

# **Leadership for reconciliation: A Truth and Reconciliation Commission perspective**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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*As important as the need for authentic leadership in the fields of politics, economy and education in Africa may be, the continent is also in dire need of leadership for reconciliation. Against the backdrop of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the author – who served on the Commission – discusses five characteristics of leaders for reconciliation. Leaders need to be: leaders with a clear understanding of the issues at stake; leaders with respect for the truth; leaders with a sense of justice; leaders with a comprehension of the dynamics of forgiveness; and leaders with a firm commitment. The insights and experiences of both the chairperson of the TRC, Desmond Tutu, and the deputy chair, Alex Boraine, form the backbone of the article.*

## **1 AFRICA, OH AFRICA, WHERE ARE YOUR LEADERS?"**

I will always remember that day. I was being driven through Nairobi in the company of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It was in November 1994, and the PACLA II (Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly II) meeting was due to commence. Tutu, who was asked to be the keynote speaker, invited me, on our arrival at the airport, to accompany him for the rest of the day, meeting with church leaders and other luminaries in the Kenyan capital. It was when our driver, an official of one of the ecumenical bodies in Nairobi, was reporting on the difficulties they were facing, that the Archbishop leaned back in his seat, and with closed eyes murmured: "Africa, Oh, Africa, where are your leaders?"

Tutu was not the first to raise the question. For decades, ever since the late 1950s when one African state after the other gained independence from their colonial masters, the question of leadership came under scrutiny (Adewoye 2000:39ff). Africa had its share of inspired and able leaders - Sékou Touré of Guinea, Léopold Senghor of Senegal, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and others - who despite many hardships and failures succeeded to lead their countries and their people into a better future (Campbell 2000:67-92). But the disappoint-

ments, too, were many, when leaders were not able to produce what their people had been promised. In many African countries - Uganda under Milton Obote and Idi Amin, Ethiopia under Mengistu Haile Mariam, Somalia under Mohamed Siad Barre, Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe, as well as Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda and Liberia under a succession of military rulers – the high ideals of democracy, of an independent judiciary and economic growth gave way to autocratic rule, either in one party states or military dictatorships, where repression, injustice, human rights abuses, mal-administration, misappropriation of public funds and other resources, as well as corruption became the order of the day. “The governing cliques, whether civilian or military, concentrated on their own survival”, the Kenyan scholar George Kinoti recently wrote, “to the extent that they neither had the time nor the resources to maintain the economic and social progress achieved in the early years of independence” (Kinoti 1997:28).

South Africa, the last country in Africa to gain its independence after nearly 350 years of colonial and white minority rule, was indeed fortunate. Leaders were produced that succeeded in guiding the country, after decades of struggle against apartheid, to a new future of democracy and economic prosperity. The leadership emanated from all communities and racial groups, from men and women, who, in spite of differences and hostilities in the past reached out to one another, to build a new South Africa: political leaders like Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Thabo Mbeki, Helen Suzman and F W de Klerk; community leaders like Desmond Tutu, Cyril Ramaphosa, Beyers Naudé, Albertina Sisulu and Ellen Kuzwayo. They came from all walks of life, men as well as women, who did not only put their people’s interests before their own, but who, with wisdom and courage, led a deeply divided South Africa on the road to reconciliation. They were not alone. Indeed, when Desmond Tutu received his Nobel Peace Prize (1984) for the leadership qualities he personified over many years, homage was paid by the Nobel Committee as well as by the Archbishop himself to the many South Africans that stood behind him (Hulley 1996:25ff).

Of course, there were disappointments. Also among South African leaders, black as well as white, were those who were found wanting, with feet of clay. During the hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 1996-1998), many of these disappointments in the spheres of politics and finance, in the business and legal fraternities, among academics, also in the faith communities, surfaced. It was clear that South Africa, too, was in need of leaders with integrity and wisdom, with energy and resilience. Louise Kretzschmar’s comments to a Nigerian audience (Ibadan November 2000), surely apply to South Africans as well:

“Among the growing calls for the 21st century to be the African century, all Africans, including African Christians, need to pay serious attention to one of the vital components that will effect genuine transformation, namely, that of authentic leadership. Given the situation in Africa today, plagued as many countries are with leadership problems in government, business, churches, and civil society as a whole, there can be little doubt in our minds of the vital importance of the issue of leadership for our continent” (Kretzschmar 2002:41; Heifitz 1979:16ff).

## **2 LEADERSHIP FOR RECONCILIATION**

As important as the need is for authentic leadership in the fields of politics, economics, education, is the need for leadership in the field of *reconciliation*. Africa has been – and still is – ravaged by violence and strife, by bloody civil wars, by the results of generations of injustice, poverty, of man’s inhumanity towards men. The recent histories of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan, are written in blood. But even in relatively politically stable countries, African people have a limited experience of political freedom, stability, and justice. The results, Kretzschmar argues, are plain to see: civil strife, disappointment, riots, genocide, economic collapse, refugees, illegal arrest, depressed currencies, and desperation in the eyes of mothers (Kretzschmar 2002:42). In South Africa the TRC was established with the mandate to contribute to the alleviation of these needs in South Africa, not only by uncovering the atrocities of the past, but also by promoting reconciliation in the country. The Commission’s lofty charge will without a doubt be subscribed to by millions of fellow Africans north of the Limpopo river, who share the need for justice and reconciliation (TRC Report Volume 1:55-57):

“To provide a historical bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering, and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex.

The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all citizens, of peace and reconciliation, and the reconstruction of society.

The recognition of the need for understanding but not for vengeance, the need for reparation but not for retaliation, for ubuntu but not for victimization.”

To many, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu were the embodiment of this endeavour, to facilitate reconciliation between victims and perpetrators, between black and white, between rich and poor, between communities living miles apart. But, as stated above, recognition must be given to a host of women and men, young and old, who stood behind them, helping them carry the banner of reconciliation. What set these people apart? What are the makings of agents of reconciliation?

Against the backdrop of the South African Truth and Reconciliation experience, I want to list five characteristics of leaders in the field of reconciliation, of men and women who in the past demonstrated the ability to erect bridges between individuals and communities. It goes without saying that the insights and experiences of members of the Truth Commission – above all, those of the chairperson Desmond Tutu and the deputy chair Alex Boraine – will strongly surface in the discussion. I served with them on the TRC for nearly three years (1996-1998), and some of the observations I made and notes I collected, also found their way into the paragraphs below.

## **2.1 Leaders with a clear understanding for...**

True leaders are people with vision, they are men and women who, although the particulars have not necessarily fallen in place, have a clear idea of where they are going. They have, or should have, a clear definition of what reconciliation – the goal they strive for – entails. Strangely, significantly, one of the major difficulties that the South African TRC had to contend with was that of definition. What does “reconciliation” really mean? What does it entail? Lengthy discussions were held at Commission meetings. On the one hand there were the lawyers, jurists and politicians who, with feet firmly planted on the ground, warned that one need not be too starry-eyed when reconciliation is on the agenda. When the dust settles in the streets, when the shooting stops, when people let go of one another’s throats, be grateful, they argued. That is enough. Declare it to be reconciliation! That is, in our context, often as far as one may expect to go. Desmond Tutu as well as the *baruti* (clergy) who served on the TRC favoured a loftier definition. When they spoke about reconciliation, they often clothed it in religious terminology (Meiring 2000:129). Referring to the second letter to the Corinthians, Tutu regularly quoted from the letter (2 Cor 5:18ff, RSV):

“Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Tutu unashamedly professed his conviction that, only because God has reconciled us to Him by sacrificing his Son Jesus Christ on the cross, true and lasting reconciliation between humans became possible. Attempting a definition of reconciliation, the biblical term *shalom* (“peace”) the *baruti* often referred to the description of “peace” and “reconciliation” in Psalm 85, which seemed to capture the ideal community they were looking for (Ps 85:10-12, RSV):

“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other.  
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
And righteousness will look down from the sky.  
Yea, the Lord will give what is good,  
And our land will yield its increase.  
Righteousness will go before him,  
And make his footsteps a way.”

In similar fashion, spokespersons of other faith communities – Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, African Traditional Religion, et cetera – were encouraged by Tutu when they joined the debate, to refer to the deepest sources of *their* religious traditions and beliefs, in helping to define the true meaning of reconciliation. In spite of all this, the confusion was never completely lifted. Up to the very end of the TRC, commissioners differed from one another. In his minority report, Commissioner (advocate) Wynand Malan could not but once again distance himself from the “religiously loaded” concept of reconciliation (*TRC Report Volume 5* 1998:439ff).

The debate was vehemently continued outside the TRC offices. Many researchers pleaded for a clear definition of the reconciliation we were striving for. If we do not succeed, they argued, the whole exercise will be in vain. If we ourselves were unsure where we were heading, how could we lead people in that direction? (Hamber: 1997:3f). From time to time the question was even raised whether we need not find an alternative word for “reconciliation”, a less loaded term that could infuse the concept with a fresh understanding.

In this quest we need light from many lamps. Leaders in the fields of Philosophy and Linguistics may help to analyse the history and meaning of the concept of “reconciliation”. Sociologists and psychologists need to define the context as well as the process of reconciliation. And theologians are challenged to develop a “theology of reconciliation” – Tutu called it a “theology of *ubuntu*” (Hulley 1996:103) - where not only the concept is redefined, but where the role that believers may play in the process is adequately described. Interestingly, that was exactly

what the TRC had in mind for the faith communities, when it drafted its final proposals (*TRC Report Volume 5* 1998:317):

“The Commission recommends that:  
‘religious communities develop theologies designed to promote reconciliation and a true sense of community in the nation. Particular consideration could be given to the role of whites as beneficiaries of apartheid; with regard to reconstruction and reconciliation, the empowerment of black people and those who have suffered gross violation of human rights to move beyond “victimhood” in regaining their humanity; the characteristics of good citizenship, the rule of law and the “common good” in society; (and) the articulation of a global ethical foundation which is in keeping with the major beliefs of the various religions’....”

## **2.2 Leaders with respect for perspectives of the truth**

Central to the business of reconciliation and peacemaking is the quest for truth. When the then Minister of Justice Dullah Omar introduced the TRC legislation to Parliament, he exhorted all South Africans “to join in the search for truth without which there can be no genuine reconciliation” (Villa-Vicencio 2000:128). But how to determine “the truth”? I vividly recall the discussions we had on the subject. During so many hearings, after analysing stacks of papers, how does one establish what *really* happened, what the motives of the people involved *really* were. Modesty, it seemed, becomes everyone in search of truth. We took some courage from the celebrated words of Michael Ignatief that, although we will never be able to present a perfect picture to establish the final truth, the very least that we should be able to do was “to curtail the number of lies that up to now had free reign in society” (Villa-Vicencio 1998 in *The Sunday Independent*, 7 June 1998).

But the quest for truth is more than collecting facts and weighing findings. It has a deeper side to it. In the traditions of all religions searching for the truth turns into a spiritual exercise. Finding truth, the leader will soon discover, goes far beyond establishing historical and legal facts. It has to do with understanding, accepting accountability, justice, restoring and maintaining the fragile relationship between human beings - as well as the quest to find the ultimate truth, namely God Himself. The search for truth, the TRC Commissioner concluded, needed to be handled with the greatest sensitivity. Would that not be the case during the TRC years, the nation could have bled to death. But if the TRC succeeded, the Commissioners hoped, it would lead to a national

catharsis, to peace and reconciliation, to the point where the truth in all reality sets one free.

This, indeed, is what happened. When some perpetrators, after much anguish and embarrassment, unburdened themselves to the Amnesty Committee, when they made a full submission of all the relevant facts, after the questioning and cross-questioning came to end, it was as if a cloud was lifted. On the final day of his appearance before the TRC, when he had to testify about his role in the Khotso House (headquarters of the S A Council of Churches) bombing, ex-Minister of Police, Adrian Vlok, said (Meiring 1999:357):

“When the final question was asked and when the legal team of the South African Council of Churches indicated its satisfaction... my heart sang. I got a lump in my throat and I thanked God for his grace and mercy to me.”

Victims had the same experience. The truth set them, too, free. At a hearing in Soweto, an elderly gentleman remarked: “When I was tortured at John Vorster Square my tormentor sneered at me: ‘You can shout your lungs out. Nobody will ever hear you!’ Now, after all these years people *are* hearing me!” (Van Vugt & Cloete 2000:190). After a particularly difficult testimony at an East London hearing, when an aged Xhosa mother described the terrible tortures inflicted on her fourteen year old son – a story that had many in the audience in tears – she finally remarked on the relief she experienced given the opportunity to put the truth, her truth, on the table: “Oh yes, sir, it was worth the trouble (to testify). I think that I, for the first time in sixteen years, will fall asleep immediately tonight. Perhaps tonight I will be able to sleep without nightmares” (Meiring 1999:371).

But it was not only the perpetrators and the victims that needed the truth telling, the *nation* needed it as well: to listen to the truth, to be confronted by the truth, to be shamed by the truth, to struggle with the truth, to eventually also experience the reality of being set free by the truth. This process is not yet finished. It has to continue, and asks for a very special kind of leadership. During the life of the TRC, 22 400 victims came to the fore with their stories; 7048 perpetrators followed suit. Many of them experienced healing. But in South Africa today there are still millions of people – victims as well as perpetrators – from all walks of life, from all communities, who are still struggling with the pain, the frustration, and the anger of the past. There are those who were arrested and convicted of petty apartheid offences, who were discriminated against, who were forcefully removed from their homes, who in a myriad of ways were

abused and humiliated. And there are those, whites, who also suffered, who lost their beloved in attacks on farms and on busy street corners, who sent their sons and their husbands to fight a border war from which they did not return. They, too, need the opportunity to tell, to be listened to, to be taken seriously, and to experience healing in the process.

We need leaders who are willing to facilitate this process, who have taken note of the words of Ellen Kuzwayo, the revered African writer (Vugt & Cloete 2000:196):

“Africa is a place of story telling. We need more stories, never mind how painful the exercise may be. This is how we will learn to love one another. Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone else’s eyes.”

To listen as Kuzwayo urges us to do, is a difficult and often humbling exercise. A leader is usually expected to *talk*, to rouse the masses by his eloquence and his oratory. In this instance the leader is challenged *not* to talk, but to sit at the feet of others and to *listen*, realizing that the Good Lord has created us with *two* ears and *one* mouth, and that we need to use them accordingly. Listening twice, behoves a leader, before speaking once!

### **2.3 Leaders with a sense of justice**

Justice and reconciliation are two sides of the same coin, the leader has to recognize. For reconciliation to take place, there has to be a sense of justice being part and parcel of the process. Lasting reconciliation can only flourish in a society where justice is seen to be done. In South Africa this brings a number of issues to the fore: not only the issue of proper government reparation to the victims of human rights abuses to balance the generous granting of amnesty to perpetrators of the abuses, but also the wider issues involving every South African: unemployment, poverty, affirmative action, equal education, restitution, the redistribution of land, reparation tax, et cetera.

Justice, I came to realise, has many facets. Thabo Mbeki, while he was still Deputy President of South Africa, delivered a very important address at the opening of Parliament in May 1998, in which he stressed the vital link between reconciliation and justice. To his way of thinking it was especially *economic justice* that was at stake. His definition of reconciliation was clear cut: the creation of a non-racial, non-sexist society, the healing of the divisions of the past, and the improvement of the quality of life of all citizens (Boraine 2000:348). To reach this, first and foremost, the issue of economic justice needs to be addressed (Boraine 2000:349):



“South Africa is a country of two nations. One of the nations is white and well off, and because of their background and their economic, physical, and educational infrastructures, they are able to exercise their right to equal opportunity and the development opportunities that flow from the new Constitution. The second and larger nation of South Africa, is black and poor with the worst being affected women in rural areas, the black population in general, and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructures.”

In Rwanda another facet of the relationship between justice and reconciliation came to the fore. Tutu vividly describes in his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999), his experience when he, after visiting some of the horrendous genocide sites where almost a million Rwandese died at the hands of their compatriots (Febr-Apr 1994), was invited to address a rally in the Kigali stadium. He made a passionate plea for forgiveness and reconciliation, in spite of everything that happened in the past, arguing that without that there are no future for Rwanda and its people. Neither his audience nor the Rwandese government, were persuaded. Forgiveness, blanket amnesty in a society where for years there was no rule of law, no sense of justice, was impossible, they maintained. They liked the South African TRC process, especially the opportunity given to thousands of victims to tell their stories, but blanket amnesty to perpetrators, guilty of heinous deeds, was unacceptable. Tutu’s (1999:209) plea that they needed to move from retributive justice to restorative justice, fell on deaf ears.

“The president of Rwanda responded to my sermon with considerable magnanimity. They were ready to forgive, he said, but even Jesus had declared that the devil could not be forgiven. I do not know where he found the basis for what he said, but he was expressing a view that found some resonance (among his people): that there were atrocities that were unforgivable.”

Thirdly, it must be clear to leaders that the message of reconciliation must never be brought *at the expense of social action*, never be used as an excuse for harbouring injustice. Alex Boraine (2000:361), deputy chairperson of the TRC, was very firm in his conviction on this, often quoting the Filipino poet J Cabazares to stress his point:

“Talk to us about reconciliation

Only if you first experience  
The anger of our dying.

Talk to us about reconciliation  
If your living is not the cause  
Of our dying.

Talk to us about reconciliation  
Only if your words are not products of your devious scheme  
To silence our struggle for freedom.

Talk to us about reconciliation  
Only if your intention is not to enrich yourself  
More on your throne.

Talk to us about reconciliation  
Only if you cease to appropriate all the symbols  
And meanings of our struggle.”

Lastly, to stand for justice may be difficult, even hazardous, to the leader. But it is a price that needs to be paid – if the leader is serious about his role as reconciler. The leader is called to *identify him or her totally with the victim*, in order to be of service. When Beyers Naudé was standing trial in Johannesburg, the defence advocate questioned him on his understanding of the concept of reconciliation. Naudé (De Gruchy 1968:171) answered:

“No reconciliation is possible without justice, and whoever works for reconciliation must first determine the causes of injustice in the hearts and lives of those, of either the persons or groups, who feel themselves aggrieved. In order to determine the causes of the injustice a person must not only have the outward individual facts of the matter, but as a Christian you are called to identify yourself in heart and soul, to live in, to think in, and to feel in the heart, in the consciousness, the feelings of the person or the persons who feel themselves aggrieved. This is the grace that the new birth in Jesus Christ gives a person, every person who wishes to receive it.”

## **2.4 Leaders with a comprehension of the dynamics of forgiveness**

Reconciliation requires a deep, honest confession – and a willingness to forgive. The TRC Act did not require of perpetrators to make an open

confession of their crimes, to publicly ask for forgiveness before amnesty was granted. Yet it has to be stated clearly that lasting reconciliation rests firmly upon the capacity of perpetrators, individuals as well as perpetrator communities, to honestly, deeply, recognize and confess their guilt towards God and their fellow human beings, towards individual victims as well as victim communities – and to humbly ask for forgiveness. And it equally rests upon the magnanimity and grace of the victims to reach out to them, to extend forgiveness. A prime example of the latter, was Nelson Mandela, who after suffering so much at the hands of the apartheid government, returned from twenty seven years in captivity with one goal in mind – to liberate all South Africans, white and black alike (Mandela 1994:617):

“It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man’s freedom I a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I take away someone else’s freedom, just as surely I am not free when my freedom is taken away from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both.”

Tutu, who has become the symbol of reconciliation in South Africa, has written movingly on the issue of forgiveness. In his *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999) he, against the backdrop of his Truth and Reconciliation Commission experience, reflected on the many aspects of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is *a risky business*, Tutu explains. When one embarks on the business of asking for and giving forgiveness, you are making yourself vulnerable. Both parties may be spurned. The process may be derailed by the inability of victims to forgive, or by the insensitivity or arrogance of the perpetrators who do not want to be forgiven. But remember, the archbishop counsels, forgiveness and reconciliation are *meant* to be a risky and very costly exercise. Quoting the ultimate example of Jesus Christ, he writes: “True reconciliation is not cheap. It cost God the death of his only begotten Son (Tutu 1999:218).

He further discusses the misunderstanding that reconciliation asks for the glossing over of past mistakes and injustices, that reconciliation requires national *amnesia*. This is totally wrong (Tutu 1999:218).

“Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse.

It is a risky undertaking, but in the end it is worth while, because in the end there will be real healing from having dealt with a real situation. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing.”

Forgiveness, however, means *abandoning your right to retribution*, your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin. But it is a loss, Tutu maintains, that liberates the victim (1999:219ff):

“A recent issue of the journal *Spirituality and Health* had on its front cover a picture of three US ex-servicemen standing in front of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC. One asks: “Have you forgiven those who held you prisoner of war?” “I will never forgive them”, replies the other. His mate says: “Then it seems they still have you in prison, don’t they?”

If individuals need to ask for forgiveness, and are called upon to grant forgiveness, the same goes for communities. And it especially goes for the *leaders* of these communities. There are shining examples of leaders who understood this, and who embarked on the difficult, humbling, road of confessing the sins of the past, asking for forgiveness for their own as well as their community’s involvement. Willy Brandt, chancellor of Germany knelt silently at the Warsaw War Memorial, as an act of confession and repentance for German offences against the Polish nation (1970). President Gerald Ford issued an official apology to the 120 000 Americans of Japanese origin who, in 1941, after the attack on Pearl Harbour, were rounded up and humiliated by the United States government (1976). In March 2000, Pope John Paul II, in a solemn mass in St Peter’s Basilica in Rome, acknowledged the errors and cruelty which had taken place in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, including the Inquisition, the forced conversion of native peoples in Latin America and Africa, the support of the Crusades whose victims included Muslims, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, as well as Jews. In South Africa, Willie Jonker, at the Rustenburg Conference (1986), made an eloquent plea for forgiveness to his black fellow Christians on behalf of Afrikaners, especially those belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church, for the atrocities of apartheid.

Fortunate are the countries where, at critical times in the history of the nation, leaders have emerged who dared to go against the tide, dared to apologize, to ask for forgiveness, and by doing so opened the door to reconciliation. Regrettably, Alex Boraine notes, great leaders of sensitivity and compassion are not easily found. John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia, who refused to apologize for the way in which Australians treated Aborigines, especially Aboriginal children, failed to seize the opportunity. The same applies to ex-South African State presidents P W Botha and F W de Klerk, who according to Boraine, missed the opportunity to open doors to national reconciliation by publicly and openly, and without qualifications, acknowledging the pain and suffering they, as well as their fellow white South Africans, had caused to millions of Black and Brown and Indian compatriots (Boraine 2000:347ff).

In a media statement on 8 May 1997, Desmond Tutu called upon all political leaders in South Africa to make some symbolic act of atonement, setting an example to all in the country. He asked Nelson Mandela to make a public act of atonement at the site of the Church Street bombing by ANC cadres in Pretoria, where many civilians lost their lives. He asked Mangosuthu Buthelezi to make a similar act of atonement at the village of KwaMakhuta where women and children were massacred by IFP supporters. He asked Stanley Mogoba, leader of the Pan African Congress to hold a special service at St James' Church, Cape Town, in remembrance of the victims of the assault on the church in 1993. He finally asked F W de Klerk to travel to the site of the Boipatong massacre, on a similar mission. "Would it not be wonderful", Tutu said, "if all the leaders of these political parties could go to the site of a notorious atrocity committed by his side and say: 'Sorry – forgive us'. With no qualifications, no 'buts or ifs'" (Boraine 2000:372).

Sadly, none of the leaders accepted Tutu's challenge, and the cause of reconciliation in South Africa suffered as a result. A true leader is a man or a woman who, when the occasion demands it, shows himself or herself able and willing to rise to the occasion, to act as an instrument of peace.

## **2.5 Leaders with a firm commitment**

Reconciliation, history teaches us, is not for the fainthearted. To act as a reconciler, a builder of bridges between opposing individuals as well as communities, asks for a strong commitment, resilience, and nerves of steel. It is often a hard and thankless task. But, bridges are made to be tread upon! Jesus Christ, the ultimate Reconciler put his life on line – and He expected of his disciples to follow his example. During the 1930s the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer repeatedly warned his

fellow-Christians against the temptation of “cheap grace”, which is a mortal enemy to the gospel. “Costly grace” should be the aim of all believers who, knowing and accepting their salvation as a free gift from God, offer themselves to Him, and to one another, as a living sacrifice. In our times and in our context, it seems to me, we are called to warn against a similar temptation, that of “cheap *reconciliation*, reconciliation without cost, which too is a mortal enemy to the gospel of our Lord. We need to rediscover on a daily basis what ‘costly reconciliation’ entails, and dare to live according to our discovery”.

In South Africa, God was good to the people of the country, providing not only leaders like Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Beyers Naudé, but tens of thousands of women and men, some young, some old, who *were* willing to rise to the occasion. In many instances they had to pay a very costly price for being harbingers of peace. The annals of the TRC contain the stories of many of them, ordinary citizens who reached beyond themselves, to facilitate reconciliation in their communities. “It never ceases to astonish me”, Tutu wrote in between Truth Commission hearings, “the magnanimity of many victims who suffered the most heinous violations, who reach out to embrace their tormentors with joy, willing to forgive and wanting to reconcile” (Meiring 2002:68).

Leaders in the field of reconciliation are in need of a number of things: solid training, proper empowerment, resilience, understanding, faith, love, and – especially – a healthy sense of humour. Tutu’s sense of the absurd, his explosive humour at the most unexpected times, often saved the day. On many an occasion, in a tragic circumstance, when the stories of the victims or perpetrators were almost too painful or too shocking to bear, the Archbishop would rescue the situation by relating a humorous story, or referring to a funny incident, often at his own expense. Tutu’s stories usually contained a deep lesson that offered the audience ample food for thought.

Finally, a committed leader needs to know how much he or she depends on others, that in the business of reconciliation no one can exist without partners. Africa has introduced the concept of *ubuntu* to the world, the conviction that no person can live without the other. *Ubuntu* represents personhood, humanity, group solidarity, and morality. Its core belief is (in the Nguni language): “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, motho ke motho ba batho ba bangwe”, literally translated, “a human being is a human being because of other human beings” (Boraine 2000:362). A leader’s commitment, therefore, is not only to the opposing individuals or parties; he or she endeavours to bring together, the leaders themselves are inextricably bound to, and dependent upon, their fellow workers on whom they, even if they do not always realize it, depend. Desmond Tutu used an allegory to illustrate this (Hulley 1996:103):

“There was once a light bulb which shone and shone like no light bulb had shone before. It captured all the limelight and began to strut about arrogantly quite unmindful of how it was that it could shine so brilliantly, thinking that it was all due to its own merit and skill. Then one day somebody disconnected the famous light bulb from the light socket and placed it on the table and try as hard as it could, the light bulb could bring forth no light and brilliance. It lay there looking so disconsolate and dark and cold – and useless. Yes, it had never known that its light came from the power station and that it had been connected to the dynamo by little wires and flexes that lay hidden and unseen and totally unsung.”

Part of the make-up of a leader, therefore, is a sense of *ubuntu*, of knowing how much we need one another, how crucially important it is to stay connected to our dynamo, our power base, and how totally dependent we are on “the little wires and flexes” that enable us to do our work.

## 2.6 Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika

“Africa, Oh, Africa, where are your leaders?” Nearly a decade has passed since the day in November 1994, when Desmond Tutu uttered his cry for leadership in Africa. Leadership, still, is a scarce and valuable commodity on the continent – especially in the sphere of reconciliation. Looking back at the recent past, however, one cannot but recognize the leaders that *did* emerge, women and men that enriched and blessed their people by their tireless efforts. Some of them became leaders, according to Joanne Ciulla’s description, because of the talents and dispositions they developed, or because of their wealth and military might, or their position in society. Others came to lead because they possessed great minds and ideas, and were able to tell compelling stories. And then there were people who stumbled into leadership because of the times or the circumstances in which they found themselves (Ciulla 1998:xv). But all of them played their part as instruments of peace on a continent in dire need of reconciliation.

They, fortunately, are not the only ones. Also in the annals of South Africa the names of many are recorded who carried the banner of reconciliation, who kept the dream alive. More than fifty years ago, in the hey days of apartheid, a white Afrikaner, Justice H A Fagan, witnessed a great gathering of Africans, where the hymn that was later to become South Africa’s national anthem, *Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika*, was sung. He was touched to the core, and back home wrote a poem, celebrating the many South Africans from all communities who “were bound in one great cord”. His turn of phrase, the words he used, may sound dated. His

feelings, the dream he passed on to us, continue to inspire (De Gruchy 1968:63):

“From lips of thousands swells the music. Ah!  
I close my eyes, and like a seraph choir  
I hear these voices that my soul inspire:  
*Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika.*  
For Africa we crave Thy blessing, Lord.  
I look, and lo! The Zulu thousands stand,  
Xhosa, Shangaan and Sotho hand in hand,  
And I, whiteman – bound in one great cord.  
We many races seek the one reward,  
Blessing on our rear home, one fatherland;  
Rooted and grounded here at thy command,  
By one and all Thy blessing be implored!  
We many raise one song, one ‘Gloria’ –  
*Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika.*”

Africa is still a dark continent, a continent struggling with seemingly insurmountable problems. Hunger, drought, poverty, political instability, war, human rights abuses, and Aids, continue to ravage its people. But light dances on the horizon. After presiding over many hearings where victims and perpetrators tabled their stories of cruelty and suffering, after helping prepare a report on a country torn apart by racism and prejudice - but also taking note of the role that many have played to bring peace, to foster reconciliation - the chairperson of the TRC could not but rejoice. Tutu's words serve as an exhortation to all the people of Africa, and their leaders (Meiring 1999:379):

“We have been wounded but we are being healed. It is possible even with our past suffering, anguish, alienation and violence to become one people, reconciled, healed, caring, compassionate and ready to share as we put our past behind us to stride into the glorious future God holds before us as the Rainbow People of God.”

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