

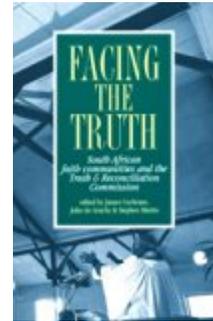
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

James Cochran Martin, John de Gruchy, eds. Stephen. *Facing the Truth: South African Faith Communities and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Cape Town and Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999. xii + 238 pp. \$18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1307-4.

Reviewed by Joel E. Tishken (University of Texas at Austin)

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'Facing the Truths'

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This book provides a very helpful view of the role of religion in the South African reconciliation process by well-informed "insiders" and other scholars. All three editors have been intimately involved in the RICSA (Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa) Report prepared for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The three editors are academics: De Gruchy and Cochran are professors of religious studies at the University of Cape Town, and Martin is a theologian and program coordinator at RICSA. Cochran and de Gruchy "produced a document which provided historical background, gave a summary of the submissions and made recommendations for the hearings" [1]. Martin then synthesized their work to produce the final RICSA Report (p.11).

To the editors' credit, despite their closeness to the TRC, *Facing the Truth* is not a ringing endorsement of the TRC but is rather a critical assessment of the effectiveness and shortcomings of the TRC from a variety of religious viewpoints. The book seeks to continue the dialogue of reconciliation involving religious organizations and avoids any assumptions that the TRC produced the final word on the subject. The editors "insist that the gaps are still there to be addressed, the stories must still be told, the confessions must be given space and actions must be made practically real." (pp.5-6). Above all the debate must continue as closure would be premature (p.6). *Facing the Truth* represents a solid step in this direction,

although it remains to be seen if the South African populace will take up this challenge. As Niehaus notes in chapter 1, thus far faith communities have done very little to contribute to reconciliation (p.89).

Roughly one-quarter of the book (pp.15-77) reproduces the final RICSA Report drafted by Martin. This document is already easily accessible on the Internet (<http://www.ricsa.org.za/trc>) and is not likely reaching many more individuals in print form. Given this availability, the book might have done better to devote that space to direct transcriptions of testimonies provided by faith communities. A few pages of this sort reproduced in Appendix I hint at just how valuable these testimonies can be. This would be the best means of obtaining reconciliation within and between a particular church or religious body as it would make the statement of a faith community available in its entirety. Summations simply can not do justice to the complexities and nuances of multifarious notions such as truth, reconciliation, resistance, complicity, or victimhood. Several of the contributors noted the disappointing statement of the Dutch Reformed Church, which avoided any expression of complicity by referring only to how the church disappointed God. Perhaps making transcriptions of testimonies such as the Dutch Reformed Church widely available would help congregants of such faith communities apply pressure to their own churches for a genuine statement of reconciliation. However, it may be that the pages of testimony are simply too large for reproduction, which is unfortunate.

Facing the Truth does little to address the Christian bias of the TRC and in fact perpetuates this bias in its selection of contributors. Of the nine contributions, six deal with Christianity (Niehaus, Arendse, Maluleke, Peterson, Botman, and Everett), two deal with reconciliation in general (Chidester and Majiza), while one deals with the Holocaust and comparative human rights violations (Grunebaum-Ralph and Stier). To the book's credit, African Initiated Churches have been included to problematize definitions of resistance and victimhood (Peterson). However, no contributions have been included that analyze the TRC submissions of non-Christian religions. This reviewer feels that at the least Hinduism, Islam, and African indigenous religions ought to be considered; the latter for its pervasiveness, the two former because of their size and importance, especially in Kwa-Zulu Natal. I agree with the editors that "... no other faith tradition was as compromised by apartheid as was Christianity." (p.172). But that does not mean that the other faith traditions do not have important lessons to be shared with all faith communities and South Africans. The emphasis on Christianity in the book serves as a symbol of privilege in a country that needs to be reminded of its plurality.

The contributors differ in their feelings on the TRC and RICSAs Report. William Johnson Everett has a positive perspective and sees the TRC as the central body around which faith communities can organize covenants to work toward theological reconciliation. On the other hand, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke writes that the TRC is not

synonymous with national reconciliation but is one instrument among many possible instruments to achieve these ends (p.106). Maluleke's chapter is by far the most critical in the book. Inclusion of other significantly dissenting voices, who challenge the very foundational principles of the TRC, would be an excellent addition. This is not to say that Maluleke's chapter is the only one that critiques the TRC, as this is not the case. However, reconciliation will be best served when all viewpoints are understood as fully as possible.

In the end, however, *Facing the Truth* lives up to what it intended. It has perpetuated a dialogue concerning reconciliation and has helped create a forum for discussion and reflection. Contributions to the book approach the TRC from a variety of perspectives that illustrate how reconciliation eludes easy definition and comes in a variety of guises. Significant questions like the role of the bystander, reparations, victimhood, and even reconciliation itself remain open (p.171). In this way perhaps the book ought to be entitled *Facing the Truths* as it aptly demonstrates that there is not just one truth.

Note

[1]. <http://www.ricsa.org.za/trc/>

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