Church: Three essays by Karl Barth*, editor Will Herberg (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1960).
- 26 For analysis of this and related problems see the chapters by Marlene Ferreras, Herma Percy, and Andy Lampkin.
- 27 For example, in the Cape Conference (white), where a 75 per cent majority was required for constitutional change, repeated attempts fell a few percentage points short of the mark.
- 28 While a major task of the TRC was to uncover the truth concerning “gross human rights violations” and adjudicate amnesty appeals, it also had a secondary task to compile as full as possible an account of the apartheid era, including the role of the various churches and other religious communities, both negative and constructive.
- 29 The official reason given by the commission was that it was simply a clerical oversight. But I suspect that at least part of the reason was the low profile the church has had with respect to public awareness.
- 30 Kayle de Waal, who tells his story of growing up in South Africa in his chapter, had just graduated from Helderberg College a couple of years prior to these events.
- 31 See Pule B Magothi, and Thula M Nkosi, *God or Apartheid: A challenge for South African Adventism* (Institute for Contextual Theology, 1991).
- 32 The full history of the document is as follows: on December 2, 1997, an available-members committee of the Southern Africa Union Conference Executive Committee voted to make a submission to the TRC (Minute 312; of the 20 available members, nine were white); on December 14, 1997, a one-paragraph statement of confession was voted (Minute 313) and submitted to the TRC with a promise of a longer statement to follow; in January 1998, the full document was voted (Minute 314) by an available-members committee of the union and submitted to the TRC to meet their extended deadline; and in February 1998, the full union committee endorsed the process and sentiment of the submission. Given the newly merged union conference, the overwhelming majority of the full executive committee came from formerly disadvantaged communities.
- 33 One unavoidably thinks, for example, of the classical Nicean and Chalcedonian confessions in the patristic era; the various Reformation confessions in the 16th century; and in this context, of course, of the *Barmen Declaration* of the Confessing Church in Germany in 1934, and the *Kairos Document* (1985) and *Belhar Confession* (1982–1986) in the wider church struggle in South Africa.
- 34 However, we have, interestingly, retained the substance of the language of confession for entry into church membership. On the “profession of our faith in Jesus Christ” we are baptized, and others are accepted into membership by “profession of faith.”
- 35 Here, of course, we have a similar move to re-appropriate our own exegetically based theological/eschatological self-understanding for the purpose of relevant socio-political and economic critique of injustice, expressed so well by Janice De-Whyte, Olive J Hemmings, Claudia M Allen, and Yi Shen Ma in earlier chapters.
- 36 See the important exception in the Lake Union Conference in 2015 recounted by Mark Carr.
- 37 To access the full text, visit <http://www.religion.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/113/Institutes/Archives/submissions/DOCUMENT_TO_THE_TRUTH_AND_RECONCILIATION_COMMISSION.pdf>
- 38 All biblical texts in the statement to follow are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.