

Restitution: A contemporary theology for young people

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Abstract

‘Restitution’ as a Christian theological concept has received scant attention in the main and even less as an essential part of the discipling of youth. Drawing on data from an extensive ethnographic study in a South African township and informed by thorough theological reflection, this paper aims to outline a defensible theology of restitution. It considers both the need for, and requirements of restitution as a reflection of spiritual witness. In particular the paper will cover both an Older and New Testament understanding of restitution; the effects of generational sin; how grace and restitution are interrelated, and the practical application of a theology of restitution, particularly for those who live in contexts of structural injustice (as perpetrators and victims).

Bicycle theology – a parable

Father Michael Lapsley, an Anglican priest in South Africa who had his hands blown off by a letter bomb during the apartheid struggle, tells a story he calls ‘Bicycle Theology’. It’s about two boys who live next door to each other – Jabu and Johnny. Both have bicycles. One day Johnny steals Jabu’s bicycle. Jabu tries hard to get it back but can’t. Of course they stop being friends. A year passes and they do not talk or even look at each other. But Johnny misses his friend and goes over to Jabu’s house one day and says ‘Jabu lets be friends again’. Jabu agrees and so they shake hands and make up. A few days later Jabu says to Johnny, ‘Johnny, what about my bicycle?’ to which Johnny replies ‘Look Jabu, this is about becoming friends again, not about bicycles’.

This parable is clearly an account of the South African story – of colonisation, apartheid, transition, and democracy. But the story doesn’t end there – it may continue something

like this: A few years later Jabu's father comes home from work and announces he now owns every single bicycle factory in South Africa. Johnny is visiting at the time and the two boys are playing marbles in the backyard. Johnny looks up expectantly at Jabu and says 'See now your father can get you a bicycle'. Jabu's father looks at his son and says 'Son, there are 35 million people who need bicycles, and the factories are only able to produce 6000 new bicycles a year. We also have to pay off the previous factory owner's debt. So it's going to be a long wait because I must make this business profitable and I must make sure everyone who already has bicycles has enough spares and can get their bike fixed or replaced when they need it. I may be able to give you a wheel, some handle-bars, and the right to ride a bike when you get one. But for now... you are going to have to watch Johnny ride his two bicycles'.

A few of Jabu's friends might be successful and get their own bicycles, but for most, there are not enough bicycles to go around. Most bicycles remain in the hands of those who were powerful and privileged, and who for some bizarre reason remain powerful and privileged. The story might continue even further... when Johnny dies perhaps he will leave his two bicycles to his daughter (lets call her Joanne). Only now it's an antique and worth a lot of money. With it Joanne might be able to buy a house, start a business, and get a university degree. But Jabu will still have no bike... nor will his children. But does this parable really reflect the current state in which South African finds itself? Are the majority of her people still victims of injustice? Has the new democratic government not addressed these injustices?

The current South African context

South Africa's history of colonisation, slavery, theft of natural resources by minority settlers, violence and apartheid has been variously described as 'one of the great evils of the modern era' (Crais, 2002, p. 4), a 'statutory evil' (Corder, 2000, p. 99), and 'a crime against humanity' (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1999, Volume 1 p. 94-102). After the first democratic elections of 1994, the ANC government and its partners, embarked on a limited (and to date still inadequate) programme of redistributive justice in

terms of employment equity, 'black' economic empowerment, land redistribution, increased social benefits, capital gains tax and a national payroll skills levy. A mere 22,000 victims of gross human rights violations have been compensated with R30, 000 (US\$4,300) each. During apartheid there were an estimated three million forced removals¹. The land claims court has to date processed 869,506 claims and plans to complete its work by March 2008 by processing a further 7,500 claims (Government Communication and Information Services, 2005, p. 103). While redistributive practices have created a new 'black' elite and a growing 'black' middle class, 57% of South Africans still live below the poverty line (Human Sciences Research Council, 2004), 6% realise 40% of all income earned, the poorest 40% only 4%. Nearly half of all current school leavers will not find employment (National Labour & Economic Development Institute, 2003).

So, in spite of constitutional guarantees that rights to freedom of expression, association and belief 'exist side-by-side with socio-economic rights [and that] each person has a right to freedom from poverty, homelessness, poor health and hunger' (Department of Education, 2002, p. 8) more than half of South Africans (the vast majority 'black') remain impoverished. At the same time the majority of 'white' South Africans have sunk into collective but economically comfortable amnesia. During the apartheid years 'white' South Africans enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the world. They still do. South Africa's current Gini coefficient (a measure of income inequality amongst its population) is .77 (Human Sciences Research Council, 2004) and places South Africa amongst the most inequitable nations in the world. In the year 2000 the average 'white' household earned six times that of the average 'black' household (National Labour & Economic Development Institute, 2003). Unemployment is six times as high amongst 'black' South Africans as amongst 'whites' (Statistics South Africa, 2006, p. xvi).

¹ This in addition to the fact that 'black' people had been basically excluded from land ownership by the Glen Grey Land act of 1894. This was done to ensure a 'black' work force for settlers.

Many lay the blame at the government's door² for being slow to redress inequalities, but an enormous contributing factor has been the lack of 'social dynamic' from those who have been beneficiaries of apartheid. There has been an almost deafening silence around the issue of restitution³ in public discourse. And such restitutive justice needs to be seen as an integral part of the long road to citizenship upon which South Africa is currently embarked (Swartz, 2006), and as an integral part of Christian discipleship. So while the TRC report did assert the importance of ensuring socio-economic justice in post-apartheid South Africa, it also expressed the judgement that only if the 'emerging truth unleashes a social dynamic that includes redressing the suffering of victims will it meet the ideal of restorative justice' (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1999, Volume 1 p. 131). But there has been no such 'social dynamic', much less an ongoing public discussion. The TRC was ultimately perceived to have sacrificed justice for truth. At the time the criticism was answered by various people reminding us of the 'negotiated revolution' (Kader Asmal in Hansard 1995, p. 1382-3) of which the TRC was a part, and that 'a new morality' could bring about greater good than punitive justice (Frank Chikane in Krog, 1999, p. 27). With the benefit of hindsight, it is plain to see how those sentiments were necessary for beginning the process of transformation and reconciliation in South Africa. However the current conditions in which the majority of South Africans find themselves, remind us that restorative justice without socio-economic justice are inadequate moral responses to the South African experience of apartheid (Bell & Ntsebeza, 2001; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002). LenkaBula (2005) in particular, summarises the argument tersely:

The righting of structural wrong, injustices or oppression and/or reconciliation requires ... restorative, restitutive and redistributive, or socio-economic justice....

The limitations of South African reconciliation... have been their overemphasis of forgiveness, truth and restorative justice, while they downplayed the role of

² The position of the current ANC government is invidious. The previous apartheid government saddled them with a huge debt. They have adopted a neo-liberal trickle-down approach to growing the economy.

³ In the law restitution is required when there has been an unjust shift of wealth from one person to another, not as damages but because it is legally and morally wrong for a person who has committed a wrong to be allowed to keep a benefit, obtained as a result of the commission of the wrong (Alexander Molle, personal communication, 6 September 2005).

economic (distributive) justice. If socio-economic justice is not taken as one of the core activities ... society will remain polarized according to apartheid hierarchy and designations.... those who are disappointed by the lack of the radical transformation of apartheid would seek revenge because they feel they have not been treated in a just manner (p. 114).

What young South Africans have to say

In my recent ethnographic work⁴ amongst teenage township youth in South Africa, young people took revealing images of the poverty around them in response to a request from me to take photographs of the moral influences in their lives. (See Figures 1-6). Strangely enough few spoke of the effects of poverty. Vuma and Luxolo's comments were rare:

Vuma: You know Sharlene like I was worried when I see - last of last week - ... there were about twenty to fifty mothers you know - where they are giving bread away like. So I saw mothers they are running there - to be there the first to get that bread. I thought like in SA it has changed but it didn't change that much. It's the little things that have changed because you see the mothers they are running for the bread you know. Like I feel like how are their children? Like are they at school? And how do they take them to school when the farmers give them so little money – and they have to run for bread?

Luxolo: [Poverty] sort of like puts you down, yah...Yah, sort of like you, you, maybe like you're not, you're not someone - like out there - in South Africa.

⁴ The study took place in a Cape Town township and was concerned with understanding young people's constructions of morality. Thirty seven young people, aged between 14 and 20 participated in the study, most of whom were in Grade 9. Through the use of participant observation, a series of three interviews, and numerous stimulus methods including the use of autophotography, young people constructed their moral worlds and represented their moral influences. The study is the topic of my PhD thesis at the University of Cambridge, and is due to be completed by June 2007.



Figure 1

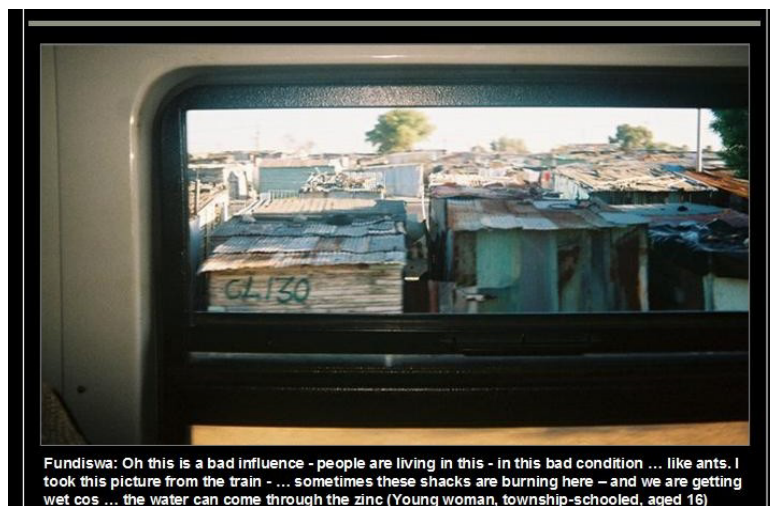


Figure 2

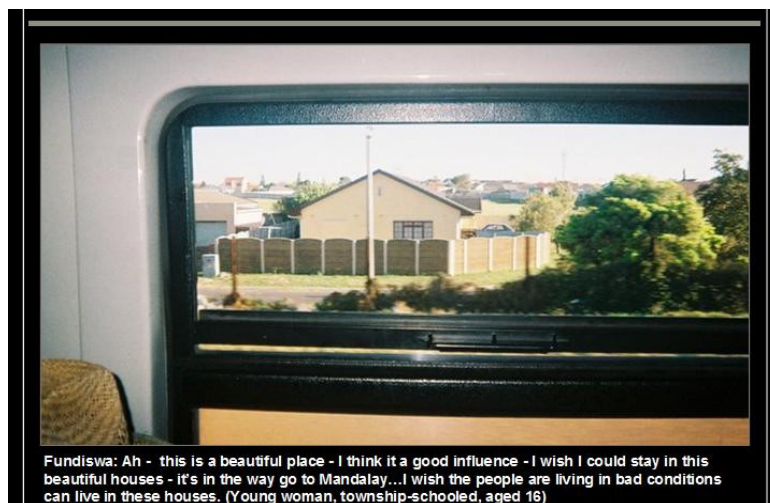


Figure 3



Figure 4

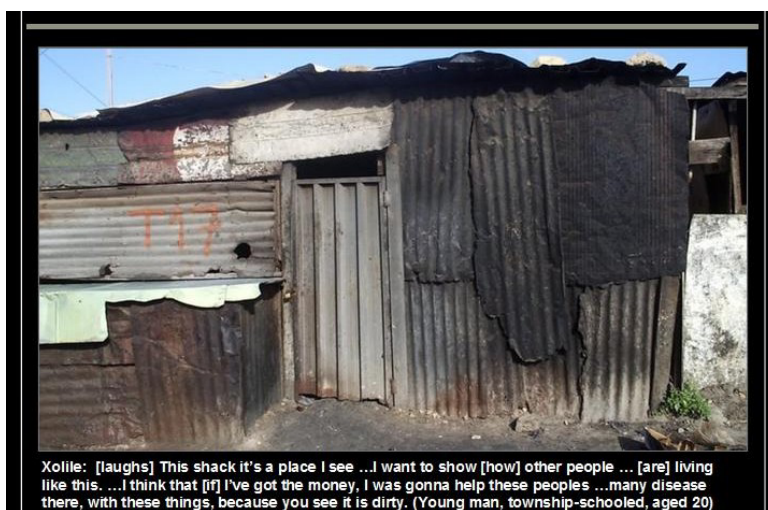


Figure 5



Figure 6

Although initially this ‘muteness’ extended to talk of apartheid, when I pressed them, young people had sadly surprising things to say. Few youth made the connection between apartheid and their present socio-economic circumstances. Views such as ‘Apartheid hasn’t affected my life. I live on a freedom world now. I will have a house like yours if I work hard’ (Nonkiza) were common with youth equating hard work and education, and seeing both as the silver bullet to achieving socio-economic mobility. There was very little, if any, critique of the still inferior quality of township education and the lack of available jobs⁵ even for those who complete school. Comments such as ‘I understand why poor people would steal from the rich – like revenge for apartheid’ (Thandi) were rare, coming mainly from township youth who were schooled in resourced suburban schools. Instead the majority of youth (especially young men) reflected Joules’ sentiment about apartheid ‘I don’t want to live my life in the past’, little realising that it was the past itself that might prevent him from realising his future ambitions. Instead, the following views about apartheid dominated young people’s responses:

Luxolo: When I was born there was no apartheid

Mhoza: It affected our grannies cos they are all domestic workers and we don’t live in the suburbs... Coloured people’s dogs chase us

Amande: It affects me because it affected my parents, who couldn’t be what they wanted to be

Phindiwe: It doesn’t affect my life. You’ve worked hard to have what you have. We haven’t achieved yet.

Again Vuma, a minority voice, made the connection between past injustice and present poverty:

⁵ Only a minority, 9 out of 37 youth, believe the government ought to be doing more, or were critical of poor education standards, housing policies and language policies in schools.

Vuma: Like Sharlene – it has affect my parents - and when it affect my parent it affect me you know cos like if apartheid didn't affect them they maybe wouldn't be staying in that shack house you know Sharlene. Like me I won't get corrupt - like I will be still at school. ...So maybe if my parents are staying in the suburbs I didn't know about those things and I didn't see so much smoking ganja and hijacking.

Others though, without making explicit connections between the past and current depredation, were quick to propose socio-economic changes when asked what they would change in South Africa where they the President:

Thimna: I would give them a job or something to do. Because we are like this now because we have nothing to do in location [township] - that is why we take a dagga and smoke and make crime cos we have nothing to do.

Andiswa: Uh, I would just try to provide them with a sponsor for tertiary. Because most of people are quitting school - it's because they don't have money for tertiary. Most of them 'black' people.

Fundiswa: I will make schools so that they can get free education, others they can come to school so that they can learn so [they are] not staying around and robbing people. I can also build them beautiful houses, not staying in shacks.

Although young people may have been mute about poverty and the effects of apartheid, they were certainly not blind. But they were reluctant to blame the past for their current situation. Instead they exhibited a strong sense of hope, purpose, and personal responsibility for the future, most related to completing school and finding a job.

Nonkiza: If you poor, then I think it's because they didn't work hard.
 Sharlene: You think so? Sure? [pause]
 Nonkiza: No I was, I was going to say too because they don't find work neh?
 They don't find work -.
 Sharlene: And whose fault is that, that they don't find work?
 Nonkiza: It's their fault

Poseletso: I would blame myself - just I didn't study my books - maybe if I
 just study my book then I got that dream

Vathiswa: I [pause] when I finish what I can do - when I finish - when I finish
 at school I am going to work in a job or I have no money

Fundiswa: I am going to be, I am not sure. I would like to be a pilot or a
 doctor.

Sharlene: What are the chances that you will achieve that dream?

Fundiswa: I don't think so - a small chance.

Sharlene: Who will you blame?

Fundiswa: No one - cos my mother is not working. It is only my father. So if I
 didn't get it - the money at home I don't know

Young never spoke about the need for restitution, for entitlement to compensation. Instead 31 out of 37 young people clearly reflected what has come to be known as the 'meritocracy myth' (McNamee & Miller, 2004) – the idea that by hard work and personal responsibility a person is able to achieve what has eluded others, without concern for social and political contexts⁶. Few articulated the problematic phenomena that finishing school does not necessarily result in gaining employment. This despite, the high rate of youth unemployment in South Africa.

⁶ No young men at all said they would blame anyone except themselves if they failed to achieve their dreams and escape poverty.

In contrast to this group of young ‘black’ South Africans, when I asked young ‘white’ South Africans⁷ (all of whom are the beneficiaries of apartheid) about poverty and restitution, opinions were clearly divided. There were generally three groups of answers. The first group, like many of their parents, believed that ‘it was all over now’ and that people should not be punished for being ‘white’ through affirmative action. In December 2006, a group of Afrikaner young matriculants got together at the Voortrekker Monument⁸ just outside of Pretoria to protest against affirmative action for members of their generation. They argued that they began their schooling under South Africa’s first democracy in 1994 (Govender, 2006) and should not be help responsible for the past. The second group spoke of how being wealthy would help the economy and create more jobs for others – a classic conception of so-called ‘trickle-down economics’ (currently the chosen strategy of the South African government). But a large group of youth were easily persuaded in the course of discussion that ‘something stinks’ in South Africa. These youth were eager to find way of making restitution from within their own contexts, as teenagers, students, and working young adults.

These brief extracts from my research indicate the need for an ongoing discourse of the moral implications of the absence of justice in the South African context, and how such an omission contributes to the notions of national citizenship and Christian discipleship. But what does the bible say on the issue of restitution?

The biblical perspective on restitution

Habakkuk Chapter 2:6-12 speaks of God’s judgment against a person who commits acts of injustice, who ‘piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion’, who ‘builds his realm by unjust gain’ and ‘who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!’ (NIV). It is not alone in condemning unjust gain. The Older Testament speaks clearly of how we should deal with those who do wrong. Restitution is expected. It ought to be more than what was taken. There are a number of different ways in which

⁷ This was largely anecdotal and limited to two groups of middle to upper class youth involved in faith based activities.

⁸ A symbol of Afrikaner nationalism closely associated with apartheid.

to do it. In Exodus 22:1 the wrong doer is to repay four or five times what was stolen depending on the size of the theft. In Exodus 22:4 the repayment is double. In 2 Samuel fourfold. In Leviticus 6:5 we are to restore and pay an additional 20% in damages. In Proverbs 6:31 it is sevenfold (or everything you have) and in Job 20:18 it says that restitution ought to be made according to your means. The principle is clear – if you have taken something from someone else you must return it and pay damages. If you have injured, hurt, offended or damaged their property you must make amends – and there are a number of ways to do so. There are also numerous examples of land restitution in the Older Testament. In 2 Samuel 9:7 David restores the land of Saul to his grandson Mephiboseth. (See also 1 Kings 20:34; 2 Kings 8:6 and Nehemiah 5:11). Leviticus 6:4 teaches us not that it's 'finder's keepers', but 'finders-returns' (Deuteronomy 22:2). We are to return things to their rightful owner once they are identified.

And when Zacchaeus tells Jesus what he is going to do in Luke 19:8 i.e. give away half of his property to the poor and pay back four times as much to anyone from whom he has unfairly extracted taxes, Jesus doesn't revoke the principle! Restitution remains a New Testament principle. In fact the New Testament speaks eloquently about forgiveness and repentance as dance partners, not that one is a precondition for the other but that repentance is a mark of those who have been forgiven. In Luke 17:3-4 we read that forgiveness is dependant on repentance, 'If he repents forgive him'. But our clearer theology of repentance is that we produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8 and Acts 26:20). Restitution is therefore a fruit of repentance, and becomes visible and evident in the actions that accompany them. Repentance is about more than words – it's about turning away from the wrongdoing, and making right what we have done. There is a clear biblical precedent and theology of restitution. In bicycle terms the bible teaches us that when we return a bicycle, we return it polished and shiny, with working lights, a new Shimano XT9 group set with hydraulic disc brakes and front and rear suspension, and where possible - transformed into a Harley Davidson.

Guilt and restitution in social science research

But the bible is not the only place where restitution is a subject of discussion. In law it is evident, but also in civil society and social science research it is a contemporary phenomenon. There are three main contributors from the social sciences⁹ who assist in developing a theology of restitution for youth. The first is renowned Harvard law professor Martha Minow (Chayes & Minow, 2003), the second a little known volume entitled *The Guilt of Nations* (Barkan, 2000) and the third an article about guilt and restitution by Iyer *et al* (2004) in a collection white privilege edited by well known critical scholars Michelle Fine and Lois Weiss.

Minow and Chayes (2003), and Barkan (2000) call attention to a multitude of issues to which restitution applies. These are mainly at the macro level and are summarised in Table 1. To this list I have added issues at the micro level which I believe also require consideration in regards to restitution. In addition, Minow and Chayes provide a rationale for why restitution is important, the various forms it might take, and why there seems to be a current resurgence in talk of restitution in political discourse. Barkan draws attention to the implications of large groups of people describing themselves as essentially victims.

Macro level

- Germans extermination of Jews, Nazi gold and Swiss solidarity
 - Colonisation of indigenous people in Americas, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa *et al*
 - Internment of Japanese Americans during the second world war by the US government
 - Conflict between people groups (Bosnia, Serbia, Dafur)
 - Abduction of Koreans as sex slaves by the Japanese
 - The annihilation of Tutsis by Hutus in Burundi and Rwanda
 - Violent purges during communist revolutions
 - Slavery
-

Micro level

- Perpetrators of child sexual abuse
 - Perpetrators of violence
 - Young offenders
 - Drugs abusers and other substance abusers (where it has caused harm to others)
 - Conflict between young people and their parents (and of course vice versa)
-

Current restitution practices

- Alcoholics anonymous – Step nine
 - Affirmative action
 - Black Economic Empowerment
 - Land redistribution
 - Increased social benefits
 - Capital gains tax
 - A national payroll skills levy
 - Government apologies for slavery and colonialism
 - ‘Sorry’ days instead of ‘founder’ days
-

Table 1 *Events and practices of restitution*

⁹ Of course I believe that theology and sociology are compatible, and that each informs the other.

Iyer *et al* present the findings of empirical research on guilt and responsibility. They cite studies which show how racially advantaged groups avoid guilt (providing as an example the various law suits brought against affirmative action in South Africa) (p. 352) and the percentage of Australians (14%) who express guilt regarding the treatment of indigenous people in their country. A further study concluded that people were more reluctant to call something unjust if they were perceived as the in-group (p. 353). But recognising injustice in others and in other locations was more common. People respond differently to acknowledgments of guilt depending on whether they are self-focused or other focused and whether the primary emotion is guilt, sympathy, or moral outrage.

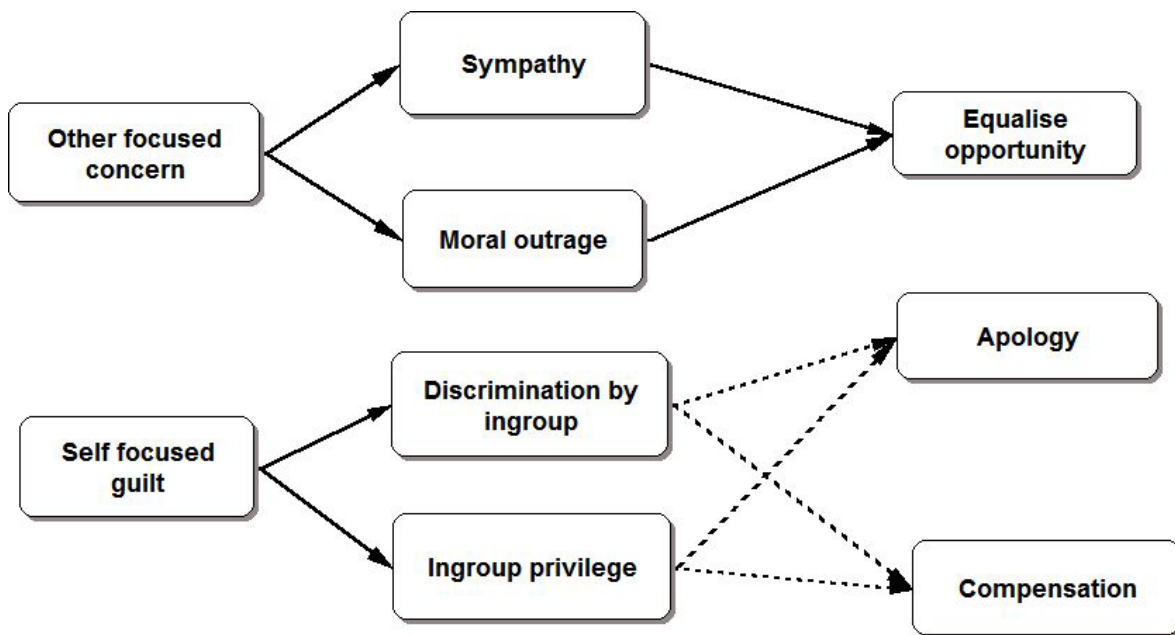


Figure 7 *How guilt works (adapted from Iyer et al, 2004)*

They conclude that racially advantaged groups tend to avoid guilt, and responsibility (not so among SA youth); that guilt plays an ambivalent role in restitution; that self-focused guilt is less motivating than other-motivated guilt; that emotions such as sympathy and moral outrage motivate people to action more so than talk of discrimination or in-group privilege; and that talk of 'equalisation of opportunities' is also more motivating than talk of self-focused guilt, apology or compensation. Figure 7 provides a diagrammatic

representation of these findings. But are these findings enough. Surely, guilt (a prerequisite to conviction) is a feature of Christian discipleship. Without it, how do we acknowledge our shortcomings, and call our actions what they are – sinful?

Some objections and unanswered issues

There are a number of objections to talk of restitution. Some are theological, others are practical. The practical objections are perhaps easiest to deal with, and revolve around the following statements: *'We never knew'*, *'It wasn't us, it was our parents'*, *'The nation has apologised'*, *'We (our parents) worked hard for what we have'*, and *'Isn't there a statute limitations?'* and *'How long must we go on paying?'* The theological objections are more difficult to resolve since the bible is paradoxical about the issue of the relationship between forgiveness and repentance, and between personal and corporate guilt.

Many Christian would argue that guilt is a useless emotion – it makes us blame others, defend ourselves, makes us try to avoid the issue, retreat into ourselves, and leaves us with emotional problems. Sometimes guilt paralyses or overwhelms us. But when Christians feel guilt – the bible says we have an advocate with the father – and to rid ourselves of the feeling of guilt we should remind ourselves that Christ died for our sin – past, present and future. Our response to this forgiveness is (ought to be) repentance – *and* bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. The emotion of guilt is not useless, but there are two kinds of guilt or sorrow. In 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 we read that that Godly sorrow for actions leads to repentance (not sorrow for having been found out, or self pity for having been disgraced), but worldly sorrow leads to death. So guilt can lead us to repentance, (and restitution). On the other hand, forgiveness is not dependent on repentance but on grace¹⁰. This, while a theological paradox, ought hardly to be invoked as an excuse for ignoring restitution. Doing so would be to trample on God's grace to us (Romans 6).

¹⁰ But Jesus also says that those branches that bear no fruit he cuts off from the vine (John15:2).

The second question we must ask before we can think about our response is ‘who is guilty?’ A quick answer in the South African context is the previous government. And although they admitted their guilt – they were not made to pay. In fact they left the new government with a huge debt of \$18 billion (Dor, 1999). Twenty four percent of every rand in income the current government receives goes towards servicing this debt (and not towards alleviating the poverty to which apartheid has contributed). But it’s hard to hold an institution responsible and so people have been singled out. But is it really only Vlakplaas commander Eugene De Kock who is guilty, or government ministers like Magnus Malan, Adrian Vlok, PW Botha, or Hendrik Verwoerd? Are not those who put them there – those who voted for them and fought for them, guilty too? What about those who readily accepted the benefits of their policies?

The bible speaks of a nation being guilty – Nineveh, Sodom and Gomorrah – but is clear about punishment being linked to the sins of individuals. In Joshua 7 – Achan and his whole family are put to death for a sin Achan commits – but this is not the pattern in the Older Testament. Sometimes the bible describes what happened, but does not prescribe this as the model for what ought to happen in the future, or for all time. Through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God says that it is the person who sins who carries the blame, not his descendants (Jeremiah 31:29-30 and Ezekiel 18). It is not true that the Germans killed the Jews. Adolf Hitler commanded his army and government to do so. The Zulus didn’t kill Piet Retief – Dingaan and his body guards did. Are ‘white’ people responsible for *apartheid*? Many ‘white’ people and Afrikaners supported the government and administration which perpetrated the evils of apartheid, but some did not and suffered for their opposition. The primary teaching of the bible is that we are individually responsible before God for our actions. We alone will stand before God on judgement day. We will account for our actions. Of course the bible does teach us that we have responsibility for others – teachers for students, parents for children, prophets for those to whom they are sent – like Jonah going to Nineveh and getting in trouble for running away from this responsibility, and in Ezekiel 3:17, we read we are to keep watch for others and to warn them. But the bible is clear that while children might experience

the consequences and ill-effects of sin in their families, punishment is only due to an individual's actions.

In the law today it is the same – if your father commits a crime, you might feel shamed for it, but you won't go to jail for it. If a board member of IASYM commits adultery, I might feel shame for it, but I won't be asked to step down because of it. And when good things happen – we bask in the reflected glory of it too. When my parents are kind and respected in the community – I enjoy taking some of the credit. When a Cambridge professor wins a Nobel Prize I bask in the reflected glory. So while we may share in the shame of what others with whom we identify have done, we are not guilty just by virtue of our identity – we are not accomplices merely by association.

But is there anything of which we are guilty, for which we are culpable? Some South Africans voted for a 'white' exclusive government. Others were politicians. Some were drafted into the army, although some objected (and were imprisoned for their beliefs). Most South Africans are guilty of simply doing nothing, and enjoying the benefits of institutionalising 'white' superiority. In Dostoyevsky's famous book *The Brothers Karamazov* (1927) he comments:

If the evil deeds of men sadden you too greatly and arouse in you an anger you cannot overcome and fill you with a desire to wreak vengeance on the evil-doers - fear this feeling most of all ... because you too are responsible for the evil deeds of all men. Bear that ordeal and your desire for revenge will be quenched when you understand that *you were guilty yourself for having failed to show the light to the wicked*, as a man without sin could (p. 389).

Similarly, in the liturgy we confess the things we have done and those we have left undone or failed to do.

But there is more than the sin of simply doing nothing of which we are guilty. Charles Robertson (2004) of the church-led Restitution Foundation in South Africa sums up

succinctly: ‘Many South Africans and their forefathers... received in a direct and indirect manner what they would not otherwise have received; and that many South Africans and their forefathers were on the opposite side of this ‘equation’, by having something taken from them unjustly’. Through job reservation and privileged access to land and wealth, ‘white’ South Africans have been beneficiaries of apartheid. And for the younger generation, who did not enact the legislation procuring these benefits, we are guilty of having received stolen goods – property, jobs, education, benefits. The law maintains that if you are the recipient of stolen goods – even if you did not know they were stolen, you are liable – at least to return them, if not for prosecution. Would the way of the cross ask any less of us?

Of course we may argue we never knew. But ignorance is no defence in a modern court of law. Some people knew – many ‘white’ people joined in the struggle against apartheid – but they were few. How come others didn’t know? Did our material comforts perhaps affect our wanting to know? Did we perhaps conveniently not want to know? Or did we believe the lie – that ‘black’ people were inferior and ‘other’, and that ‘might is right’. In Job 20:10 we read that the children will have to repay what parents stole from the poor. It doesn’t say ‘be punished for...’ but *repay*. But it is unavoidable that we think of being made to pay as a punishment – since so much of our justice system is concerned with paying fines. Perhaps that’s a helpful distinction to make though – that being asked to repay is a requirement for stealing stolen goods rather than a prosecutable offence. It perhaps helps to resolve the paradox between generational sin and personal responsibility.

I was educated in a good government ‘white’ school in Johannesburg. I went on netball and hockey tours. I had lunch (or lunch-money) for school everyday. When I needed help with Grade 11 maths – there were teachers who helped me, and my parents paid for extra tuition. In Langa – where I conducted my research – 2 out of 43 young people are passing Grade 9 maths. Young people regularly come to school hungry and go home hungry. The entire school of 1,400 has 2 cricket teams and 3 soccer teams – they play on stones and gravel, and don’t go away on sports trips. The money the government spent on my

education meant that there was less to spend on other children. *In fact for every R20 the government spent on me, they spent R1 on 'black' youth.* I didn't know that then – but I know it now! And it's an injustice I would like to help put right. The apartheid debt that prevents social spending on the poor was spent on me. But what of a young 'white' South African who was only born after the end of apartheid? *It wasn't me, it was my parents.* What is their culpability for the fact that they enjoy privilege merely as an accident of birth?

Or we may argue that we worked hard for what we have. That may be true but it was only possible because others were denied that same opportunity. Jobs were reserved for 'white' people. Salaries were hugely disproportionate. 'Black' people were corralled into infertile parts of the country. But *how far back do we go?* We can't make things right for the whole world of wrongs that have been perpetrated. Is there a statute of limitations? Is it ten years, fifty years, three hundred years (to the beginning of British colonialism) or perhaps as far back as the Crusades? I'm not sure but it seems like saying sorry for the past fifty years, or thirty years is not an unreasonable thing to do. It seems that if I am still benefiting from criminal, inhuman, evil actions of my parents, their parents, the government of my country, my South African brother who fought in a war against the sons of the women who cooked, cleaned and looked after me as I was growing up – I think something ought to be done. A principle of making restitution for acts 'in my lifetime' seems an appropriate principle.

But the government has made plans for restitution and reparations? From what I've outlined earlier, does this seem just or enough? And what about personal sacrifice? Is it enough to say sorry or leave doing sorry to governments? Surely not. Jesus did not ask Caesar to make amends – he simply looks at Zacchaeus and approves of Zacchaeus' desire to make personal amends – over and beyond what he has cheated people out of.

Let's go back to the story of Zacchaeus - from a slightly different perspective. Let's imagine that Zacchaeus the tax collector never met Jesus, that he is now dead and leaves a wife and five children. He also leaves a huge fortune from all of his corrupt tax

collecting. The people of Zacchaeus' town hated him and now they hate his family. Two of his children are dead, they died defending Zacchaeus from the mob that came to demand their lives back – because Zacchaeus had taken so much from them. Yet another two of Zacchaeus' children have long since left Israel and have gone to live in nearby Lebanon where they are not known, have good jobs, and are never harassed. They console themselves at night that they are doing this so that their children will have a peaceful life, free from fear of retaliation, retribution, and hatred. They miss their homeland and while sometimes they wonder whether they could or should have done something about their father's cheating, they often drown out these pangs of conscience with a good shot of Jack Daniels.

But for Zach's daughter (let's call her Sarah), it's another story. Sarah alone is left in Israel out of the Zacchaeus family. Her dead father has left her a substantial fortune. When she sees the people her father has cheated – she feels confusing emotions. Some of them spit on the ground as she walks by, but not many. Of course everyone knows she is her father's heir, and that the house she now lives in (in the winter) has been paid for by her father's ill-gotten gains. The summer house on the lake of Tiberius is the one place she forgets about her father's systematic robbery. The thing that troubles her most is that no-one is demanding that she pay back the money – although everyone knows how it was made. The law doesn't, the people don't. It's just her conscience that plagues her. Of course the town government are doing all they can to uplift these poor people. There are job creation projects, and people can apply for land that is being reclaimed from the nearby swamp. In addition, the synagogue that Sarah occasionally attends often feeds those who are hungry. And sure she contributes when people ask. But what more should she do. More poignantly, if Sarah encountered Jesus today, how might the conversation go? What might Sarah's response be?

Implications for youth ministry

If we agree that restitution is an important Christian issue, and that despite the unanswered questions, it is worth acting upon, what ought our response to be? At the end

of the day Zacchaeus made restitution not because he was court-martialed, or found out, or ordered to by a decree of Caesar – but simply because he had *been* with Jesus. Because he had received Jesus into his home, his heart – because Jesus had sought him out and looked deeply into his eyes. *Zacchaeus restitution was a heart response of gratitude to Jesus before it was an act of contrition towards people.* Just like apartheid was first an offence against God before it was a wrong against people. Zacchaeus' restitution was not prescribed. He came to it himself. But it was generous, and it was costly. If we treat restitution as a response to God – a sacrifice for him, we won't be satisfied with giving 'anything that costs us nothing' – as David does in 1 Chronicles 21:24 when God instructs him to build an altar and the landowner offers to give it to him for nothing. 'No! I want to pay you what they're worth. I can't just take something from you and then offer the LORD a sacrifice that cost me nothing' is David's response.

We don't know if Zacchaeus restitution was public or private. We don't know if all the other tax collectors were convicted by Zacchaeus' actions and also made restitution. Zacchaeus could easily have said he was merely a pawn in a system of corrupt tax collectors – he was no different to anyone else. In fact it was accepted practice. But he didn't. When Jesus Christ of Nazareth called him out and looked into his eyes – and said 'Zacchaeus I want to come to your house today' (for tea or otherwise) – Zacchaeus said 'Lord I will repay everything I have taken. No excuses.' I also have a deep conviction that if Luke 19 was a story about Zach's daughter rather than Zach himself – that if it was Sarah in that tree and Jesus walked up to her – and looked into his eyes – she would have said, 'Lord you know it wasn't me it was my father, but what he did stinks, Lord, and I have benefited for the last 37 years. I am so sorry that people have gone hungry, have starved while I have enjoyed my father's stolen wealth. Today I will restore and repay – half of what I own and four times what my father stole.'

So what are the implications for youth ministry? The topic itself is difficult and filled with emotion and pain. Doing sorry is difficult for adults, how much more so for young people. Those who have been wronged are asked to forgive and to forget what lies behind and to move on, but there is no getting away from the fact that without restitution, how

can we say we've repented? I have met incredible people, who have experienced the worst injustice at the hands of largely 'white' people, who have forgiven and now try with all their might to eke out an existence. But we are not talking about those who have been wronged – we are talking about those of us who have done the wronging, beneficiaries of injustice, and in receipt of stolen goods. How surprising and refreshing would it be if there were a group of Christian people who decided, not because the government demanded it, or because those who have been wronged demanded it – but simply because it was the right thing to do – to begin a huge voluntary restitution movement. It would be a fragrance in South Africa (and the world), one that might permanently displace the stench of injustice.

So if restitution is an answer to injustice, what ought we to do? I've compiled a list of possibilities (in the South African context) but ultimately, they are just suggestions. To be quite honest I don't actually know what we should do – which makes it a lot easier to talk about it. I too am guilty – and perhaps it's from this place of brokenness that God can gently lead us. Here are some suggestions:

1. We might encourage perpetrators to be involved in healing and serving professions. Michael Lapsley (the Anglican priest who lost both his hands) makes this suggestion when asked how he would respond if he were confronted with his attacker, now asking forgiveness. He says he might ask the person whether they still make bombs for a living, and persuade them to be a paramedic.
2. Encourage 'white' youth to use their superior education and family resources to be an entrepreneur, creating jobs rather than leaving the country and bemoaning affirmative action.
3. Adopt a poor family – Cassie Carsten's at the first Transformation prayer rally at Newlands a few years ago, told us that if every Christian family in South Africa adopted one or two poor families – supporting them with R800 (\$120) a month, there would no longer be people living below the poverty line.
4. 'Sponsor' a few 'black' youth – by which I mean a combination of 'sponsor' and 'mentor' – neither is sufficient on their own. Assist them through high school and

help them to overcome barriers into their first jobs. Perhaps even save for a bursary for a young 'black' youth alongside your provision for your own children's studies.

5. Speak about the spiritual act of not emigrating, of 'diluting the ghetto' (Mary Robinson), perhaps even move into a township slum area. Perhaps begin by attending a township church.
6. Sell your large home/holiday home and build a home for a poor 'black' family.
7. Investigate how your church denomination acquired its land.
8. Adopt an AIDS orphan, or more than one – even if you can't afford it.
9. Learn an indigenous language, and use it.
10. Give away a second car. Use public transport more.
11. Begin to engage in national public holidays rather than using them as days to shop or go to the beach. Many countries have politically-oriented days, which only the disposed meaningfully observe. In South Africa Human Rights day, Youth day, Freedom day, and Heritage day are some of these.
12. Change your career plans towards development and upliftment of those who have been disadvantaged and displaced by your privilege. Maths teachers are in serious demand (and short supply) in township schools for example.
13. Ensure that someone you employ is well taken care of – housing, healthcare, a pension, and education for their children.
14. Merge organisations that are still divided along racial lines (including church denominations).
15. Support the introduction of a Basic Employment Grant (social welfare grant) of R100 a month for everyone, perhaps through voluntary tax increases.

Conclusion

Developing a contemporary theology of restitution is no easy task. It is made more difficult in the context of youth ministry for a number of reasons. The first is that it is likely to be an emotional issue, and youth ministers may be accused of furthering their own political agendas, if not sensitively dealt with. Second, it has the potential of causing sharp divisions between parents and their children, and between members of a

congregation. Third, there are difficulties in reconciling and aligning our theologies of personal versus corporate guilt, forgiveness, and grace, with that of restitution. Finally, it is always difficult to speak of issues over which we (personally and corporately) have long been silent. Perhaps it might help us to remember that Zacchaeus made restitution simply because he had *been* with Jesus. *His was a heart response of gratitude to Jesus before it was an act of contrition toward others.* If Luke 19 was a story about Zach's children, I believe the response would be – ought to be – the same. To return for the final time to our bicycle story... Ultimately it's not about friendship, or even about bicycles, but about young people having *been* with Jesus.

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