RELIGION & STATE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

*A German-South African dialogue on
historical and current challenges*

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25 years of democracy in South Africa: the role of churches and religious communities in overcoming apartheid, reconciliation and nation building

*Thabo Makgoba*¹

Introduction

I would like to extend a heartfelt greeting to you from your brothers and sisters in Christ in South Africa. Thank you very much for your generous welcome and hospitality. To be invited by this prestigious institution, the Protestant Academy Tutzing, is a great honour.

Some of you may have heard me already say this in South Africa, but I would nevertheless like to repeat it: In South Africa we are deeply indebted to the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) for its support in enabling us to gain our freedom in South Africa, not least through your support for ecumenism in the darkest days of apartheid 30 to 40 years ago. At a time when the South African Council of Churches, led by my predecessor Desmond Mpilo Tutu, was leading the church's struggle against apartheid, you made the largest single contribution towards its funding. This support was not limited to your own sister churches, but

¹ Dr Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town and Primate of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa.

was especially directed at those who worked/proclaimed in black communities. Thank you for helping us get to where we are today!

The history of the church in South Africa

First of all, I would like to briefly outline the history of the churches in South Africa, with an emphasis on those that were founded by missionaries from Europe.

When we look at the entire African continent, then we know that Christianity can never be described as a religion that came to us exclusively from Europe.

In the British and American editions of my new book *Faith & Courage: Praying with Mandela*, which will be published later this year, I describe myself as a proud African Christian who remembers that my faith is not a European import, but begins with a young man from Palestine riding a donkey. As an African Christian, I acknowledge that many of the early church fathers – Athanasius of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, Cyprian of Carthage, Origen and Tertullian – were Africans. And I am a Christian who seeks the origins of Christianity in Africa in the churches of Nubia and Aksum, dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries after Christ.

Nonetheless, it is of course also true that the churches in our part of Africa, namely in the South, are the product of Western evangelization. Our stories are marked by two contradictory realities: on the one hand, ecclesial structures and their governance reflect the dominance of European colonists, and on the other, local churches have contributed to providing basic education and health services to the indigenous poor. For the most part, this ministry was carried out by white missionaries with a paternalistic attitude and a sense of superiority, although in a few cases it was accompanied by a quest for justice to protect the dignity of the local population. And where indigenous people rebelled against paternalism, many separated from the European churches to found their own African churches, like the one where my father served: the Zion Christian Church.

Allow me to return to the churches founded by European colonists.

The provision of pastoral, educational and health services in rural areas and to the poor during the colonial and apartheid period helped to alleviate some of the serious consequences of racist segregation, but without resolving them.

It also created a democratic space for critical debates (for instance, on banned organisations and personalities) and played an important role in the formation of black political leadership and trade union leadership. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was the church and not the white administration that enabled black South Africans to be the first to be educated. They brought forth political leaders of the calibre of Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, Steve Biko and Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as well as church leaders such as Desmond Tutu or the late Manas Buthelezi.

Throughout the liberation struggle, the church and its leadership were frequently divided on certain measures: those influenced by financially strong white constituencies defied any measures such as economic sanctions aimed at the rapid destruction of apartheid, while other leaders, such as those of the *Confessing Movement in the Reformed Churches*, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches (WCC), rallied support for banned political parties such as the ANC and the Pan-African Congress. Prominent church leaders such as Dr Beyers Naude, Archbishop Tutu, Dr Allan Boesak and Reverend Frank Chikane were instrumental in mobilizing church networks and boycotts around the world in support of the struggle for democracy.

After Nelson Mandela and other leaders were released and the apartheid government began to negotiate with them, church leaders played an instrumental role in national reconciliation initiatives: during the consultation and declaration of the Rustenburg Church in 1990, Prof. Willie Jonker of the Dutch Reformed Church acknowledged the sin of apartheid in the name of the white Dutch Reformed Church.

When Nelson Mandela became president of a government of national unity, he appointed Tutu and three other former church leaders as members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The commission sought to address the crimes of the apartheid era in a way that balanced the need for stability with the need for a certain degree of justice. More than 20,000 survivors and victims of apartheid violence came forward, and hundreds of perpetrators were granted amnesty in return for their confession of crimes committed under apartheid. However, the success of the commission was diminished by the fact that the government did not compensate the victims in full, as recommended by the commission. In

addition, those perpetrators who did not apply for amnesty or were rejected by the commission were not prosecuted.

The proclamation of a modern constitution for a new South Africa was internationally praised, but politicians and political parties were not held accountable. A serious weakness of our electoral system is that the party leadership can 'capture' the structures created for democracy in order to manipulate them. For example, our system of so-called proportional representation states that members of parliament are selected from the lists of candidates drawn up by the party and that voters in local constituencies have no role in deciding who should represent them in parliament.

Several investigative commissions are currently dealing with the widespread misuse of public monies, resulting from collusion between high-ranking politicians, senior public sector managers (especially in state-owned enterprises) and corrupt businessmen. Such corruption has resulted in the loss of several billions of rand of public funds, which considerably reduces economic growth and affects efforts to secure/supply public finance for the common good.

Formal cooperation between church and state: justification, coordination and cooperation

Nelson Mandela's accession to power changed the relationship between government and churches. During his presidency, which began 25 years ago, he started working with faith communities, a process which was formalized under the chairmanship of President Thabo Mbeki. The reasons for this agreement of cooperation in 2006 were summarized as follows:

One of the biggest challenges for South Africa is underdevelopment and the eradication of poverty. While the government is investing substantial resources to address this challenge, it acknowledges that given the scale of the challenge, it cannot do it alone. Civil society, the private sector and religious organisations play an important role in extending the reach of government programmes. Acknowledging this fact, the President and the religious sector agreed to jointly

enter into an agreement of partnership between the government and the religious sector.²

The 20-year formal cooperation between church and state, which was often achieved through individual agreements (ad hoc agreements) in the years 1997 to 2018, was successful in many respects. These developments distinguish themselves, on the one hand, through an evaluation of formal agreements and, on the other, through an assessment of the contribution made by churches to collaborative programmes (e.g. early childhood development and the fight against HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis).

- The cooperation between churches and the government is a good investment of public funds. It provides good value for money and has a high impact. It ensures coordination and increases the efficacy of government spending by 30-50%, as churches make contributions from their own resources or from parents using infrastructure provided by the church.
- The cooperation also has an impact on religious networks in order to raise additional funds from international donors such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Donors have also partnered with churches to support orphans and strengthen educational programmes. Despite some challenges, a special collaboration between the Global Fund and the Health Authority has been particularly successful. I will go into this in a moment.
- Cooperation guarantees the direction and impact of programmes; it improves cooperation between all sectors and strengthens social cohesion.
- It reaffirms the objective of the Government's National Development Plan to promote 'active citizenship'. Religious networks have the greatest influence on health, social and development projects in South Africa.
- Cooperation between church and state can help the country achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa, especially in the fight against poverty, in expanding healthcare and in improving the quality of education.

National and global challenges

The churches nonetheless face a number of challenges in the future.

² Partnership Agreement facilitated by the National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD), 10 May 2005.

a) Internal structural challenges

First of all, in South Africa we face structural obstacles. A report prepared by a government commission headed by former President Kgalema Motlanthe as well as a special report by the Ministry of Finance – on weaknesses in social policy and support for welfare programmes – revealed that in many cases we do not have an ‘effective state’ in South Africa. It is one of the objectives of the National Development Plan to create a professional public service and improve governance. The failure of the government is evident at many levels of the state, e.g. in communities where we cannot provide basic services, which has led to unrest in several communities.

One of the frustrations in church networks dealing with state-funded programmes is the lack of continuity in bureaucratic and political leadership on the part of the government; there is much more continuity in church structures. We are therefore often faced with the challenge of exchanging experiences with new representatives of the state system.

There are also other specific obstacles in legislation and government guidelines for non-profit organizations – in particular churches – such as when we bid for public and international funding for health programmes that address issues such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. While church-organized programmes are very effective, artificial policies and barriers discriminate against the largest religious networks. In doing so, they exclude institutions present in every corner of the country from becoming successful partners in order to strengthen efforts to achieve better health outcomes and expand systems so that they could become more sustainable in the long run.

In this context, I have repeatedly appealed to the leadership of the South African AIDS Council and to the Minister of Health to refrain from legal requirements that prevent the most effective networks from making a substantial contribution to the fight against HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Despite the fact that South Africa has made great progress in treatment programmes, we still face a challenge in terms of preventing and complying with treatment programmes. For this reason, we need a new approach that explores new models of partnership.

Therefore, I would like to reiterate a view I shared with Dr Buthelezi, Chairman of the AIDS Council, in response to a previous call for proposals. I wrote to Dr Buthelezi and quote from my letter to him:

It is ... alarming and unacceptable that [the Council] draws up guidelines ... which per se exclude faith communities from implementation. Some of the conditions that are not relevant to the performance, conduct or representation of the majority of South Africans (e.g. the specific BEE rating), formally exclude the largest and some of the most competent networks in the religious sector (as well as the largest churches). Religious networks (both at management level and at the level of beneficiaries) represent and fully mirror the majority of South Africans. These institutions do not rely on 'participation' / 'shared ownership' or proprietary ownership, but are non-profit networks that employ a large number of additional volunteers (apart from full-time employees). The objective of BEE legislation is to promote integration and not exclude the most competent and respected networks in South Africa.

b) Interference with international donations

International donors' policies and funding power (both government agencies and international multilateral organizations) directly affect civil society and the activities of churches and faith communities in developing countries of the global South. A number of their directives and priorities simply do not make economic sense in order to ensure that a good investment with a sustainable impact will be made. In many cases, church community projects cannot be evaluated within the timeframe of one to three years as required by some framework directives. Unilaterally formulated guidelines by state development agencies frequently do not prove useful to developing countries, with the result that the outcomes of programmes are unnecessarily called into question.

Just to give an example: the work of Thuli Madonsela, South Africa's former Public Protector (our national ombudswoman) was crucial in uncovering the high rate of corruption I mentioned earlier. Her work has enabled President Cyril Ramaphosa's new government to launch a large-scale campaign against state corruption. The ecclesiastical funding provided by Dr Beyers Naudé once helped

Thuli Madonsela complete her law degree. In this way, a long-term investment in the education of one of the leaders of the new South Africa has paid off enormously. Current government guidelines, on the other hand, would not allow support for such a project.

It is also of great concern to us that international aid is not optimally used in the fight against HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

We are deeply grateful for the substantial resources we have received from the international community to strengthen South Africa's response to the crisis. Furthermore, we have supported the Global Fund (GFATM) on international platforms in its campaigns for replenishment. At the same time, however, we are concerned that powerful donor organisations and senior officials (and certain companies) can create and implement programmes that virtually exclude local faiths and ignore systemic weaknesses in the public healthcare system. In particular, funds from international donors that reach South Africa systematically underestimate or exclude church and religious programmes.

While purely biomedical interventions are relatively successful in the fight against disease, such interventions cannot address basic problems. Problems that are linked to social factors and poverty and for which churches are well qualified and equipped to address, including e.g. why so many women interrupt treatment or do not undergo tuberculosis treatment. Church networks that are locally anchored and sustainable can have a strong impact in these areas.

c) Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)

We need (and are grateful for) international partnerships such as the PaRD, in which the German Federal Government, through the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), has launched a laudable international campaign to strengthen dialogue, reflection and cooperation between religious networks and government agencies, particularly with regard to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Aligning government priorities and guidelines with those of major civil society actors and religious networks is a real challenge, but it is of the utmost importance. After all, churches are not only a 'moral voice' in society or merely service providers that function as organs of government programmes.

Perspectives

It is our aim to actively influence the priorities and guidelines of international partnerships. This is not just the beginning of the learning curve for both areas in our society. The risk is that the government – because of its political and financial influence – will dominate the agenda in setting priorities and guidelines for implementation. Churches and civil society networks cannot simply be used. Genuine cooperation can only be built on mutual respect and mutual recognition as equal partners, with each side contributing different types of expertise, cultures or resources to joint programmes.

Long before ‘globalization’ turned into a social and economic concept, the Ecumenical Catholic Church was a global institution both catholic and universal, as we say. In South Africa, we as churches hope that the South African government will join the PaRD as a fully-fledged partner; and we strongly advocate such membership. There are many areas where such international exchange and cooperation would be advantageous, particularly in community-based health programmes and in the areas of education, the status of women, and sexual and reproductive health rights.

Only through channels/programmes such as the PaRD, the World Council of Churches and high-level meetings of church leaders can we tackle the obstacles that prevent the full realisation of the possible contributions of religious networks. We hope that we can convince our government to host the PaRD annual meeting in South Africa in 2020, and are seeking meetings with cabinet members about this.

Today's contribution of churches

In South Africa today we operate in a very challenging political and economic environment in which the formal structures and procedures of a constitutional democracy are abused in order to trample on the fundamental values of our democracy, and in which – as I have already mentioned – corruption and the misuse of public funds are widespread.

My response to the crisis triggered by the collapse of morality in parts of our government and in political life has been to stress that it is essential for our political leadership to place the emphasis on value-based decisions, if it is to lead South Africa into the future.

At the height of the crisis in 2014, I said that “the question of leadership stands out as a key determinant of our future ... Governance is navigated by our decisions and our decisions are navigated by our values. ... Governance has to do with how we exercise power, not lord it over others. Governance is how we lead, not how we order. ... acting to provide humanity with a contextual framework in how to build relationships of trust with others.”³

Process of courageous dialogue

We as churches must mediate social justice, hope and practical local solutions. For this reason, I have initiated a ‘process of courageous dialogue’ in the mining sector in South Africa. We must take into account the serious challenges of the mining legacy concerning economic and labour practices and the impact of mining on the environment of surrounding communities.

As churches we have the strength to ‘bring all stakeholders to the same table’, and this is the particular foundation and strength of your ecclesial academies. We need to exchange ideas and explore practical solutions.

One of the pressing issues that will have a direct impact on the sustainability of our new constitutional democracy in South Africa is the redistribution of land lost by indigenous communities to white settlers during colonial times and to white South Africans during apartheid.

In my contribution to the debate I have called for a new and practical approach of the church: I have argued that for the sake of reconciliation we should also work with congregations, where we as churches have legitimately preserved or acquired land and used it properly, in order to find out how we can shape the future together. In this way we will be able to keep the land in the hands of the

³ T. Makgoba, 2014, *The Sunday Independent*, 20 April, p. 19.

local churches for the benefit of all, with the poorest of the poor in mind. I urged this solution and wrote the following:⁴

Our intention is to infuse a debate otherwise pursued for political and commercial gain with Gospel values: sharing, reconciliation, healing and taking care of our neighbours...

I do not think land reform will work if it is driven only from [the state government], or only by business. We should decentralise the process by allowing people to work out local solutions backed by laws and policy provided by the government. ... Each of us needs to consider: what can we contribute to economic transformation and social cohesion? If we cannot bring that about, the South Africa of tomorrow will be as unsustainable for our children and grandchildren as the South Africa of the apartheid past.

Conclusion

Allow me to revisit the good relations we maintain with you in the South African churches. We are deeply grateful for the vibrant partnership that exists between the Protestant Academy of Tutzing and the EFSA Institute: a relationship based on the values of tolerance, respect and Christian responsibility, which provides a platform for engagement and discussion between church, science, politics and business on the important challenges we face today.

We are also grateful for the renewal of the formal partnership agreement of both institutions on 15 September 2016, which will continue until September 2021 and includes the vision of building a sustainable infrastructure to strengthen ecumenical work in the form of an academy on the Blaauwklippen Estate in Stellenbosch.

Trevor Manuel, South Africa's former Minister of Finance and now Special Representative for Investments for President Ramaphosa, stressed in his formal recommendation for such an academy in Stellenbosch:

⁴ T Makgoba, *Sunday Times*, 23 September 2018.

In the struggle against apartheid the ecumenical church played a prominent role as a source of inspiration in the struggle for justice and as a sanctuary from injustice. Perhaps the country thought it could do without the central pillar of a caring/social church. One consequence of our democracy is that there has been a shift towards instant satisfaction of needs. Our values as a people are seriously threatened. Rebuilding a state requires people who care, respect, trust and who build. The only institution that can guide this process is a caring and deeply rooted church, focused on values and inspired by courage... The fruits of our struggle are too precious to be wasted.

Finally, let me return to the metaphor I use in my next book, namely the one of the young man from Palestine riding a donkey. As I wrote this particular chapter of the book, I was asked:

In the face of the history of your own people, in the face of the suffering inflicted by the invaders, who called themselves Christians, on the indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia and America, why should you choose to become a Christian?

In response I wrote that I had a simple answer to this profound question:

I am a Christian and I remain a Christian because I remember that our faith begins with a young man from Palestine on a donkey. [This idea] tells me that since Roman times we have twisted the word and mission of Jesus Christ and his message concerning what God intends for the world. Over the centuries, we have allowed ourselves to follow imperialist programs. Christ's message was affixed to national flags, military power and AK-47 [Kalashnikov assault rifle]. But this is not the gospel. Christianity is not imperialism. Christianity is not colonialism.

Christianity is how I love my neighbour as myself and as others. The man who unites us to God is the one who enters Jerusalem, a nobody who rides a borrowed donkey. He is humble and ostracised, but his message of love and simplicity is powerful, powerful enough to challenge the perversion of the universal humanity generated by the Empire.

The Christian identity I strive for is one of equality, of harmony, of reconciliation, of truth and indeed also of turning the other cheek. For me this is more convincing and powerful than the values of those who have worldly power.

This identity is what I hope can embody our relationship, namely the relationship between Christians in South Africa and Christians in Germany. This occurs when we set out together to improve the lives of our people and to realize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in our respective countries, thus promoting the Kingdom of God in church and society.

God bless.