**Restitution is intrinsic to justice**

We understand justice to mean the restoration of right relationship with ourselves, other people, and the environment. It is a state in which everyone has enough and no one goes without. Christians recognise that God is a God of justice; the theme is woven throughout our Scriptures. God “loves justice” and “hates robbery and iniquity” (Isaiah 61:8) and “secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy” (Psalm 140:12). We, in turn, are instructed, “Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And, do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place” (Jeremiah 22:3). The entreaties to justice are bound up in what Jesus tells us is the greatest commandment and the summation of the Law: love God entirely and love your neighbour as yourself. If, as theologian Cornel West says, “justice is what love looks like in public,” then we cannot love our neighbours without also seeking justice with them.

We catch a glimpse of how restitution may be a component of this in the well-known verses of Isaiah 2: “They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” Like the soccer match between unequally matched opponents, it is not enough just to try to wipe the slate clean. God does not direct the people simply to discard their spears and swords; they are not to be left in a shed or safe somewhere in case we may need them again.

Rather, we are to convert the tools of destruction into tools for building a new and just world. Doing this requires giving up our weapons and using them for good. Whether it is our wealth, social privilege, or power that we have deployed as weapons to protect ourselves, the call to justice requires that we lay them down and risk vulnerability as we build societies in which we grow new life rather than destroy it. When we do this, says Isaiah, we will “walk in the light of the Lord.”

While government has its role to play in the pursuit of justice, it cannot and should not bear the entire burden. We have the resources and imaginative, spiritual and intellectual capacities to be effective and powerful agents of justice when we voluntarily band together and become agents of justice in our land.