**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON RESTITUTION**

Even though restitution forms an integral part of the Christian understanding of the reconciliation process, very few South African theologians have written on the topic. The Restitution Foundation invited a wide range of South African Church leaders and theologians to reflect on the theological rationale of restitution.

**Sacrificing Justice for Cheap Reconciliation -** *Prof Nico A. Botha*

*Department of Missiology, UNISA*

It is perhaps more appropriate to start with a lament on the manner in which the poor of South Africa have been betrayed. Neither the Peace Accord of the early nineteen nineties, nor the negotiated political settlement or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have delivered to the poor of the country. In fact, it would be fair to suggest that the most serious deficit of all these processes had been the sacrifice of justice on the altar of cheap reconciliation. Retrospectively we now know that the interests of neo-liberal capitalism in general and of the South African *petit bourgeoisie*, both black and white, in particular, were paramount. To suggest, however, that the betrayal of the poor was only political, is to indulge in reductionism of the worst kind. Religion in South Africa has got a lot to account for. Even before any form of serious national dialogue gets going, there should be an opportunity for faith-based communities to express shame and to plead for forgiveness from the "sinned against", namely the poor and the God of the poor.

In turning to the notion of restitution, it is perhaps important to engage the concept itself critically. A kind of "conceptual cleansing" might even be necessary. In the *Catholic Encyclopaedia,* for example, restitution is taken to be signifying "an act of commutative justice by which exact reparation as far as possible is made for an injury that has been done to another". And further, "the grounds on which restitution becomes obligatory are either the possession of something belonging to another, or causing of unjust damage to the property or reputation of another". There would of course be alternative interpretations of restitution, but an important question will be whether it is a helpful concept for the kind of process which seems to be emerging in South Africa pertaining to the redress of the socio-economic inequalities. The question needs to be posed: Does the concept not focus on a very narrow sense of justice that is legalistic, ignoring the bigger justice/injustice picture? Does the notion of restitution not come out of a mentality that supports the status quo? Is restitution not inadvertently and unintentionally perhaps, arising from a protectionist tendency, i.e. to protect the interests of the wealthy as much as possible? A further question is whether restitution will be aimed at tackling the underlying system which has given rise to the huge discrepancies between the rich and the poor, however complex and difficult that may be, or will it degenerate into yet another delusion?

On a positive and constructive note: In what way should the contribution of theology and religion to the ongoing debate on restitution be theological or religious. In terms of a virtual subversion of the pertinent questions posed, I want to suggest the inducement of the vision of *shalom, God's shalom*, which in the Bible is a condition of all-encompassing peace. It integrates a kind of spiritual well-being with material well-being. The vision of shalom can also quite easily be brought into a very creative discourse with the African philosophical concept of *ubuntu*. An indispensable dimension also, will be to keep justice and peace in creative tension to one another. In the Bible they operate as twin sisters or alternatively as mother and daughter where mother justice gives birth to daughter peace.

**The theological basis for restitution within the South African context** -*Prof Hans Engdahl*

*Department of Theology and Religion, University of the Western Cape*

There are two pitfalls.

1. To think that you can redeem yourself by paying back for damages, to think that you are able to make good what was destroyed or lost
2. To think that God’s forgiveness which is a free gift allows you to walk off as a free man/woman without obligations leading to restitution

Reconciliation, leading to restitution, is a liberated life of forgiveness committed to a new transfigured dispensation with justice for all. Zacchaeus might serve as paradigm (Luke 19.1-10). Having become accepted as a disciple of Jesus, out of sheer joy he shares, he pays back and there is little of calculation but much generosity.

In our work for restitution we must have the courage to look critically at our churches.

The following six points should be considered.

1. Restitution constitutes an integral part of any authentic reconciliation process.
2. Our understanding of what is church could vary enormously. At this time focus should be on church as communion, as fellowship in solidarity, as *koinonia* (Acts 2.42).
3. We must take courage to stare down the ugly face of segregation in our churches.
4. Those who are to be reconciled must find themselves in the same worshipping community.
5. A restitution process will flow from such a communion of Christians.
6. South African churches could again show the way and become role models for world Christianity.

**Restitution is essential as a basis for the restoration of justice and peace in South Africa -** *The Most Rev Stephen Brislin*

*Catholic Archbishop of Cape Town*

Where a wrong has been committed and relationships have broken down, there can be no healing without some restitution. This is basic to forgiveness, reconciliation and normalisation of relationships. If there is to be peace and justice, restitution is a basic essential element both for the perpetrator and the victim.

In South Africa so many formerly (and presently) advantaged people are angry and distraught at the ongoing mention of the evils of apartheid and feel that apartheid is over, so why can South Africa not “forgive and forget”. On the other hand, so many former (and present) victims of apartheid feel that little has changed and that the heinous evil from which we are emerging is not understood or appreciated. How can one forgive and forget if little has really changed?

In the case of apartheid, full and complete restitution (in the sense of restoring the former situation) is not possible. The same is true of slavery, colonialism, the industrial revolution and other evils that have changed the social, political, economic and spiritual environment in which we live. For example, in South Africa, the attempts for restitution through legal mechanisms for those people who were forcibly removed from their land through apartheid, tend to forget that forcible removal from the land does not only (and not even primarily) mean the loss of land. It entails the destruction of communities, of family life, of the ‘rootedness’ of people in their environment. It means also the loss of agricultural skills and experience as well as feelings of self-worth that flow from the experience of economic and social independence. So return of the land cannot be meaningful restitution in itself. It may potentially even add to the suffering of the victims to whom restitution has been made.

Perhaps this form of incomplete restitution is more important in giving the perpetrator a sense of righteousness and a feeling that forgiveness has been achieved – but for the victim there is not the sense that relationships have been corrected.

So restitution is essential as a basis for the restoration of justice and peace in South Africa but restitution in the sense of restoring what was before is not possible – so what is the way forward?

Certainly, some form of symbolic restitution can be helpful provided that it is properly understood both by perpetrator and by victim to symbolise genuine and deep contrition and the desire to make things right. But at the same time, we must be very careful not to go for a ‘quick fix’ so that we can feel better about the situation without really fixing it.

Fundamentally, the only truly meaningful restitution will be the establishment of a society that is based on principles of equality and justice – not only (and not even mainly) in the legal or political sphere, but especially economically, and socially.

At present society is run on the principle of the aggregation of the personal greed of individuals. This was the root cause of apartheid and colonialism in the past and it is the root cause of the injustices in the economic life of today. It is this that must be changed for real restitution to be effected. We need to move away from restoring only *things* to *individuals* and move towards working for a new order of peace through social and economic justice.

Is this pie-in-the-sky – will it ever be possible? Christian hope says “yes”. It is possible, it can be achieved. It will certainly take a change of attitudes and values, and a willingness to work tirelessly to that end in our own lives, in our institutions, and in our society and the world as a whole.

**Tutu, the wealth tax, and the humanist imperative** -*Prof John de Gruchy*

*Emeritus Professor, University of Cape Town*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s recent statement about a white wealth tax has evoked much discussion in the media. His comments were part of a speech he gave at the launching of a book entitled *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa*, the culmination of a two-year long research project based at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS). What Tutu said about a wealth tax, as well as his challenge to government leaders to scale back on the amount spent on their luxury official cars, was a thoughtful response to a major theme in the book. His comments came at the end of a speech in which he had stressed the need for us to recover that sense of human solidarity that was at the heart of the struggle against apartheid. Human solidarity in the struggle for justice, he insisted, is of the essence of a genuine humanism, it is this which gave rise to our new constitutional democracy, and it is our failure to achieve economic justice that threatens it.

*The Humanist Imperative* was an outcome of the New Humanist Project which involved thirty-nine academics and public leaders from a range of backgrounds and disciplines in discussions over two years. Its aim was to examine the current state of the nation in terms of its humanist foundations. While humanism is generally associated with the liberal secular tradition that grew out of the European Enlightenment, it has a more complex history in Africa, some of it liberal, some socialist; some secular, some religious. But the underlying thrust of humanism remains: the affirmation of human freedom, rights, responsibilities, dignity, and economic justice.

The anti-colonial struggle for independence in Africa, as many distinguished African leaders claimed, was a humanist project; so, too, the struggle against apartheid was humanist at its core. Thus the eventual outcome, our remarkable Constitution is humanist through and through, but in its own way. It is neither narrow in its formulations or focus, but embodies the insights of all those humanisms that contributed to overcoming apartheid and laying the foundations for the new South Africa. As such it strongly affirms our common humanity irrespective of race, gender or sexual orientation, while at the same time respecting our differences as contributing to the enrichment of our common life. It is a unique document amongst national Constitutions, an inclusive humanist manifesto that calls for an “open society in which government is based on the will of the people;” a society in which “every citizen is equally protected by law;” and, significantly, a society which seeks to “improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person.” This is the “new humanism” we are called to affirm, protect and embody.

This new South African humanist project is currently under threat from various directions. The litany of these threats needs little repeating here: racism, gender discrimination, homophobia, xenophobia are words that immediately come to mind. But the most challenging of all is the growing gap between the rich and the poor, for this fundamentally betrays our common humanity and undermines our commitment to improve the quality of life of all citizens. This was a key concern of the New Humanist Project, it is reflected throughout the essays in *The Humanist Imperative,* and it was rightly highlighted by Archbishop Tutu in concluding his launching speech.

Wealth originally meant human well-being, and commonwealth meant the well-being of society as a whole. To regain this humanist understanding of society there has to be a decisive shift in the dominant value system currently shaping our democracy. This was forcefully stated by Neville Alexander, one of the contributors to the book: “in order for a new humanism to become feasible, we have to find the vehicles that will enable our new South Africa to free itself from the trap of self-seeking individualism and status-seeking as well as power-hugging accumulation of material goods.” Whether or not Tutu’s challenge is taken up in precisely the way he expressed it, we simply have to find ways to become a common-wealth for everybody’s sake. At the very least, the Archbishop’s remarks should goad us into further discussion, perhaps within the context of an economic Codesa, but even more to some practical responses that will indicate that we are serious about the well-being of our society.

**Different understandings of the meaning of reconciliation** -*Prof Julian Müller*

*Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria*

I have been invited to respond to the reaction of the majority at a conference in Gauteng, who struggled to link the idea of forgiveness with restitution. As a practical theologian, I am firstly interested in the experiences of people and therefore would like to understand the reasoning behind such a position. This reminds me of a similar situation which I have experienced. A few years ago I was involved in discussions between the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Origstad. They invited me to facilitate a weekend workshop with representatives of both groups. The aim was the telling of stories in order to heal memories and make progress towards reconciliation. Some participants from the white community put great emphasis on the necessity to tell the painful stories of the past, but this position was not shared by most of the representatives from the black community. The black group were looking for good intentions and a willingness on the side of the white group to work towards a better future. In summary, the white group had the need to formulate their guilt by way of telling the stories of the past, but the black group didn't feel the need to listen to these stories.

My preliminary conclusion is that restitution shouldn't be forced on any community where the need is only to forgive and to transform. On the other hand, when the need for some form of restitution is clearly stated, it should be addressed. It can be done in various ways, but I think storytelling and negotiations about expectations and perceptions would always be necessary.

**Restitution as a way of communicating "true sorryness”** - *Canon Rowan Smith*

*Dean Emeritus, St George's Cathedral*

The basis for our understanding of restitution arises out of both our responsibility to God and to our neighbour. To acknowledge that all is gift from God and that "I am my brother's keeper" is to accept responsibility for my actions. Thus I would ask of God forgiveness for my sin where I have erred in any way. Cain, in killing his brother Abel, does not do this and so refuses to behave in a mature relationship with God . Sadly, this attitude towards God and our neighbour persists to this day. Those who refused to appear before the TRC displayed this behaviour which is a result of fear rather than love - fear of punishment. Within the catholic tradition of the Church, in sacramental confession, referred to as the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Penitent says "...I am truly sorry, firmly mean to do better and humbly ask pardon of God, and of you penance, and absolution." (Anglican Prayer Book p. 449). The "penance" is a way of indicating the sincerity of one's confession and a sign of restitution. Archbishop Desmond would say thus if I confess to stealing my neighbour's bicycle, my penance would be to return the stolen item. Actions following words and "being truly sorry" are key.

We in South Africa need to move towards a renewed spirit of altruism and those of us who profess to be Christian, towards displaying maturity of faith in our relationship with God. As St Paul says, I am not there yet but I seek to strive towards that goal of Christ in me, the hope of glory. We desperately need to hear that Christian voice which calls us all to accountability both towards God and our neighbour.

**Restitution, Reconciliation and Forgiveness** - *Prof Thias Kgatla*

*Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria*

Biblical reconciliation has two sides to it. First, there is a reconciliation between humankind and God and second, the reconciliation between human beings themselves. One should always keep the separation between the two. If, for instance, we take reconciliation between human beings we should first think of restitution according to God's law. For example: "If any one sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbour … or through robbery, or if he has oppressed… he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by oppression… and shall add a fifth to it... And he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD... and he shall be forgiven for any of the things which one may do and thereby become guilty."(Lev.6:1-7), Ex. 22)

If a person has sinned against God, the eternal restitution for their sin must be paid with an eternal ransom price. The second reconciliation between humanity and God, described in the Bible in this way: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-26)

No one should confuse the two modes of reconciliation or use them interchangeably. Psalm 24:1 tells us that the earth and all that is in it belongs to the LORD. This is so even if human beings sinned against him. God is not reduced to be less God or Lord because of the sin of humanity. Even there he gives his only son for redemption of sinners without losing anything of his glory, majesty and Godhead. But if human beings sin against another by robbery, oppression or denying another the opportunity to achieve what he/she could have had they not been "sinned against", the "sinned against" becomes disadvantaged, dehumanised and deprived.

The only logical way is to restore such a person to the original position before reconciliation (restoration of interpersonal relation) can be considered. It is a grievous mistake to try to short-circuit the process of lasting reconciliation by skipping restitution. If wronged parties 'let it go' on their own without restitution they do it on their own, but they are not 'more Christian' than those who demand restorative justice (restitution). In fact, Christians who demand restitution after an offence has been committed understand the Bible better than Christians who do not demand restitution.

Any reconciliation concept that ignores this is less authentic and is bound to fail. True reconciliation removes guilt, hostility and negative attitudes between human beings by restoring them to their original position, not by ‘hook or by crook’, but by sincere, authentic love of Christ. Cheap grace, lofty words and impure motives do not have place in the true reconciliation of God that is in Christ. The road to authentic reconciliation goes via restitution - reversal of unjust enrichment.

**Restitution and Costly Grace** - *Rev Dr Philip Knutson*

*Evangelical Lutheran Church in SA*

In his rigorous exposition of the Sermon on the Mount in his well-known book *The Cost of Discipleship* (Macmillan, 1963) written in 1936, Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenged readers saying:

"Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace… Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves…Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance…Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate (:47).

[Costly grace] is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a [person his/her] life and it is grace because it gives a [person] the only true life. … Costly grace is the incarnation of God."

Bonhoeffer explained: "It was not the justification of sin, but the justification of the sinner that drove [Martin] Luther from the cloister back into the world. The grace he had received was costly grace. It was grace, for it was … forgiveness of all his sins. And it was costly, for, so far from dispensing him from good works, it meant that he must take the call to discipleship more seriously than ever before" (:52).

I believe these are valuable insights in the discussions regarding restitution among Christians and others.

For me restitution is not an optional issue and much more than a single act or event but a way of life, a journey, a way of being in the world as interdependent individuals, as churches, communities and institutions. Restitution, understood as restoration to wholeness, is specific and general, personal and communal, local and global. The world is not equitable. How does one "undo" the unjust and inhuman legacy of slavery, colonialism and apartheid as well as global economic exploitation and inequality?

Essential for me is the acknowledgement that we are all interdependent creatures and co-creators created in God's image and that all creation is a gift from God to be cherished, nurtured and shared equitably and justly. I also confess that I am, along with all human beings, "*simul justus et peccator*": simultaneously justified and sinner. The Good News is that that by God's grace we are claimed, gathered and sent to participate in God's mission of reconciliation, restoration, renewal and restitution so that all people and all creation might have life and life in its fullness (John 10:10).

Let's talk about restitution and costly grace and what it means to live together and share life and God's earth in the world recalling Bonhoeffer's words again:

"When Christ calls a [person], he bids [him/her] come and die…Jesus' summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and his call are necessarily our death as well as our life. The call to discipleship, the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, means both death and life" (:99).

**A theological basis for restitution within the South African context** - *Prof Ernst Conradie*

*Department of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape*

When we do harm to one another, there is always something that can be given back and something that can never be given back. If I damaged your car, I (or my insurance) should cover your costs. But your anger and frustration cannot be undone and the time that you required to address the matter can never be returned. There remains a deficit. I could give you an appropriate gift to signal my recognition of that deficit, but at a certain point you will need to bring closure to the matter by either condoning, forgiving or forgetting this deficit.

When the harm that I have done is not merely related to property but to persons (if I injured and maimed your child) and if that was done deliberately (assault, rape, murder) that deficit is much more significant. I can never undo what I have done, but societies find a way of restoring reciprocity through civil law, through criminal law or through forms of reconciliation. If the deficit is ignored and if what can be given back is not, this leads to long-term agrievement, anger and social tensions. Not surprisingly, such tensions may boil over, leading to further forms of verbal and physical violence, prompting an ongoing spiral of violence. In South Africa such tensions have built up over hundreds of years and continue to be aggravated by the current situation.

Through the Christian message of reconciliation in Jesus Christ the problem of the immense deficit in the legacy of human sin against God and one another has been addressed once and for all. That is immensely liberating as we can find a way of starting anew without the burden of the past. However, in our relationships with one another we should still individually and collectively give back what can indeed be given back. This is demanded by justice and human dignity, but also by the need for living together, finding a common humanity. If that is not done, if we fail to recognise the remaining deficit and even fail to see the need to give back what we can, that will necessarily undermine our ability to live together before God. Restitution is a way of recognising the long term impact of centuries of economic domination in the name of the differences of race, class, civilisation and religion. We should give back what we can and trust in God’s grace to address the deficit.

**Notes on the theology of Restitution** - *Prof John de Gruchy*

*Emeritus Professor, University of Cape Town*

Biblically-speaking, restitution draws on the Jubilee tradition in which periodically there is a redistribution of land and goods, the cancelling of debts etc., so that equity can be restored. Whether or not that was ever implemented successfully I do not know but doubt. But my sense is that it was always part of the prophetic vision rather than part of Israel's policy in practice. And that is, of course, the problem facing us. A theology of restitution however necessary has to be implementable given the realities on the ground. That is why I think your project is so important because you are working at the issues from the bottom up in terms of your experience in the Worcester area.

Restitution is a key element in restorative justice. The question then is what is meant by restoring land or whatever, and that is precisely the problem we are sitting with, not the principle of the matter.

**Notes on the theology of Restitution** - *The Most Rev Dr Thabo Makgoba*

*Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town*

Restitution in South Africa has many facets which could make valuable contributions to the building of the society which we long to see.

From the perspective of our Constitution, restitution upholds the cherished values of freedom, equality and human dignity. It has the possibility of deepening social cohesion and enabling South Africans to redress past wrongs and move forward together.

As a person of faith, I believe restitution is quite simply, the ‘right thing to do.’

‘*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*’ is the biblical foundation for retributive justice which is often put forward in such discussions.

However, there is another perspective, namely, a restorative way. This way is held by at least seven of the world’s great religions. It is mostly referred to as the Golden Rule – that we are called to care for others as we would like to be cared for ourselves. It seems so simple and yet we experience it to be quite difficult at times. Indeed, the history of our country would be quite different if we had begun long ago to live by this rule. That is our past, with which we must amend and make peace- hence our need for restitution.

At a practical, restorative level, perhaps the State, in partnership with business, should enact symbolic repentance. The State should hand over state land for communal purposes and business should assist the recipients of this land in addressing current lack of skills, socio- economic disparities and joblessness.

Today holds a key for tomorrow, our future. Let us not repeat our past mistakes. Let us care for others as we would wish to be cared for ourselves.

**Notes on the theology of Restitution** - *Dr Moss Nthla*

*Director, The Evangelical Alliance in South Africa*

The role of restitution in South Africa is to locate the responsibility for reconciliation in the people of South Africa (especially Christians on whom the assignment of being an agent for reconciliation is placed, according to St Paul).

Restitution gives meaning to the concept of reconciliation beyond confession.

**Notes on the theology of Restitution** - *Dr Jaco Beyers*

*Department of Science of Religion and Missiology, University of Pretoria*

Restitution does not refer to the return to a previous dispensation as the Latin root (*re+statuere,* to set up again) suggests. This would imply that the best lies in the past, in a previous order of things. This linear perspective limits the meaning. The meaning of restitution much rather falls in a qualitative category than a quantitative. As a judicial principle, restitution refers to the remedy, as determined by a court of law, for wrong caused. The person wrongfully benefitting from the property of someone else needs to restore the financial status of the one wronged. In situations where the goods no longer exist, an amount equal to the value of the goods is to be given as compensation to the lawful owner.

Restitution from a theological perspective introduces a third party to the process. God participates in the act of restitution between two parties. A theological perspective on restitution requires a view on the past (acknowledging the wrong committed), as well as a view on the future (providing the answer on how to proceed from here without repeating the mistakes of the past). God as the acting agent in restitution will not only restore humans but also the whole universe to the original state and function He intended.

This future act of God is what is expected in the eschatology as presented by Matthew (24:30-31; 25:31-33). True restitution is a process steered by God. The process wants to restore relationships to the peaceful state God intended. God intended peace, harmony, equality, righteousness and love among all humans. Restitution then becomes the process of restoring relationships to that state of peace and harmony when everything was created ‘very good’ by God (Genesis 1:31); a return to a state of peace and harmony between God and humans and among humans before sin corrupted human nature. The purpose of restitution is not to enrich or to punish. The outcome ought to be forgiveness, reconciliation and healing of relationships.

Restitution is the result of salvation through Jesus Christ and can never be a requirement to receive salvation. Our own ethical behaviour cannot reconcile us with God. Through God’s grace in Jesus Christ, He restores the broken relationship with mankind. People now aware of this restoration brought about by God, follow in this way of life-restoration in order to experience life to its fullest. Restitution is part of the on-going process of reconciliation, which includes repentance, the undertaking never to repeat the same transgression and compensation for the wrong committed.

**Restitusie: Vloekwoord of Antwoord?** - *Dr Braam Hanekom*

*Moderator, Western & Southern Cape Synod, Dutch Reformed Church*

Gronden die besit van bates word ’n al groter kwessie in ons samelewing. Een van die woorde wat telkens in die gesprek opduik, is die woord “restitusie”, of te wel die teruggee aan diegene wat bogenoemde onregmatig verloor het. Vir sommige is dit ’n woord wat hoop inhou en vir ander ’n woord wat bedreiging inhou. In onlangse gesprekke, wat ek met ’n aantal Christene van verskillende afkoms en kerklike agtergrond gehad het, het dit vir my baie duidelik geword dat die kerk hierdie kwessie nie langer kan ignoreer nie.

Deel van die probleem is egter dat, wanneer daar oor restitusie gepraat word, daar dikwels ongekwalifiseerd en onduidelik oor die saak gepraat word. Vir diegene wat weet dat hulle iets sal moet afstaan, skep dit onsekerheid en bedreiging.Vir diegene wat hoop om by die gesprek te baat, skep dit dikwels onrealistiese verwagtinge.

Laat ons dit eers duidelik stel: Oor een ding mag die kerk nie verskil nie. God is ’n God van reg en regverdigheid. God herstel altyd weer, al neem dit tyd, onreg en veral wanbalanse in die geskiedenis en skepping. Dit sal die natuur jou leer.

Tog is dit so dat ons deesdae sukkel om behoorlik oor restitusie te praat. Nie dat sommige nie wel daaroor praat nie. Een persoon wat padlangs hieroor praat, is Julius Malema. Hy gebruik wel ander taal, soos “nasionalisering”, maar is ten minste baie duidelik oor wat hy verwag. “Gee 75% van al julle grond en al die moeilikheid is opgelos.” Maar gaan dit ons enduit help? Die geskiedenis vertel ’n ander storie. Vergun my dus net die volgende.

Eerstens. Ons sal eerlik en reguit met mekaar oor die saak moet praat. Tans is daar baie emosie, persepsies en wanpersepsies wat die gesprek beïnvloed. In so ’n gesprek gaan alle partye dinge hoor waarvan hulle nie hou nie. Ons mag nie daarvoor terugdeins nie. Ons sal egter met moed, eerlikheid en deursigtigheid die gesprek moet voer. Dit gaan nie van self weggaan nie. My blootstelling aan Zimbabwe het my geleer wat gebeur wanneer jy die proses aan ’n “jeugliga” en ’n onbesonne diktator oorlaat. Gelukkig is daar ook voorbeelde soos in Chili, waar grond hervorming gekoppel is aan verantwoordelike opleiding, dissipline en werklike benutting van die grond. Wanneer dit gebeur, bring dit vrede. Daarsonder duur die onrus voort.

Tweedens. Restitusie en versoening mag nooit losgemaak word van mekaar nie. Restitusie wat nie tot heling en versoening lei nie, help min. Dit kan dinge selfs vererger. Om dus net te sê : “Gee my soveel en soveel”, en dan weg te stap van mekaar om niks weer met mekaar te doen te hê nie, gaan ons nie help nie. Restitusie moet dus plaasvind binne ’n verhouding. Waar die verhouding nie bestaan nie, moet daaraan gewerk word.

Derdens. Restitusie moet meer as ekonomiese geregtigheid in die hand werk. In die gesprek word die term “helende geregtigheid” soms gebruik. Dit moet inderdaad gaan oor restitusie wat lei tot die herstel van verhoudinge en die heling van gemeenskappe. Ek is nie seker of almal dit al behoorlik verstaan nie.

Laastens. Vir Christene begin restitusie nie in onderhandelinge of raadsale nie, maar op jou knieë en in ’n verhouding met God self. Ware restitusie is wat jy aan ander doen, in die vryheid van jou gewete, omdat jy oortuig is dit is die regte ding om te doen. Nie omdat jy gedwing word om dit te doen nie. Mag kerke hierin vir ander ’n voorbeeld stel.

**Aware and Accountable: my story** - *Dr Elize Morkel*

*Member of Executive Committee, Western & Southern Cape Synod, Dutch Reformed Church*

I am a white Afrikaner woman who has been practicing as a psychologist in South Africa for almost thirty years. I grew up on a farm in a privileged family where my contact with black people was limited to farm and domestic workers. I never questioned why only white people attended our school, university and church or visited the beaches that we went to. I accepted it as a given – white people belong *here;* black people belong *there*. In the late eighties I started a private practice with rooms at a new private hospital in Somerset West outside Cape Town. Within four years the practice provided work for three full-time psychologists. Success meant having a diary filled with paying clients.

When the political changes started happening in 1990, I was suddenly living in a new reality. By befriending black colleagues and listening to the stories told to the TRC I became aware of the suffering of millions of black South Africans. I had to face my own complicity with, and benefit from, the system of apartheid that had violently oppressed black people. I realized the extent to which the Afrikaner people and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), of which I am a member, were responsible for justifying this evil system. I experienced despair at the lies that I had been fed all my life and at the way in which I had swallowed them, because it suited me to do so.

Suddenly I started questioning my practice that was serving only 10% of the community (mainly white) while the remaining 90% (predominantly black) could not afford my services but were clearly suffering extreme trauma. I remembered my favourite childhood Bible story - the parable of the Good Samaritan. I could clearly see *myself* in the priest and the Levite who ignored the beaten man and crossed to the other side of the road to get to their important church meetings. My church taught me to regard the relationship with God as separate from and as more important than the relationship with my neighbor. I volunteered one day per week in my practice to people from impoverished communities, but then I was confronted by both the limitations of my training (traditional Western models) and by the privileged and sheltered life that I had been living. I felt that I had no way of making sense of the problems related to living in communities of extreme poverty: I had nothing to offer.

Over-whelmed by intense guilt, helplessness and burn-out I was diagnosed with a major depressive episode in 1997. I eventually decided to leave my practice and used the next two years to recover, retrain and reposition myself as a therapist that could serve the wider South African community. It dawned on me that as an Afrikaner and DRC-member I am really part of the robbers in the story of the Good Samaritan. I imagined the robbers coming back to say sorry to the man that they had beaten-up, but without offering help or giving back what they had stolen. I understood, finally, that it was not just about caring for the injured man, but also about saying sorry and giving back what I had taken.

Declining to return to my lucrative practice with its good infrastructure and high visibility in middle-class society was a radical step at a time when white colleagues and friends were experiencing career uncertainty. I was determined to live and work differently, despite serious doubts, pressure from colleagues and at times a tremendous sense of isolation and loss. The practice which I opened at my house in 1999 enables me to keep overheads low and to make two days per week available for work that involves acts of giving back and doing sorry. Restitution starts with a painful awareness of what has been broken and of our complicity as white South Africans. Then follows acts of accountability, of giving back something for all the many ways in which we benefitted and remain privileged. We have so much to offer and yet we are so poor in many respects. Restitution is about becoming changed as we participate with those that we never even noticed and thereby assisted in robbing of so much.

**Restitution is about returning the cow** - *Dr Bongani Finca*

*Presbyterian minister & Former TRC Commissioner*

The subject of restitution is both complex and controversial. No one is willing to touch it. It has been carefully dropped by all structures of society – by the churches, by the organs of state and structures of political engagement, and by civil society in general. No one wants to think about it, no one wants to speak about it, no one wants to touch it because it is just too hot, too complex, too divisive, too uncomfortable, and too controversial. Although it is poignantly raised in the reports of the TRC and in its recommendations to the State and to the Nation as a whole, it has been roundly ignored, even by the bravest amongst us.

Restitution gives integrity to our national programme of reconciliation and it solidifies our democracy.

There is a legend on the meaning of reconciliation that is told about a man called Zulu who had one cow. One day a Mr White came along, overpowered Zulu, took his cow and went away. Zulu lived a miserable life without his cow. A few years later a TRC reconciliation process touched the lives of both Zulu and White. They were deeply moved, they washed each other’s feet, and they had tea together, hugged and cried together. At the end of the process Zulu stood at the door of his shack and White walked to his car outside the gate. Before they waved good-bye Zulu had the courage to ask the question: *Mr White what about the cow?* Mr White was very angry and said: *Zulu, this is about reconciliation, it has nothing to do with the cow.*

Restitution takes the imperative of seeking national reconciliation to a deeper level, yes, to a more uncomfortable level. It speaks about a cow. Aristotle calls it corrective justice because it does not only confess the injury done, it seeks for ways and means to correct what has been done wrong. One person has less than he ought to have because the other has taken away more that he should.

**Land Restitution: the cornerstone for the future of reconciliation in our land** - *Dr Mvume Dandala*

*Former Secretary of All African Council of Churches and former Presiding Bishop, Methodist Church in Southern Africa*

Land Restitution is one of the cornerstones for the future of reconciliation in our land. Handled properly with innovation and creativity it presents us with an opportunity to lift the levels of collective and individual wealth creation to unprecedented levels. Precisely because of its standing in the future of reconciliation, it has to be approached by all racial groups in our land with honesty, determination and vigour. It has to be characterised by a deep sense of commitment to justice for all, accepting the unjust history of our land. When there is that conviction about the past and an equal determination for justice for all in the future, two major stumbling blocks will have been removed in the process. Land is an emotive subject at the best of times. But where there is clarity about these two central factors, the emotion is immediately diffused. It is then with a passion for justice for all, accepting the principle of equal citizenship that we will then apply ourselves to the task radically and with a sense of empathy for one other. The journey can be as reconciling as the goal we pursue. With the matter of land restitution resolved, there is no other challenge we may not overcome together for a just and reconciling South Africa.

**Restitution is about Restoration** - *Prof Tinyiko Maluleke*

*Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Johannesburg and former President, South African Council of Churches*

The aim and root idea in the notion of restitution is restoration. There is a strong corrective and justice motif in the idea. For me restoration is about the fixing of broken and unjust relationships. Restoration assumes a prior period of just and healthy relationships which, having been broken and violated, now need to be restored. The prior period of just and healthy relations may pre-date the biological lives of the participants in the restoration effort. Theologically speaking, the basis of unjust relations between God’s creatures predates human history as we have known it – it goes back to Adam and Eve. Indeed, present day participants in restitution projects may know nothing but broken and unjust relations in their own life times – a situation which some may come to accept as unchallengeable. Alternatively, their historical memory of unjust and broken relations may be so obscure that while they sense it, they are unable to explain it.

There are many possible responses to broken and unjust relations. We can choose to read the history and consequences of unjust and broken relations selectively and narrowly. We can pretend that everything is fine and that all things are equal – ‘people need only get skills and work hard’ and everything will be fine. We can propose that the poor need only be patient while the ‘economic cake is being grown’ so that it will soon be able to cater for all. The way of restitution is different. Restitution is an acknowledgement that unjust and broken human relations are historical, material, spiritual and all encompassing – affecting blacks and white, rich and poor, men and women, young and old, straight and gay, Christian and African Religion adherents etc.

Furthermore, restitution is an acknowledgement that humans have had unjust broken relationships with fellow creatures as well as the environment. Not to seek to fix these broken relationships is to continue down the path of slow but sure (self-) destruction. Restitution is therefore not merely about cosy human relations or cosy human interventions as self-appointed stewards of the rest of creation. Whatever else restitution is understood to be, it is ultimately about human survival and the survival of the earth.

**Restitution is not only about saying sorry but doing sorry** - *Fr Michael Lapsley*

*Institute for the Healing of Memories and Anglican Priest*

Some of us in South Africa benefitted from Apartheid but all of us were damaged by Apartheid. The humanity of all of us was affected by Apartheid. All of us in South Africa need healing.

Sometimes we as South Africans reduce forgiveness to saying sorry without addressing the harm caused by Apartheid. Restitution is a way of taking *saying sorry* a step further to *doing sorry* and thereby acknowledging that abuse occurred.

Sometimes religious people increase the burdens of hurting people by telling them that they should forgive. We do not free them by doing so. We actually weigh them down further because the pain of the hurting people is not heard. Their pain is not acknowledged. When pain is acknowledged perhaps the hurting people will choose one day to travel a journey of forgiveness if it is possible.

**Has justice come to South Africa?** - *Rev XolaSkosana*

*Pastor, Way of Life Church, Khayelitsha*

Black people have been in a state of expectation, believing that the New South Africa will bring them justice. That land would be given back to rightful owners, that people would have access to decent education, that victims of apartheid, including those who lost family members in detention, those who were maimed and permanently disabled, would be meaningfully compensated. That the quality of life of black people would be so improved and that all that has characterised their lives would be something of the past. The biggest frustration they have to contend with every waking day is that the past is right here with them; homelessness, racism, landlessness etc.

Statistics South Africa has probed South Africans about their living conditions in three major scientific surveys in the 15 years of democratic dispensation - in 1996, 2001 and 2007. Their report deals specifically with measurement in the domains of meeting basic needs, housing and services, water and sanitation, energy and electrification, telecommunications, health care, social security and welfare, tenure status as far as main dwellings are concerned. In all of the above, statistics, if they are anything to go by, show that progress has been made. That report ends with these words, supposedly spoken by South Africans, “2009 is better than 2001 and indeed 2001 was better than 1996. Today is better than yesterday.”

Indeed, South Africa is better today than it was yesterday, but only for a few of us. For those of us with bank rolled or credit lifestyles, those who have access to the world through technology. South Africa is better for us who travel every so often by air, otherwise in the privacy of our cars. We can say South Africa is better because we have the luxury of visiting God’s window, Blyderivierpoort, Table Mountain and Robben Island every so often, our children go to the best schools and have emerged as TV personalities. We enjoy a clean environment etc. Of course South Africa is better today than it was yesterday. However, we form a small margin of people living in this country.

The majority of South Africans are experiencing life, not from the high ways of convenience, but the path ways of inconvenience. They depend on loan sharks and other survival schemes in the second economy with a high illiteracy rate. Most of them travel by crowded trains and taxis and have to endure crime as a daily experience. They have resorted to solve problems through kangaroo courts and vigilantism because there is no justice for them in the courts. Their communities are ravaged by Aids. For these people, the majority of South Africans, South Africa today is not better than yesterday. Justice has become elusive for them.

Barack Obama’s speech on race on the 19th of March 2008, was particularly educational to say the least. It was strangely punctuated by words like “ultimately unfinished”, “final resolutions to future generations”, “perfect over time”. It rings true for many black South Africans who feel that justice has been denied them, “two hundred and 21 years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America’s improbable experiment in democracy. Farmers and scholars, statesmen and patriots who had travelled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their declaration of independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the spring of 1787. …The document they produced was eventually signed but *ultimately unfinished* …to leave any *final resolutions* to future generations.”

Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution, a constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law, a constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfect *over time*.”

If American history is anything to go by, justice is hard to come by.

**The Theological basis for Restitution within the South African context** - *Rev Breda Ludik*

*Dutch Reformed Church, Helderberg*

We were created for communion with God and with other human beings. This is a reflection of God’s character. We were created in the image of God. In our broken world, however, communion between human beings is often broken by acts of injustice, selfishness and aggression. When this happens, it is imperative for Christians to do all we can for reconciliation to take place. This can only become a reality if there is genuine contrition from the perpetrator and true forgiveness from the victim.

Restitution is part of reconciliation in situations where injustice has caused imbalances between the parties concerned. It should not be viewed as a way of buying the victim’s forgiveness, but as an expression of the guilty party’s contrition and acknowledgement of the material and emotional effect of the wrong that was done. It comes with no expectation of putting things back where they were before, since it can never undo the wrong that was done, but it is an attempt to restore equity. It also cannot be used to blackmail the victim into forgiveness. What it does is to open up new possibilities of reconciliation, even where the victim is not ready to forgive. Its aim is, above all, reconciliation and healing.

Restitution can have many forms. It can be done by passing material benefits from one person (or group) to another, by offering a public apology or whatever is in accordance with the wrong that was done. It needs to reflect the scale and nature of the wrong. Even if it does not lead to full reconciliation, it can benefit both concerned parties in different ways.

In the South African context where systemic injustice occurred over a long time, and perceptions are severely warped, it can become a complex task to determine the extent and nature of restitution needed. We are apt to have different perspectives on the extent and impact of the wrong that was done. There is the added complexity that the interests of society as a whole need to be taken in consideration and not only those of isolated individuals. The only way to bridge this gap is through frank face-to-face discussions where people on both sides of the divide can tell their stories and reciprocal understanding can take shape. As Christians we cannot shy away from the task of participating in the task of healing the wounds of our community if we are in any way serious about the kingdom of God as a kingdom of relationships that reflects the true nature of God.

**The Theological basis for Restitution within the South African context** - *Prof Fanie Snyman*

*Dean, Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa*

The Bible as the Word of God for the church and its members can be described as a book addressing relationships. The Bible is first of all concerned about the relationship between God and human beings. Humankind was created to live in a harmonious relationship with God, but this relationship went wrong and the Bible tells the story of how this relationship can and has been restored by various initiatives taken by God Himself, in the final instance through the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. The Bible is not only interested in the divine relationship but is equally interested in the relationship between human beings. In fact, the issue of proper relationships between people is so important that it may even be said that a Christian's relationship with his/her fellow human being determines his/her relationship with God. Restitution is all about restoring relationships between humans by making right what has gone wrong.

Relationships between human beings are often complicated and can easily go wrong. Large parts of the Bible are therefore directed to restoring relationships between human beings. This can be seen from the bedrock of the ethical behaviour expected from people who consider themselves part of the people of God, the Torah or Pentateuch, especially the book of Deuteronomy. In the so-called Deuteronomistic History (Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel and I & II Kings) there are numerous stories told of restoring relationships that have gone wrong.

The teachings of the prophets as well as the admonitions of the Wisdom literature are often exhortations to restore relationships between humans. In the New Testament the teachings and deeds of Jesus and the writings of Paul are also directed to people to be sensitive to a proper and restored relationship with one's fellow human being. An essential part of restoring relationships is the willingness to forgive the wrongs and injustices inflicted. Disrupted relationships cannot be restored without forgiveness. Restoring relationships form the foundation of restitution. Without the realisation that relationships have to be restored, restitution will have little meaning.

Righteousness can be seen as one of the most important ethical markers for human behaviour. Righteousness can be broadly described as the way in which a human being measures up to the claims a particular relationship lays upon him/her. Righteousness is something like a power-charged area into which human beings are incorporated to do deeds that are beneficial for the community (Von Rad). Righteousness serves as the imperative for restitution. In order to bring about righteousness in society restitution is an indispensable ingredient. Restitution is thus not a goal in itself it is a means to achieve the goal of righteousness in communities.

Restitution becomes necessary where a community is in need of reconciliation. The need for reconciliation arises when a community or people are in need of healing because of the pain inflicted by broken relationships. Reconciliation is love made visible. Where reconciliation has taken place, relationships are restored and healing can take place. Reconciliation is thus both the *pre-requisite* and *result* of restitution.

Restitution cannot be viewed in isolation from other theological terms related to restitution. In this contribution the focus was placed on restoration, righteousness and reconciliation. There can be little doubt then that restitution is a deeply theological term concerned with the wellbeing of individuals living in a society and with communities at large. Applied to the current South African situation, restitution should address the big divide created by political ideologies keeping people sharing the same country, apart from one another. Restitution has to do with restoring human dignity. Restitution means to restore righteousness where injustices have prevailed. Restitution has to do with restoring the marginalised segments of the population, creating opportunities for growth. Restitution means to address the very social fibre of communities to combat and overcome prejudices. Restitution means to reconcile communities so that people may live in peace.

**Lamenting the persistence of liminality** - *Prof Cas Wepener*

*Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria*

The theological content of our faith is expressed in the prayers of the people and the prayers of the people from their faith – *lex orandi lex credendi*. In South Africa we have experienced vast changes in our society over the past two decades. These changes were reflected upon by theologians who attempted to give theological content to concepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation, restitution, social capital and social cohesion. Since 1994 certain concepts received more attention than others, which was and is an indication of how these scholars interpreted and are interpreting their surrounding South African context. I am convinced that along with reflection on the theological content, attention should also be given to the ritual expressions of that content which in turn also forms the content. The question, however, is where are we today regarding the legacy of apartheid in our country? What are the core concepts that should be reflected upon and thus concomitantly, what kind of rituals and liturgies are needed twenty years after 1994?

For the past twenty or more years the work of Victor Turner on liminality, communitas and societas has been very popular in order to explain the transition that we experienced and are experiencing and also to assist faith communities in that regard. Turner’s insights from Cultural Anthropology as he reflected on rites of passage are also valuable with regard to liturgy and rituals and answering the question regarding what rituals are now needed.

Many theologians have since 1994 discovered the concept of liminality, the reality of being ‘*betwixt and between’* as a person in the liminal phase of a rite of passage, and have argued that such a phase is important and needed. We have read about grieving for change and Antjie Krog wrote in *Country of my skull* (1998) that we should *die into reconciliation*. The gains of a communitas time in which most people are experiencing liminality has been discussed and also the need for apt rituals for such a period, especially the need for lament.

Also in the period after Krog wrote *Country of my Skull* one can still hear the echo of liminality in a work such as *A Change of Tongue* (2003) and the symbol of the sole (tongue fish in Afrikaans), which is in a process of adapting to a new context. But are we still in a state of liminality, grieving for change, dying into reconciliation, adapting to sandy shallow waters like a sole? The way in which we interpret the current context will inevitably have an influence on the kind of rituals and liturgies we deem to be necessary to be performed twenty years after the first democratic elections.

Krog’s latest book in the series is entitled *Begging to be Black* (2009)*.* To quote her reference to the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation: “So what would be the difference? Christian forgiveness says: I forgive you because Jesus has forgiven me. The reward will be in heaven. ‘African’ forgiveness says: I forgive you so that you can change and I can begin to heal and all of us can become the selves that we were meant to be. The reward is here on earth.”

In the year 2014 what is needed is what Krog also longs for: “*I am trying to become others, plural, interconnected-towards-caringness.*” I believe this is somewhat different from being betwixt and between, neither here nor there, but building on the experience and lessons learnt in liminality rather entails a concerted effort to move forward. I think what Krog refers to here is much closer to Turner’s societas time or the concept of restitution. And for this apt rituals and liturgies are needed. The first ritual that we can start with is to lament the persistence of liminality as key concept-informing reflection on liturgy and rituals in South Africa by the year 2014. Liminality was indeed helpful in 1994 and even still in 2004, but not any longer.

Some time ago, one of my Zulu-speaking students quoted a Zulu proverb which related to initiation rites (thus to liminality, *communitas* and *societas*) and applied it to the importance of the season of Lent in his class sermon: “*You do not learn during, you learn before. Then comes the time of doing.*” The children of apartheid who have been in the bushes for the past two decades must step forward and act as adults in South Africa in 2014. And we need liturgies and rituals to help us in this regard.

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**Is saying sorry enough? Exploring a theology of restitution in contemporary South Africa** - *Dr Deon Snyman*

*COO, Foundation for Church-led Restitution*

I would like to start by asking a further question. What is it that we want to achieve by saying sorry? Do we want to achieve healing, closure, forgiveness and reconciliation for *ourselves*? Or do we want healing, closure, forgiveness and reconciliation to happen in the lives *of those who have been harmed*?

I think the focus on justice in the process of saying sorry is crucial in answering these questions. Without justice, which includes some form of restitution, saying sorry has only the interest of the perpetrators at heart. If we add justice to the framework of saying sorry we consider the interests of the victim.

The omission of justice in the process of saying sorry has much to do with a distorted theological understanding of forgiveness shared by many South African Christians. This understanding assumes that saying sorry is enough to be forgiven. This theological approach is probably based on a very literal understanding of the Bible: Jesus has forgiven my sins and now you have to forgive my sins as well. A literal understanding of the Old Testament reading in Psalm 103: 12 also comes to mind: “*As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us*”. This type of theological understanding is probably one of the reasons why many South African Christians say sorry, and then continue to walk past ongoing injustice. They rush with speed towards the future without addressing the behaviour and consequences that caused the pain. Fr Michael Lapsley often tells the story of a bicycle. One day a man apologises to his neighbour for stealing a bicycle years ago. The neighbour accepts the apology, but turns to him and says, “Where is my bicycle? Can I have it back?”

Not long ago I attended an event in a small town and heard a Dutch Reformed Church member pray: ‘God, help the black people to forgive us, help them not to focus so much on the past, help them to forgive us so that they can be healed.’ This prayer was followed by the prayer of the secretary of the local ANC women’s league: ‘Yes God, let us stop looking back at the past, let us forgive now, let us forget the past and love each other. Let us forgive.’ Needless to say the white church member lives in a beautiful house, has a black domestic worker and drives a good car. The ANC women lives in a shack, makes use of public transport and works as a domestic worker. The distorted theological understanding of forgiveness is thus not limited to the Christian perpetrators of abuse, but to the abused too.

Survivors of abuse often share the same simplistic understanding of forgiveness, but also perhaps fear God’s wrath if they do not forgive. I was recently invited to deliver a presentation at a conference of National Church Leaders on the theme promoting restitution as a vehicle to convey sincere remorse. In the plenary discussion after my presentation white respondents asserted strongly that Jesus has forgiven white South African Christians and therefore other Christians have to follow suit. During the tea break one of the black participants came to me and said “You know, my head and my heart do not want to listen to each other today. My head knows that God wants me to forgive when people say they are sorry … but you know in my heart I wish Malema could become president so that all the things taken from black people can be given returned to them. I do not like this saying sorry without justice.”

During the last years of the 1990’s I arranged for some of my Zulu-speaking congregation members to attend a weekend reconciliation workshop with some members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Opportunities were created to listen to each other’s stories, empathise with each other and even to ask each other’s forgiveness. After the workshop I gave an Afrikaans-speaking guy and a Zulu-speaking guy a lift back to their respective homes. I first dropped the Afrikaans man at his nice house in a nice suburb with beautiful manicured lawns. When driving the Zulu-speaking man to his shack without water and electricity in the township I asked him what he thought about the workshop. He was very honest when he said to me that he was angrier towards white people than ever before.

At the workshop he got to know the white guy that I dropped first and realised that they had more or less the same intellectual capacity. “When I saw the house this guy was living in I just realised his saying sorry does not mean anything to me. Look how much better his life is from mine. If he is really sorry something needs to happen to address inequality in South Africa”.

Recently Archbishop Tutu caused a huge stir with his call for a wealth tax on white people. Later at UCT he explained his call. When you say sorry you also have to demonstrate that you really mean it and you do that by showing that you really care. He also indicated that the outcry about his statement within the white community was an indication of how guilty they still felt about the past. Their just saying sorry did not assist them to forgive themselves.

*Saying* sorry without *doing* sorry is not being truly sorry. The lack of demonstrating true ‘sorryness’ when rendering an apology can even damage the relationship further.

Our general theological understanding of forgiveness in South Africa needs to be deepened. It should be preceded by a theology of restitution based on a text like the Zacchaeus narrative (Luke 19:1-10) where Zacchaeus returned three times the tax that he had taken. A theology of restitution is a significant tool to address the residual ills of discrimination as well as other causes of inequity in our communities. Restitution involves seeking to set right the generational ills of inequality by engaging those who have benefitted from the system, directly or indirectly, in transferring wealth and social capital and reinvesting in communities that are still suffering.

I understand this not to be a purely black-white issue, although I believe addressing the apartheid past is a responsibility that heavily rests on the shoulders of the beneficiaries of Apartheid.

There also rests a restitution responsibility on the shoulders of those who benefitted generously since the democratisation of the country to share their gains to address the huge inequality in our society.

A theology of forgiveness should make provision for the fact that forgiveness and justice are twins and that forgiveness can and should never be forced upon anyone.

Forgiveness is a natural response. In a way it is to be compared with love – an emotion that comes naturally. You cannot pretend forgiveness. It is a journey that each individual will travel in their own way and in their own time. And it is a journey that will differ from day to day – some days it will be easier to forgive than other days.

High expectations within societies, such as South Africa, affected by prolonged periods of systemic violence often lead to a hope for swift closure and reconciliation and healing which will enable a return to a relative normal way of living.

In reflecting on the feasibility of reconciliation in the early phases of transition processes Weinstein (2011:1-10) argues that 150 years after the end of the American Civil War and more than seventy years after the Spanish Civil War both Americans and Spaniards still have not achieved full reconciliation. It is therefore unrealistic to expect reconciliation to happen in communities who only recently embarked on the peace journey.

Instead of focusing on achieving closure and reconciliation, Weinstein (2011:8) advocates for communities to rather focus on possible ways to co-exist through the promotion of sustainable peace which in turn may create opportunities for future reconciliation. Doing sorry and taking restitution seriously are important foundations for sustainable peace within communities.

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