CHAPTER 5:   RELIGION AND RECONCILIATION:

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The holy man of our time, it seems, … [is] a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time.

(John Dunne, 1978:ix)

5.1   Preliminary observations and considerations

5.1.1   Not all are equal

Up until now, I have only described various reconciliation models in Western Christian and African religion. In this chapter, I want to go further and compare these models. As I have shown earlier, neither a postmodern approach to religion, nor pure religious studies intends to imply that all religions and religious phenomena are equally good or justified. Even without a belief perspective, models, myths, rituals and theories can be measured, compared and evaluated.

5.1.2   An enquiry into religion

Kobus Krüger (1995:79-120) laid down the dimensions of enquiring into religion. According to him, an enquiry into religion involves getting the external data, introspection, understanding intended meaning, theory formation, evaluation, and an investigation into religious thought, mysticism and morality.

5.1.2.1   Qualitative research

When gathering data various techniques can be used, ranging from quantitative to qualitative techniques. I chose to do this study qualitatively, concentrating on rituals and the myths behind them, rather than a broader quantitative survey. My intention is to discover some useful new ideas and models of reconciliation, rather than listing all the possibilities. I selected my literature and interviews to give me a qualitative picture of traditional Western Christian and African models of reconciliation (Krüger, 1995:79-80).

5.1.2.2   Objectivity and Subjectivity

On the question of objectivity and subjectivity, I agree with Krüger that adequate knowledge is reached only by taking my subjectivity serious: "'Objectivity' is established at the heart of 'subjectivity'" (Krüger, 1995:81).

I am conscious of my points of departure and take responsibility for them. I am a Christian, white, male, Afrikaans speaking South African – all of which influences my judgements and analysis of the religions in question. My motive (or ideology) is an unease with traditional Western and Protestant expressions of Christianity and a perhaps idealistic appraisal of the African religious expressions. I look at the world with a postmodern eye; see truth as conditional and relative (Krüger, 1995:82-89).

5.1.2.3   Shared humanity

To understand the intended meaning, purpose and aim of different religions is not so easy. While I am a Christian and understand Christianity (or at least my branch of it) on an

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existential level, I can only hope to gain some insight into African religion as an outsider. This I do through dialogue (especially the interviews) and literature on African encounters. An outsider understanding is very limited, but I believe adequate, for the purposes of this study. In the end I do not wish to contribute to African religion, but rather to Christianity by engaging in dialogue with the insights of Africa (the position of reflexivity). Our shared humanity is at least one common basis for understanding religions and religious acts and rituals. Humans share (to some extent) the same joy and despair, feelings of brokenness and ecstasy; I want to get to the different African religious reflections on these human matters (Krüger, 1995:89-91).

5.1.2.4   Understanding and explaining

According to Krüger: "Theoretical work links various phenomena in a network of relation-ships. In terms of this approach a fact is explained if we are able to indicate how it fits into a coherent pattern" (1995:96). I will try to understand the various myths and rituals, explain the logic behind them and point out relationships and underlying patterns.

In order to understand and explain these religions, I will have to formulate theories that may exceed the self-expression and self-understanding of its adherents. This does not mean that I contend to have more insight into African religion, for example, than its adherents as a psychoanalytical reductionist approach to religion may suggest. My theories would simply elucidate my understanding of the religion, rather than pretend to know better. They would always be "…open, dynamic, anti-authoritarian, anti-dogmatic, relative, cultivating the germ that will lead to their own demise" (Krüger, 1995:95-96). They will always be merely tools to help understand and explain, and nothing more.

Such theories and patterns should take into account the dynamics within a certain religion, the socio-cultural context or the views of various religions. My theories will probably span all three different perspectives, and I should take care to acknowledge the uniqueness and historical setting of each religion, as well as acknowledge the points of convergence (Krüger, 1995:97-101).

In their study of Witchcraft discourses, the Sanpad (South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development) team realised the importance of not only the socio-cultural context, but also the political context:

> (An interpretative framework) is the socio-political context. All belief systems must be studied within their specific historical setting, social organisation, and political processes. These contexts explain much and render the processes studied plausible. Explanations occur at both the individual and the social level.
> (Sanpad Research Report 2003 = SRR 2003:10)

They also make a convincing case for comparing religious ideas, or to study the views of various religions – as Krüger suggests. They write in their report that:

> Comparison is essential. Any belief system studied is seen as just another option open to human beings, one possible belief among peers. No system is to be privileged in the treatment, all belief systems are considered equal. Upon that equality comparison rests. The aim of comparison is to provide alternatives for beliefs, practices and control mechanisms; when seen in a strictly local context, all belief systems seem to be inevitable and inescapable. *Only comparison brings out the implicit choices that have been made in these systems*. Thus, it is helpful to see one's own, as well as the informants' belief systems, as one option among many.
> (SRR 2003:9; my emphasis)

It seems that the idea of studying two religions' reconciliation models, may indeed open up not only new possibilities, but also the hearts of the religions themselves.

5.1.2.5   **The cognitive dimension**

A comprehensive enquiry into religion could include the study of myths, metaphysics, mysticism and morality. I will not describe Christianity and African religion in terms of these concepts, as I do not wish to give a detailed account of these religions. But in my study of the rituals and models, myth, metaphysics, mysticism and morality will from time to time be addressed (Krüger, 1995:125).

5.1.3   Principles for evaluating religion

There are two useful principles to measure religions or aspects thereof (as I will show in the following paragraphs): the one is the religion's integrative power – the ability to communicate in a certain context; the second principle is the religion's transcending power. The religion must make a difference – not just state the obvious – and be flexible and incomplete (Krüger, 1995:110).

5.1.3.1   **Integrating**

According to the principle of integration, a better religion or religious act should be clear and comprehensive. This implies, inter alia, that a religion should be coherent, simple and straightforward, link up with existing thinking and cover the facts (Krüger, 1995:110-114).

Coherence

The main ideas of a religion should hang together and imply one another, each deriving meaning from the whole that they jointly constitute. A good religion should make sense

and be consistent. This does not mean that there can be no paradoxes. Many religions teach paradoxical notions – the whole intention of paradoxes is that they point beyond reason. But flat contradictions make for poor religion (Krüger, 1995:110).

Simplicity

"A good theory is streamlined, a thing of intellectual beauty and elegance" (Krüger, 1995:111). The appraisal of religion itself is largely an aesthetic judgement in that religions appeal to us in their wholeness, their completeness, their balance and their harmonisation of contrasts and discords. It should help people to make sense of their world, and not complicate matters further.

Link up with existing thinking

A religious expression must link up with the tradition in which it stands. Whatever a present generation does or says must somehow articulate that tradition, and is good and true to the extent that it accords with the established norm of the tradition. In a sense a religious idea or act must be acceptable to the religion itself. Of course this cannot be the only measure to evaluate a religion. Any religion must also be in touch with the wider reality. But it must also be compatible with its own holy book or traditions (Krüger, 1995:113-114).

Cover the facts

A religion should cover the facts – its explanations should apply adequately to the array of items they wish to explain. The more facts it covers, the better. Krüger likens religion to a

map that helps its adherents find their way through the world. A good religious map must reflect the topography in as detailed a way as possible. "A map's failure to show a sheer cliff where there is one could be lethal. Unless religions stay in touch with the changing external environments around them, they lose their power in the long run" (1995:115).

Krüger (1995:116-117) concludes that:

> … if a religion does make intellectual statements about reality, the congruence with reality of such propositions may be tested. Insofar as it makes such statements, it cannot claim special privileged status but has to compete on the open market of ideas – with electricity, so to speak (Bultmann). Then the view that the world was created in six days must compete on equal terms with the theory of the Big Bang. As our politicians keep repeating: the playing fields must be levelled. Whether or not such questions are difficult or easy to answer, or will perhaps never be answered, is beside the point. What matters is that they relate to the general field of experience accessible to normal, waking, everyday awareness and to science… [and] that they are in principle examinable.

5.1.3.2   Transcending

Although a religion must be accessible and understandable, it must challenge its adherents to move beyond the obvious and usual. It must help them to grow. Albert Nolan (1988:187) explains that:

> Transcendence means going beyond something, going beyond some boundary or limitation. This is a very concrete, everyday experience. Love, for example, is an experience of transcendence because it means going beyond myself and my own selfish interests. The experience of hope is the experience of reaching out beyond the status quo, the given situation.

Perspectival, relative and historical

Religion should be conditional and open. According to Gort & Vroom (2002:6-10) good religious answers are ambiguous and open new perspectives. Krüger (1995:117) agrees

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that a transcending religion acknowledges that it is perspectival, relative and historical.

Religion is a relation of mutual conditioning of the known and the knower. He explains:

> The known affects the knower, and at the same time its constitution in the perception of the knower is coloured, in a variety of ways, by the knower. Yet it is a real relation. People can imagine things, and deliberately distort the perspective. Certainly no perspective can lay claim to absolute accuracy. And certainly the fact of multiperspectivism should be appreciated.

Religion should be relative. According to Krüger (1995:118), religion is an orientation, a "… never-ending series of balancing acts, a receptive creative interplay with reality". To allow the flow to coagulate into a solid, unchanging state would run contrary to the logic of religion. Therefore conceptual closure in absolute dogmas is an attempt to escape from the dynamic of creative adaptation from moment to moment. Religious forms are landmarks left from other people's journeys. They are indispensable pointers for others. But sooner or later they are left behind. None of them is absolute.

With historical, Krüger means that what was true three hundred years ago, may no longer be true. Good religion is firmly planted in and limited by a specific historical setting Krüger (1995:118).

Authority and force

Better religion relies less on force and more on authority. A sound religious system would captivate people's imagination, while a system that forces itself on people or that can only survive through force and violence is a poor religious system (Krüger, 1995:119).   Again, Krüger says it best: "Authority invites, lures, challenges and pushes you forward into freedom; force threatens, stifles, represses and pushes you back into submission" (1995:120).

Stimulating

Related to the criteria of authority and force, is that religion should stimulate new thought and ideas. Religious explanations should raise as many questions as answers and should continue to grow and improve. The opposite is often more true of religions in that they tend to have a strong conservative instinct. Still, the value of any system (including a religious system) lies in its ability to stimulate the ongoing search for meaning (Krüger, 1995:120-121).

The difference it makes for the better

It makes sense that a religion should make a difference for the better. It should transform its followers, and this transformation must leave them and others better off. Possibly, mainstream religion may not transform its adherents at all. History teaches that religion sometimes changed communities for the worse. A good religion makes people freer and happier (Kgatla, 1995:125; Krüger, 1995:121)

The Sanpad researchers make the same point by arguing that a belief or system that causes suffering, is not just another relative option, but a poor belief system.

> The fact that a particular custom or belief is "traditional" or "part of our culture" is neither an explanation, nor a justification of the practice. Other than in politics, in empirical studies there is nothing sacrosanct about "tradition" and "culture", as these concepts, too, have to be explained, interpreted and rendered plausible. A cultural relativistic view considers all variations of culture in principle of equal value, but this does not preclude cultural criticism on ethical grounds. Human suffering is beyond relativism, and cultural practices that lead to this - as witchcraft accusations do – are not to be condoned under the pretext of relativism. Relativism is a tool for research and interpretation; it is not a denial of ethical judgement per se, nor a denial of shared humanity.

> (SRR 2003:10)

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Witchcraft discourses and relativity

In their interesting study on witchcraft discourse (SRR 2003:21-27), the Sanpad researchers found that tension exists in all African communities. Some communities (like the San, the MaButi or the Barakwena) do not have a notion of personal evil and deal with the tension without reference to witchcraft. In other societies (like the Dogon of Mali), tension gives rise to suspicions or gossip about witchcraft, but it is never pursued. It seems that where social relationships are dominant, the need for harmony in close relations is stronger than the need to identify witches or to do anything against witchcraft.

In other societies, where relationships are deemed less sacrosanct and the individual agency less dominant, witches are named, persecuted and even executed (similar to the practice in historical Europe) (SRR 2003:21-27).

It is interesting to compare these different responses to tension and evil. While some communities seem to either live with the tension or find different explanations for it, other communities deal with evil by naming and blaming witches – identifying and expelling evil from within their midst. I would hazard that this may represent two common approaches to disharmony and disruption, also at work in reconciliation rituals: While some rituals of reconciliation seek to deny, appease or attack external sources of tension, others need to identify and expel internal agents of evil.

The question is: Are they both valid ways of dealing with evil/tension? Is the one as good or as bad as the other? Or is one of the options better. To answer these questions, the options' (empirical) effect on society would have to be determined. According to the Sanpad group, the first approach offers the long-term solution that tries to ascertain the

real causes of tension (for example poverty), it underscores the value of human life, dignity and education. Even though some would consider 'witchcraft' and the naming of witches to be an authentic dimension of African culture, society has the challenge to preserve "…what is valuable in it and do away with what has become harmful and detrimental to society." (SRR, 2003:29-35, also Vroom, 2003:231).

Krüger (1995:122) finally writes that sound religion:

> … (enables) one to live openly and freely, with joy and confidence, and with the strength to endure hardship. It aims to release one from the compulsion to possess all sorts of things – from material goods and other people … [to articulate] error-free dogmas. It aims to get people to the point where they are able to live together in peace and justice in open universal fellowship, in which group egoism is transcended just as surely as individual egoism. It seeks to integrate humanity with a world in which it is linked to animal, vegetable and inanimate nature in cosmic solidarity and responsibility, with reverence for the mystery in all these things. This also permits negative criticism. Where religions legitimise the exploitation of nature or fellow humans, they must be criticised ruthlessly for deviating from their religious intention. The arguments that religion is the universal obsessive neurosis of humankind (Freud), that it is an opiate of the oppressed (Marx), that it is the self-deification of society (Durkheim) are legitimate exposés of some forms of religion. The list of restrictive abuses is longer. Not least among these is the phenomenon of a religion closing in on itself, becoming introverted, setting up its dogmas and forms as inviolable, acting as a jailer rather than a liberator.

5.1.4   Patterns of reconciliation

Religion is a human response to human questions and dreams. So too, is reconciliation a human act, in which human beings try to make their peace with whomever they feel out of peace with. As an anthropological and sociological enterprise, sound reconciliation should be also examined and guided by these disciplines.

Just as religion can be better or worse, so too can a religion's models of reconciliation be better or worse suited to human beings and society. A religion may promote or prevent

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reconciliation, perhaps even without realising it. Reconciliation models should not only be tested to determine if they are good religion – they should be tested for their quality of reconciliation. Put differently, one should ask whether the kind reconciliation attempted is in fact relevant and useful. This is of course an expansion of the conditionalist requirement of sound religion. The kind of reconciliation should fit the condition to which it is applied (Gort & Vroom, 2002:3-6).

5.1.4.1   Functionalism and Marxism

The anthropologist André Droogers warns against reconciliation at all cost: "Reconciliation seems to be basically positive, and conflict has a negative connotation. Yet, just as a conflict can be necessary and healthy, reconciliation may camouflage a socially and morally harmful situation" (2002:11).

When one considers, for example, the once competing schools of functionalism and Marxism, his warning becomes clear. The functionalist presupposition is that order is normal and self-restoring in society, whereas Marxism presents conflict as prevailing, just and necessary. Functionalists had a cyclical view of society as always returning to equilibrium after periods of anomie, Marxists took a linear position, viewing society as the arena in which opposite forces were to engage in a long struggle which would last until the proletariat gained the ultimate victory (Droogers, 2002:12).

> This means that functionalists would view reconciliation as the ultimate result of social dynamics, once equilibrium and social order had been restored in a predictable and almost natural way … In contrast, Marxists would condemn reconciliation as treason to the common cause, as an expression of false consciousness and an ill-fated attempt to frustrate the inevitable course of history.
> (Droogers, 2002:12)

Though these schools no longer dominate the construction theory within the social sciences, their insights have not disappeared and still echo in current debates. They also lead Droogers to introduce five sets of dichotomies, which should be considered in order to determine the applicability (or conditionality) of reconciliation models (Droogers, 2002:12-14). I will discuss these sets of dichotomies as possible guidelines to establish what kind of reconciliation is really needed in our society.

5.1.4.2   **Harmony and conflict**

People usually view harmony, order and continuity as the norm, and conflict, anomie and rupture as the deviation. Yet conflict is all too common. Changing circumstances, ever-innovating self-conscious actors and opposed interests nourish conflict. Reconciliation appears to promote harmony, order and continuity, and rejects conflict (Droogers, 2002:13).

Minnema shows that in the Bhagavad-Gita and Greek tragedies (e g Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*) the concept of a "united human family" may not be the ideal. Contexts or societies may instead demand war or fratricide (as in these cases) (2002:68-84). According to Isaiah Berlin's concept of negative liberty as a secular model of reconciliation we should even abandon all notions of a final harmony – for the desire for harmony is the cause of rather than the solution to many conflicts (in Aarsbergen, 2002:150-151).

That is exactly Wesley Mabuza's predicament. In an interview with Spong (2003:75) he laments that a superficial harmony in South Africa denied a more painful but more real kind of reconciliation:

> There are two kinds of reconciliation. There is the one where reconciliation contains the acknowledgement of wrong by one party and forgiveness by the other. The other one is where one party gives in: that happens when someone feels that to go on with the other person or group is more valuable than not to go on.

But my question is: Is harmony always reconciliation? Cannot reconciliation under certain conditions demand conflict or at least disorder and discontinuity? How would liberation theology define reconciliation? Huber (1990:44) is convinced that "reconciliation does not mean harmonisation but change", while Derrida (1998:52-53) reminds us that conflict (or "violence") is an integral part of religion, and a balance to the concept of sacrifice.

5.1.4.3   Cyclical or Linear

The second dichotomy is between cyclical and linear views. The former suggests the universal and predictable repetition of social cycles in a history that repeats itself, disregarding local and temporal circumstances and differences; the latter conveys the notion of idiosyncratic historical change, allowing for uniqueness and ever-changing conditions, a history that is marked by trends and developments (Droogers, 2002:12).

> … in the (cyclical view) reconciliation is an integral and recurring phase of social cycles through time, as is in functionalism. (In the linear view) it is almost an impossibility, at most a temporary exception to the usual diversity, strife and struggle, perhaps the once-and-for-all end result of a long-term process, as in Marxism.
>
> <div align="right">(Droogers, 2002:13)</div>

Is it true that reconciliation is a return to a previous state of well-being? Could reconciliation not be something new, something not done before? If reconciliation is part of a transcending religion, then surely it should be changing, flowing and open to new ways of being, and not only returning to old, unconditional cycles.

5.1.4.4   **Structure or Process**

The third set of dichotomies distinguishes between structure and process, the static from the dynamic. When structure is emphasised as in structuralism or structural-functionalism, a great deal of attention is paid to the logic of the system and the social scientists focus on the supra-individual dimension. When the emphasis is on process, the focus is rather on the questions of what people do with structures, how they are influenced by them, and how they produce and change them (Droogers, 2002:13).

The concept of power is used in both approaches: in the *structure* approach to show the power that emanates from the system, in the *process* approach, to show how people dominate others by manipulating power, or how they resist domination by using countervailing power. Feminist theory uses both perspectives to make explicit the anchoring of male dominance in social structures and to design emancipation processes to change the power balances (Droogers, 2002:13-14).

According to this dichotomy, reconciliation could either be a structural given or a provisional result in an otherwise dynamic, vulnerable and ongoing process. Likewise, reconciliation can be the result of the wielding of power, either through the structures themselves or through the efforts to erode and replace them. Reconciliation can be enforced or contested by the use of power (Droogers, 2002:14).

Again Mabuza complains that to be powerfully forced into a state of reconciliation is no reconciliation at all.

> Another thing is that it seems that many white people are refusing us the right to
> feel bad about the past. It is very painful. White people keep on saying, 'Now look

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at this President Mandela. He comes out after twenty-seven years in prison and is not bitter and you should be like that'. You refuse us the right to feel pain, and you are pushing us too quickly to forget. It is another perpetuation of oppression that you even deny my feelings.

(Mabuza, in Spong, 2003:78)

In short, is reconciliation a structure that should be built, or something that people should continually do? Under what conditions would we require a structural kind of reconciliation, or on the other hand, an ongoing process of reconciliation? What role can and should power play in reconciliation? A structural reconciliation may emanate a wonderful, life-giving power; it can also stifle any human freedom and initiative. Can power be used to reconcile, or does reconciliation describe the struggle against power. And what about the powerful and the powerless, the offender and the offended?

5.1.4.5   Society and individual

Another dichotomy is between society and individual, group and person, social structure or actor. When studying reconciliation, the role of the individual in stimulating or inhibiting reconciliation in the context of a group or society must receive attention. Are certain individuals vested with the authority to decide for the whole group? What liberty do other individuals have in taking initiatives that deviate from the norm? How much social support do these persons receive? Do they succeed in changing the power relations (Droogers, 2002:14)?

Again Krüger's better religion demands freedom, stimulating and fruitful questioning and less force. Can reconciliation come from one side, or achieved by one person on behalf of all? Conversely, can a group reconcile on behalf of its members? Only the context and conditions will determine the answers to these questions.

5.1.4.6   **Society and culture**

Finally, reconciliation has both social and cultural dimensions. According to sociologists, humans are animals; according to anthropologist, they are animals with something extra – call it "culture". This culture makes them reason, question, hope – it gives then identity. Now the question is: do they reconcile on a social or a cultural level? Do they form a new social group, or an existential group? Or as Droogers puts it:

> (Reconciliation) … may refer in a social sense to the coming together of formerly opposed groups or persons, but it may also refer in a cultural sense to the coexistence or synthesis of ideas or practices that were previously used as hallmarks of contrasting positions.
>
> (Droogers, 2002:16)

Globalisation and creolisation (the tendency of people to become increasingly fluent in more than one cultural language) establishes a kind of forced social reconciliation in society. This may cause people to flee from uncertainty and confusion to a more closed autonomous cultural tradition and maintaining their idiosyncratic identity in an otherwise multicultural context. But is can also cause them to move closer to one another and result in a mixing and integration of cultures (Droogers, 2002:17).

Related to this is the question of the depth of reconciliation. Van Bijlert (2002:373-376), Abe (1996:6) and Meiring (2002:286) have shown that people, religions and groups mean very different things when they talk about reconciliation so did. If reconciliation is only a social affair with no cultural reconciliation – it may simply consist of the cessation of conflict, bearing with one another. On the other hand, if a deeper reconciliation is intended, it should probably involve a measure of cultural reconciliation and integration.

Can cultural reconciliation produce social reconciliation? That seems also possible and appears to happen commonly. When people share a culture – for example a belief system or religion – it in turn should facilitate social reconciliation. Two adherents of the same religion should reconcile easier because of that shared worldview.

5.2   The South African situation

> The whole reconciliation idea lends itself to some very wishy-washy, unclear, western liberal, Christian-loving Lord, un-thought-out notions, and so it is a problematic expression for me because it carries with it all these possibilities.
>
> (Faried Esack, in Spong, 2003:239)

It seems that reconciliation models should not only conform to good religion and take serious the questions of the social and human sciences – good sociology and anthropology – but it should also make sense in terms of a specific context. The context wherein a human needs to reconcile himself or herself with God varies, and the conditions giving rise to this need depend on each individual. But the conditions for reconciliation between groups may be quite diverse and may touch on issues such as justice, freedom of religion, power sharing, education, progressive economy, women's issues, concern for others, respect for life, social justice, empowering people, social en economic inequalities, tolerance and power (Folbert, 2002:378-380; Villa-Vicencio, 2000:1-2).

I would also like to unearth a model of reconciliation that could be useful to our nation as a whole. Franz Auerbach reports from a worldwide survey, that members of all religions see reconciliation as involving acknowledgement of wrongdoing, confession, remorse, seeking forgiveness and making restitution by those who have wronged others. The victim of wrongdoing or injustice also has a role to play in that he or she must forgive the perpetrator (in Spong, 2003:223). Does this apply to the South African context as well?

Do South Africans add anything? What would the preconditions be for reconciliation among South Africans?

In the past ten years, the quest for reconciliation has been high on the South African agenda. During the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a lot was said about reconciliation – but it also seemed that everyone had a different idea of exactly what reconciliation was and what it would entail. For some, reconciliation simply meant peace and quiet, a safe continuance of the status quo, meaning in the South African context that the enemies had to be defeated and the unjust system accepted. For others, reconciliation demanded justice – justice first, and then reconciliation and only then is there a possibility for peace (König, 1989:130-131; Volf, 2001:34).

The drafters of the TRC Act built their version of reconciliation on the African concept of *ubuntu* (mixed with a good dose of Archbishop Tutu's Christianity), whereby the restoration of the community takes precedence over retribution. They developed an amnesty process for offenders so that these people could be restored to their place in the community. They also envisaged restitution, which in turn, was not so high on the government's agenda. Some families indeed called for retribution, others retreated (Tutu, 1999:35).

Part of my motivation for this study is to find new reconciliation models for South Africa. The criteria set out above should help to make sense of all the possible variants of reconciliation. But, as the criteria indicate, the South African context determines to a large extent what reconciliation should be. In this section I investigate the context.

There is probably not one South African context. As diverse as our community is, so diverse are South Africans' views of our community, our challenges and what

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reconciliation means. In order to find out what South Africans mean by reconciliation, I turned to the views of a number of representative South Africans.

Bernard Spong (2003:19-265) conducted interviews with members of the religious community in South Africa, and recorded their prerequisites for reconciliation in this context. Their answers indicate four important elements for reconciliation in South Africa: the requirement of truth, confession and forgiveness, the requirement of justice, participation of all the actors, and humility and dignity. According to the principle of sound religion, even these elements shouldn't be closed and dogmatic. They are at best guidelines. But we do need guidelines.

5.2.1 Truth, confession and forgiveness

The first essential element for reconciliation in South Africa is truth, confession and forgiveness. Reconciliation cannot do without it, as the following examples show (Gerloff, 1998:46; Maluleke, 1997a:77; 1997b:9):

5.2.1.1 Truth

At the Venda University, Roswith Gerloff recorded this poster (1998:17):

> Don't let our Nightmares become our Children's.
> Let's speak out the truth to each other
> By telling the Truth.
> By telling our stories of the past,
> so that we can walk
> the road to reconciliation together.
> Truth – The Road to Reconciliation.
>
> THE TRUTH HURTS, BUT SILENCE KILLS. LET'S SPEAK …

All agree that reconciliation demands truth. It makes perfect sense; the problem must be spelled out to its fullest extent if it is to be solved. To let the truth out leads to acknowledgement of what happened, handing out and accepting responsibility (Gnanadason, 1999:77; Maluleke, 2005:1; Ngubane, 2004:1; Scott, 1999:352-353).

According to Scott (1999:353):

> Reconciliation needs truth. People must know what happened and why it happened to them. They need to know where their deceased lie; they must know if those who simply disappeared are alive somewhere, or are long dead. Truth is painful, but this pain must be endured if there is to be any hope of reconciliation.

Faried Esack (in Spong, 2003:239) puts like this: "What is reconciliation for me ideally? It is a proportionate acknowledgement of all crimes of the past, meaning there must be acknowledgement from all sides of culpability". Thus:

> Finding the truth is a prerequisite for reconciliation. The victims needed it; it was an important first step on the road towards reparation and rehabilitation. … [the] nation, too, needed to hear the truth, to be shamed by the truth, to wrestle with the truth, to learn to live with the truth and eventually to be set free by the truth.
> (Meiring, 2002:375-376)

5.2.1.2   Confession

Closely related to truth telling is confession. Confession means that you not only tell your side of the story, but also judge it, admitting failure and wrongdoing. Meiring (2002:287) remarks that: "… lasting reconciliation rests upon the capacity of perpetrators – of a community of perpetrators – to recognise their guilt honestly and deeply towards God and their fellow human beings – the community of victims – and to ask humbly for forgiveness". Olivier agrees that there is a necessary connectedness between confession and reconciliation (1997:104).

5.2.1.3   Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an important prerequisite for reconciliation (Gnanadason, 1999:82; Volf, 2001:45). It completes the picture: "there cannot be total reconciliation without confession and forgiveness" (Matalengoe in Spong, 2003:112). And this forgiveness must be sincere. Rathinasamy insists that the person against whom the offence was committed has to truly and really forgive:

> It is not like the Afrikaans saying that you forgive but you do not forget. I think that if you think of genuine reconciliation the forgiveness has to go with a willingness to forget.
>
> (In Spong, 2003:260).

But forgiving does not mean forgetting; reconciliation does not imply amnesia. It is important to remember (Tutu, 1999:218-219, Volf, 2001:45). As long as the lesson is learnt and not lost so that history may repeat itself. Louw takes a psychological view, saying: "The essential ingredient of a Christian memory is accountability. Thus one carries the past into the future with the vital hope and promise: it would and should never happen again" (Louw, 1996:394). Memory should play a constructive role and not become a neurosis and a stumbling block for the process of reconstruction in South Africa (Louw, 1996:394).

Forgiving, then, means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim (Tutu, 1999:219).

Desmond Tutu (1999:35) explains that forgiveness is not just altruistic, but also the best form of self-interest: "Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them".

5.2.2   Justice

A second element of reconciliation has to do with justice and reparation – rehabilitation. The wrong should be righted; the community restored. This may well be the one outstanding prerequisite for true reconciliation in South Africa (Gnanadason, 1999:82-83; Scott, 1999:354; Tutu, 1999:58). Many South Africans would agree with the statement that: "The prerequisites for reconciliation are that there should be truth, there should be justice, and there must be *some sort of meaningful restitution*" (Meiring in Spong, 2003:123; my emphasis).

The writers of the Kairos Document (1985) called for justice as a precondition for reconciliation: "Any form of peace or reconciliation that allows the sin of injustice and oppression to continue is a false peace and a counterfeit reconciliation". It warned against "cheap grace" – a reconciliation that readily receives love from God, but has no sense of obligation towards one's neighbours. There is no reconciliation without justice. (Connor, 1998: 73; Huber, 1990:44; König, 1989:130-132; Volf, 2001:34-35):

> In our situation today it would be totally unchristian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed. Any such plea plays into the hands of the oppressor by trying to persuade those of us who are oppressed to accept our oppression and to become reconciled to the intolerable crimes that are committed against us. That is not Christian reconciliation, it is sin. It is asking us to become accomplices in our own oppression, to become servants of the devil. No reconciliation is possible in South Africa without justice.
>
> (Kairos, 1985)

This is an interesting prerequisite. Although our South African context absolutely demands justice for reconciliation between the different groups, it is not an obvious African idea. While some African leaders stand by it like Archbishop Ntongane of the Apostolic Methodist Church (Spong, 2003:211): "The people in our independent churches like the

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Old Testament. They are not very comfortable with the New Testament so much. Our idea of reconciliation, therefore, is based on the justice of God shown in the Old Testament", there are many who argue (and may even boast) that traditionally, African reconciliation was much more unconditional:

> The African process of reconciliation means to make peace again, to make friends again, restore harmony in society and restore order amongst humans. That is why there is no punishment given as a condition for reconciliation and reparation is never a prerequisite. Reconciliation is a willingness to lose, not forget one's past but gain one's future. Future for an African society is guaranteed by being in harmony with the ancestors and consequently with the community one lives in.
>
> (Zulu, 1998:192)

Tutu (1999:51) distinguishes between retributive justice and restorative justice. According to him, retributive justice is a kind of justice in which an impersonal state hands down punishment with little consideration for victims and hardly any for the perpetrator. In contrast, restorative justice is not concerned with retribution, but: "… in the spirit of *ubuntu*, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships". This kind of justice rehabilitates both the victim and the perpetrator, who are given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community.

5.2.3   Participation of all the actors

Who should engage in reconciliation? Who must take the initiative? There are many wonderful examples of reconciliation that was initiated by the offender and other examples where the offended started the process. Sometimes it is even hard to say exactly who is more responsible for setting the process into motion. But reconciliation cannot be one-sided. For any reconciliation to succeed both parties must be involved (Hay, 1998:123).

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Mvume Dandala (Spong, 2003:57) explains that reconciliation requires the efforts of both sides:

> I do also believe that as a Christian when we talk about reconciliation, we are not talking about something that is acted out by the only one who has caused harm or wrong. It requires, as well, a lot of sacrifice and giving up of oneself on the part of the person who has been wronged.

This position holds across religious lines. Faried Esack concurs from the Muslim perspective: "We have an Arabic expression called *tasamuh*, which means a mutual letting go of the hurts and the pains of the past, and that comes the closest thing in our tradition to the expression of 'reconciliation'" (Spong, 203:239).

Often the lines between individual and social reconciliation dwindle. John Mbiti indicated the important role of the community in reconciling a husband and wife. He said that in African culture, the whole community becomes involved in the reconciliation process, and that the community actually views conflict as an invitation to interfere. In African culture this seems to be true for reconciliation in general (Mbiti, 2005:1).

Maake Masango recalls (Spong, 2003:101):

> I was invited to do a program of reconciliation at the Top Security Company in Hammanskraal. As I walked in I saw that one of the guys there was the one who had tortured me when I was held in Pretoria. They had moved some blacks into the meeting, and there was a lot of tension between the whites and the blacks. So I immediately said, "Guys, I am coming to do reconciliation, but I had always had a lot of anger against you, Hendrik". And Hendrik said, "I don't know you". "I will help you", I said, and I told the story of how he tortured me in prison in Pretoria. My God, he was shocked. Then I went on to say that before we could proceed with the whole thing he and I needed to reconcile. The whole group was shocked. He wanted this to be our private thing. I said no, this thing is part of the community. I have come to help heal this community. You wounded me, and until you and I reconcile there is no way I can help heal the others. We need to be reconciled first. *Then if you and I are healed the community process has already begun* (my emphasis).

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Thus reconciliation calls for the participation of both sides of the conflict, as well as members of the wider community.

5.2.4   Humility and dignity

The last element or prerequisite for reconciliation in South Africa has to do with humility and dignity. It may seem too simple or obvious to call it a requirement. But perhaps there is more to it. It may well turn out to be the most important requirement for many.

5.2.4.1   Humility

Bishop Marcos believes strongly that reconciliation happens naturally when people humble themselves before one another. He envisions a reconciliation that grows from a small group of people sitting flat on the ground, listening to each other. He illustrates it through a story (Spong, 2003:221):

> Let me tell you a story. Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, was known for her faith. She longed very much to look at the true cross of Christ. So her son gave her all the facilities to go to Jerusalem, and there she found the true cross. She knew that this was the true cross through a miracle where this cross brought a dead man back to life. Anyhow, Constantine was baptised and became a Christian. So he came to Jerusalem to place the cross of Christ in a big cathedral there to be called by the name of the Holy Cross. The bishop of Jerusalem at the time was a very holy man. There were great preparations, and it was decided that the emperor of Rome was to carry the cross of Christ on his shoulder and enter the cathedral. So Constantine came dressed in a very, very expensive dress bedecked with many jewels. There was a crown on his head and his shoes were made of gold. He carried the cross of Christ and tried to enter the church, but he could not even take one step with the cross on his shoulders, not even move one step. He fell down and then he tried again and could not move. The people came and supported him and he tried once more, but again he fell down. Then the bishop came next to him and whispered in his ear and said, "Your majesty, the one who carried this cross was naked, was poor, was hungry and thirsty, and he was crushed under pain and sorrow. You can never carry the cross as you are. It will not be possible". Constantine understood the bishop, and

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he went and he removed all these rich things. And when he came with a simple dress he could carry the cross!

5.2.4.2   Dignity

Closely related to Bishop Marcos' humility, is the principle of dignity. Once again it is believed that wherever people's dignity is restored, they are automatically (or at least more easily) reconciled. Discord and strife happens when human beings' dignity is taken away. Furthermore, according to African thought, our dignity is interconnected (Kobia, 2003:94). Tutu says (1999:35): "What dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me".

Mabuza holds that South Africans must restore each other's dignity. He recalls that in the African tradition "… when two people were fighting with sticks, the one who won took the one who had been beaten to the river to go and wash his wounds. That is restoring the dignity of the person" (Spong, 2003:75-76). Bishop Marcos echoes the thought that:

> Reconciliation, according to the biblical principle, is when we acknowledge the rights and the duties of everybody, and we recognise the value of each other. No woman is less than the man in the world or no man is less than the woman in the world. And it is the same thing between whites and black and any other colour.
> (Spong, 2003:235).

This also means that the dignity of both the offended and the offender should be restored. No one should be humiliated (Spong, 2003:75-76).

Tom Manthatha remarks that this principle of dignity has structural implications:

> I see reconciliation first in our ability to recognise, to offer, the dignity and integrity of an individual person, whoever that person is and wherever that person comes from. This goes together, of course, with having created such structures that can lead to the recognition and enhancement of this dignity. We need structures that will have a place for these very individuals where they will find recognition for themselves and are able to make decisions about themselves.
> (Tom Manthatha, in Spong, 2003:194).

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It seems that: "… reconciliation is (indeed) a very costly thing" (Chapman, 2003:284).
There are so many contextual prerequisites, anthropological and sociological theories and
religious principles involved that reconciliation seems very hard to pursue and accomplish.
Added to that are the numerous contradictions in ideas and viewpoints. Not that
contradiction is a bad thing – contradictions probably illustrate the conditionalist aspect of
reconciliation. There is no one correct model. Some are better and some worse,
depending on the conditions.

What this means is that there are no easy answers or quick fixes. Reconciliation is hard
work, takes a long time, and changes all along. "For (true) reconciliation, a deep
commitment is needed" (Meiring, 2002:287). And there is a wealth of models to learn
from.