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Forgiveness, reconciliation and justice *à la* Desmond Tutu

ABSTRACT

In the eyes of many, chairing the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was the crowning contribution of Archbishop Desmond Tutu to his country, and to the world at large. Against the backdrop of his role leading the TRC, chairing the many victims' hearings and guiding the amnesty proceedings, the article focuses on Tutu's views on forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice. The TRC operated within the mandates given to it by the South African parliament, but Tutu with his theological background, strong views, and dynamic personality put his own stamp on the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa. The role of religion in establishing truth and working towards justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation was controversial, but for the former Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, it was inconceivable to embark on the journey of reconciliation without faith in Jesus Christ, the ultimate Reconciler.

1. NEW YEAR'S DAY 2022, CAPE TOWN

When Archbishop Desmond Tutu passed away on Boxing Day 2021, messages from across the world proclaimed the love and high regard of millions for the ninety-year-old cleric. At his funeral on New Year's Day 2022, in the St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, where he became archbishop twenty-six years earlier, the first Black man to be raised to this position, eulogies from colleagues and friends, from South Africa and from the international community, were read: from Pope Francis, the Dalai Lama, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Queen



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Elizabeth of England and her prime minister Boris Johnson, Presidents Barak Obama and Jo Biden, António Guterres, General Secretary of the United Nations, and many others. In South Africa, his death was mourned by politicians, fellow clergy, friends, and colleagues from the struggle against apartheid, young and old. President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his eulogy at the funeral, spoke for many, describing the archbishop as

a crusader in the struggle for freedom, for justice, for equality and for peace ... a global icon of great moral stature ... a moral compass to all
(*The Guardian* 2022:1).

Desmond Tutu will indeed be remembered for many things: his role in the anti-apartheid struggle; the prophet who fearlessly spoke the truth to the powers of the day, standing up against the oppressive White minority government; the rebellious priest leading thousands of protesters in the streets, confronting the police; presiding over the funerals of activists killed in the townships; the ecumenical leader travelling the world, campaigning for sanctions against the apartheid regime. Pictures in the press and on television recalled the highlights of his life and ministry: receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Sweden; standing on the steps of the Cape Town city hall with Nelson Mandela hours after his release from prison; having fun with the Dalai Lama at his home in Dharamanshala; embracing members of the gay and lesbian community in the St George's Cathedral.

In history, however, Desmond Tutu will above all be remembered for his role as chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – in the eyes of many, the crowning contribution of his life.

2. DESMOND TUTU AND THE TRC: FORGIVENESS, JUSTICE, AND RECONCILIATION ON A NATIONAL SCALE

On 10 May 1994, Nelson Mandela, leader of the African National Congress, was inaugurated as the first Black president of the New South Africa. In the streets of Pretoria, in front of the Union Buildings where the ceremony took place, hundreds of thousands were dancing and singing. Indeed, in the whole country there was a sense of jubilation. The New South Africa had arrived. But there was also concern. The country was still deeply divided. The scars of apartheid on individuals as well as communities were still visible to all. The vexing issues of the country's past still needed to be addressed. Millions of South Africans had suffered deeply and were crying for recognition and for justice. At the same time, a large number of perpetrators of human rights abuses were clamouring for amnesty, hoping for the books of the past to be

closed. Political leaders, old enemies from both sides of the struggle, found it difficult to reach out and trust one another.

How to deal with the problems of the past? Prior to the 1994 elections, delegates from political parties, civil organisations, and academic institutions met at the World Trade Centre, near Johannesburg, to discuss a new constitution for South Africa. The final issue on the agenda of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was devoted to the issue of the country's apartheid past. How should the needs of the victims be met? And, more difficult, what about the needs of the perpetrators from both sides of the divide? Some of the delegates advocated a blanket amnesty. But evidently this was impossible, as this would disregard and dishonour the pain and the suffering of the victims. Others argued: Why not institute Nuremberg-type trials? Force the perpetrators to pay their dues. But this was not advisable, the CODESA delegates decided, not if reconciliation and national healing were to be the order of the day (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Vol. 1* 1998:1-23).

Finally, at the closure of its deliberations, CODESA decided to appoint a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to establish a complete picture of the apartheid past (1948-1994), in order to facilitate the granting of amnesty to perpetrators who applied to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and to establish the whereabouts of the victims, inviting them to relate their own accounts of the violations they suffered and to recommend reparation measures in this respect.

In July 1995, the South African Parliament, acting upon CODESA's recommendation, decided to appoint the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with a far-reaching mandate (*TRC Report, Vol. 1* 1998:55-57):

- To provide a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised 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 victimisation.

At the specific request of President Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu was appointed to chair the TRC process. Under his leadership, the three committees provided for in the TRC Act began to carry out their respective mandates in January 1996.

The first of the committees, the Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC) of the TRC traversed South Africa for three and a half years, to find and invite victims to approach the TRC, to make statements and to appear at a series of public hearings in many cities and towns across the country. The HRVC's programme was closely followed by the press. Media coverage was extensive. Daily reports appeared in the press and on television, in the country and abroad. Night after night, the South African public was invited to share in the pain of victims who came to tell their stories: mothers who had lost their children, men and women who had lost their spouses, comrades who bore the scars of their suffering, White farmers, victims of land mine attacks, innocent passers-by maimed by explosions in busy streets and shopping centres. When the final *TRC Report* was tabled, it included reports of 140 public hearings, containing the names of 27,000 victims of gross human rights abuses. Reliving the experiences of the victims was often hard, sometimes traumatic, to the victims, the TRC staff, and the public at large. Tears flowed freely at the hearings, but often they were tears of healing (Meiring 2000:18-190).

The Amnesty Committee (AC), at the same time, proceeded with its work, processing the applications of almost 7,000 perpetrators, coming from men and women from both sides of the struggle, guilty of gross human rights violations. The Amnesty Committee, led by judges and senior legal practitioners, needed nearly six years to complete their task. The proceedings were, in some quarters, controversial. In the Eastern Cape, the high-profile Biko, Goniwe, and Mxenge families strongly opposed amnesty to the perpetrators. The process, according to them, favoured the perpetrators, while not enough was done to alleviate the plight of the victims and their families. The AC's task was further complicated by the intransigence of a number of senior military and police officers who refused to apply for amnesty. The AC was on a witch-hunt, they said. It was out to shame them in the eyes of fellow South Africans, and they would have nothing to do with it. Ultimately, the AC did succeed in finishing its task, and a large number of perpetrators were given amnesty.

In close co-operation with the Human Rights Violations Committee and the Amnesty Committee, the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee (RRC) was tasked to take care of the victims of apartheid, of their immediate and long-term needs. After studying the harm suffered by victims and victim communities, as well as the nature of their respective needs, recommendations on reparation and rehabilitation were drafted. The AC identified five categories of reparation for victims: interim reparation, individual reparation grants, community reparation, symbolic reparation, and institutional reparation (Meiring 2000:191).

For the duration of the process, Archbishop Tutu was the public face of the TRC. In the media, on the daily TRC reports on national and international

television, the “Arch”, as he fondly became known, could be seen, presiding at the hearings, comforting the victims, celebrating with them, weeping with them, sometimes upset and angry with them, addressing the audiences, and speaking to the press. Often the Arch was pictured praying for the victims and for the perpetrators alike.

Desmond Tutu was far more than the face of the TRC. In many respects, he became the heart and soul of the process. He did not work alone. He had an able and erudite vice chairman, the seasoned church leader and parliamentarian, Alan Boraine, at his side, together with a strong team of TRC commissioners and committee members. They met weekly around the table, sharing their views on justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation, mapping the way towards nation-building, discussing the daily and weekly programmes of the TRC. But it was clear from the start that Desmond Tutu would put his own stamp on the life and work of the TRC, that his input on the issues at stake would be significant. In his many sermons and statements, in his books and sermons in the years prior to the TRC, Tutu often elaborated on forgiveness and reconciliation, on justice and confession, but during the TRC process, all of this was put into practice. Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of Cape Town in his purple robe, with his silver cross on his chest, stood at the helm of the TRC.

In 1999, in the aftermath of the TRC process, during his stay in Atlanta (USA) as visiting professor at Emory University, Tutu had the opportunity to reflect on the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa, and on the role he had been called to play. His book, *No future without forgiveness*, makes for fascinating reading, and provides important insights into Tutu’s thinking on the issues of forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice.

3. THE ROLE OF RELIGION

From time to time, Tutu’s way of directing the process was contested, even from within the ranks of the TRC itself. It was felt that Tutu, being the Archbishop of the Anglican Church, was not asked to preside over the TRC, but as chair of a secular commission appointed by parliament – not the church. After the first TRC hearing in East London (16-19 April 1996), with the enthusiastic hymn singing and prayers led by the Arch, there were complaints from some quarters. The proceedings were far too “religious”, unbecoming of a juridical process.

Early in the morning before the opening of the Johannesburg hearing, the second on the TRC’s programme, Fazel Randera, head of the Johannesburg office, informed the Arch that the local team had decided that this would be a *secular* hearing, without hymn singing and praying. If the Arch felt that the

ceremony needed to start on a solemn note, why not allow for a brief moment of silence and meditation, as is the practice in parliament? Ironically, the “secular” hearing was to take place in the large hall of the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg.

The outcome of the morning’s opening became significant for TRC hearings to come. Allow me to quote from a report on the day (Meiring 1999:29-30).

In the vestry of the Methodist Church, early in the morning of Day Number One, Tutu discussed the issue with the local TRC members. “Very well”, he agreed, “it is your hearing. I will do as you ask. We will only have a moment of silence before we proceed.”

When the clock struck nine the witnesses and their families were escorted into the crowded hall. Tutu followed, with his colleagues. The chairperson (Tutu) shook hands with the victims, one by one. Then he proceeded to the platform where he took his seat. He asked for half a minute of silence. The first witness was brought to the table and sworn in.

But Tutu could not get under way. He sat down. He moved his papers from side to side. Visibly uncomfortable, he looked at the victim, at the audience in the hall. “No, this won’t work! We really cannot start like this”, he said, and over the loudspeakers: “People, close your eyes so that we can pray!” A long earnest prayer followed – to Christ who is the Truth, and to the Holy Spirit, to lead us. After closing with “Amen”, Tutu rubbed his hands together and informed the audience with a disarming smile: “There, now we are ready to proceed”.

Fazel Randera and his supporters good-naturedly gave up. From then on, every day would be opened and adjourned properly.

The critics were silenced. Fazel Randera and the remainder of the Johannesburg team were persuaded: the vast majority of South Africans saw themselves as religious, and for them, it seemed impossible to discuss the issues before the TRC and the nation – which to them had everything to do with their religious beliefs – without referring to their deep-felt convictions. In the South African community – among Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews and other religious communities alike – the issues of healing and forgiveness, of justice and reconciliation were so central to the core of their beliefs that it was unthinkable to conduct the TRC’s agenda in a “secular” way.

In the audience at the Johannesburg hearing, Jorge Heine, Chilean ambassador to South Africa, was intrigued. In an article in a local newspaper, he reported on the event. Watching the Archbishop praying, Heine wrote that he could not help but reflect that in many countries where the separation

between church and state was taken seriously, this would be unthinkable. The ambassador continued:

Yet it seems to have worked in South Africa where there is a great religious diversity but where the strongly Christian subtext of repentance and forgiveness that pervades the Commission's proceedings conveys the right message as to what reconciliation is all about (*The Sunday Independent*, 2 August 1996).

4. DEFINING RECONCILIATION

The TRC came to realise that it is not that easy to define the term "reconciliation". What is the true meaning of "reconciliation"?

Strangely and significantly, one of the major difficulties that the TRC had to contend with was that of definition. What does "reconciliation" really mean? The question was debated at length at Commission meetings. The jurists and the politicians warned against being too idealistic in either definition or expectation. When the police vehicles drive away, when the shooting stops, and the dust settles in the streets, when people release one another's throats, call that "reconciliation". Do not expect more. Tutu with other commissioners at his side, especially his fellow pastors, asked for a loftier definition. Bible in hand, the Arch described reconciliation:

Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss one another. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The Lord will indeed give what is good and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps (Ps. 85:10-13).

True reconciliation is a gift of God, Tutu often reiterated. God had reconciled us with Him by sacrificing his Son Jesus Christ for mankind on the cross. For this reason, real and lasting reconciliation between men and men became possible (2 Cor. 5:16-21).

Similarly, Tutu and the TRC encouraged spokespersons of the other faiths – Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, African Traditional Religion, and so on – to join in the debate, to help their fellow South Africans, from the deepest sources of their traditions and beliefs, understand the full meaning of reconciliation. The debate was, however, not fully settled during the life of the TRC. When the final TRC Report was lodged, it contained a minority report by Commissioner (Advocate) Wynand Malan who distanced himself from the "religiously loaded" concept of "reconciliation" (*TRC Report Vol. 5* 1998:439-441).

Desmond Tutu had high expectations of the role that the religious communities were to play in implementing reconciliation once the TRC closed its doors. Under his signature, the Final TRC Report contained the recommendation that the faith communities not only take the lead in campaigning for justice and reconciliation in the country, but also by devising theologies of reconciliation. The *TRC Report (Vol. 5 1998:317)* challenged

the religious communities (to) 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.

5. THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

Justice and truth go hand in hand. In 1995, when Dullah Omar, Minister of Justice, tabled the Act on National Unity and Reconciliation before the South African Parliament, he called upon all South Africans "to join in the search for truth without which there can be no genuine reconciliation" (*TRC Report Vol. 1 1998:48*).

The quest for truth, the TRC Commissioners learned, was no easy exercise. It had to go far beyond collecting facts and weighing findings, far beyond recording historical events and seeking legal opinions. Truth-finding involved understanding, accepting accountability and justice, and accepting responsibility for the fragile relationships between men and women. Especially so, because in the traditions of all religions, seeking the truth involved a deep spiritual experience. The quest for truth, therefore, needed to be undertaken with great sensitivity. If that was not the case in the TRC process, the nation might bleed to death. But if the Commission succeeded, it might open the way to a national catharsis, to peace, and national healing. Tutu and his colleagues hoped and prayed that finding the truth would indeed set us free!

Often, at TRC hearings in different parts of South Africa, the Arch's prayers were answered. Perpetrators approached the Amnesty Committee. They brought their truths to the judges at the bench. They subjected themselves to the questioning and cross-questioning by the commissioners. Although not legally required, many of the perpetrators expressed deep sorrow and shame, committing themselves to reach out to the victims of their crimes, and to help

repair the damage they had done. Many perpetrators reported that when this happened, it was as if the dark cloud that had loomed over them for years, was lifted. One example: Adrian Vlok, a former Minister of Police, applied for amnesty for his part in the bombing of Khotso House, the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches in Johannesburg, as well as for his role in the attempted assassination of Frank Chikane during the SACC's general secretary's visit to the United States. His reaction echoed that of many other perpetrators who received amnesty:

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 (Meiring 1999:357).

Many victims reported similar experiences. They, too, felt that the truth would set them free. An elderly gentleman testifying at the Soweto Hearing looked at the audience and said:

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! (Meiring 2000:190).

Desmond Tutu recorded the stories of numerous victims in his book on the TRC, *No future without forgiveness*, describing their reactions after having unburdened themselves. One of them was Lukas Sikwepere:

Here is what a young man, Lukas Sikwepere, said after he had described how a notorious Cape Town policeman, Warrant Officer H. J. C. 'Barrie' Barnard, had shot him in the face, blinding him: 'I feel what has brought my sight back, my eyesight back, is to come here and tell the story. I feel what has been making me sick all the time is the fact that I couldn't tell my story. But now ... it feels like I've got my sight back by coming here and telling you the story.' (Tutu 1999:128-129).

To hear the truth, to be confronted by the often heartbreaking and harrowing testimonies, was not only necessary for the victims and perpetrators, for the TRC officials leading the hearings. The South African nation needed to hear the truth. They, too, needed to listen, to be shamed, to struggle with the atrocities of the apartheid past, in the hope that the truth would liberate them, set them free. The daily *TRC Report*, immediately after the 8 o'clock news on television, brought the stories of the day. The faces of victims and perpetrators appeared on screens across the country. South Africans were invited to share in their experience, to accompany one another in the quest for truth and reconciliation. Some accepted the invitation, others not. The reaction of many White South Africans, who distanced themselves from the TRC process, was

a great disappointment to the Arch. But there were exceptions. At the East London Hearing (April 1996), Tutu (1999:90) opened a letter from a member of the White community:

As an ordinary member of the public, I would like you to know that I have been immensely moved and inspired by the testimonies heard at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in East London last week. My pain and inspiration have come from the awesome, horrific, and humbling stories and the extraordinary forgiveness of those wounded people. We are all wounded ... The pain belongs to us all.

The author included a poem, written by him, which moved both the Arch and his audience:

The world is wept.
 Blood and pain seep into our listening, into our wounded souls.
 The sound of your sobbing is my own weeping;
 Your wet handkerchief my pillow for a past so exhausted,
 it cannot rest – not yet.
 Speak, weep, look, listen for us all
 Oh people of the silent hidden past,
 Let your stories scatter seeds into our lonely, frightened winds,
 Sow more, until the stillness of this land can
 soften, can dare to hope and smile and sing.
 Until the ghosts can dance unshackled,
 until our lives can know your sorrows
 And be healed.

6. WHAT ABOUT JUSTICE?

During the TRC years, a lively debate was held on the issues of amnesty and justice, in both the media and the wider community. Desmond Tutu devoted an entire chapter of his book to the question: "What about justice?". For many critics, it seemed unacceptable, even immoral, to allow perpetrators, who were guilty of horrible crimes, seemingly to be let off the hook. Perpetrators were not even asked to show contrition or remorse. The TRC Act only required of them to make a full disclosure of their offences, to show that their acts were politically motivated, and that the consideration of proportionality was observed (Tutu 1999:47).

Desmond Tutu came to the defence of the TRC Act. He agreed that justice was of prime importance. Without a sense that justice was observed, there was hardly any hope of lasting reconciliation in the country. But justice would be meted out: proper and comprehensive reparation for the victims would balance the generous granting of amnesty to the perpetrators of human rights

abuses. The fear that the granting of amnesty would encourage impunity, was unfounded. Perpetrators were not able to escape the consequences of their action. The Arch explained that innocent people – or those who claimed to be innocent – were not the recipients of amnesty. Amnesty was awarded to perpetrators who pleaded guilty and accepted responsibility for their deeds.

It was important, Tutu wrote in *No future without forgiveness*, to distinguish between retributive justice and restorative justice. Retributive justice takes place when an impersonal state hands down punishment to perpetrators, with hardly any consideration of the effect that the punishment may have on both the victims and the perpetrators. But this is not the only form of justice; there is also another kind of justice, namely restorative justice. The latter, the Arch argued, was deeply imbedded in, and 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. This is a far more personal approach, which sees the offence as something that has happened to people and whose consequence is a rupture in relationships. Thus we would claim that justice, restorative justice, is being served when we are being made to work for healing, for forgiveness and reconciliation (Tutu 1999:51-52).

Not everyone was persuaded, neither in South Africa, nor abroad. Tutu experienced this at first hand during a visit to Rwanda. He was taken to some of the shocking genocide sites where nearly a million Tutsis were killed by their Hutu compatriots during a three-month killing spree in 1994. He was then invited to speak at a huge rally in Kigali. The audience enjoyed what the Archbishop had said about the pain and the suffering of the victims, and how important it was to assist them in the process of healing. But when Tutu made an urgent plea for forgiveness, and for amnesty to the victims, for restorative justice instead of retributive justice, both the crowd and their president, Paul Kagame, objected.

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 (Tutu 1999:209).

In the TRC's discussions on the relationship between justice and amnesty, the need for proper reparation to, and rehabilitation for the victims was never forgotten. The final TRC Report stated clearly that, without adequate reparation and rehabilitation measures, there could be no healing and reconciliation at either an individual or a community level. Amnesty needed to be counterbalanced by generous reparation measures. The matter was so serious that the implementation of reparation was put in the hands of government – to be specific, in the President's office (Tutu 1999:55).

Accordingly, the TRC spent much time defining proper reparation proposals for victims. Apart from urgent interim relief, the TRC recommended final reparation grants of up to R23,000 for individual victims or their families, payable over six years. Great was the disappointment when government, for a number of reasons, dragged its feet. In spite of earnest pleas by Tutu and his TRC colleagues as well as victims' organisations, victims had to wait for years to receive reparation. Ultimately, when the money was paid out, it was far from the amount set by the TRC. Thousands of victims, justifiably angry, complained: Too little, too late! (Tutu 1999:58).

7. RECONCILIATION, CONFESSION, AND FORGIVENESS

And reconciliation? How do a nation and individuals reach the point of reconciliation? The Arch often explained that reconciliation requires perpetrators to make a commitment from both parties: a heartfelt, honest confession from the perpetrator, as well as the willingness of the victim to forgive. As noted in the above paragraphs, the TRC Act did not force perpetrators to publicly ask for forgiveness for their crimes before amnesty could be granted. Yet, Tutu emphasised time and again that real and enduring reconciliation can only be achieved if and when perpetrators and perpetrator communities show their willingness to honestly recognise their guilt towards God and their fellow human beings, to confess their crimes, and to humbly ask for forgiveness. At the same time, only the grace and magnanimity of the victims willing to embrace the perpetrators and to extend forgiveness enables the process. Tutu loved to quote the example of Nelson Mandela who walked out of prison after 27 years in captivity with one goal: to liberate all South Africans, White and Black. The man who was to become president wrote:

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 the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is 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 (Mandela 1994:617).

In *No future without forgiveness*, Tutu wrote that the road of forgiveness is difficult, often risky. By asking for and extending forgiveness, you are making yourself vulnerable. You may find yourself misunderstood; your motives may be questioned. The inability of victims to forgive or the insensitivity or arrogance of the perpetrators who do not want to be forgiven, may derail the process. But that is to be expected. Working toward forgiveness and reconciliation asks for a price to be paid. Referring to Jesus Christ who died on the cross to reconcile the world with God, and men with men, Tutu warned that forgiveness and reconciliation are meant to be a risky and very costly exercise. Referring to Jesus giving away his life on the cross, Tutu (1999: 218) wrote: "True reconciliation is not cheap. It cost God the death of his only begotten Son."

Reconciliation is often misunderstood as a process of glossing over past mistakes and injustices. Reconciliation merely calls for closing the books, for calls for national *amnesia*. Tutu (1999: 218) maintained that this is far from the truth:

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 worthwhile, 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, does require from victims to abandon their right to retribution, their right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin. It is hard and sometimes very difficult, Tutu counselled, but it is a loss that ultimately sets the victim free. In his book, Tutu refers to a recent issue of the journal *Spirituality and Health*. Its front cover had a photo of three US ex-servicemen standing in front of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC. All three men had been held captive by the Viet-Cong (Tutu 1999:219-220):

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?'

Not only individuals, but also communities need to ask for forgiveness. Above all, the leaders of the communities must set the example. In a media statement (8 May 1997), Desmond Tutu called upon the political leaders of the day to lead the way. Would President Mandela reach out in a public act of atonement to the victims of the ANC Church Street bombing in Pretoria? Would Mangosuthu Buthelezi travel to the village of Kwa Makhuta where women and children were massacred by IFP supporters? Would Stanley Mogoba, leader of the Pan African Congress, conduct a special service at St James Church, Cape Town, in memory of the victims of the assault in the church in 1993? Finally, would Former President F.W. de Klerk visit Boipatong to atone for the massacre?

“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).

Regrettably, neither Mandela, nor De Klerk, nor Buthelezi, nor Mogoba answered Tutu’s call, and the country remained all the poorer for that.

8. RECONCILIATION REQUIRES A FIRM COMMITMENT

History teaches us that reconciliation is not for the fainthearted. To act as a reconciler, a builder of bridges between opposing individuals and communities, asks for a strong commitment, resilience, and nerves of steel. People walk over and tread upon bridges! To act as a reconciler may prove to be hazardous, even deadly. Tutu emphasised that Jesus Christ, the ultimate reconciler, was willing to lay down his life – and he called his disciples to take up their crosses and to follow Him. The German church leader and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, repeatedly warned of the temptation of “cheap grace”, following Christ at the lowest possible cost, which is the deadly enemy of the gospel. “Costly grace”, on the other hand, is expected of Christians who, having accepted their salvation as a free gift from God, offer themselves as living sacrifices to God and to one another (Bonhoeffer 1960:45). In South Africa, in our day, we need to guard against a similar temptation of “cheap reconciliation”, reconciliation without cost. Reconciliation without a willingness to suffer in the process, to pay a price, is a mortal enemy of the gospel of Christ.

In his personal life, Tutu demonstrated what costly reconciliation entailed. He fearlessly confronted the apartheid government’s leaders, B.J. Vorster and P.W. Botha. He led protest marches through the streets, at great personal risk. He faced harassment and arrest by the police. He was willing to pay the price.

He was noted sometimes to do the controversial and unexpected. Against the criticism of many of his peers, he reached out to former opponents, always hopeful that they would enter into the spirit of reconciliation. He never lost hope that White South Africans would come to the table of confession and forgiveness, that they would realise the pain and suffering that apartheid had caused, and contribute to the healing of the land.

Tutu's biographer, John Allen (2006: 224-225), relates an instance when the Arch nearly lost his life coming to the rescue of a young man accused of being an *impimpi* (police informer). In June 1985, a funeral was held in Duduza township, near Nigel. Four young activists, killed by police, were buried that day. A huge crowd filled the soccer stadium, many of them pupils boycotting school. After an emotional service the clergy, Tutu among them, accompanied the families to the local cemetery. Walking back from the grave, Tutu and Simeon Nkoane, a local cleric, encountered a frenzied crowd of young mourners who were beating and kicking a man whom they suspected of being an informer. The man's car was overturned and set on fire. Shouting "*Impimpi, impimpi, burn him!*", they doused him with gasoline. When they lifted him up, ready to throw him into the fire, Desmond Tutu and Nkoane rushed to the scene.

Allen describes what happened next. Tutu and his colleague, both shorter than most of the people in the crowd, their purple cassocks flaring, entered into the fray. They were jostled and pushed by the angry crowd. The victim, his head bleeding, clung to Tutu's leg. Nearly in tears, the Arch pleaded with the youths to let go of the man and pulled him away. They put the victim in a car to be speeded to hospital, by Nkoane. The young people beat their fists on the roof of the car.

The youths then turned to Tutu. "Why don't you allow us to deal with these dogs the same way they treat us?", a young man, *sjambok* in hand, shouted. If Tutu saved an *impimpi*, he implied, Tutu must be one of them! Tutu, keeping his cool, talked to the youth and his mates about their noble and righteous struggle against apartheid. "Why", he added, "must we use the same methods as the 'system'? Why don't we use methods of which we will be proud in years to come?". Joined by dozens of youths, the young man retorted that the "system" had killed their four comrades, who were laid to rest that day. He indicated that they would also be sold out by informers.

Tutu answered that he understood their anger but would not allow them to kill people. "Do you recognise us as your leaders?" Grudgingly the youths did.

"Then why don't you do as we tell you? What is the point in claiming to recognise our leadership when in fact you don't?" (Allen 2006:225).

Desmond Tutu had saved the day, and a man's life. But the risk to his own life was real.

The Arch was not alone in this. During the TRC hearings, stories were told of men and women who were willing to carry the cost of reconciliation: not only of well-known heroes, among them Nelson Mandela, Mvume Dandala, and Beyers Naudé, but also of thousands of women and men, some young, some old, who rose to the occasion. The *Final TRC Report* recorded their stories, stories of ordinary South Africans who reached beyond themselves, no matter the cost.

“It never ceases to astonish me”, Tutu wrote after chairing yet another hearing, “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).

Agents of healing and reconciliation need not only commitment, proper training, and resilience, but also a healthy sense of humour. The Arch, with his sense of the absurd, his unexpected, explosive, humour, often saved the day. It often happened that, when the testimonies stirred the audience to tears, even to anger, Desmond Tutu saved the moment with a funny story or a humorous comment, often at his own expense.

9. BACK TO CAPE TOWN, 2020

A quarter of century has passed since Desmond Tutu and his colleagues, with the South African community at large, embarked on the epic journey towards peace and reconciliation. In the 1990s, the mood was optimistic. South Africa was the Rainbow Country, and the rainbow people were reaching out to one another, embarking on the journey of healing and nation-building. There were problems to be faced, but with President Mandela at the helm and with Archbishop Tutu acting as the moral compass, South Africans were ready to set sail.

In the 2020s, the mood turned solemn. Storms were lashing from many sides. The problems loomed like dark clouds: poverty, unemployment, hunger, corruption, political instability, bad governance, xenophobia, violence, disease. The country still, desperately, needed healing. Reconciliation is not an event; it is a process, a very long process, an ongoing process, the Arch used to warn. And his warning is as true today as it was in the 1990s. But a rainbow does rise above the clouds. After having had to listen to so many shocking testimonies at the TRC hearings, the Arch's words are filled with hope for us, on our journey (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.

The Arch's funeral service on New Year's Day 2022 was televised across six continents. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, only one hundred family members, colleagues and near friends were allowed to attend. The atmosphere was muted, but also filled with joy. With her children next to her, Mama Leah Tutu sat with her head bowed. The casket was simple, the cheapest available, with a small bouquet of carnations on top. Messages from far and wide were read. Eulogies were brought, reflecting on the many aspects of Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu's life, on the legacy of the man destined to lead South Africa on the road to forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice. Not only in South Africa. In his videoed message, Rev. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, mentioned that Tutu belonged to the world (*The Guardian* 2022:1)

When we were in the dark, he brought light and that light has lit up countries [across the world] struggling with conflict or where the marginalised have suffered. He never failed to bring light, and his light did not fade but grew brighter. [He] is shedding light for those on the edge and those who suffer to this day and in the future.

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