

“You will be known as the people who rebuilt the walls, who restored the ruined houses.” Challenges and opportunities for the churches in South Africa and Canada

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Abstract

In South Africa the Truth and Reconciliation process has come to an end. In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has just begun to investigate the Indian Residential School system, a programme run over the course of 150 years by the Canadian government, with the co-operation of a number of churches which caused great harm and suffering to the Aboriginal communities. The article analyses the ways in which the South African churches and their Canadian counterparts can assist one another on the way to truth-finding, justice, forgiveness and healing.

Keywords Canada, South Africa, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, churches, justice, truth, forgiveness, Residential School System

It is a great privilege to contribute to this publication honoring Klippiess Kritzinger's contribution to theology and mission in South Africa. When David Bosch passed away, Klippiess emerged as his true successor - not only in the Department of Missiology at Unisa, but also in very ably following in Bosch's academic footsteps. Klippiess is not only a scholar, but also involved himself in the life of the church and in the role that the church is playing in civil society. For his contribution to reconciliation in South Africa - especially for his tireless efforts to heal relationships within the Dutch Reformed Church Family - to help steer the churches towards reunification, I have nothing but the highest regard. To celebrate this, I elected to write on reconciliation and the churches – on two sides of the Atlantic.

Introduction

“Probably the best of all Truth Commission hearings,” Archbishop Desmond Tutu observed at the end of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Faith Community Hearing* in East London (17-19 November 1997). For almost two years, thousands of victims of apartheid had made statements to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) sharing the pain of having to live in South Africa during the

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apartheid years (Meiring 1999: 266). After the victims, many institutions – political parties, the police, security police, correctional services, universities, medical fraternity, the media, the country’s law institutions and the business community – were invited to the TRC to explain their role in the past. The last of these hearings belonged to the Christian Churches and the other faith communities in the country. Careful consideration was given by the TRC to the hearing. Should it indeed take place? Did the faith communities have much to confess? None of them – not even the Afrikaans churches that openly favoured apartheid – were guilty of *gross* human rights violations. On the other hand, it was felt, the churches and the other communities were so closely involved with everything that happened in South Africa – on both sides of the struggle – that it was inconceivable that the opportunity should *not* be given to them to join in the process of truth telling and reconciliation. For three days the leaders of the faith communities addressed the TRC and the nation, explaining their histories, admitting their guilt, asking for forgiveness, committing themselves to justice and restitution, to reconciliation and healing.

A decade later it was the Canadian Churches’ turn to face their Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their nation. In recent years no less than twenty-one Truth Commissions were established in many countries: in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Fiji, Germany, Guatemala, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Korea and East Timor, to name only a few (McDonald 2008:353). But it came as something of an eye opener to the rest of the world when the news broke that a Canadian TRC was established. Was such a process really asked for in Canada of all countries? And the churches – are they really guilty of human rights violations? The answer to both questions came as an unequivocal *Yes*.

The Canadian Indian Residential School System

In the 19th century the Canadian government, accepting its responsibility for the caring and education of the country’s aboriginal people, decided that their best chance of success was to teach the First Nation (Indian), Inuit (Eskimo) and Métis (“mixed blood”) children the English language, to have them adopt Christianity as well as European customs. The aim was, as it was said quite bluntly at the time, “to take the Indian out of the Indian”. The Canadian government developed a policy called “aggressive assimilation” to be taught at church-run, government-funded industrial schools, later called residential schools. Children, it was felt, were easier to mould than adults. Removing them from their communities and taking them to boarding schools, was the best way to prepare them for life in the main stream of Canadian society. The schools were under the supervision of the Federal Department of Indian Affairs. Attendance was mandatory and government

agents were employed to ensure that all Aboriginal children attended. (*CBC News Canada*, April 29, 2009).

Initially about 1,100 students were taken to 69 schools across the country. More followed and in 1931, at the peak of the system, 80 schools were operating in Canada. This programme continued for 150 years from the early 19th century to 1996 when the last school closed its doors. There were a total of about 130 schools, operating in every territory and province except Newfoundland, Prince Edwards Island and New Brunswick. It is estimated that during these years about 150 000 First Nation, Inuit and Métis children were removed from their communities. In 2005, there were an estimated 80 000 living, mostly aged survivors in the country (*Anglican Church of Canada News*, March 3, 2008). Throughout these years the children suffered severely. They were often forbidden to use their own language and if they were caught doing so, experienced harsh punishment. A recent report describes their plight as follows:

The...students lived in substandard conditions and endured physical and emotional abuse. There are also many examples of sexual abuse. Students at residential schools rarely had opportunities to see examples of normal family life. They were in schools 10 months a year - away from their parents. All correspondence from the children was written in English, which many parents couldn't read. Brothers and sisters at the same school rarely saw each other, as all activities were segregated by gender.

When students returned to the reserve, they often found that they did not belong. They didn't have the skills to help their parents and became ashamed of their native heritage. The skills taught at the schools were generally substandard; many found it hard to function in an urban setting. The aims of assimilation meant devastation for those who were subjected to years of mistreatment (*CBS News Canada*, April 29, 2009).

The Canadian churches were deeply involved. The residential schools were after all *church* schools. The Roman Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian Churches, as well as the United Church of Christ, co-operated with the government, erecting and running these institutions for one and a half centuries. When stories of atrocities, of misconduct and sexual abuse started to surface, fingers were often pointed at church officials. In recent years a large number of cases have been lodged in different courts accusing the churches of colluding with the government for violating the rights of Aborigine families and children.

In 1990 Phil Fontaine, then leader of the Association of Manitoba chiefs, himself a survivor of the residential school system, called for the churches to acknowledge the physical, emotional and sexual abuse inflicted upon the students over the years. In 1991 the Canadian government convened a *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* to record the experiences of survivors. The recommendation of the commission, that a

public enquiry into the running of the residential schools be held, was sadly, never followed. The churches, however, *did* work with government to design plans to compensate the former students, many of whom had already turned to the courts of law in search of justice and compensation; and in 2008 no less than 1.19 million Canadian dollars have been paid to survivors in 61,473 cases. The churches involved in the system pledged up to 1 million Canadian dollars, in cash and services, towards healing initiatives. A solemn promise by government to appoint a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was made to the victims and their families. On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered an official apology to residential school students in Parliament (CBC *Canada News*, April 29, 2009).

The establishment of the Canadian TRC

The Canadian TRC was formally established on June 1, 2008 as part of a court-approved Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement that was negotiated by former students at the residential church schools, legal council for the churches, the government of Canada, the Assembly of the First Nations and other aboriginal organizations. The TRC is an independent body that has to provide former students and anyone who has been affected by the Indian Residential School legacy with an opportunity to share their individual experiences in a safe and culturally appropriate manner. "It will be an opportunity for people to tell their stories about a significant part of Canadian history that is still unknown to most Canadians. The purpose of the TRC is not to determine guilt or innocence, but to create a historical account of the residential schools, help people to heal and encourage reconciliation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians"(CBC *News Canada*, June 10, 2009). With a budget of 60 million Canadian dollars, the TRC has to complete its work within five years. Over the course of its mandate the commission will, inter alia:

- Prepare a comprehensive historical record on the policies and operations of the schools;
- Complete a publicly accessible report that will include recommendations to the government of Canada concerning the Indian Residential School System and its legacy;
- Establish a research centre that will be a permanent resource for all Canadians;
- Host seven national events and support local events, to promote awareness and public education about the Residential School System and its impact.

The TRC had a slow start. Justice Harry LaForme, a member of the Mississauga's of the New Credit First Nation in Southern Ontario, was appointed the first commission chair, but resigned in October 2008, together

with his co-commissioners Claudette Dumont-Smith and Jane Brewin-Morley. On June 10, 2009 Justice Murray Sinclair, an aboriginal judge in Manitoba, was appointed as the new chief commissioner with Marie Wilson and Wilton Littlechild at his side. In a public statement on June 22, 2009 Justice Sinclair and his colleagues announced that the TRC had commenced with its work. He made an urgent appeal to all victims to support the process and to approach the TRC with their stories:

...We will ensure that the whole world hears their truths and the truth about residential schools, so that future generations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians will be able to hold to the statement that resonates with all of us: This must never happen again (*TRC of Canada*, June 10, 2009).

Rebuilding the walls, restoring the ruined houses: Will South African and Canadian churches rise to the challenge?

Will the churches in the two countries rise to the twofold challenge of searching for the truth and of contributing to the process of healing and reconciliation? The circumstances surrounding the South African and Canadian TRCs are not the same. In South Africa, as was the case in most other countries, the truth and reconciliation process followed major social upheaval or a dramatic political change. This was not the case in Canada and the chances for it to happen in the near future are very slim (McDonald 2008:353). The question, however, remains: will the churches on both sides of the Atlantic join in the venture? Will the *South African churches* continue on the road to reconciliation? Will the faith communities, at a time when the country seems to be torn apart again by poverty and despair, by violence and corruption, by racism and xenophobia, help to heal the land? In the same vein: will the *Canadian churches* that were so deeply involved in the injustices of the residential school system, contribute to the healing of their community? "Overall, the churches have been given a tremendous gift and opportunity", a senior Canadian cabinet minister commented at the establishment of the TRC. "(It) represents an opening to initiate many actions toward right relations" (:349).

The interest in the work of the two TRCs proved to be sincere and mutual. During the South African TRC years a number of visitors from Canada were welcomed at the TRC offices. Among them were the eminent Canadian politician Michael Ignatieff who contributed much through his presence and his writings to the South African process (Meiring 2002: 724), as well as David McDonald, an ordained United Church of Christ pastor who, after joining Parliament, held various cabinet positions in the Federal Government. MacDonald traveled to Cape Town in 2006 to review the

South African TRC in the light of the experiences of other TRCs from across the globe. In their turn, numerous South Africans have shown a keen interest in the work of the Canadian TRC. Alex Boraine, former minister in the Methodist Church and vice-chair of the South African TRC, visited Toronto to lecture on the subject. In July 2009, I followed suit. Having been responsible for co-coordinating the TRC's Faith Community Hearing, it was my privilege, at two working luncheons, to inform Judge Sinclair on the processes we used. I had meetings with a number of First Nations groups and supervised a class of senior students at the Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, in preparing a submission to the TRC. Judge Sinclair expressed the hope that Archbishop Desmond Tutu may, in some way, contribute to the Canadian process.

Will the Canadian churches and their South African counterparts join forces? David MacDonald expressed high expectations for the Canadian truth and reconciliation process:

On a late Sunday in August 2007, I sat in a downtown church in Halifax where the minister read from Isaiah 58:12: "you shall be called repairers of the breach". The words spoke of authentic compassion and justice. In an instant I could see what true reconciliation is all about. It is recognizing and responding to the hurt and the need. Years of alienation and oppression resulting from Indian residential schools require a concrete response. Without that, reconciliation is nothing more than hollow words without meaning. The challenge of reconciliation is both to know and to do the truth. These are not separate functions, but part of the same reality (MacDonald 2008: 343).

Can the South African Christians, with their experience of success and sometimes failure, accompany their Canadian colleagues on the road of truth, reconciliation and healing? Can we, together, help "to rebuild the walls and to restore the ruined houses" (*Good News Translation*) in our two countries? To do this, a number of things are required: asking for forgiveness, searching for truth, campaigning for justice and developing a ministry of healing and reconciliation.

Asking for forgiveness

For the South African faith communities the TRC offered an ideal opportunity to look one another, as well as the nation, in the face. The Faith Community Hearing (East London, 17-19 November 1997) created a space for the churches and other communities to stand before the mirror of history, to analyse and explain their own past, coming to grips with their errors, and confessing the pain that they have caused to many. Reports were tabled of churches that opposed apartheid, and suffered, and of churches who supported apartheid. It was a time of asking for and extending

forgiveness. Leaders of the Christian Churches joined Desmond Tutu in a sincere apology to the other faith communities in South Africa:

I am certain that all my fellow Christians in South Africa will agree with me if I express our deep apologies to you, the members of the other faith communities in the country, for the arrogant way in which we as Christians acted – as though ours was the only religion in South Africa, while we have been a multi-religious community from day one (Meiring 1999: 272).

In Canada the churches' season of "rebuilding the walls and restoring the ruined houses", and initiating the process of acknowledgement of guilt, of healing and of reparation arrived even before Prime Minister Harper's apology in Parliament (June 11, 2008). For many years leaders in the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United Churches agonized about the residential school system and their involvement in the process. It culminated in 2007, when the leaders of these churches proclaimed a covenant, issued on the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the new Canadian Constitution and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, calling for the recognition and protection of Aboriginal self-government in Canada. The covenant was reaffirmed in March 2007. Michael McDonald captured the mood at the time:

Behind the covenant lie many challenging and difficult years as the churches struggled to come to terms with their colonial past. In particular the past decade has been an agonizing one as the churches struggled to come to terms with their colonial past. In particular in the past decade it has been an agonizing one for the churches in discovering the degree to which they had participated in a ruthless program of assimilation of Aboriginal children. Stories have been told of acts of cruelty and disrespect, which are totally at odds with the stated attitude and practices of these very same faith communities. Increasingly, church members are recognizing that attitudes and acts, which were not just part of these schools but also deeply resident in all aspects of Canadian society, run counter to what the churches themselves believe and declare (2008: 345).

The *Anglican Church* was from the very beginning involved in the system. At various times between 1820 and 1969 the Church administered about three dozen Indian and Inuit residential schools and hostels. Already after World War II the Anglican Church started to question the prevailing practice of church-run schools. By 1969 all the Church-run schools had been given over to the government who also planned to close them down as soon as possible, or to turn them over to First Nation groups. Many initiatives were taken by the church to redress the injustices of the past. In 1991 the church established an indigenous Healing Fund to support the healing initiatives undertaken by local Aboriginal communities and institutions. In 1993 the Anglican Primate, Archbishop Michael Peers, in an address to the National Native Convocation, offered a full apology for the Church's role in being

part of the system and for the wrongs committed. In 1998, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was established to manage the Church's healing strategy and to complement existing government, church and First Nations programs (*Anglican Church of Canada*, March 3, 2008).

In 1986, and again in 1998, the *United Church of Christ* issued apologies to Canada's Aboriginal Communities. This was followed, in 2003, by a commitment by the General Council of the United Church towards healing and to the building of new relationships in the country. "In all that we do in relation to our responsibility for the residential school system, the goal of working toward right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples should be uppermost in our thoughts, words, and actions", the Council's statement reads. According to David MacDonald, himself an ordained minister of the church, the statement affirmed the Council's belief that the United Church and its members "are to act to overcome and, indeed, reverse the decades and centuries of discrimination and exploitation" (MacDonald 2008: 344).

Four leaders of the *Presbyterian Church in Canada* signed a statement of apology in 1994: "It is with deep humility and in great sorrow that we come before God and our aboriginal brothers and sisters with our confession" (*CBC Canada News*, April 29, 2009). The General Assembly of the Church, at its 2006 General Assembly, made a similar statement to accept the Church's role in the past and its responsibility towards the Aboriginal community in the country. Plans for creating a Healing and Reconciliation Ministry were approved. A call was made to local church members and groups, also to the youth, to reach out and get to know their Aboriginal neighbors.

The *Roman Catholic Church* oversaw three-quarters of the 130 residential schools. Yet it was the last church to have its leadership officially address the issue. Eventually, on 29 April 2009 Pope Benedict XVI, at a meeting with Catholic Leaders and representatives of the Canadian Aborigine community, apologized to victims of the church-run schools, expressing his "sorrow" for the abuse and "deplorable treatment" that students suffered at the schools. He offered his sympathy and "prayerful solidarity". Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, was a member of the delegation. "What we wanted the pope to say to us was that he was sorry...and that he deeply felt for us", Fontaine commented. "We heard that very clearly today" (*Roman Catholic Church*, April 29, 2009).

The other churches in Canada were not directly involved in the residential school system. Yet they, too, accepted responsibility for reconciliation and healing in the country. On June 21, 2007 on National Aboriginal Day, Lutherans as well as delegates from the Christian

Reformed and Mennonite Churches, joined with the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and United Churches – as well as a number of ecumenical organizations – to renew the Churches’ covenant with the Indigenous Peoples, committing themselves again to human rights and justice initiatives.

Standing for Truth

Central to the business of reconciliation and peacemaking, is the quest for truth. The *South African* TRC, therefore, was mandated “to establish the truth in relation to past events as well as the motives for and circumstances in which gross violations of human rights have occurred, and to make the findings known in order to prevent repetition of such acts in future” (TRC *Report* Vol 1:55). When the 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). When political change came to South Africa, the issue and the wisdom of truth finding was widely debated. There were those who, with the best intentions, said: “Let us close the books, let us forgive and forget!” The response of many, including Archbishop Tutu, was: “No! We can never do that! We need to open the books, we need to deal with our past - horrible as it may be - before we close the books”. Searching for truth can be painful and difficult, even hazardous. It can disrupt the journey towards reconciliation. But in the long run, it is the only way to go. Reconciliation is about uncovering the truth, not about amnesia.

How does one determine “the truth”? After listening to so many victims, after working through stacks of paper, how does one determine what *really* happened, what the motives of the people involved *really* were? Modesty, it seemed, becomes everyone in search for truth. The TRC, at the time, was encouraged by our Canadian guest Michael Ignatief, who said that although we will never be able to present a perfect picture to establish the final truth, the very least we should be able to do was “to curtail the number of lies that up to now had free reign in society”(Meiring 2002: 724).

Finding truth goes beyond establishing historical and legal facts. It has to do with understanding, accepting responsibility, justice, and restoring and maintaining the fragile relationship between human beings. It has to be handled with the greatest sensitivity. Had that not been the case during the TRC years, the nation could have bled to death. But if the TRC succeeded in its quest, we hoped, it would lead to a national catharsis, to peace and reconciliation, to the point where the truth sets one free.

This, indeed, is what happened. Many *victims* of gross human rights violations, 22 400 in total, approached the TRC. For many telling their stories and reliving the agonies of the past, was difficult. Emotions

sometimes ran high and tears flowed freely, but in the vast majority of cases, testifying before the Commission proved to be a cathartic and a healing experience. The victims were edified and honored by the process. Many *perpetrators* who appeared before the TRC had a similar experience. When they, after much anguish and embarrassment, unburdened themselves to the Amnesty Committee and when they made a full submission of all the relevant facts of their misdeeds, after the questioning and cross-questioning came to an end, it was as if a cloud had lifted.

But it was not only the victims and the perpetrators 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 and finally to be liberated by the truth. The South African TRC was a public process. All the hearings were open to the nation and large audiences attended the events. The media had free access to all sessions of the Commission. Every day the newspapers carried TRC reports. Every night, after the 8 pm news in a special TRC programme, the highlights of the day were shown. The nation had to know! The majority of South Africans entered into the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation process. They wanted to come to grips with the past. Sadly, there were also those who did not want to know. Up till the end of the process, the TRC was dogged by some, especially from the white community, who were unwilling or unable to accept the truth and who described the TRC's work as a one-sided witch-hunt, designed to shame and embarrass one section of the community.

The process however, was not intended to stop when the TRC closed its doors. Truth telling had to go on. There are still millions of South Africans from all the communities in the land, who did not qualify to appear before the TRC but who also are in need of healing, who also need to be recognized and edified by having people listen to their stories. They need people to share their pain. In its Final Report the TRC urged the South African faith communities to continue with this process, to invite members of all walks of life, Black and White, perpetrators and victims alike, to meet one another and to talk to each other. Ellen Kuzwayo, a celebrated South African author wrote:

Africa is a place of storytelling. 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 (Vugt 2000: 196).

In *Canada* the same high premium is placed on truth telling. The preamble to the TRC Mandate made it very clear:

There is an emerging and compelling desire to put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future. The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and

comprehensive response to the Indian residential School legacy is a sincerer indication and acknowledgment of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing... The truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation (*Mandate*: 413).

Immediately after his appointment as chair of the Canadian TRC, Judge Murray Sinclair and his co-commissioners made an urgent plea to victims from the First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities to come to the fore:

I promise you that we will seek out the stories of all those connected to the schools who are still alive, from the students to the teachers, to the managers and the janitors, as well as the officials who planned and carried the whole thing. If you have a story to tell about the schools, we will hear it. If you cannot come to us, we will come to you. If you cannot speak, we will find someone to speak for you (*TRC of Canada*, July 22, 2009).

For the victims and their families the process may prove to be difficult, having to relive the past and having to report on it. But in the end, as was the case in South Africa, it will prove to be worthwhile. This is the process Phil Fontaine and his colleagues asked for and this is what they deserve to get: acknowledgement of the injustices and the suffering of the past. The churches may be able to contribute to the process, not only by accepting their own complicity, but by standing behind their congregants, guiding them with love and care and understanding through the months and years of the TRC process.

But not only are the victims in need of the truth-telling process. As in South Africa, the *nation* needs it. In years to come all Canadians will be forced to ask: How did this happen? What was in the mind of government officials and church leaders? (MacDonald 2008:345). Moreover, what was, and is, in the minds of the majority of Canadians? Are they willing to face the truth? Aaron Janzen, a senior student at the CMU, described the difficulty young people have in questioning the “Conventional Canadian Narrative”.

While most Canadians are aware, at least to some extent, that personal and cultural abuses occurred...most do not know (and do not want to know)...Canadians are often guilty of underestimating the impact of these abuses. The prevailing attitude among many non-indigenous Canadians is that the abuses ...are largely exaggerated. It is difficult for Euro-Canadians to believe that their government and people...were responsible...Euro-Canadians have been raised to believe that they are the morally upright demographic in Canada. This is a belief that can be traced back to the colonization of Canada, when the “civilized” Europeans first interacted with the “savages” of North America (2009:2).

Canadians will have to prepare themselves for the adventure of speaking and of listening to each other. They will have to re-examine their *real*

history. They will have to question stereotypes and assumptions, the dubious truths of the past. How can we learn from one another? David McDonald asked. Echoing Ellen Kuzwayo's sentiments, he continues: "Can we begin the journey of walking in each other's shoes or moccasins?" (2008: 351f). There are many opportunities for the Canadian churches to help guide the process. From their own chequered past, with humility and understanding, they can reach out to all Canadians, helping them to open the books in order to one day close them again.

A serious obstacle in the process of truth telling - in the minds of many - is that the Canadian TRC is mandated to hold all hearings in camera. In order not to "jeopardize any legal proceeding" that may be undertaken in the present or in the near future, the TRC is required not to identify persons alleged to have been involved in wrong-doing, unless the person has been convicted already by the court. No names of persons involved in atrocities may be recorded. Other information that may be used to identify such individuals shall be anonymized (*Mandate* 2.i). In the Submission to Justice Sinclair the CMU students voiced the concern of many who fear that the TRC hearings may lose some of its integrity, at worst be seen by some as a cover-up (Walker 1009: 5).

It is of utmost importance that the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) survivors be afforded the freedom to publicly name their perpetrators and for the Commission to make public records of the alleged perpetrators' names. Without naming, there will exist no full disclosure and thus there will exist no real truth. We believe that amnesty would enable the Commission to seek full disclosure (Cat 2, 1. ii).

Justice Sinclair's statement, that in the end the whole world will hear the truth, gives some assurance that the TRC will find a way to publish its findings in the public domain. It has to happen, because public reconciliation is not even a remote possibility without public understanding and insight.

Campaigning for justice

Justice and reconciliation are two sides of the same coin. For reconciliation 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*, during and after the TRC process, this brought a number of issues to the fore: not only proper reparation for the victims of gross human rights violations, to balance, the gift of amnesty that was given to perpetrators of these abuses, but also the wider issues involving every citizen in post-apartheid South Africa: unemployment, poverty, affirmative action, equal education, restitution, redistribution of land, HIV/Aids, et cetera.

Desmond Tutu described the vital link between justice and reconciliation in his book *No future without forgiveness* (1999). After visiting some of the horrendous genocide sites where almost a million Rwandese died at the hands of their compatriots (1994), the Archbishop addressed a rally at Kigali stadium. He made a passionate plea for forgiveness and reconciliation, because without that, the future was bleak. Neither the audience nor the Rwandese government were persuaded. Forgiveness, amnesty for perpetrators in a society where for years there was no sense of justice and no rule of law, was unimaginable. Tutu's pleas that they move from a position of retributive justice to restorative justice, fell on deaf ears.

In South Africa, with the granting of amnesty to perpetrators of apartheid, a choice was made between *retributive* justice and *restorative* justice. The latter, Tutu contended, was characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence:

Here the central concern is not retribution or punishment, but in the spirit of *ubuntu*, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships. This kind of justice seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offence (1999: 51f).

In *Canada* too, the call for justice is loud and clear. The preamble of the *Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* states unequivocally that "the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing" need to be addressed (2008:1). Without that, there is little chance of success.

Over the years many examples of injustice perpetrated against the Aboriginal population have been chronicled. In his book, *A National Crime*, John S Milloy described the failure of the policy of "aggressive civilization" to meld the different cultures in the land. He presented a catalogue of the suffering the students at the residential schools had to endure. As early as 1907, medical inspectors were discovering unsanitary conditions in the schools. Between 1888 and 1905, 24% of 1,537 children had died. In 1918, the Spanish flu pandemic killed more Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal people, and the numbers were high in the schools due to "poor living conditions, poor nutrition and lack of access to medical care". Doctors, commissioned to visit the schools in the early 20th century, presented shocking reports. In one school 60% of the students had scabies, in another 70 % had contracted tuberculosis (Milloy 1999: 98f).

A century later, First Nation, Inuit and Métis students and communities are still suffering. The marks of the past are still on them. Nancy Wallace reports:

...(They) are still suffering. Many act out with violence or self-destructive behaviours. These survivors, relatives of survivors or victims of survivors, are still hurting and are in need of closure. Whole communities have been devastated from the consequences of abuse at the schools. Disrupted lives and social ills that resulted as a consequence of the family and cultural destruction are seen in the over-representation of Aboriginals in jail populations, poverty statistics, unacceptably high infant mortality rates, poor health, city gang life (which had its genesis in the residential schools), sexual confusion, the high rates of substance abuse and the high rates of suicide. Parents cannot parent and other victims are not able to lead or guide the community back to health (Wallace 2009: 2).

It is not only the victims and their immediate relatives that need justice, the wider community is suffering as well. The CMU students reminded Judge Sinclair that the work of the TRC should include “(t)he full range of issues that attend the colonial manner in which the dominant society has treated the Aboriginal peoples, including isolation, loss of acres of land, loss of culture and language and the resultant diminution of life quality in matters of health, cultural fitness to live within their historical culture, and environment and industrial encroachment on First Nation territories” (*Submission* 2009: 1 c).

The issue of reparation is tied to that of justice. The Canadian Churches, as well as the government, have realized their responsibility in this regard. In 2007, while the churches have committed themselves to a substantial amount to be paid to victims, the Federal Government has formalized a 1,9 billion Canadian dollar compensation package for all those students who were still alive as of May 30, 2005. The compensation, called Common Experience Payment, amounts to \$10 000 for the first year or part of a year a student attended school, plus \$3 000 for each subsequent year. By the end of March 2008 \$1.19 billion had already been paid out, representing 61 473 cases. The question is: is monetary reparation sufficient? The CMU group also touched on the matter, recommending that the TRC should, where its discretionary powers permit, model its final recommendations on the South African TRC’s reparation proposals, to include not only the above payments to be made, but to also attend to symbolic reparation, as well as community and institutional reparation (*Submission* 2 a).

Finally, in most discussions on the Canadian TRC, the matter of amnesty is brought to the table. The Mandate of the TRC does not allow for amnesty for perpetrators, which impacts heavily on the work of the commission and on the long-term outcomes of the truth and reconciliation process. Again, the CMU group expressed their fervent hope that the TRC in some way may be allowed to broaden its scope to include amnesty to perpetrators, who meet established criteria. Two reasons were offered:

First, amnesty is a moral necessity. Without the potential for qualified perpetrators to be released from legal culpability, reconciliation will be unattainable and the moral responsibility to one party in the abuse of Aboriginal peoples will be unfulfilled. *Second*, providing amnesty will enable the Commissioners to access truthful confessions from alleged perpetrators (*Submission 1 b*).

It remains an open question whether the TRC Commissioners will find a way to acquiesce to the request. In the mean time the churches will be wise to introduce the concept of restorative, instead of retributive justice to their congregants. During the TRC years and after, when the results of their work will be made known, the Canadian community will need healing and forgiveness. Justice will be asked for and if the Christian Churches are able to lead the people on the road of restorative justice, true and lasting reconciliation may be reached.

A Healing Ministry

Reconciliation requires a deep, honest confession and a willingness to forgive. The South African TRC Act did not require 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 and 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 the grace of the victims to reach out to them, to extend forgiveness. A prime example of the latter was provided by Nelson Mandela, who after suffering 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, the oppressor and the oppressed (Mandela 1994: 614).

Tutu, against the background of his TRC experience, reflected on the many aspects of forgiveness and healing, things that the churches in Canada and South Africa in developing their healing ministries, will do well to take note of.

Forgiveness is a *risky business*. In asking for and extending 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 perpetrators who do not want to be forgiven. A common misunderstanding is that reconciliation requires national amnesia. This is totally wrong.

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 is a risky undertaking, but in the end it is worthwhile because in the end there will be real healing from having dealt with a real situation. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing (1999: 218).

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

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 that 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?'

Reconciliation, we need to realize, *requires a firm commitment*. It is a costly undertaking. Building bridges between opposing individuals or groups is often a hard and thankless task. Jesus Christ, the ultimate Reconciler put his life on the line and He expects us 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 of the Gospel. In our times we are called to warn against the temptation of *cheap reconciliation* which too, is a mortal enemy of the Gospel of our Lord.

Conclusion: Building and Restoring – an awesome responsibility

At the end of the South African proceedings, the TRC in its final *Report*, made a number of recommendations to the faith communities, urging them to continue with the process of truth, justice and reconciliation: to organize healing ceremonies, creating special liturgies, making available the skills of its members and identifying the land in their possession that can be made available to landless people or to return it to its rightful owners. Trauma centers need to be erected. In terms of reconciliation there were as many requests: that marginalized groups be welcomed, that interfaith dialogue be promoted and that theologies to promote reconciliation and a true sense of community be designed. Above all, that the faith communities promote a culture of tolerance and peaceful co-existence in the country (TRC Report Vol 5:316ff).

In a similar vein, the Canadian TRC, has numerous expectations of the churches and other religious organizations, stating the importance of working hand in hand with government and church officials (10, A/k). MacDonald mentioned support to be given to victims who want to testify, the organizing of special events, building programmes, offering their

facilities to people in need, preparing how-to and resource manuals, identifying and empowering leadership, creating networks of organizations and individuals working in the field of justice and reconciliation (2008:350ff). Building walls and restoring ruined houses have many faces!

It is, however, gratifying to know that in spite of the failures of the past, government and civil society are still looking to the churches in our two countries to do their bit, to help guide the nation on the road to healing and reconciliation. What David MacDonald wrote about Canada applies to South Africa as well:

...The churches have been given a tremendous gift and opportunity... We now have the opportunity to learn our true history, to repent, to apologize, to heal, to reconcile and to restore right relations (2008:350).

It is of critical importance that future generations see our generation as one that has responded positively and bravely to this call to be active "repairers of the breach" (2008: 357).

Building and restoring is an awesome responsibility. We, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, have to contend with the realities of our situations. In South Africa we still live in a fractured society, with seemingly insurmountable problems. In spite of all of this, at the conclusion of the South African TRC process, the chairperson Archbishop Tutu, could not but rejoice. His words may serve as an exhortation to Canadians, embarking on *their* journey of truth and reconciliation:

We have been wounded but we are being healed. It is possible even with our past of 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 (Meiring 1999: 379).

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