

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY
INTO THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

HELD AT PRETORIA

ON 28th MARCH 1983

CHAIRMAN: THE HONOURABLE MR JUSTICE C F ELOFF

COMMISSIONERS: MR S A PATTERSON
 MR T L BLUNDEN
 PROF P OOSTHUIZEN
 MR F G BARRIE

CHIEF INVESTIGATING OFFICER: ADV K P C O VON LIERES SC

INVESTIGATING OFFICER: ADV ETIENNE DU TOIT

SECRETARY: MR M L MARAIS

ON BEHALF OF COUNCIL FOR THE

S A C C: ADV P A SOLOMON

LUBBE RECORDINGS (PRETORIA)

/VMD

WITNESSES: REV DR K E M MGOJO
 BISHOP G LISLERUD
 MR T WAITE

VOLUME 59

(p 3412 - 3460)

C10

THE COMMISSION RESUMES:

KHOZA E.M. NGOJO, declares under oath:

ADV. SOLOMON: Dr. Ngojo, by way of introduction you are the President of the Methodist Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, is that correct?

--- Yes, M'lord.

I would just like to take you very briefly through your curriculum vitae, I will lead you on this if you would just confirm what I say. You were born at Umzimkulu, you attended school and Teachers' Training College at Ndelene Teachers' Training School in Natal where you matriculated in 1952, is that correct? --- Yes, M'lord. 10

You then taught at Port Shepstone from 1953 to 1955, is that correct? --- Yes, M'lord.

You then moved to I think Durban where you taught from 1956 to 1958? --- From 1955 March to 1958.

In 1958 you decided to go into the ministry and you then spent from 1959 to 1960 doing pastoral work, is that correct? --- Yes, Sir.

Doing a sort of probationary term? --- Yes, M'lord. 20

In 1961 to 1963 you studied for a Bachelor of Arts in Theology at Fort Hare? --- Yes, M'lord.

And in 1964 you were ordained as a minister of the Methodist Church? --- Yes, M'lord.

You were thereafter called to the Methodist Church in Western Pondoland? --- Yes, M'lord.

And thereafter you were called to Clarkbury in the Transkei? --- Yes, M'lord.

In 1966 you received a scholarship to study at Chicago where you studied a Master of Theology degree? 30

Yes / ...

--- Yes, M'lord.

In 1967 to June 1968 you returned to South Africa where you were involved in training evangelists and the Bible women at the Umtata Methodist Centre? --- Yes.

You became superintendent minister at the hostel at Mount Frere? --- That is right.

And then you were at the Federal Theological Seminary at Alice from January 1970? --- Yes, M'lord.

In 1970 you obtained a scholarship to attend Harvard University where you studied for a Ph.D.? --- Yes. 10

As I understand it you registered in the School of Arts and Sciences and not the School of Theology at Harvard and you studied arts and philosophy and you graduated with your Ph.D. in 1975? --- Yes, M'lord.

And your thesis for your doctorate was "The Democratisation of the Royal Ideology in the New Testament and Related Literature", is that correct? --- Yes, M'lord.

On your return to South Africa you were appointed by the Methodist Conference to teach at the Theological Seminary where you have remained until the present? - 20

--- Yes, M'lord.

And in 1980 you were appointed as chairman of the Natal West District of the Methodist Church? --- Yes, M'lord.

And in 1981 you were appointed as president-elect to the National Conference of the Methodist Church and inducted as president in October 1982? --- Yes, M'lord.

And as I understand it your term of office continues until October 1983? --- Yes, M'lord.

You are also the chairman of the South African Council of Churches Standing Committee on Refugees? --- Yes, M'lord. 30

Now, you have had personal contact with the South African Council of Churches, what is the contact between the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and the South African Council of Churches? --- Well we would divide the contact into two categories, there is the contact of membership under which we send what we call delegates to be the members of the SACC, that is category number one. Category number two, we have an annual contribution that is the category of finance, which we give to the SACC of R2 000 annually.

10

Right. Well let us take those in turn, let us take your membership of the South African Council of Churches. In what way is the Methodist Church involved in the day to day and the annual running of the South African Council of Churches in its capacity as a member? --- When you are speaking about the South African Council of Churches you are not speaking about the constitutions there, during the course of the year there are 30 meetings which are happening leading up to what we call the National Convention, and some of our members who are appointed by the Conference to be part of the SACC, they attend these meetings, and these meetings lead to what we call - they culminate in what we call the National Conference..(intervention)

20

I am sorry to interrupt you, that is the National Conference of the South African Council of Churches? --- Of the SACC, and then it is from this Conference that now when the resolutions have been made in this Conference of the SACC, they go back to our churches to be looked at. For instance the resolutions which may come from this

30

year's / ...

year's SACC which shall be meeting before our Conference in October, they are to come back with them, and we shall be looking at them as a Conference. That is why you find that in all our minutes of the Conferences there is always a reference to the SACC.

So in other words there is a report-back on the various committees of the South African Council of Churches and a report-back from the National Conference of the South African Council of Churches? --- Yes, M'lord, through our reps. 10

And are the issues which arise within the South African Council of Churches and which are reported back to the Methodist Church then debated at the Methodist Church Conference? --- We debate them, we give them enough time, M'lord.

So one couldn't accuse the Methodist Church of merely being a passive member of the South African Council of Churches? --- I wouldn't say so, M'lord.

As I understand it you as the president of the Methodist Conference will this year attend the National Conference of the South African Council of Churches as a delegate of the Methodist Church? --- I am really longing for that, M'lord. 20

And your function thereafter will be to report back to your own National Conference? --- To our National Conference.

Do you feel that the South African Council of Churches is representative of its member churches, or do you feel that it has become an autonomous body which has become divorced from its members? --- Yes, that is a very difficult question / ... 30

question, if I were to try and give the exigencies of your question to explain it, that is the same question you can get within an ordinary set-up of a congregation. What I am saying is because my church has got four levels, there is what you call the grass roots, there is what you call the quarterly meetings, there is what you call the Synods, there is what you call the National Conference. We have had at times the impression that these on the lower level, they feel that these who are upper are doing their own things, so there is that kind of thing when you are in an organisation, and that is why you have to keep on meeting to bridge this gap. So that would not be unique of the SACC, that would be unique of any other church.

10

And do you feel there is the same attempt between member churches and the South African Council of Churches to remain close or become closer together from time to time? --- I mean you have to be close together from time to time, we cannot what you call act in isolation from one another.

20

Now you, by the very nature of your occupation, are in close contact with the Black members of the Methodist Church at the grass roots level? --- Yes, M'lord.

What is their view of the South African Council of Churches? --- M'lord, if I were to - again that is a very good question which you ask, because there is a tendency to make general statements, and in the set-up of our structure in South Africa you can't make a general statement, because there are different world views. For instance from the Black community the SACC is a beacon of

30

light / ...

light on the hill. There is hope there because of the kind of thing that the SACC has done practical to the Black community, so they view it as one of those hopes for a Black person in South Africa.

You have also been in contact by virtue of your occupation with the views of the White members of the Methodist Church, is there any discernible difference between the perspective which the Black members have of the South African Council of Churches and the perspective which the White members have? --- M'lord, you do get a very minority from the Whites, but that would also be an incipient statement if you say that the Whites are all not in favour of the SACC, just as in any big organisation - don't forget that my Church is one of the biggest churches in Southern Africa - for sure you do get sometimes some small minority from the Blacks, and of course we do try to, as the Church, because in the Methodist Church we have moved a long way, we feel that we have to work together to educate ourselves as the Church, and it is through this kind of education it does help some of the people who may be having some misconceptions about the whole thing. So it would be unfair to say that the White Church is against South Africa, against the work of the SACC, is just a minority, and that is very unique in any kind of organisation.

Now turning to the second aspect of your involvement with the South African Council of Churches, namely, the financial side of things, does your Church contribute any funds to the budget of the South African Council of Churches?

--- M'lord, I think I have already mentioned that when I was

answering / ...

answering to some of the things. My Church, according to the Minutes of Conference 1932, page 105, does contribute an annual contribution of R2 000 to the SACC, and again according to the Minutes of Conference 1932, page 19, my Church had voted a sum of R3 000 to the Schreiner Commission.

To the cost of the Schreiner Commission? --- That is right, M'lord.

Now, your Church as you mentioned is a large church, would I be correct in saying that the membership within the Republic of South Africa is approximately three-quarters of a million people? --- It is, M'lord. 10

Why is it that your Church is not able to make a more substantial contribution to the budget of the South African Council of Churches? --- M'lord, if I were to respond to that, again let us not forget that my Church although it has so many big numbers, I would say that 80% of those people are Blacks, and it is only the person who does not know the conditions of a Black man in South Africa who would query that. Most of the Blacks have no work, no jobs, most of the Blacks have been affected by the forced removals, which is that the Church now instead of concentrating on things outside its own congregation, has to try and see that these people are moved where they are building some churches or some work on the open veld, they must get a few churches to worship. There are still some of the people who are worshipping under trees because there are no worshipping places. So my Church is still very much engaged in domestic things, that is why it is very hard really to have enough money to send outside the Church itself. 20 30

So your members are not even able to cover the cost of the running of your Church itself? --- We are struggling very hard, in fact there is this year what we call the centenary appeal, a drive for the Church to raise the money so it can respond to certain needs of our Church because our coffers are just empty.

I take it from that that if the very substantial budget of the South African Council of Churches is curtailed in any way, for example by its overseas sources of funds being cut off, your Church would not be in a position to fill the breach in any way? --- It would be impossible, M'lord.

10

Now, we have heard and you no doubt are aware that the South African Council of Churches is not confined purely to the ecclesiastical field or the ecumenical endeavours but is also involved in the broader socio-political field. How does that accord with the activities of the Methodist Church itself? --- M'lord, that is a very good question theologically and logically. In the first place let us not forget that when we are speaking about the Church it is a Christian Church. We are speaking about those people who are the followers of Jesus, and the manifesto or programme of Jesus is very clear from the word go when he announces His programme for His mission. It is the holistic Gospel which includes the political aspect of life, social aspect of life and the spiritual side of life. And let us not forget that when we are speaking about politics, you are speaking about politics in relation to a person created in the image of God. When you are speaking about the rights of a person that is politics, and

20

30

according to the Divine Law of God everybody created in the image of God must have his own rights. When you are speaking about social conditions of a person, you are speaking about how a person created in the image of God lives. Is he having a good, peaceful living, better accommodation, etcetera, etcetera. When you are speaking about the spiritual life of a person you are speaking about a person, his relationship with his God, and automatically his relationship with his God, if that is right, there is going to be a correct relationship with his fellow man. So it is the whole thing, I must say here - I am speaking now as a theologian - I really find it very hard to put these things into watertight compartments and say that this is politics, this is social aspects, this is spiritual aspects, because to me it is a whole, and if we were to look at the Cross of Christ it is a plus sign, a symbol, which means that once you become a Christian, it is the Gospel plus something not the Gospel minus something, you cannot subtract when you are dealing with a person as seen by God, it is a plus symbol. So to me it is the whole thing, that is why I am having problems when you start putting this thing into compartments. 10 20

So your Church then is obviously involved in this field and would you then endorse the involvement of the South African Council of Churches in this field as well? --- In the holistic Gospel, and we must underline that word holistic Gospel because I don't want to separate these things.

Now, on the everyday level you have seen the benefit which your congregants have received from the charitable work of the South African Council of Churches, you know of the 30

Inter-Church Aid, the Dependants' Conference, these sort of activities? --- Yes.

If these activities of the South African Council of Churches were inhibited in any way or cut off in any way, what result do you think that would have on the benefit from these activities? --- M'lord, I also believe that that would cause a lot of confusion, because just as I have said before, from my Black constituents the SACC is a beacon of light on the mountain. And you know that once the people have lost light and are frustrated this in turn 10 causes a confusion. I am just praying for a day that this thing will not happen, because I think the Black community will lose all hope. And let us not forget again that the SACC has been one of those organisations which have been very consistent in preaching peaceful change through non-violence. So now, if this work of the SACC were to be, let us say, banned, I don't know, the ordinary Black person will say that: is the Government now saying that the movement which is preaching peaceful change through non-violence, is the Government now saying that there must be 20 movements for violence. Because in most cases it is known this has been a consistent philosophy of the SACC, peaceful change through non-violence, and that gives hope to the whole people of South Africa.

Right. Now, I mentioned earlier that you are the chairman of the Standing Committee on Refugees, a committee of the South African Council of Churches. What is the function of this committee? --- M'lord, again when you are speaking about refugees I want to underline this, when you are saying a refugee to one of the persons in the Black 30 community / ...

community, you are referring to his or her child. The function of this committee is threefold: pastoral - we have got our children who need to be pastored, you know some of them leave when they still need the parent; education - they must receive education, and of course medical. We are only concentrating on those three things just like any parent would concentrate if he or she were dealing with his own child. So to us who are trying to be those things you may ask how, what is the methodology, let me say it before I am asked. You know that in these 10 places like Botswana, Lesotho and so on there are what you call the Christian Councils, so we felt that it would be wise, we don't just get in there and say we are looking for the refugees, we are working through the people who are there, Christian Councils who are there, and we want to learn from them what are the problems affecting the refugees pastorally, are they being pastored? Two, as far as education is concerned are they being helped, when they are sick are they being helped? So we liaise with the Christian Councils who are there, we don't act directly 20 with the refugees, we have no direct contact with the refugees, we have direct contact with the Christian Councils who are there, who are on the spot. And that thing does help because we get firsthand information. You know sometimes you get things which are perverted, if you get information from the people who are there you get better information.

Now along the lines of the pastoral care for the refugees, what is the approach with regard to ministering to the South African Defence Force? --- You know there was 30

a conference, Methodist Conference, some time ago, I can't remember the year now - in fact I was one of the people who stood up at the Conference I must say that, because we must speak the truth here - who complained that whereas I appreciate ministering to the Forces on the Border, let us not forget that we as the Church family called Methodist, we have got two groups. It would be morally right if you are ministering to one group, to minister also on the other side, and the thing was debated at Conference until my Church now has accepted the point, that is the Methodist Church, if we are to do the ministering it would be good too to minister on the other side, that is to refugees. Of course there are still pragmatic difficulties, in principle we have accepted that we must minister also to the people who are called refugees but of course there are some practical difficulties there which have to be looked at. We are aware of the practical things, but in principle we have agreed that it is good to minister, these are all our children, and it becomes clearer now since I have become the president of the Conference, because as the head of the Church these are all my children, the White boys who are there are my children, the Black children on the other side are my children.

10

20

Now, do you feel that it is practical in ministering to people in the refugee camps on the one hand, people in the South African Defence Force on the other hand, for the churches to each go and act individually, or is it more practical for that to be done through a body such as the South African Council of Churches? --- Of course I myself

30

am of the opinion that the churches, the denominations cannot go it alone these days, I think the churches have to come together to bear the witness of Christ together. Because when they are divided what is the witness of a divided community of the Church.

Thank you, M'lord, I have no further questions.

ADV. VON LIERES: Dr. Mgojo, how would you then describe the relationship between the Methodist Church and the South African Council of Churches, do you support them consistently throughout or are there certain areas in which you don't support the South African Council of Churches? --- M'lord, just as I said that in any type of organisation really there are some of the things what you call, you start what you call questioning. I would say there are some of the things which the Methodist Church has been unhappy about in the SACC just like any other organisation, but as far as supporting the SACC, my Church is supporting the SACC. I mean the SACC is an organisation of human beings, sinners subject to errors just like any other person, so there may be some of the things where the SACC may falter.

Could you perhaps just give a practical demonstration to the Commission of that type of thing that the Methodists were unhappy about in their relationship with the SACC? --- Well for instance speaking about this gap again, I know that there are some people in the Church who felt that maybe there was rather a gap when the SACC spoke you know, they were not speaking really for the Church. I think it was because of these gaps that do appear sometimes.

Excuse me, are you referring to the same gaps the

Reverend / ...

Reverend Wing spoke about this morning? --- Yes, Sir.

You were present here when he spoke? --- I was here.

And you also heard me read out to the Reverend Wing the attitude of the Church Unity Commission which expressed concern at that particular meeting about the manner in which the SACC existed and acted apart from the churches rather than with the churches, you heard that. Is that also the Methodist view? --- To a certain extent although I find that very much exaggerated, because we send our reps to all the meetings of the SACC. We have the reps, maybe if there has been some kind of, what you call, they may have been caused by communication, because the communication can really be a hinderance in some of the things. Some of the things are decided and then because of communication some of the things are mooted, and then such things do come up.

10

Yes, Doctor, let us just deal with this consultation between the heads of the Church Unity Commission churches early in 1981. Did that particular consultation find or express concern at that meeting about the manner in which the SACC existed and acted apart from the churches rather than with the churches? --- M'lord, I was not there, I can't comment on a meeting that I was not present.

20

Now, were you informed by the then president of the Methodist Church what decision that consultation reached, were you informed by your predecessor that they expressed concern at that meeting? --- M'lord, again I don't think that I would like to comment on that, because I am not what you call clear about it, I would not like to comment on it.

30

Who was the past president, from whom did you take over office? --- I took over from Dr.Gqubule, the vice-president of the SACC.

And did you not discuss with him this 1981 consultation on church unity? --- M'lord, there are so many things really we discuss in the Church, it is very hard to say really, I don't remember really taking it as a subject. It may have been discussed, but there are so many things we discuss in the Church, our own Church things, domestic things, I do not really want to commit myself and say that we sat here and discussed the thing. 10

Well, tell me were you on the Executive of the Methodist Church in 1981? --- In 1981 I was the president elect and I used to attend the chairman's meetings.

Could I ask you then was this consultation reported to you by your then president at an Executive Committee meeting? --- M'lord, unless I have the minutes in front of me of that meeting, I would not want to comment on that. I don't have the minutes of that meeting. As I say there are so many things that we discuss there. 20

Well would you be prepared to send the Commission the relevant Executive Committee Minutes of the Methodist Conference in which the report-back by your president on the consultation between the heads of the Church Unity Commission and churches was reported on? --- M'lord, again with all due respect if the Minutes are there, I would be prepared to do it.

And why wouldn't this be there? --- M'lord, Sir, if the minutes are there, if it was discussed, if it was on the agenda of the meeting when the report was made back, I 30

will what you call process them with no doubt.

CHAIRMAN: I would appreciate it if you would see if they are there and make them available to the Commission, because one of the things which has arisen as a relevant question is the relationship between the South African Council of Churches and its member churches? --- Yes, M'lord.

ADV. VON LIERES: Now you have also heard the Reverend King informing the Commission that at the level of the ordinary members of the United Congregational Church there is not sufficient interest in the work of the South African Council of Churches. You have given the Commission four levels on which your Church operates, namely, the grass roots level, the quarterly meetings, the Synods and the General Assemblies. Now let us take the grass roots level in the Methodist Church, what do you say, is there sufficient awareness at grass roots level of what the South African Council of Churches does? --- I would think, M'lord, on the grass roots level the ordinary person who is living in a village or in a Black community, their awareness is through the help of the SACC, when the parents what you call, are detained the SACC has helped the children, through the Asingeni Fund the SACC has helped those people. It is only through the help really where they have much information. That is why I say that the SACC to an ordinary person on the grass roots is a beacon of hope through the help which these people have got from the SACC.

Now, when you talk of the ordinary person are you referring there to the one who has been helped by the SACC? --- I mean the neighbours who are witnessing this and

who / ...

who are seeing this.

What must we make of this then, must we understand that you differ in your understanding of the knowledge at grass roots level amongst Methodists from the understanding that the Reverend Wing has of the knowledge of members at grass roots level at his church. Do you not agree with him? --- M'lord, once again I am just trying here to present what I understand as far as my Church is concerned, I am not trying to make comparisons.

Well I am asking you to make a comparison? --- Well, 10
if Reverend Wing says the grass roots people are not conscious of what the SACC is doing, I will say that our comments differ very much. They understand the SACC from the Methodists, because as far as the Methodist people are concerned, I mean the ordinary people really there is much help which has been done by the SACC, they have seen these things happening.

Now if your grass roots level in the Methodist Church in fact sees the SACC as a beacon of light, why don't they support the SACC financially? --- M'lord, I have already 20
said there is R2 000 which is coming from the Church.

But that was for the Schreiner Commission you said?
--- No, I said R3 000 was for the Schreiner Commission, and I said that according to the Minutes of Conference - let me look at the page so that we have the record straight - I said that according to the Minutes of the Conference 1982, page 103, there is an annual contribution of R2 000 which is made by the Church.

And you say you have three-quarters of a million members approximately? --- M'lord, I said so. 30

And / ...

And there is not 10 cents a head available for the SACC? --- M'lord, I say that we contribute R2 000 to the SACC, and I say that we have got so many programmes within the Church itself, and we have got this annual appeal which we are having this year to raise moneys so that we can meet the needs of our Church as the Methodist Church.

No further questions.

CHAIRMAN: Could you assist me a little on the question of the refugees. By refugees do you mean the people who have left the Republic and are living in neighbouring states? 10
--- M'lord, yes.

Could you give me some idea of the extent of the problem, how many refugees are approximately - I know you can only give an approximate figure - are taken care of?
--- M'lord, that is a very good question again, we are still in the process of this, we have not even succeeded in liaising with all the Christian Councils of these other states. This is still in process, we have not even started what you call giving this help.

Are there Christian Councils say in Botswana which 20
would do the sort of work which you had in mind? --- There are Christian Councils in Botswana but we are to liaise with them to see what is happening there, and again we think that is in line with the theology of the Body of Christ.

In regard to your communication with your own Church's adherents, how does communication take place at the local congregational level, is it from the pulpit or in what way?
--- I would say, M'lord, when we meet at Conference we have resolutions and decisions, and there are some of those decisions which have not come from the grass roots level, 30

and / ...

and it means that they must go back to what we call the quarterly meeting of societies and be discussed there, if they are approved they are passed through our different Synods, and they are discussed there and then those which are approved go back to the Conference to be polished and to be confirmed, because we avoid dictating to the grass roots, everything must come up through discussion through certain committees.

ADV. SOLOMON: No re-examination thank you.

CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for your contribution. 10

ADV. SOLOMON: M'lord, I mentioned to your Lordship earlier in Chambers that written submissions from various overseas visitors were being prepared. These have been prepared and I understand have arrived. I haven't had the chance to examine them, may we have a short adjournment?

THE COMMISSION IS ADJOURNED.

THE COMMISSION RESUMES:

CHAIRMAN: Bishop, have you any objection to the taking of the oath? --- No.

GUNNAR LISLERUD, declares under oath: 20

ADV. SOLOMON: Bishop, you are a Bishop of the Church of Norway, the Lutheran Church, is that correct? --- That is correct.

Now you have presented a written submission which has been handed to the Commission. Would you take his Lordship through that submission and enlarge wherever you feel appropriate? --- Thank you. I was born and raised in Norway, but I have served as a missionary to Southern Africa from the year 1949 to 1963, and I was then the principal of Lutheran Theological College at Kapunulo, Natal. I am a 30

Master / ...