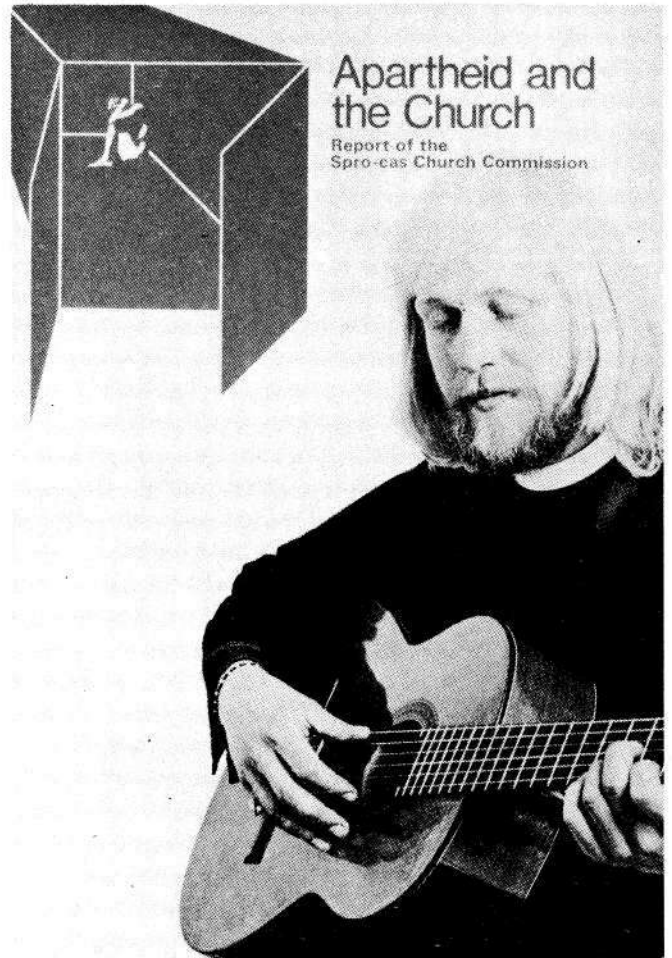


# “A CRISIS OF FAITH”

A review of the SPRO-CAS Commission Report :  
“Apartheid and the Church”

by Fenella Robbins



**“The sporadic and piecemeal efforts which have been made to liberate Christians from racial prejudice must be intensified, co-ordinated and expanded. A substantial and, if possible, ecumenically co-ordinated or sponsored programme of education in attitudes which reflect faith in the Gospel or reconciliation is an urgent necessity.”**

This is one of the recommendations made by the Church Commission of Spro-cas<sup>1</sup> in its report, *Apartheid and the Church*<sup>2</sup>.

In its study project the Commission has found no room for complacency. It believes that “the Church by its very nature as the servant of the word of God is called upon to examine critically all human ideologies and societies in the light of the Gospel. Yet it has long compromised its role as prophet and critic in South Africa. We are judged by the very gospel which judges society. By the standard of the Gospel we find ourselves a Church whose performance has in no way matched what should be expected of it. Called to hope, we too often live as though without hope.”

## SERIOUSLY RESTRICTED

The Church Report analyses the effects of apartheid on the life and mission of the Church. It finds that the Church’s freedom to witness to the word of God and to serve the people of God is seriously restricted by apartheid laws and customs in South Africa. Government regulations governing freedom of movement, residence, association, education and worship are serious hindrances to the work of the Church. The report points out, however, that a climate of thought has developed, encouraged by the plethora of laws and regulations, which makes even legally permissible actions seem doubtful and dangerous. A great many people assume that the law allows less freedom than it does, and

thus there are still considerable opportunities, for example, in inter-racial contact, which are often neglected because of ignorance and uncertainty regarding the law.

Although there is no direct law curtailing freedom of speech, Church workers are, however, inhibited by the fear of bannings, deportations, refusals of visas, and withdrawals of passports.

Turning from such external controls, the Report deals with the “internal ideological activity” brought about by apartheid society. Thus while the Church is still one of the few places where Black and White can meet in an environment of relative acceptance, for the most part the life of the Church reflects the prevailing social and political attitudes of the country. We are motivated by fear — racial fear, fear of failing to be successful, fear of controversy, fear of ostracism and isolation, fear of loss of identity, fear of authority. We have become prey to prejudice, conformism, authoritarianism, and despair, thus hampering the life of the Church.

The Report also examines such structural problems as disunity within the Church and the deep division between those who reject it as a pseudo-gospel.

## CRISIS OF FAITH

The Church is indeed faced with a crisis of faith. The Commission makes a number of recommendations, recognising that they will be of no use unless programmes are set up to put them into effect. (It is hoped there will be support for Spro-cas 2 — the Study Project for Christian Action in Society.)

1. Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society.

2. Sponsored by the Christian Institute and the S.A. Council of Churches.

Some of the Report's more specific recommendations read as follows:

Each denomination should embark on a programme aiming at equalising stipends for ministers of all races by 1975.  
Churches should concentrate on building ecumenical and multi-functional buildings.  
Church members should be taxed to assist African education.  
Churches should plan symbolic acts of resistance to what is false and unjust in the life of the community.  
Every congregation should have a clearly visible notice board announcing that Christians of all races are welcome.□

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## CENSORSHIP

This article was the proposal speech for the motion "that Censorship should be abolished" delivered to the University of Natal Debating Society in Pietermaritzburg on 12th September, 1972. The motion was carried by a comfortable majority.

by Donald Beale

**Some of you here tonight may not be aware that Censorship is a problem, either because you've always been shackled within its mind-structure, or because you don't care. Either way points to its insidious effect, subtle, lethal, like radioactivity slowly and silently rotting the bone.**

Let us be clear at the outset: in debating the abolition of censorship we are not debating the abolition of moral standards nor of moral discrimination. We are concerned with censorship as a government-sanctioned institution which takes upon itself the right to intervene in our normal human habits of discrimination and choice in determining that which it deems fit for us, and that which is not fit for us. It seeks to impose itself on individual human moral choice, and it is our right to that, that I am concerned to defend in proposing the abolition of censorship, since I do not believe that any outside body has the right of control that blanket censorship insists on. In subverting our own right to free choice and free thought, it substitutes a definite corruption and immorality for what is only a possible one, since it lessens and evacuates the area of choice. Censorship is not unique to South Africa, but even if it is worse elsewhere, that cannot justify it here. The two most frequent imposers of censorships are invariably the State and the Church — one thinks of Blake's aphorism: *As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys.* A pattern emerges: it is almost axiomatic that the severer the censorship, the more likely it is that the government be repressive and authoritarian, and the greater the incidence of indoctrination.

Our concern tonight is with the principle of Censorship, not with Pornography and Obsenity, and while Censorship includes the latter, they are not the central focus of the motion, and I trust we shall not be side-tracked into heady moral disquisitions on degrees of sexual acceptability: censorship extends beyond these to areas of political, theological, and philosophical speculation, and seeks to curtail these areas also. It is as well to bear in mind that censorship bans not only books and films, but ideas, and, without compunction, people also.

### NOT STATE'S PREROGATIVE

**To advocate the abolition of censorship is a sweeping move, and obviously I am not asking for a wholesale and indiscriminate indulgence in pulp and filth. What I am claiming is that moral discrimination at this level is not the prerogative of the state at all, but something private, and domestic. Parents are understandably concerned if children are reading distasteful literature, but it seems to me to be the parents task, not the state's, to deal with it. State and church, however, violate the individual right of moral choice and discrimination, at the same time claiming that it is moral concern which justifies their intrusion, all the while, however, fashioning an exclusive and rigid framework within which the very notion of individual**